

# Survey Report

## 2024 Municipal Issue Surveys

February 2025

# Contents

- Introduction..... 2**
  - Survey notes .....2
  - Response rate.....2
- Accommodation Tax..... 4**
  - Response demographics .....4
  - Results by Question .....5
- Administration and Representation in Northern Saskatchewan..... 9**
  - Response demographics .....9
  - Results by Question .....10
- Creating Municipal Districts .....14**
  - Response demographics .....14
  - Results by Question .....15
- Harassment Complaints.....19**
  - Response demographics .....19
  - Results by Question .....20
- How Do I Hold My Council Accountable? .....23**
  - Response demographics .....23
  - Results by Question .....24
- Incorporation Criteria for Municipalities .....26**
  - Response demographics .....26
  - Results by Question .....27
- Inspection of Municipal Documents .....30**
  - Response demographics .....30
  - Results by Question .....31
- Intermunicipal Cooperation.....34**
  - Response demographics .....34
  - Results by Question .....35
- Mandatory Training for Council Members.....38**
  - Response demographics .....38
  - Results by Question .....39
- Municipal Office Standards.....43**
  - Response demographics .....43
  - Results by Question .....44
- Public Notice in Newspapers .....48**
  - Response demographics .....48
  - Results by Question .....49
- Subclass Authority .....52**
  - Response demographics .....52
  - Results by Question .....53
- Vacant and Derelict Properties .....56**
  - Response demographics .....56
  - Results by Question .....57
- Conclusion .....60**
- For more information.....60**

## Introduction

In late 2024, the Ministry of Government Relations conducted 13 online public surveys to gather feedback on a range of issues.

The surveys addressed the following topics:

- [Accommodation tax](#)
- [Administration and representation in northern Saskatchewan](#)
- [Creating municipal districts](#)
- [Harassment complaints against council members](#)
- [How do I hold my council accountable?](#)
- [Incorporation criteria for municipalities](#)
- [Inspection of municipal documents](#)
- [Intermunicipal cooperation](#)
- [Mandatory training for council members](#)
- [Municipal office standards](#)
- [Public notice in newspapers](#)
- [Subclass authority](#)
- [Vacant and derelict properties](#)

## Survey notes

Because many questions allowed respondents to choose more than one response, several charts in this report will equal more than 100 per cent.

