

The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act*, 2024
Report for Rural Municipalities of Alberta

**Bill 20: The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act*:
Strengthening or Polarizing Local Elections?**

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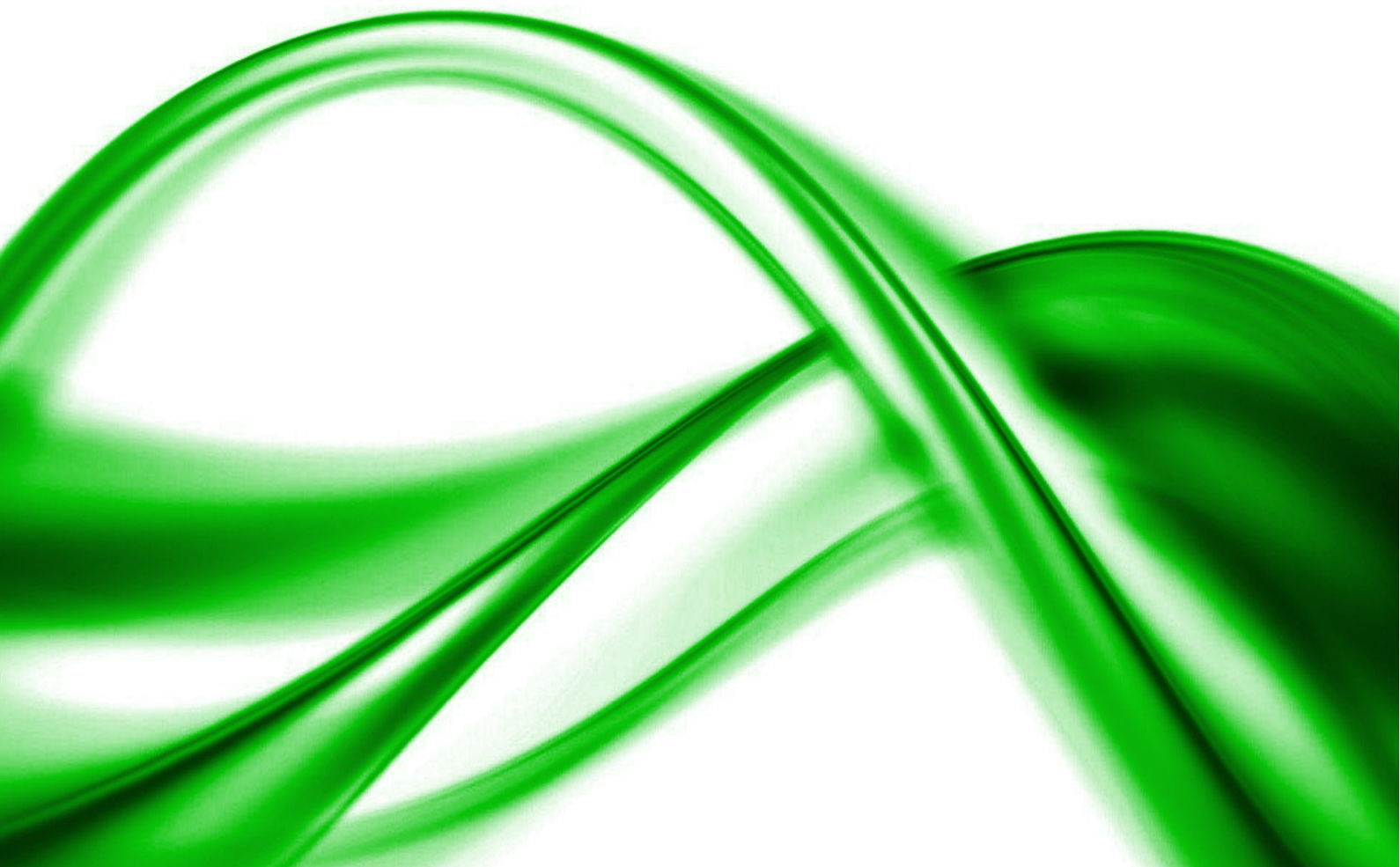


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"The University of Alberta, its buildings, labs and research stations are primarily located on the territory of the Nêhiyaw (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Nakoda (Stoney), Dene, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Anishinaabe (Ojibway/Saulteaux), lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7 and 8 and homeland of the Métis. The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems and cultures of all First Nations, Métis and Inuit nations" (University of Alberta, 2024).

Purpose of this Report:

As a part of our Municipal Politics course, a Community Service Learning program, we were asked by the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) to conduct an executive report on *The Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act* (2024). The purpose of our report is to provide concise documentation of comparable municipalities that have enacted similar legislation to Bill 20. In this, we have compiled comprehensive research, literature reviews, and opinion pieces to articulate popular opinion on whether or not political parties function effectively at the local level.

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Abstract:

The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act* has the potential to be a landmark piece of legislation in Alberta—mainly, impacting municipal elections and governance. Our findings, derived from comprehensive literature reviews, case studies, and media analysis, led us to conclude that implementing political partisanship at the local level is something many policymakers, councillors, and regular Albertans have no appetite for in local elections. Our recommendations are for the RMA to not readily embrace the ideas of political partisan integration, due to the lack of significant data showcasing that the amendments within Bill 20 were conceived with rurality in mind. We believe many articles were written from an urbanized perspective, and integrating many of these vague amendments into local elections may threaten local autonomy and the democratic processes in rural Alberta.

Introduction to Bill 20: *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*:

The Government of Alberta has tabled the *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024* [formerly “Bill 20”] in an attempt to strengthen accountability measures in local elections and municipal government. Bill 20’s proposals amend two integral pieces of municipal-related legislation:

The *Local Authorities Election Act* [“LAEA”]; and
The *Municipal Governments Act* [“MGA”].

2015 Bill 20
Third Session, 28th Legislature, 64 Elizabeth II
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA
BILL 20
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT ACT, 2015
MR. WEADICK
First Reading
Second Reading
Committee of the Whole
Third Reading
Royal Assent

Of the amendments, of high interest amongst policymakers, local officials, and Albertans is the addition of local political parties. This allows for the registration of parties that can subsequently endorse a candidate or slate of candidates. The party affiliation would then appear on the ballot next to the candidate’s name; however, these local political parties would not be affiliated with any federal or provincial political party and would initially be limited to Edmonton and Calgary as the pilot municipalities. Additionally, parties must be formally registered before a political party can accept contributions and parties need 1,000 signatures to register officially. Similar to the rules in place for municipal candidates, contributions to a local political party can only be made by Alberta residents and organizations, including unions and corporations (Bill 20: *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*). A maximum contribution of \$5,000

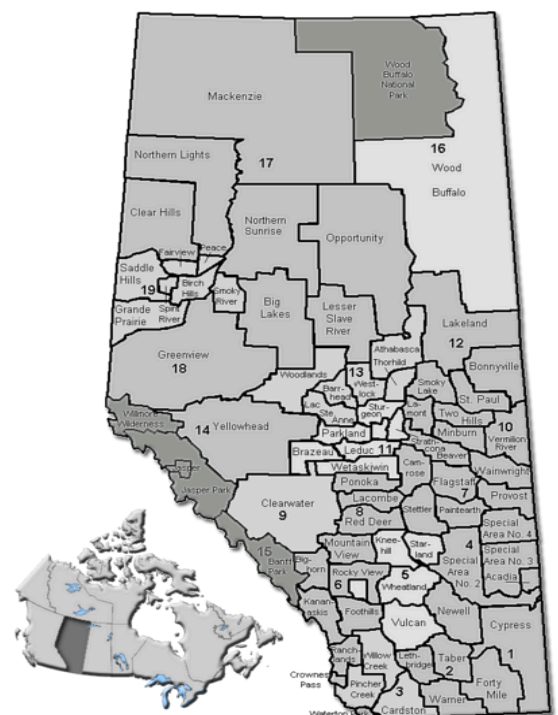
in the aggregate is also allowed to all registered political parties per municipality, per year. Parties must also ensure that all donations and expenses are managed separately from their candidates (Bill

20: *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act*, 2024). Parties must also file annual disclosure statements which will be available on the municipal website (Bill 20: *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act*, 2024). The bill specifies that no contributions may be made to slates—a more informal organization comprising a group of two candidates or more who choose to be affiliated with each other. Unlike local political parties, slates do not have such extensive registration requirements. Penalties will be put in place for parties or slates who fail to follow the rules. Ultimately, the framework of this act provides a long list of matters that include how parties are to be structured, financed and operated (Dollansky and Lang, 2024).

Partisanship in Canadian Municipalities:

The responsibilities of local governments in Canada—as in most countries with municipal levels of government—are “closer to the people” than is the case for the responsibilities of the federal or provincial governments, with the result that the policy priorities and decisions of councillors are more likely than those of other governments to affect the day-to-day lives of residents.

Political parties are contributors to municipal elections across the globe. From South Korea and Iceland to the United Kingdom and Brazil; their presence in local elections is commonplace and accepted among electors in many countries (McGregor et al., 2024). Non-partisan, local politics is less common and is found only in select locations, primarily in Australia, New Zealand/Aotearoa, the western United States, and areas in Canada (McGregor et al., 2024). While some Canadian cities—Vancouver and Montréal, specifically—have political parties at the local level, most do not. In Canada, most local elections are both formally and informally non-partisan, and voters often know nothing about the partisanship of their municipal candidates. Even in cities with party labels on the ballot, municipal parties are almost always exclusively local, with only informal and tenuous connections to major provincial or federal parties (McGregor et al., 2024). Moreover, Canada’s multi-party system at the federal level, combined with separate and distinct party systems in most provinces, makes it difficult for Canadian voters to access heuristic cues about a municipal candidate’s party affiliation. Alberta’s first introductory legislation regarding the introduction of political parties at the municipal level is the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act of 2024.



Rural-Albertan Life and Municipalities:

As Epp (2008) notes, rural conceptions of rural Albertan identity often hinge on self-reliance, self-sufficiency, independence, and an antagonism toward debt of any kind, coupled with a long-standing willingness of both provincial and federal governments to offset the inequities created by markets (or their failure) with spending. Additionally, Canada's colonial past can be understood as a mostly rural history of "extraction, political expediency, and compromise between political success and public-sector spending" (Epp 2008). While regional differences are influenced by factors such as geography, economy, language, and history, rural development can generally be viewed as a failure from social, economic, and environmental perspectives (Hallstrom 2019). As Blake (2003) writes:

"[I]t is clear that there has been a 'herd mentality' in the strategies adopted to foster regional and rural development. Most of the provinces have followed models adopted elsewhere or have simply accepted federal money for rural and regional development without being proactive, creative or courageous to the particular and peculiar challenges and opportunities in their own region or province" (p. 189).

