

Voting and counting

Legislative Assembly elections



**Northern Territory
Electoral Commission**
EVERY vote counts!

Voting

NT Legislative Assembly elections use the [full preferential voting system](#) where you must show a preference for all candidates listed on the ballot paper.

You must place the number 1 in the candidate square on the ballot paper for the candidate you want as your first choice. You then must place consecutively increasing whole numbers (starting with the number 2) in the candidate square on the ballot paper for each of the other candidates until a number is placed in all candidate squares.

A ballot paper is only formal if you have indicated a first preference and consecutively numbered all squares. A number in the series may not be repeated or skipped. If one square is left blank and all other squares have been numbered in a consecutive sequence starting with the number '1', the paper is formal providing:

- the blank square is the last in the consecutive sequence; and
- there is no marking at all in the square.

Alterations to numbers will not make a ballot paper informal, provided your intention is clear, for example a number can be crossed out and another number written beside it.

Counting

Counting begins once voting centres close at 6:00 pm on election day.

Votes that are cast on election day are counted on election night. Other counts may include early and postal votes.

Ballot papers are checked to ensure formality and those that are not completed correctly are set aside; these are called informal ballot papers and are not counted towards the result. The remaining ballot papers are sorted into piles for each candidate according to the first preference marked on the ballot paper. The number of ballot papers are then totalled for each candidate, the results phoned through to the office and added to the website.

All ballot papers are re-checked after election night to make sure they have been counted correctly.

Two-candidate preferred count

Following the first preference count, electoral officials conduct an indicative two-candidate preferred (TCP) count. This result is then phoned through to the office and added to the website.

The two selected candidates are those expected to receive the most first preference votes. The TCP count is conducted to give an early indication of who is most likely to win each seat, as this is not always clear from first preferences. The commission is required to undertake the indicative TCP count under [section 123](#) of the Electoral Act.

Re-check of ballot papers

A re-check of all votes is undertaken during the week after election day including absent, early and postal votes.

Electors voting by post have until 12:00 noon on the second Friday after election day to return their ballot papers. The distribution of preferences is not conducted until after the cut-off for receipt of postal ballot papers.

Distribution of preferences

A candidate must receive a majority of the total formal votes in the count to be elected (i.e 50% + 1).

For example - if there are 4,000 formal ballot papers in the count, the absolute majority of votes is calculated as: $4,000 \div 2 = 2,000 + 1 = 2,001$.

If a candidate has a majority of the votes, the candidate is elected and no further counting is necessary. If no candidate receives the majority, the candidate with the least number of formal votes is 'excluded' and that candidate's ballot papers are re-sorted to the other candidates according to the second preference shown on each ballot paper. The process of exclusions is repeated until one candidate gains more than half of the formal votes and is elected.

See [section 128](#) of the Electoral Act for a more detailed explanation of how a distribution of preferences is conducted.

Declaration of election results

As soon as practicable after the results of an election have been determined, the commission must publicly declare the results of the election and the names of candidates returned as elected.

The public declaration locations and times are advertised on the website, via a media release and on social media.

Recount

At any time before the result of the election is declared, a candidate may ask the commission for a recount to be conducted. The initiating candidate must state the reasons for the request, which may or may not proceed.

The electoral commissioner may also initiate a recount on his or her own volition.

More information about the commission's policy on recounts can be found via the following link.

- [Recount Policy](#) (PDF, 630KB)

Disputed elections

Pursuant to [Part 12](#) of the Electoral Act, a person may dispute the validity of an election by making an application to the Court of Disputed Returns. The application must be made no later than 21-days after the day fixed for the return of the writ for the election.