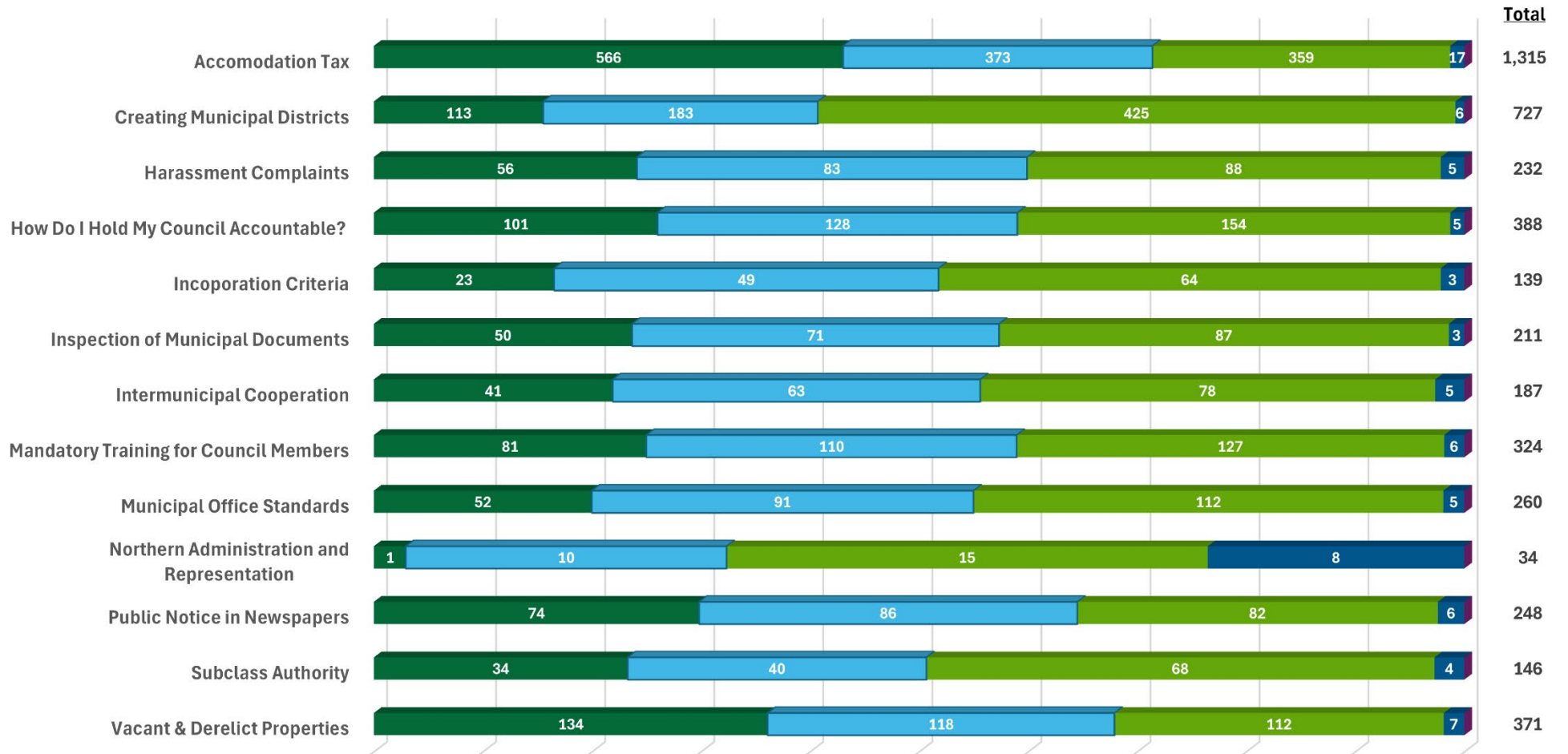
A few errors were found in survey design after the opening date, which were fixed as soon as they were identified. In those questions, results have been reported but may have lesser accuracy, as noted in the report.

## Response rate

The surveys received a combined total of 4,247 responses. Roughly 99 per cent of respondents identified themselves as living in Saskatchewan (including students or workers temporarily living elsewhere). The table on the following page breaks down the number of responses based on what type of municipality respondents live in.

## Responses by Respondent's Community Type

■ City ■ Town/Village\* ■ RM ■ North



**Note:** Because respondents were able to select more than one option, totals in this chart exceed the total number of survey responses.