He goes on to note that "development strategies have been largely unsuccessful at creating long-term economic growth and prosperity in rural Canada and throughout the more remote and sparsely populated regions of the country. One can make the case that most of the attempts at rural development and rural revitalization in Canada have been an unmitigated disaster if we were to apply a business model to the various initiatives" (p. 189).

Given the economic, cultural, and political significance of rural areas and their role in shaping Albertan identity, it seems surprising that rural development could be seen as a failure (Hallstrom 2019). However, since the 1980s, rural development has shifted focus from growth to efforts aimed at attracting business (Hallstrom 2019). In contrast, cities have emerged as hubs of innovation, growth, and modernity, benefiting from global trends such as freer trade, comparative advantage, foreign direct investment, privatization, and deregulation (Epp 2008; Hallstrom 2019). As a result, rural Canada has become both an active participant and a casualty of a Canadian political economy that remains staples-based, yet is also heavily reliant upon both rural resources and the state (Hallstrom 2019).

Municipal governments have enjoyed an uneasy position within the frameworks of Canadian politics—the provinces are responsible for the coherence of local government systems within their borders. As such, they are responsible for setting out the powers of municipal governments but are also responsible for setting and maintaining the capacity of municipalities as local and functioning democracies where a wide range of services and policies are operationalized and delivered (Hallstrom 2019). Municipalities suffer a legally and practically "weak" level of decision-making with no constitutional standing—municipalities exist as a result of provincial legislation, such as the MGA (Hallstrom 2019). Compared to other members of the International Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development, Canadian municipalities are among the weakest local governments (Hallstrom 2019). There is a growing list of core challenges to their sustainability, particularly for small municipalities, that can be derived from this weakness, including a “vicious cycle of population loss (coupled with resulting declining property tax collection) and reduced services such as schools, health care, and retail; decreased revenues from federal sources via the provinces; significant infrastructural deficits; and a common pattern of increased responsibility with no associated change in authority” (Hallstrom 2019).

From state-owned agricultural facilities in the early 20th century to the Rural Alberta Development Fund in 2008, these interventions have aimed to offset the inequities created by economic shifts. However, since the 1980s, rural communities have increasingly been relegated to serving as recreational spaces for urbanites or sites for large-scale industrial and agricultural development, often absorbing the by-products of urbanization and industry (Epp & Whitson 2009). Despite this, rural Alberta remains crucial to the provincial economy, particularly through its resource industries, yet the emphasis on growth driven by energy, agriculture, and forestry under successive Progressive Conservative governments has often neglected the social dimensions of rural development (Hallstrom 2019). This economic focus has led to significant growth in sectors like oil and gas, but also exacerbated inequities between rural and urban areas, resulting in issues such as declining populations, urban migration, and the erosion of local services and infrastructure. This neoliberal economic model, which prioritizes private-sector growth over public welfare, has perpetuated a cycle where rural communities bear the social and environmental costs of resource extraction while receiving minimal compensatory support (Hallstrom 2019).

The provincial government’s approach has been to facilitate industrial growth while minimizing the role of the state. While this has spurred economic activity, it has also entrenched rural Alberta's dependency on industries that extract wealth with minimal reinvestment into local communities (Hallstrom 2019). In practice, rural areas have been positioned as peripheral to the province's broader economic agenda, which has been shaped by the interests of energy corporations and a dominant political party that has historically aligned its policies with those of the corporate sector (Hallstrom 2019). The outcome is a policy framework that focuses on economic growth at the expense of social well-being, leaving rural communities dependent on extractive industries while struggling with social, environmental, and economic disparities.

Municipal Ideology:

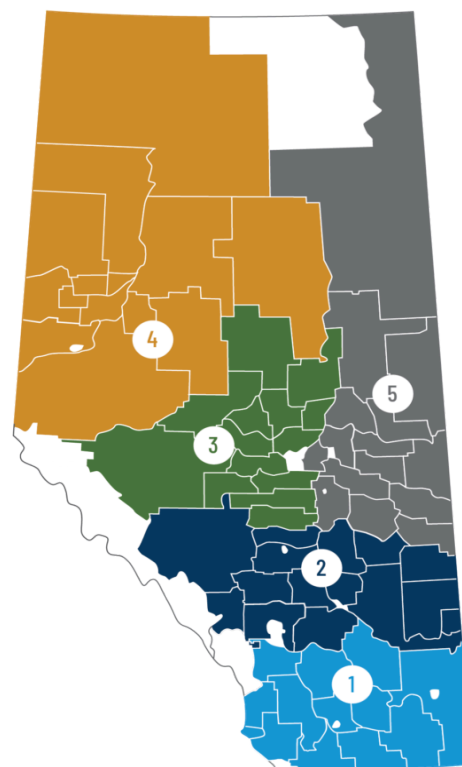
The study of local public opinion and ideological representation in municipal politics has evolved significantly in recent years. Traditionally, many scholars argued that local elections, especially outside large cities, were non-ideological, driven instead by local issues and the managerial competence of incumbents (Lucas and Armstrong 2021). This view was grounded in the belief that local governments are constrained by factors like socio-demographic homogeneity,

non-redistributive policy domains, and inter-municipal competition, which made ideological disagreement less salient (Lucas and Armstrong 2021).

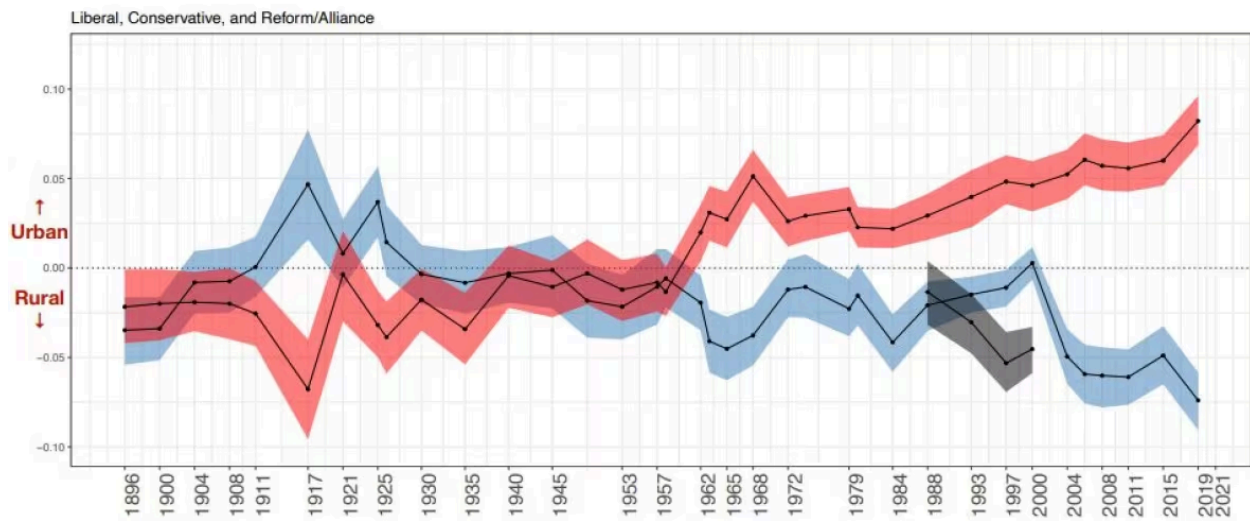
However, recent research has challenged this view, providing evidence that ideology does play a substantial role in municipal elections. Studies have shown that there is a clear relationship between voters' ideological positions and the policies their municipalities enact (Lucas and Armstrong 2021). Moreover, this trend is observed in municipalities of all sizes, including both U.S. and Canadian cities (Lucas and Armstrong 2021). Even in the context of Canadian cities, there is robust evidence of ideological voting and partisan representation at the municipal level (Lucas and Armstrong 2021).

As the question has shifted from whether ideology matters in local politics to how it shapes local elections and governance, scholars have turned their attention to two key areas. First, research on responsiveness examines the connection between the ideological preferences of municipal voters and the policies enacted by local governments (Lucas and Armstrong 2021). Second, recent studies on ideological congruence representation explore the alignment between the ideological views of constituents and the politicians who represent them (Lucas and Armstrong 2021). This line of research draws from broader studies on how well politicians understand and represent the ideological preferences of their constituents (Lucas and Armstrong 2021).

Specifically, a growing discussion amongst political scientists is the growing urban-rural divide within Canada regarding elections. Lucas (2021) found a steadily widening urban-rural divide in support for the Liberals and Conservatives since the early 1990s. A longer historical view shows that while smaller gaps emerged between the two parties in the 1920s and again in the 1960s and '70s, the urban-rural gap between the two parties was greater in the 2019 and 2021 elections than at any point in Canada's history (Lucas 2021). Their research determines that the urban-rural divide in support of Canada's major parties has been around for generations, but has dramatically intensified over the past 25 years. The urban-rural divide predicts election outcomes more strongly today than at any previous point in our history.



Rural Municipality of Alberta's Members Map



Source: Armstrong, Lucas, and Taylor 2021

Figure 1 produced by Lucas, Taylor, and Armstrong shows the relationship between riding vote share and riding urbanity for the Liberals and Conservatives across every election since Confederation. Positive values indicate urban advantage; negative values indicate rural advantage. (Jack Lucas and University of Calgary 2021).

How does this play out for Municipal Elections?

In the wake of the latest provincial election, where the NDP secured Edmonton and 11 seats in Calgary, the United Conservative Party (UCP) became the first to win without holding a majority in either of Alberta's two major urban hubs. This outcome challenges the traditional notion that partisan divides play a central role in municipal governance, which is often seen as more pragmatic and less ideologically driven. While Canadian local elections are predominantly non-partisan, with voters typically unaware of candidates' party affiliations, even cities that do label candidates' party ties often feature municipal parties that are largely local and only loosely connected to provincial or federal politics. The absence of clear party alignments at the municipal level suggests that political identity can be fluid, particularly in smaller or suburban communities. Some Canadian urban scholars have argued that local elections serve as a "relief valve" for individuals whose party affiliation conflicts with the political culture of their community, allowing them to pursue political office at the municipal level without the pressure of aligning with provincial or national parties. This concept strengthens the argument that the dynamics of municipal elections, regardless of size, might share more in common than previously thought, highlighting the increasing irrelevance of strict ideological divides in local politics.