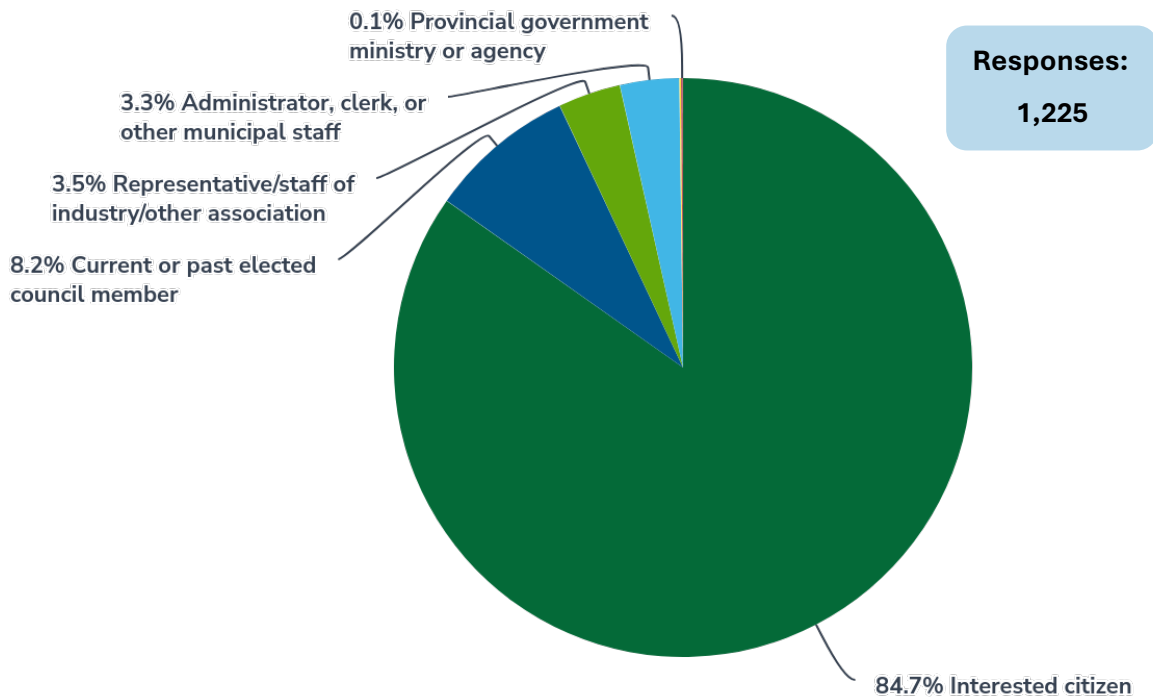
For ease of viewing, responses from provincial/national parks and First Nations are not included in this chart. These numbers are shown in the charts for each individual survey

## Accommodation Tax

This survey gathered feedback about the possibility of allowing Saskatchewan municipalities to implement an accommodation tax. An accommodation tax would allow a municipality to apply a percentage tax on stays at hotels, motels and possibly other short-term rental properties.

### Response demographics

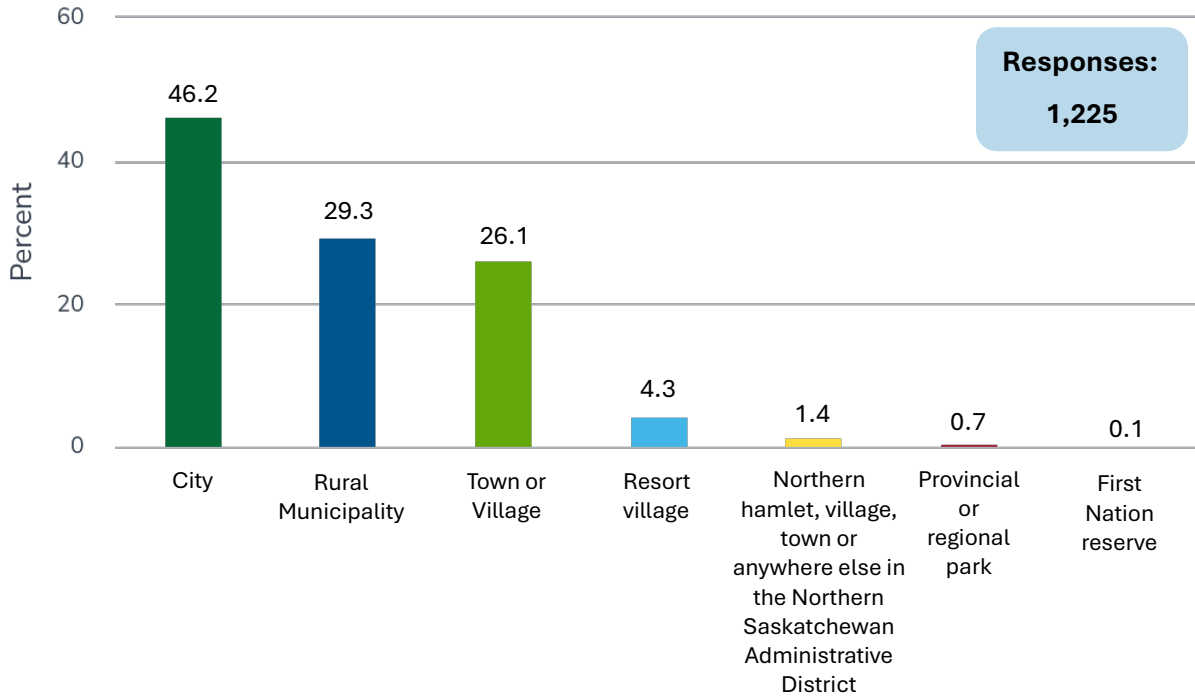
#### What is your interest in municipal government?