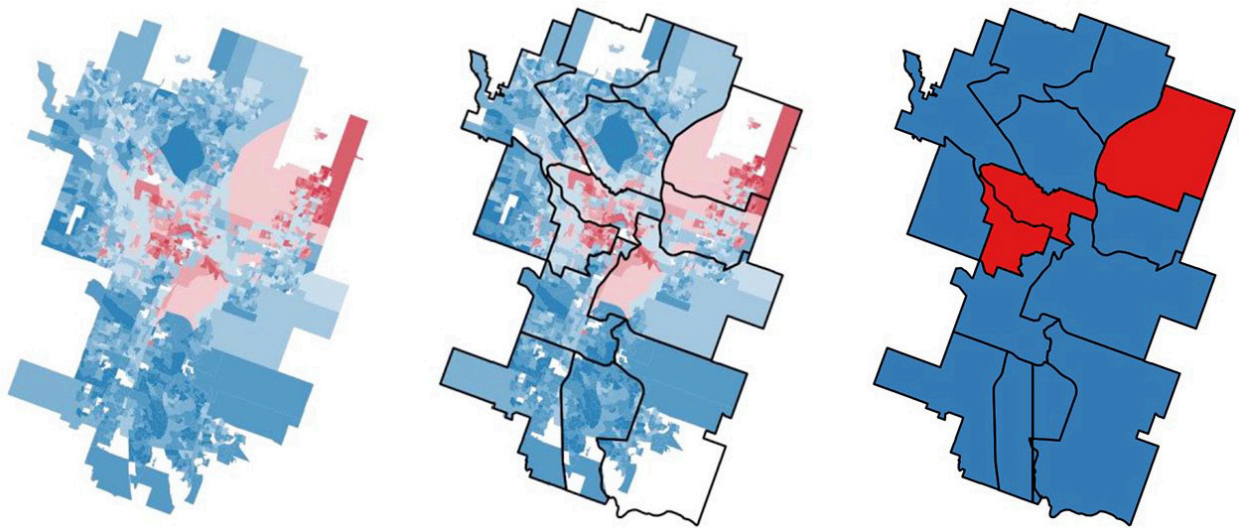


Figure 2 is an example map showing how federal voting results would look in Calgary’s ward system (McGregor et al. 2024).

McGregor et al. (2024) explain that there are a few reasons why municipalities in Ontario opt to have non-partisan ballots. From a comparative perspective, there are limited incentives on the part of incumbent politicians to encourage political parties, and some would argue that non-partisanship is a historically entrenched aspect of municipal political culture in Ontario (McGregor et al. 2024). Moreover, municipal challenger candidates, facing the twin headwinds of incumbency advantage and low levels of voter information, may see considerable benefit in creating slates with other candidates to develop shared policy promises, shared information tools and branding, and shared critiques of incumbent performance—a strategy that has proved successful in municipal campaigns earlier in Canada's history (McGregor et al. 2024). Political parties which exist at the federal or provincial level may see some advantage in selecting candidates for office municipally. Local candidacy can provide political parties with additional opportunities to reward politically ambitious party loyalists due to being “closer to the people” (McGregor et al. 2024). Implementation of partisanship at the local level can also serve as a training ground for candidates who aspire to enter provincial or federal politics later in their careers. Political parties can also benefit from the voter identification and mobilization efforts that occur during municipal elections—which create valuable up-to-date information on likely supporters in a particular community (McGregor et al. 2024). Additionally, local campaigns can allow political parties to “pilot” policy commitments or campaign messages for future elections at other levels (McGregor et al. 2024).

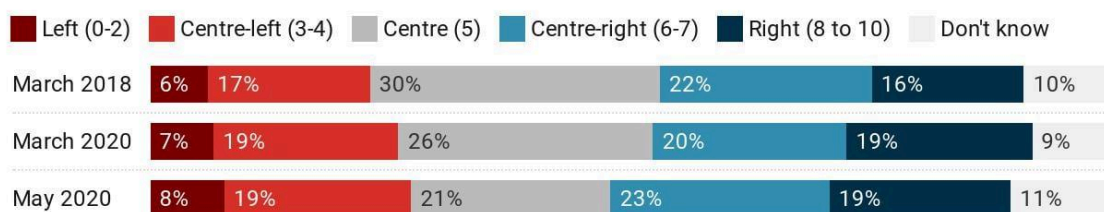
On the opposition, a possible source of Ontario's non-partisan equilibrium is public opinion. Political actors who might otherwise see good reason to form municipal parties may advocate against it if they fear that the public will punish them for their efforts (McGregor et al. 2024). This might create a stable equilibrium in which no one is willing to act as the first mover in the direction of a

partisan municipal system (McGregor et al. 2024). Moreover, political parties may be more difficult to initiate today, in an atmosphere of declining partisanship and decreasing trust in political parties, than in earlier decades when political parties emerged in most other municipal political systems (McGregor et al. 2024).

In short, McGregor et al. (2024) elucidate statistical analysis of Ontario's public discourse on party politics at the local level. The authors explain that many municipal contexts in which non-partisanship predominates are likely to face a similar version of a paradox they describe as “voters who are keen to use partisan information in municipal voting decisions...dislike the idea of introducing political parties into municipal politics” (McGregor et al. 2024). In this situation, it is certainly possible to imagine a counterfactual scenario—a scenario that is not uncommon in other countries—in which voters remain skeptical about the value of political parties but grudgingly accept a very different municipal status quo in which parties are regularly involved (McGregor et al. 2024). To move to that different equilibrium, however, a municipality or province would have to experience substantial exogenous shocks—such as an intervention by the provincial government, which has jurisdiction over municipal election law, strongly incentivizing candidates to form themselves into like-minded slates or parties. This scenario, similar to the introduction of the *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act* of 2024, might shift municipal politics in a partisan direction while allowing local candidates to avoid some of the blame for having done so. Alternatively, an act of high-risk political leadership by a municipal candidate, to form a coherent new political party or to link themselves explicitly to a provincial or federal party, might, if successful, result in a shift to a new partisan equilibrium.

Ideological Polarization over Time (2018 to 2020)

In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means left, and 10 means right?



Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Chart: John Santos • Source: Trend Research / Janet Brown Opinion Research • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3 demonstrates how Albertans identify ideologically; there is a shrinking of the center over the years (Santos 2020).

Popular Sentiments:

Across our research, we observed several similar arguments for both pro-independent and pro-party.

Argument:	General themes:	McGregor et al. Survey Respondents' Examples:
Pro-independent Arguments	<p>Municipal Distinctiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The separation of local politics from other sectors of government. 	<p>“Important to separate local politics from national and provincial ones.”</p> <p>“Don’t need party politics in municipal elections.”</p> <p>“Municipal is very different and party politics should not influence.”</p>
	<p>Independent Thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The idea is that with partisanship, councillors will think alongside political party lines rather than what's best for the municipality. 	<p>“It gives them a chance to formulate their own ideas and policies and not have to adhere to party policies.”</p> <p>“Prefer they think outside party policies.”</p> <p>“Their opinions can differ from the party.”</p>
	<p>Individual Merit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personability factors at the municipal level. Preference for voting for independents than voting alongside party lines. 	<p>“Candidates should run on their own records and policies.”</p> <p>“I like the idea of voting for the individual instead of the party.”</p> <p>“Rather vote the person for their policies and not their ‘team.’”</p>
	<p>Focus of representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The idea is that partisanship would convolute local needs. 	<p>“They should be representing the needs of the community without any political leaning.”</p> <p>“They should represent everyone no matter their political affiliation.”</p>
	<p>General anti-partisan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings of too much partisanship in other levels of government. 	<p>“It is nice to escape partisanship.”</p> <p>“Less partisanship.”</p> <p>“Most parties are corrupt and self-serving.”</p>

Argument:	General themes:	McGregor et al. Survey Respondents' Examples:
Pro-party Arguments	Information (General) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heuristic cues of candidates. 	<p>"Gives a better sense of their overall outlook and philosophies."</p> <p>"It gives you a better idea of what their views are."</p> <p>"So you know their stance in spending and policies."</p>
	Information (Ideology) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ideological heuristic cues for voter accessibility. 	<p>"Easier to identify ideology."</p> <p>"It makes it easier to know their political right or leftness."</p> <p>"To know which way they lean."</p>
	Strength in Numbers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If voted together, parties can work collaboratively within a municipality with a similar agenda. 	<p>"It allows them to work in a team."</p> <p>"There is more power to a group rather than an individual."</p> <p>"Bigger groups make bigger impacts than individuals."</p>
	Sentiments of "Getting Things Done" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less competition equates to more tangible work being completed. 	<p>"A bunch of independents with a variety of competing platforms and beliefs probably wouldn't ever get anything done."</p> <p>"They have more potential of winning and making a difference."</p>
	Accept Reality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The idea that candidates subliminally align with a party and partisanship would just bring these feelings to the public space. 	<p>"Because the independents heavily allude to their party affiliations anyway. Stop the charade."</p> <p>"They are part of a party anyway, might as well let us know which one."</p> <p>"Candidates follow party ideology anyway."</p>

Arguments In Favour:

For those wanting to run as independent candidates as has been the norm in Alberta, it will be a new challenge to compete against those tied to a party. Beyond the obvious financial advantages of affiliation, there are also apparatus benefits that naturally flow—namely data, incumbency, event planning, and a larger volunteer pool. But despite the calls from both the public and elected officials not to include parties at the municipal level, this is the new reality stakeholders and residents will have to face.