Of the 11.5 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, almost half were from towns or villages and more than a third were from RMs. 12 per cent were from cities and very few were from resort villages or northern communities.

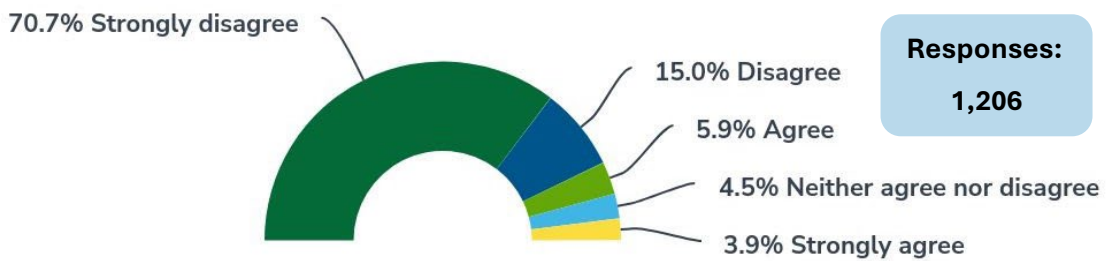
Almost all respondents who indicated they were a representative or staff of an association identified themselves as part of the hotel industry.

**I live in a: (Please select all that apply)**

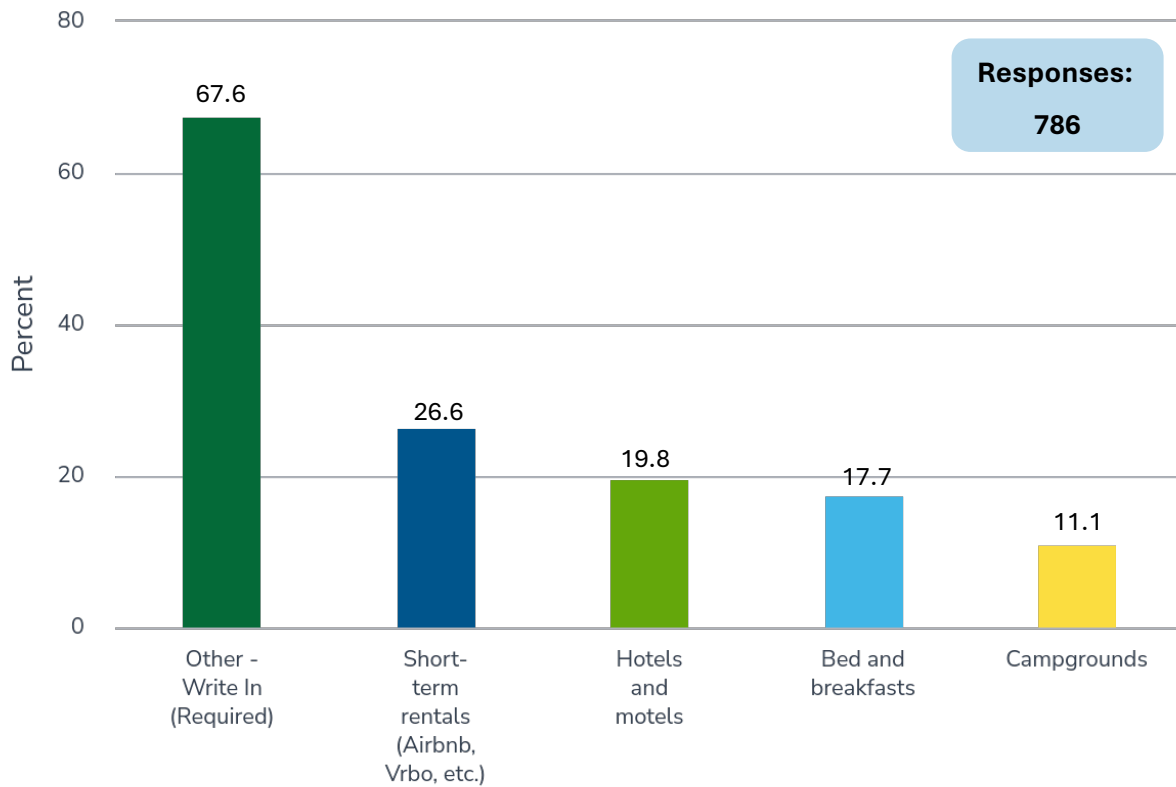


**Results by Question**

**Do you agree that municipalities should be able to charge an accommodation tax in Saskatchewan?**

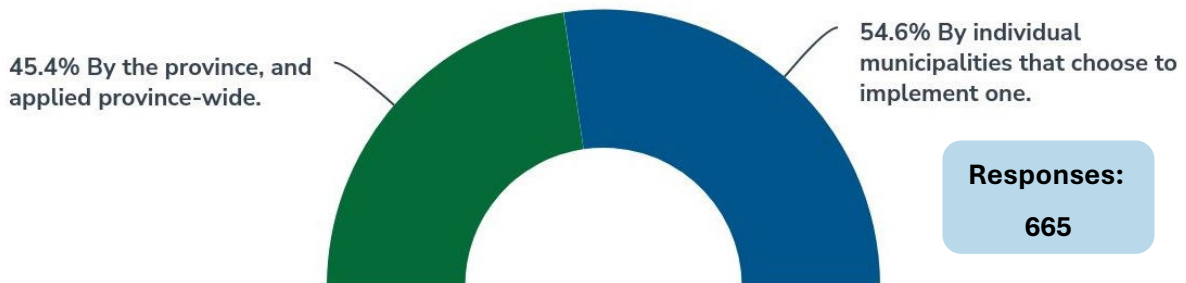


**Should an accommodation tax be applied to the following? (Please choose all that apply)**

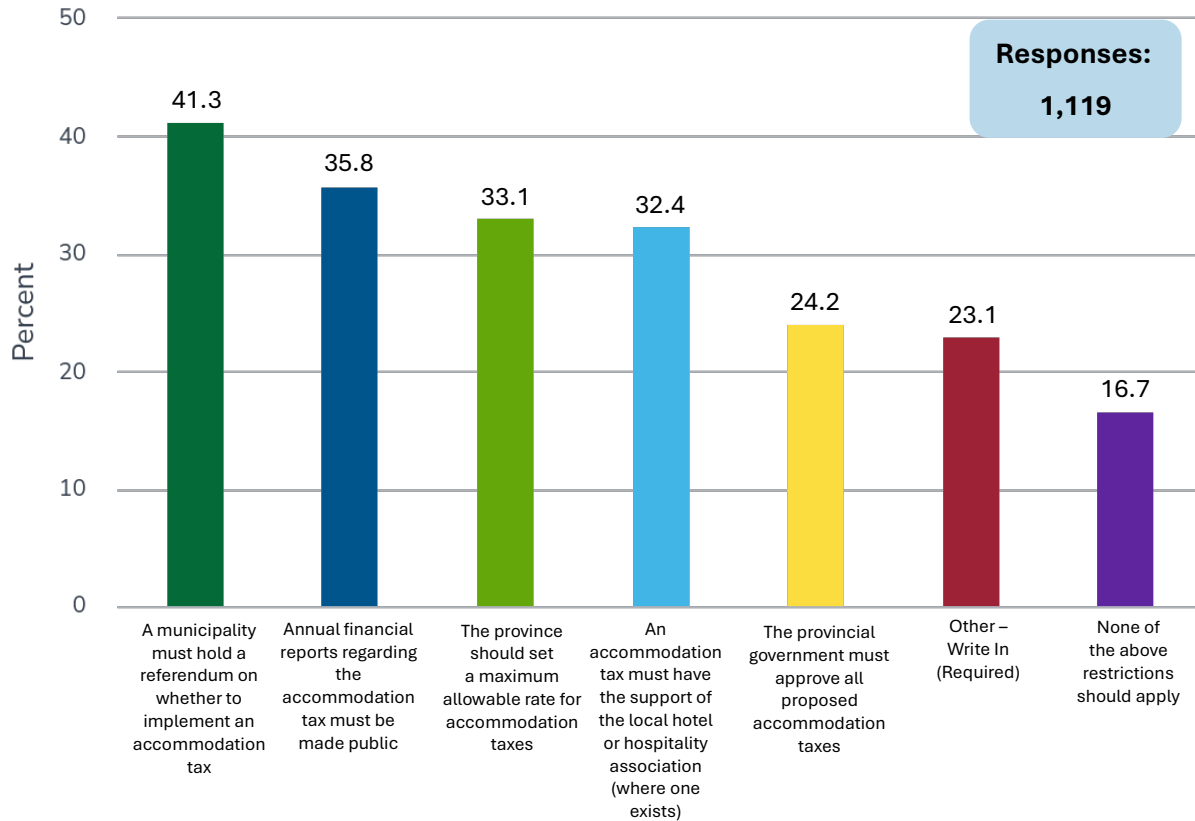


Respondents who selected the “Other” option primarily wrote in answers indicating that an accommodation tax should apply to none of the above or were opposing the idea of accommodation taxes/tax increases in general.