Research on political parties and their effects on elections and representation has pointed to three main positive effects of political parties on municipal politics: turnout, information, and accountability (McGregor et al. 2024). On the matter of turnout, Welch and Bledsoe (1986) observe that non-partisan municipal elections traditionally have lower voter turnout than those in which parties openly participate. These ideas build on the work of Lee (1960), who observed a substantially higher voter turnout rate in American cities with partisan elections than those with mandated non-partisan ballots; however, American municipal elections are under federal party banners, where Albertan elections would not be associated with federal or provincial party labels. This difference in turnout may generally be a product of the work partisan groups put into mobilizing voters and ensuring their identified supporters participate in the electoral process (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 9). Parties also have an affective component; most voters have psychological attachments to parties (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 9). Empirically, scholars have repeatedly shown that party identification is a, or even the central component of voter decision-making (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 9). As an affective attachment, it motivates individuals to participate as a display of party support (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 9). They identify the teams to root (and to vote) for in contests that otherwise—because of the costs of information voters—would have a difficult time getting excited about (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 9). Thus, party labels can provide an important mechanism to aid in voter decision-making and for the mobilization of electors into the political process (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 9).

Political parties provide accumulated expertise and knowledge to help candidates mobilize their supporters; in non-partisan systems, candidates must rely on their personal campaign team or their own knowledge of canvassing, advertising, messaging, and “get-out-the-vote” efforts, which may be limited. In the absence of partisan mobilization—and the activation of partisan identities associated with it—local participation may be more limited. Political parties also affect the local information landscape. Municipal elections are often described as low-information events, particularly in the context of consolidated media and limited local news coverage. Political parties not only have the incentive to convey their policy commitments and “brand” to voters but once established, they also provide voters with an easy heuristic with which to identify suitable candidates. By “producing a set of reference points for the individual elector” municipal political

parties would offer “a bridge between a list of candidates and voters” (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 10).

Political parties may also improve political accountability after the election is over. Even the most engaged local residents often find it difficult to track their councillor's position on important votes in non-partisan councils, especially on larger councils. In the absence of a coherent policy agenda organized by a political party, political scientists have worried that individual councillors could shift blame and avoid accountability when legislation performed poorly. In the absence of political parties, councillors may engage in strategic information disclosure to highlight their successes and downplay their failures, strengthening incumbency advantage. Political parties have a clear incentive to provide information about council success (if in power) and council failure (if not in power), potentially easing the path for voters to reward or punish their representative's performance. In essence, the presence of an organized opposition serves to keep the public better apprised of the council's business.

Popular Oppositions:

There are legitimate critiques of municipal partisanship that must be considered as well. One possibility is that a party system would remove the careful deliberation of council members from public view. Important policy decisions may be made by partisan staff and enforced by a party whip, disallowing individual members from expressing their views. Similar to this is the idea that parties can reduce the time for debate over issues and increase the time for debate over partisan “talking points”. Rather than focus on the important issues of governing, a municipal party driven by an institutionalized party apparatus, may attempt to win quick political victories over carefully considering the technical minutiae of urban systems. Another possible drawback is the potential for further animosity to develop between levels of government. As municipalities are required to work closely with the provincial governments in Canada, the possibility of each level maintaining a different partisan and/or ideological grounding could further strain the already complicated dynamics between provinces and municipalities. When parties sought to contest the 1969 municipal election in Toronto, the province's Conservative Party raised this prospect and used it as justification for their non-participation in the race.

The use of a non-partisan ballot was one of the many Progressive reforms introduced around the turn of the century that are still heavily used today. The intent of the change to a non-partisan format was, and still is, to remove party cues from a voter's decision, thereby causing the voter to seek out other information about a candidate (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001, 7). Political scientists have frequently argued that political parties not only have a positive role but that they are essential for a strong democracy. In the liberal-pluralist vision of American politics that underlies most current empirical research, politics is more often viewed as being about "who gets what" than about discovering the common good. In this view, a measure of the strength of democracy is the

character of the linkage between voters and rulers. In addition, we have come to realize that the normative view of a highly involved and informed electorate needs to be revised. Informed by rational actor theories of behaviour, political science now generally accepts the view that many citizens are going to be poorly informed about, and only moderately interested in politics (Downs 1957). Nevertheless, more recent research has demonstrated that in spite of these shortcomings at the individual level, we can and do achieve an electorate that is collectively rational and highly responsive to what the government does. This collective rationality is attained, in large part, by the use of information shortcuts. Party labels, in this perspective, provide important cognitive information. They convey generally accurate policy information about candidates and their low cost and accessibility help voters to reach reasonable decisions. It follows, then, that taking party labels away in non-partisan elections and thereby raising the costs of information about candidates for voters, non-partisan elections would make voting more difficult and thereby undermine the potential for popular control.

Opinion Editorial Analysis on Bill 20:

Given the scope of Bill 20 and the major changes that are to be seen now that it is law many people have strong opinions on changes. To get a full understanding of why some Albertans are in favour or against Bill 20, an Opinion Editorial Analysis was conducted to ensure a full understanding of different opinions on the issue. It should be noted that while a similar amount of positive and negative articles appear in this report, overall 91% of articles reviewed took a stance against Bill 20. This analysis should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of reasons or a consensus on why people think they do on Bill 20, but merely a compilation of common arguments used for or against the bill.

What Albertans Think of Municipal Political Parties:

In Favour:

Columnist for the Edmonton Journal Keith Gerein who is largely against Bill 20, in an editorial argued that one thing parties could be good for is potentially causing the city to use less time and resources worrying about candidates as the party would be able to do it themselves. Gerein writes that “if the UCP government so eagerly wants to institute political parties at the municipal level, then those parties should handle the vetting, including a scan of potential past criminality” (Gerein 2024). This is an interesting perspective as if political parties are to be used in municipal politics then they should have more responsibilities such as running themselves, taking care of their money, vetting their candidates, and ensuring stability in local government. For some, if these roles are taken away from the city to run themselves then it will simply be more efficient.

In another article, Calgary Herald columnist Rick Bell argues for political parties saying that these changes will usher in transparency to municipal politics. Bell states, “The city's boss says right now there are candidates at the doors with no party handle who can tell people they believe are conservative that they themselves are conservative and tell people they believe are liberal that they

themselves are liberal. With city parties, it will make it easier for those who want to vote one way or the other to find their candidate. The candidate's affiliation will be spelled out and if the candidate is elected and votes in a different way the voters can more easily call that politician out" (Bell 2024) This is one of the most common arguments in favour of political parties. Essentially, the argument is that municipal politics are already partisan and this will just make municipal politics more open and transparent.

Against:

A fair amount of columnists have come out against political parties in municipal politics. This included the opinion of Calgary teacher Brett Dibble who states, "Adding parties to local elections will reduce the accountability of politicians to constituents. The entire point of having an elected representative such as a councillor is to attend to the unique issues affecting their ward, as these often differ around the city. The entire point of political parties is to vote in unison with the party leaning, which often can go against what citizens in the ward want" (Dibble 2024). In other words many are weary that political parties will create politicians who are more focused on pleasing their party than their constituents.

Another common opinion that is shared is that of Scott Strasser who points out the words of Alberta Municipalities stating, "Albertans have repeatedly said they want less money, not more, in local politics," the statement read. "They have also said they do not want political parties in local elections. We note that candidates who run under a political party will benefit from greater funding. This creates an environment in which independent candidates are at a significant disadvantage, a concern we raised during our consultations with the provincial government" (Strasser 2024). Essentially, declaring that this will not only hurt people who choose to run as independents, but it will allow big money to take over Albertan politics, especially with the introduction of unions and businesses being allowed to donate to candidates.

Polls Showing Public Opinion on Bill 20:

Given the major changes that Bill 20 imposes, the Alberta government decided to survey the public to see if they would like to see parties in municipal elections. This 2023 survey from the Alberta government received 7,680 responses with 70% of people being opposed to parties participating in municipal elections, and 25% of respondents being in favour.

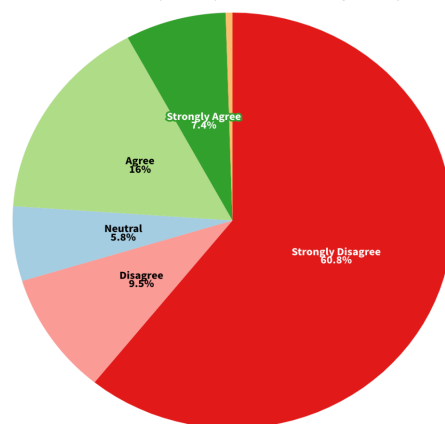


Figure 4 summarizes survey results conducted by the *Government of Alberta* on whether the electoral ballot should be amended to allow political parties to be listed by municipal candidates (Black 2024).

Similarly, Alberta's gold standard of polling Janet Brown ran a survey in 2023 on behalf of Alberta Municipalities. This survey asked the following question, “In federal and provincial elections in Canada, most of the candidates who run represent a political party. In municipal elections in Alberta, candidates run as individuals, not members of political parties. In your view, would you prefer to see municipal candidates where you live run...?” The survey received a response from a random sample of 900 Albertans and found that 68% of Albertans would prefer local candidates to run as individuals, while 24% preferred them to run with political parties (Brown 2023).

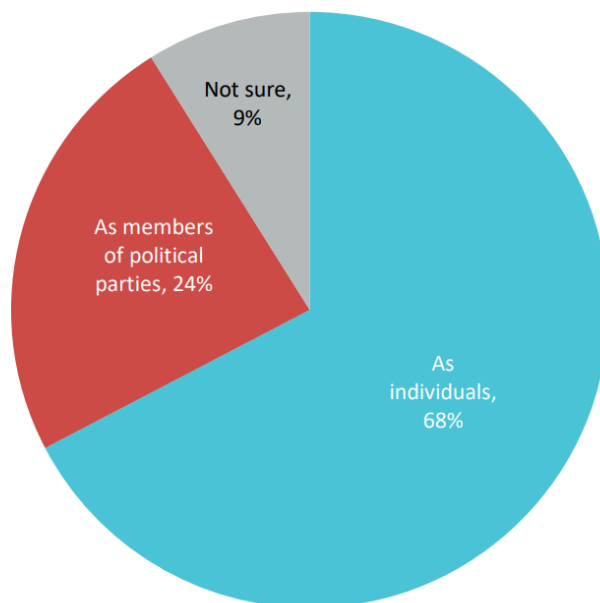


Figure 5 shows the results of a survey of 900 random Albertans in 2023 asked by Janet Brown. With the following question, “In federal and provincial elections in Canada, most of the candidates who run represent a political party. In municipal elections in Alberta, candidates run as individuals, not members of political parties. In your view, would you prefer to see municipal candidates where you live run...?”

Given the similar results between the two surveys and the mixed methods used it is reasonable to assume that these surveys genuinely reflect the feelings of Albertans on political parties in municipal politics.

What Albertan Politicians Think of Municipal Political Parties:

Unsurprisingly, Albertan politicians of differing views on Bill 20. On a provincial level it is largely being pushed by Municipal Affairs Minister Ric McIver, who states, “Our intent with introducing Bill 20 in the spring and now with the regulations I am announcing today has been the

same from the very beginning: to increase accountability, transparency, and public trust in local elections” This is contrasted by the Municipal Affairs Critic Kyle Kasawski who states, “On the campaign spending side, candidates who run in political parties will be able to spend twice as much money as independent candidates. Political parties in local elections are deeply unpopular with Albertans, but the UCP are tilting the playing field against anyone who doesn’t want to participate in the new Bill 20 political system” (Kasawski 2024).

In addition, both of Alberta’s municipal advocacy groups have come out against the proposal. The President of Alberta Municipalities Tyler Gandam stated, “Independent candidates risk being outspent and drowned out by party candidates who enjoy the financial backing of corporations and unions, essentially, Bill 20 puts local governments up for sale to the highest bidder” (Gandam 2024). The RMA takes a similar approach with their former President stating, “Bill 20 is another step in the province’s quest to exert more control over municipalities and centralize local decision-making. Because of provincial fights with a few local leaders, now all municipal councillors must worry about missing out on federal funding, joining a political party, having their local decisions overturned, and possibly being removed from office, Our members do so much for this province – we manage nearly all the roads and bridges, make sure land and services are available for industrial development, prepare for and respond to natural disasters, and more. Much of what they do is behind the scenes and goes unnoticed by the public and the provincial government. Rural municipal leaders are okay with that, but when the province actively undermines the ability of our members to serve their communities, we will not sit back and take it” (RMA 2024). At this current moment, it is clear that Alberta’s municipalities are not happy with this proposal which means that the pilot period will be essential to see if these concerns can be alleviated.

One other important perspective that needs to be acknowledged is that of municipal politicians, once again this is a polarizing issue. One such opinion comes from the mayor of Edmonton Amarjeet Sohi who believes, “The province isn’t listening to municipalities or everyday Albertans — instead, they’re changing the rules based on conspiracy theories and the wishes of a small minority. Bill 20 is an excuse to funnel more money into local election campaigns, and out of local government” (Tran 2024). When it comes to rural councillors some seem to be less concerned about the effects of Bill 20 with the mayor of Boyle stating, “For us, it would probably be redundant, It doesn’t really impact us, but I only really live in my own world... That’s more a big city one as well, we aren’t going to have a union giving me money to run in Boyle, I think they need to make it clear for donations, and I think they’re just cleaning that up a little bit. I like that part” (Brennan 2024). Essentially, this argues that the changes of Bill 20 will only really affect big cities and smaller centers and counties will have their local election relatively unchanged. It is clear that there are still major differences in the perspectives of local politicians.

Political Parties and Voter Turnout in Municipal Elections:

Context:

One of the common arguments used by those wanting to introduce political parties to municipal politics is that it will help raise voter turnout (Boyd 2024). This is due to the belief that if people are more knowledgeable about the candidate's platform or projects, they will be more likely to vote. In fact, a 2022 study found that when surveyed individuals said they would be more likely to vote if they had more information about the candidates (Breux et al. 2022). Assuming political parties increase an individual's knowledge of candidates it could be assumed that political parties raise voter turnout. To test this theory, we conducted a small study to see if the presence of political parties meaningfully increases voter turnout in municipal elections.

Methods:

Currently, in Canada, there are two major cities that have political parties in their municipal elections; these are Vancouver and Montreal. The study compared these cities' election turnout to those of Alberta's two major cities: Edmonton and Calgary.

To see if there are any differences between rural and urban areas, the voter turnout of three counties in Alberta was studied by random choice of the researcher. The three counties selected were Camrose County, Stettler County, and Rocky View County.

Unfortunately, there are currently no rural municipalities in Canada that have political parties in municipal elections, so there is no one-to-one comparison to the rural municipalities in Alberta. Because of this, the UK was chosen as a comparison point. The UK was chosen as they have political parties in municipal elections and some councils that could be classified as rural. In this the UK counties were chosen by those with the smallest population (excluding the urban City of London) the counties selected were Rutland and the Isle of Wight. Now, it should be noted that these are not necessarily like rural counties in Alberta as they contain their area's largest cities in their governance, but these are the closest possible comparisons for rural Canada. The city of Bristol in the UK was also selected to see if the same patterns held in Urban areas as well.

While the United States could have been used to compare rural turnout. This was not done because the US has their municipalities elections on the same day as their general and midterm elections, which naturally create a higher turnout. It was believed that this would not allow for a true comparison of voter turnout between the countries.

For each of the cities or municipalities that were selected the voter turnout of the last five elections was studied to determine if political parties lead to higher turnout in municipal elections.

Results:

When it came to the urban cities there was no clear evidence that political parties have an impact on voter turnout. In fact, when it comes down to it, all of our sample cities seem to be within 5% of each other when it comes to voter turnout in any given election. While there are a few

exceptions with some cities reaching a higher voter turnout in one election there is no clear pattern based on partisanship. Additionally, when looking at the numbers, the city of Calgary (which is currently non-partisan) has three of the highest voter turnouts on the list. So, it would appear that there is no significant difference between partisan and non-partisan elections.

Major Cities Voter Turnout

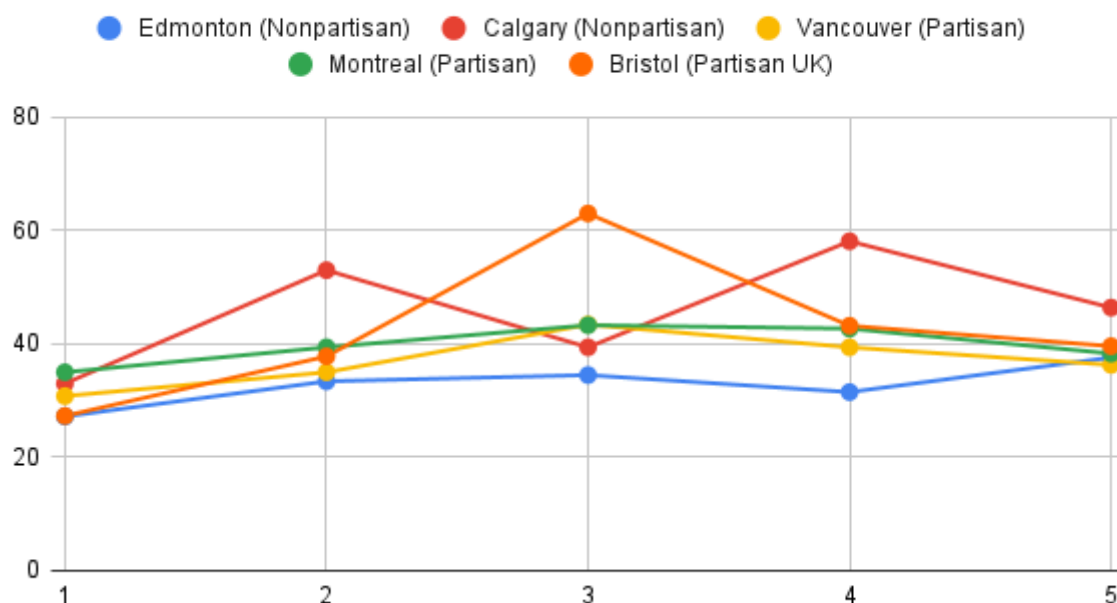


Figure 6 shows the different levels of voter turnout in urban areas, under both partisan and non-partisan systems. The figure shows that there is no significant difference in voter turnout between the partisan and non-partisan system of elections.

This trend is largely followed in rural areas. While in some of the elections the UK counties show a much higher voter turnout, those elections seem to be more outliers than anything to do with being partisan. While there is a larger spread than in urban areas of about 10% between the best and worst voter turnout in any given election, there does not appear to be a significant difference between non-partisan and partisan elections in rural areas.

Rural Areas Voter Turnout

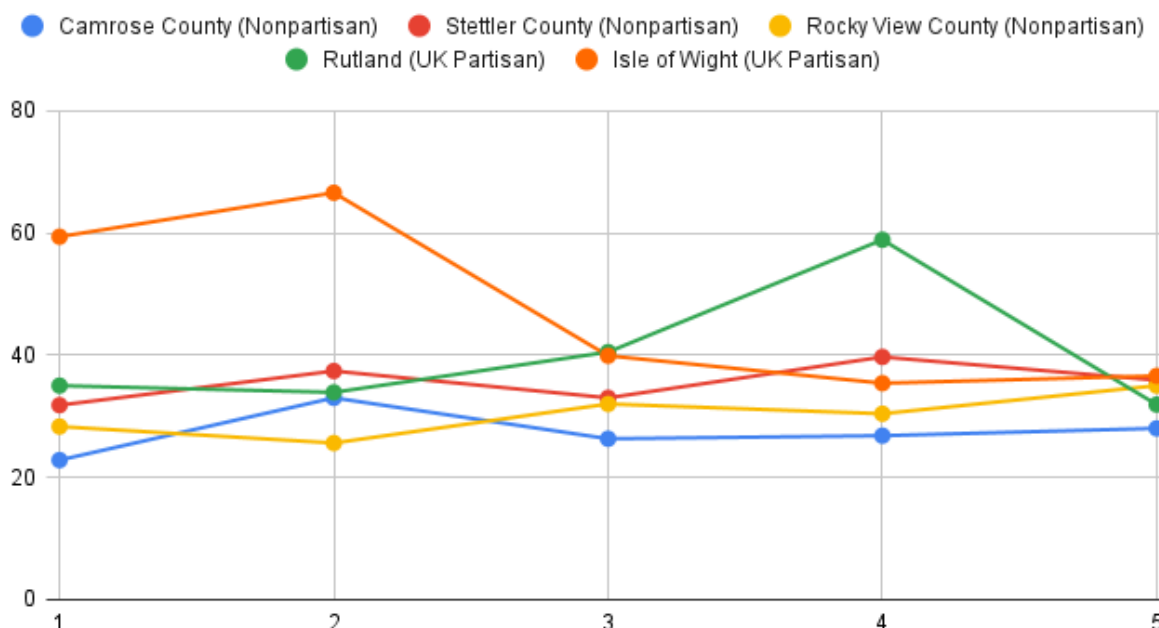


Figure 7 shows the different levels of voter turnout in rural areas, under both partisan and non-partisan systems. The figure shows that there is no significant difference in voter turnout between the partisan and non-partisan system of elections.

Discussion:

Overall, there does not seem to be any noticeable difference in turnout when it comes to partisan versus non-partisan elections, whether in rural or urban areas. With this in mind, the notions that adding political parties to municipal politics will substantially increase voter turnout in elections does not seem to be the case.

Independents Getting Elected in a Partisan System:

Context:

One of the major concerns many have about a potential move to political parties in municipal politics is the belief that there will be no more independents. Many counter this by arguing that people can still run as independents; they are just not forced to do so. A study was also conducted to see how the presence of political parties affects the number of independents who get elected.

Methods:

The same method that was used in the voter turnout study, was used to select the cities in this study. By going through the last five local elections, the percentage of independent candidates that were elected was used as a way of seeing how partisan elections affect who is elected.

Results:

When looking at the urban centers the number of independents who were elected was minimal. Independent candidates getting elected seems to be much more of an exception than a rule in major cities and often the candidate who gets elected loses in the next election. It would appear that when political parties are introduced in major cities independent candidates struggle to succeed.

Percentage of Independents Elected to Council(Urban)

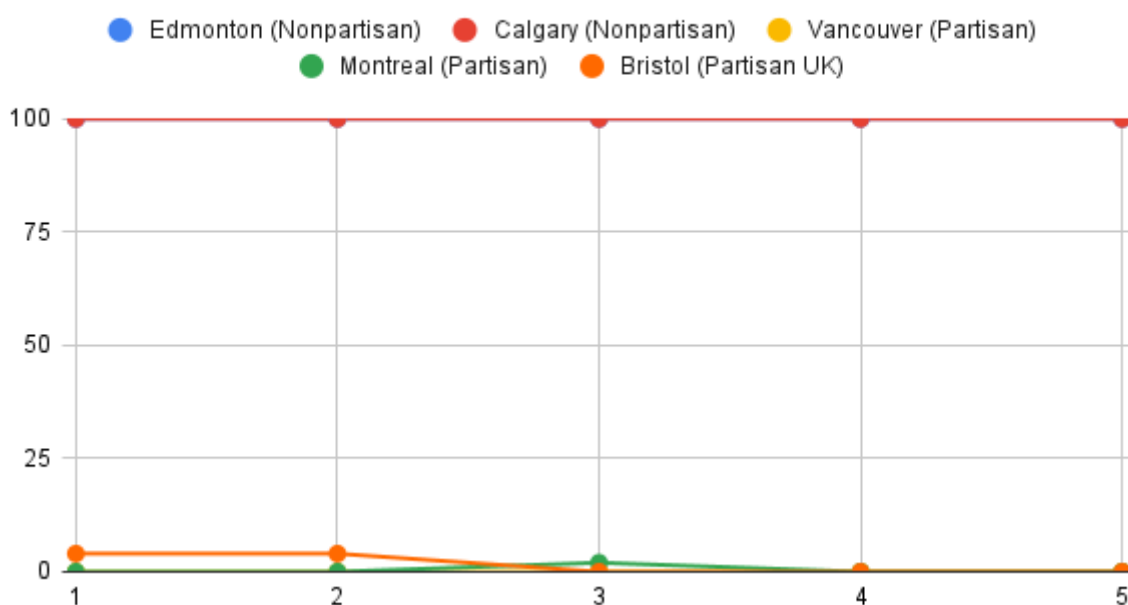


Figure 8 shows the percentage of independent candidates who get elected in municipal elections in major cities. The numbers show very few get elected, and when they do they struggle to win again. NOTE: Edmonton and Calgary are currently both 100% as their elections are non-partisan. Vancouver remains at 0% on this list as they have not elected a truly independent candidate. Vancouver has elected members of the Non-Partisan Association, however, this is considered a political party with an ideological lean.

Interestingly, the lack of independents getting elected in major cities does not seem to translate in rural areas. In terms of the UK counties studied there was a consistent level of

independents getting elected to their councils. This number seemed to hover around 25% and shows that at least in the examples used independents fare better in local rural elections. While there is no guarantee that this trend would continue if Alberta's rural municipalities had political parties, it is interesting to note the rural-urban divide in the sample.

Percentage of Independents Elected to Council (Rural)

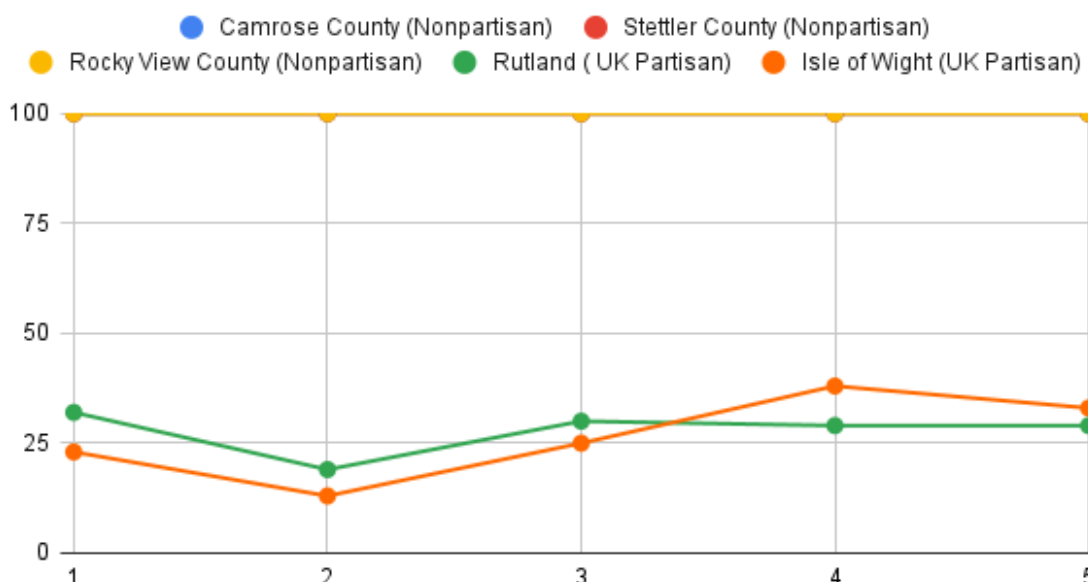


Figure 9 shows the percentage of independent candidates who get elected in municipal elections in rural areas. The numbers show that independents are more successful in rural areas than in urban areas. NOTE: The three Albertan counties are all at 100% as their elections are currently non-partisan.

Discussion:

While the small sample size of this study must be noted, it is interesting to see that independents are seemingly more likely to be elected in rural areas when compared to urban areas. This is potentially something for the RMA to note, if political parties do come to Alberta; rural municipalities are potentially less likely to have as many partisans on their councils as in Edmonton or Calgary. This could be potentially because rural politics are usually focused on less divisive issues, and it may be harder to start a successful political party in an area where you know all your neighbours.

Women's Participation in Municipal Politics & Issues with Implementing Party Politics:

The political landscape—at all levels— remains disproportionately a male-dominated field. Artiles, Franceschet, and Cloutier (2024) found that in Canada, women make up 31% of municipal politicians. However, this figure masks wide variation, with 16% of municipalities having no women and another 16% reaching parity among councillors (Artiles, Franceschet, and Cloutier, 2024). Wilton and Greer's (2020) article explores the political motivations women face when considering running for local government. Often, women are most motivated by a strong desire to serve and better their communities, having to balance family roles and the idea of giving back (Wilton and Greer 2020, 201). Wilton and Greer's study examined survey results from 198 women to explore "which women are serving in local government in Alberta, why they chose to run, and the challenges and benefits they experienced" (Wilton and Greer 2020, 202).

Non-partisanship in Alberta's municipal elections may offer both advantages and challenges for women aspiring to run for office. On the one hand, the absence of political parties could benefit women by bypassing the traditionally male-dominated party candidate selection processes, which can disproportionately disadvantage women (Wilton and Greer, 2020). Wilton and Greer's (2020) survey results indicate that the non-partisan nature of local politics was a strong motivating factor for women to run for these elected offices and party politics as a high deterrent for not running for higher levels of office with 21% of survey respondents articulating this distaste for partisanship (Wilton and Greer, 2020). In 2021, Edmonton elected a diverse council with eight of 13 seats to be filled by women and four by people of colour (Ritchie, 2021). It is evident that participation is increasing for women in municipal elections over the years; the University of Calgary on behalf of FCM's Canadian Women in Local Leadership (CanWILL) project unveiled data revealing that in 2023, women represent 31% of all municipal elected representatives in Canada (FCM 2023). However, it will be interesting to see if this increase persists under a partisan system, or if we will see a steep decline in women's participation in municipal politics.

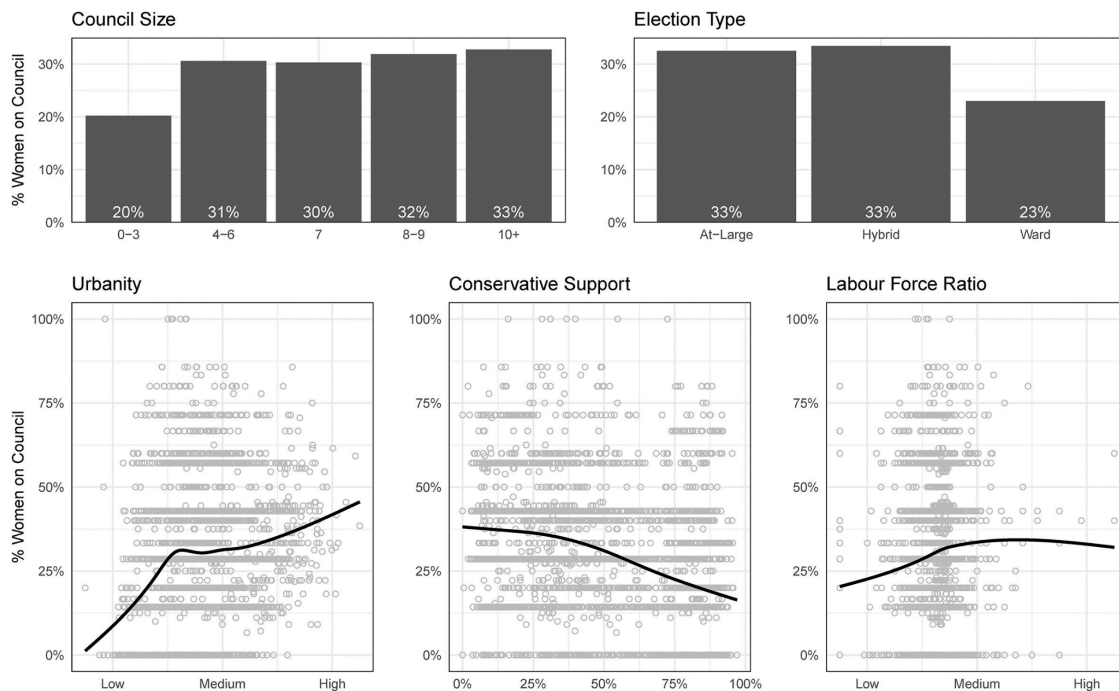


Figure 10 summarizes women's representation rates across our independent variables of interest. In the top-left panel, women's representation appears related to council size, with substantially lower representation on very small councils (20%). In the top-right panel, district types also appear to be related to women's representation, with substantially higher representation in at-large and hybrid municipalities than in municipalities with wards (Artiles, Franceschet, and Cloutier, 2024).

Minorities' Participation in Municipal Politics & Issues with Implementing Party Politics:

Why we in Canada have failed to look at minority and immigrant incorporation in municipal electoral politics is not entirely clear. It may be related to our traditional view of municipal governments as weak “creatures of the province.” Given their limited policy autonomy, the participation of diverse groups and the inclusiveness of elected assemblies at this level may seem an issue of lesser importance. Municipal issues are rising on the Canadian policy agenda, partly because of rapid population growth and demographic shifts in many of Canada’s urban centres and suburban peripheries.

In 2019, Across Canada, only 7% of municipal council seats were held by visible minorities, according to a study of the 50 largest cities. Political party responsiveness to minority mobilization has received less systematic attention than has the impact of minority mobilization in politics (Kittleson and Tate 2005, 164). There is no data on the amount of council seats held by visible minorities in rural areas.

Ideological Lines in Canadian Municipalities:

Municipal politics are often already voted along ideological lines when compared to voting in provincial and federal politics. With that in mind, political parties will not make a positive difference and will cause less independence for councillors. Partisanship of councillors across Canada mirrors what we see on a federal level. We see 40% to 54% of councillors ideologically align with how their district votes, federally.

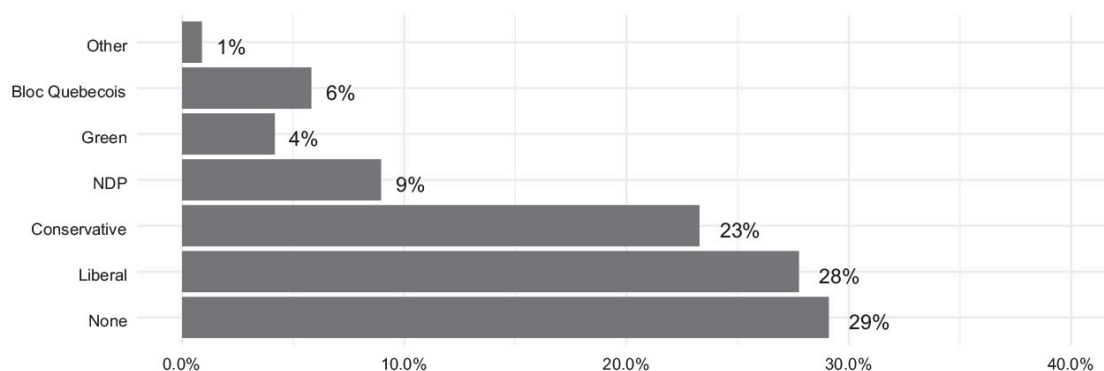


Figure 11 summarizes the distribution of party identification among municipal politicians in the CMB survey. In general, the distributions mirror those in the Canadian population as a whole: nearly thirty percent of municipal politicians do not identify with any political party, roughly one quarter identify with each of the two major parties (the Liberals and the Conservatives), and the remainder identify with one of the other parties.

What Could the Implementation of *The Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024* Look Like for Rural Alberta?

The implementation of party politics is being piloted in Edmonton and Calgary—Alberta’s major urban centers. The systematic operations of these municipalities parallel how party politics would operate in other Canadian cities like Montreal or Vancouver. Often these cities will have large majorities for the winning candidates as they use first past the post which allows winners to take a whole seat with just 30% of the vote. In these areas, people elect very few independent candidates as the parties have more funding and power. Canada has seen success in these urban areas with partisanship operating in urbanized areas, but what might partisanship look like in rural Alberta if this act expands after the pilot phase?

Honestly, it is uncertain. Across our research, there are no one-to-one comparisons of rural municipalities adopting partisanship *while* not embracing the already existing parties at the federal level. In the United States, rural counties will have politically affiliated officials but the councillors are either Democratic or Republican Candidates—the major federal parties. Under *The Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024*, municipalities are required to register under parties or slates *not* affiliated with any pre-existing or withstanding provincial or federal parties—so it is challenging to speculate how these systems of partisanship will translate to rural municipalities in Alberta.

Current Registered Parties for 2025 (as of November 21, 2024):

Calgary:

A Better Calgary Party -

Describing itself as a centre-right party, the A Better Calgary (ABC) Party held its founding convention on October 19, 2024. Organizers include Jon Horsman, who ran for the provincial UCP leadership in 2022, and party president Mike LaValley, who ran for councillor in Ward 12 in 2021. While the party says it won't put forward policies, leaving that for candidates, it plans to "focus on core municipal priorities and essential services." Other initial principles range from balancing "fiscal responsibility with compassion" to supporting "the family as a fundamental unit of society." ABC hasn't yet named any candidates.

The Calgary Party -

The Calgary Party publicly launched on October 23, 2024, with employment lawyer Brian Thiessen declaring his intention to run for mayor. Former Naheed Nenshi chief of staff Chima Nkemdirim is working on the Calgary Party campaign, as is political strategist Stephen Carter. The party says its mission is "making Calgary safer, more inclusive, and more responsive to the needs of its residents." The party's stated priorities include housing, strengthening community policing and "getting Calgary moving again." The party has announced four councillor candidates so far.

Edmonton:

TAPYEG: The Party for City Builders -

TAPYEG is a civic think-tank and a municipal political movement. They are Edmonton's modern political party. Their purpose is to empower city builders. TAPYEG is an open door for idea-driven and action-orientated Edmontonians, just like you, who are in search of a new reason to become passionate about our city and our region. TAPYEG is an acronym that is meant to encourage you to reimagine "our city and how it works". TAP stands for: Transparent and Active Partnerships. (TAPYEG 2024). However, on November 21, 2024, The Principled Accountable Coalition for Edmonton (PACE) and TAPYeg, two conservative-leaning groups in Edmonton, announced they are merging into one local political party for the 2025 municipal election under the PACE banner.

As of November 21, 2024, Tim Cartmell said he is not affiliated with any municipal political party. Still, he noted plans to "form a team and that's going to be taking place over the coming months." "And I effectively call that a party," he added. "We're not going to create a typical party with memberships and a board and performance reviews and those kinds of things. "We want to present a team of people that will hopefully form the next city council and provide residents with some comfort of what to expect after the next election."

Challenges in the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act and their Exclusion of Rural Municipality Contexts:

1. “1000 Signatures”

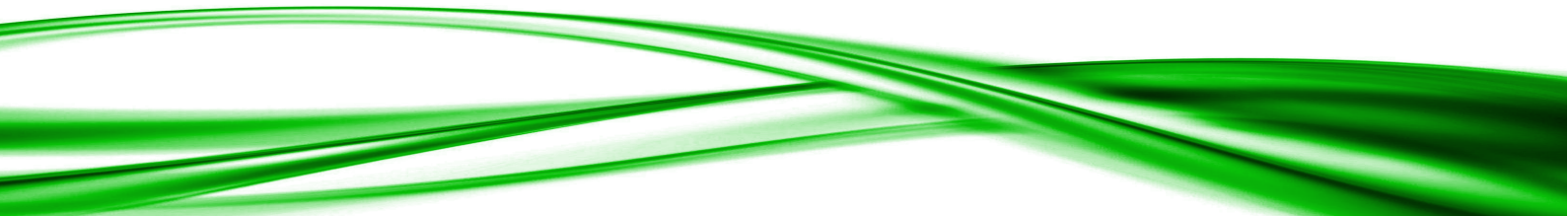
A stipulation within the *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act* discloses that in order to officially register, parties need 1,000 signatures. While this condition is plausible in urban metropolises like Edmonton and Calgary, we believe amendments would need to be made to accommodate rural populations. In an area like Stettler County, with a “population of 5,666” a thousand signatures to register a party would be ~17.7% of that area's population having to register with and sign on to *one* party (Alberta Regional Dashboard 2021). For two parties, 35% of the county's population would presumably have to register to a party. Logistically, these calculations are not conceivable when one looks at the reasons for enacting parties to increase local election participation. It simply is not feasible to presume over a quarter of a county will participate, register, and sign on to parties. This calculation is further called into question when we look at counties with populations under a thousand. Are they excluded from partisanship after the pilot period, or will there be a system to accommodate low-population municipalities? We propose if partisanship does move past the pilot period and into every municipality in Alberta, that the Government of Alberta introduce a percentage policy when having to register parties. If a Stettler County candidate was able to collect 5-10% of the municipality's population—283-566 signatures, respectively—this would be much more feasible and accessible than the regulated 1,000 stipulated in the current act.

Examples of Municipality’s Population Densities:

MD of Spirit River No. 133	MD of Ranchland No. 66	Sturgeon County	County of Stettler	City of Calgary	City of Edmonton
700	92	20,495	5,322	1,306,784	1,010,899

2. Administration Issues

Another potential issue that the RMA has already identified is the potential that the administration of political parties will fall on either the RMA or their members. Rural municipalities are already struggling when it comes to finances, and if they now have to take care of, and monitor political parties it will be another drain on their budgets. If the Alberta Government does go forward with political parties in rural municipalities, the RMA should push for these political parties to be overseen by the provincial government rather than the municipalities themselves.

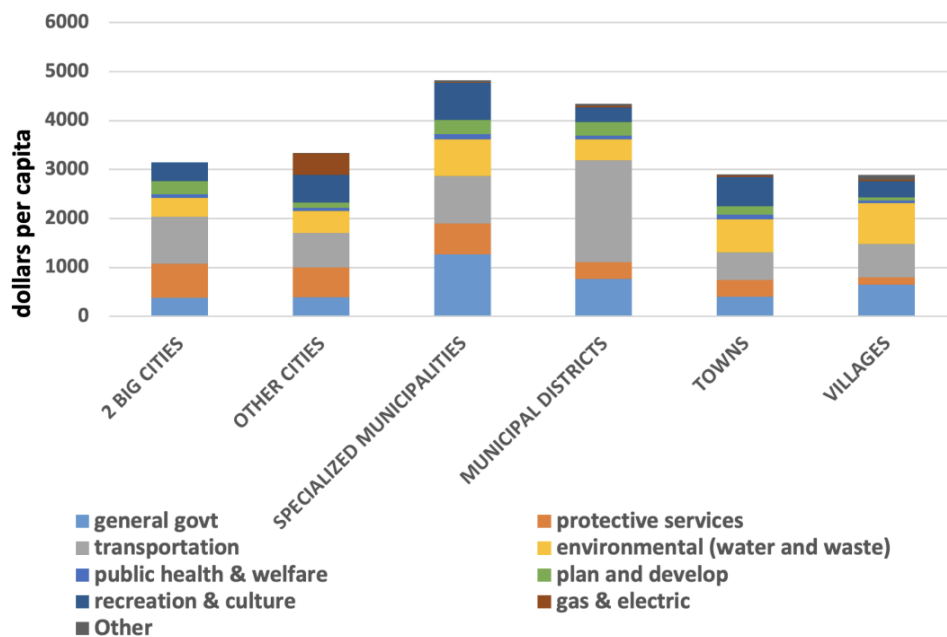


3. Financial Components

Additionally, how the act stands, corporations and unions will now be able to evolve into players within municipal elections. With the fiscal frameworks of elections changing under this act, we are skeptical to wonder if corporations and unions' ability to contribute to parties will benefit local government, totally disadvantage independents, or have minimal impact. Ultimately, it will be interesting to see how the involvement of corporation and union donations will impact policies and agendas at the local level. This calls into question what motives these corporations and unions would have to donate to a party, rather than the municipality, essentially funneling funds out of municipal donations and into the hands of parties.

Given that many of Alberta's rural municipalities have one or two large businesses in their region, and some businesses which do not pay the amount of taxes that they owe. There is potential for these businesses to donate large sums of money to candidates or parties who promise to allow them to avoid taxes. With this, the RMA should advocate to keep both unions and corporations out of municipal elections, with only individuals being able to donate.

Figure 1. Per Capita Expenses by Function and Municipal Type, 2019



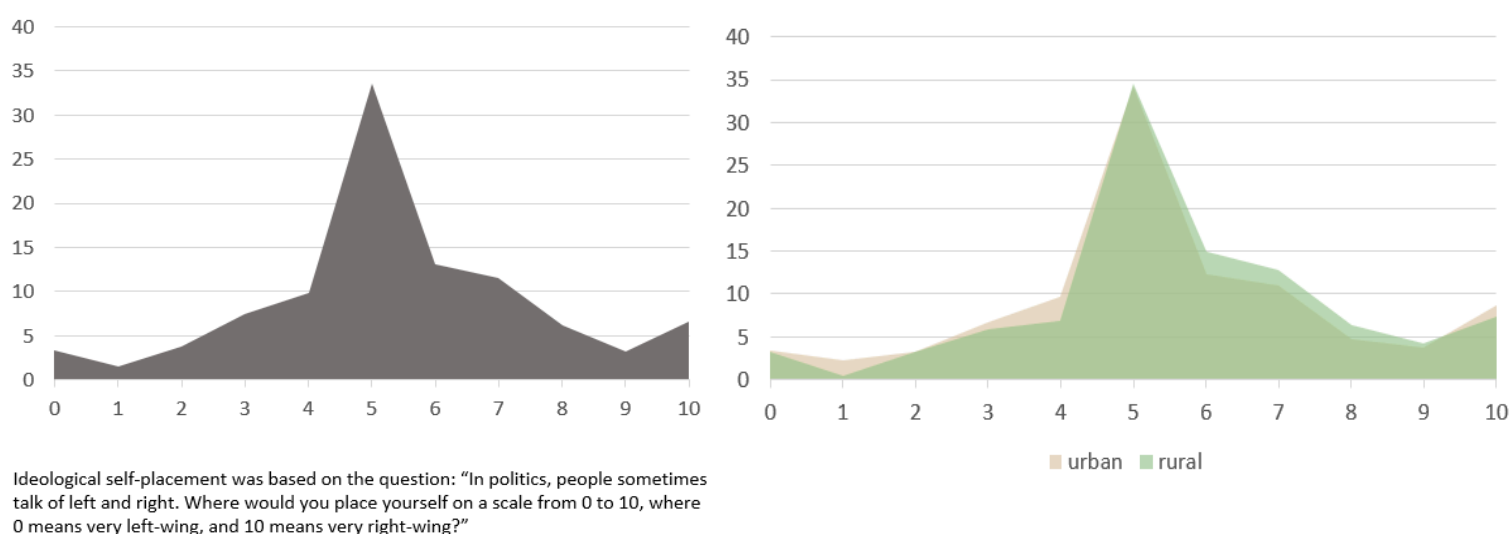
Source: Alberta Municipal Affairs, Municipal Financial and Statistical

Figure 12 reports for the various types of municipalities the per capita expenses by function.⁸ An initial feature to note is that total per capita expenses are considerably greater in the specialized municipalities and in the rural municipalities than in the cities, towns and villages.

Does The *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act* Strengthen or Polarize Local Elections?:

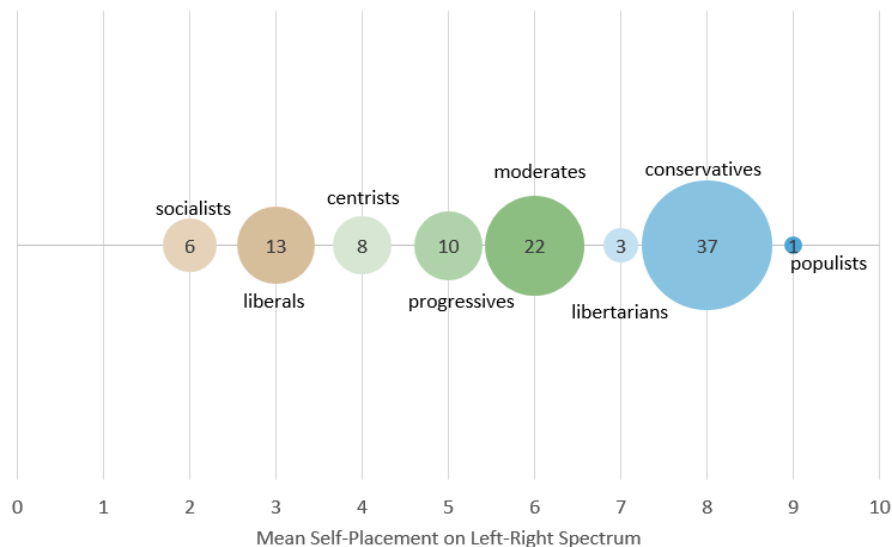
Beyond the elite rhetoric and common wisdom, to what extent are Albertans actually polarized? (Wesley, Alfaro, and Hill 2023). Do residents really diverge when it comes to their ideological placements and values commitments, or are the apparent divisions in society driven by something else, like political or partisan identity? (Wesley, Alfaro, and Hill 2023). Ultimately, Albertans are as likely to identify as “moderate” or “progressive” as they are to identify as “conservative.” And they often take on several labels at once (Wesley, Alfaro, and Hill 2023).

Distribution of Ideological Self Placement – All Albertans (Left) and By Community Size (Right)



Figures 13 and 14 represent that Albertans view themselves as relatively centrist. Wesley, Alfaro, and Hill found that only once partisanship was mentioned, the authors would start to see an ideological division emerge (at the provincial level of government, i.e. New Democrat versus United Conservative Party) (Wesley, Alfaro, and Hill 2023).

With the introduction of partisanship at the localized level we may still see these trends of centrist views; however, it is not implausible to speculate that partisanship in every sector of government could result in a more polarized and divisive populace.



SOURCE: Jan. 2023 Viewpoint Alberta survey (N = 1227). Weighted data. Respondents were asked to answer "Yes", "No", or "Not sure" to the question "Some people feel they belong to different political groups. Do you identify with any of the following?" To measure their primary political identity, they were asked a follow-up question: "Of the labels you mentioned, which one fits you best?" Ideological self-placement was based on the question: "In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means very left-wing, and 10 means very right-wing?"

Figure 15 illustrates the political self-identifications of Albertans, revealing that the two most common labels are "conservative" (37%) and "moderate" (22%). Smaller percentages identify as "liberal" (13%) or "progressive" (10%), while labels such as socialist, centrist, libertarian, and populist are much less frequent (Wesley, Alfaro, and Hill 2023). Despite living in a politically polarized environment, nearly a third of Albertans (29%) classify themselves as moderate or centrist, indicating that many do not align strongly with either end of the political spectrum (Wesley, Alfaro, and Hill 2023).

Conclusion:

It is possible that political parties could work better in larger cities. However, using Montreal and Vancouver as examples, it is clear that political parties do not substantially increase voter turnout, councillors are forced to vote along party lines, independents are iced out of politics, and there is often an increase in division. It is clear that Alberta would be better served by following the recommendations of stakeholders such as the City of Edmonton, the City of Calgary, Alberta Municipalities, the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, and everyday Albertans, by maintaining the non-partisan nature of municipal politics. This would ensure that local government remains focused on the needs of each municipality and not be overcast by the cloud of political affiliation.

Disclosure of Affiliations:

The authors of this report have no relationships with for-profit or not-for-profit organizations. Additionally, we have not been monetarily compensated for our contributions to this report, nor have we received financial or in-kind contributions for this research. We acknowledge any potential biases we may possess; however, we declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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