**Should an accommodation tax be set:**



**If municipalities are given the authority to levy accommodation taxes, which restrictions (if any) should apply? (Choose all that apply)**



Most respondents who selected the “Other” option wrote in answers conveying their opposition to accommodation taxes and/or to additional taxes in general. Several write-in answers mentioned that the proceeds from an accommodation tax should not be directed into a general revenue fund and that strong oversight and local approval are important if a tax were to be implemented.

## Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding accommodation taxes?

This survey question received 742 responses.

Roughly two thirds of responses expressed opposition to accommodation taxes, often opposing new or increased taxes of any sort.

A smaller set of respondents provided their concerns regarding accommodation taxes. The most common concern given included:

- Concern for the province's tourism industry
- Affordability of accommodation
- Layering of taxes
- Concerns with booking accommodations for medical reasons

About a tenth of respondents were neutral or favourable towards the idea of an accommodation tax but expressed the need for clarification regarding how the tax would work.

Finally, a few respondents suggested that short-term rentals (such as Airbnb) should be subject to an accommodation tax. Several respondents who were opposed to placing an accommodation tax on hotels still felt that short-term rentals should be taxed.

**“If we start applying accommodation taxes it is a downside for tourism, hard on families that travel for sports, and hard on families who want to take in-province vacations.”**

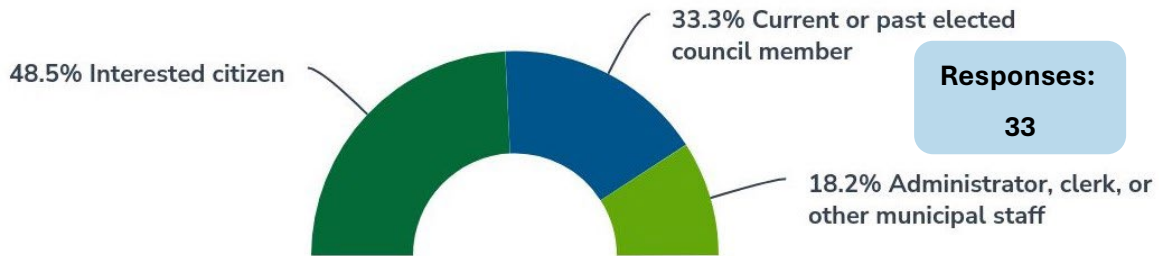
**“Hotel prices are already too high, adding a tax will decrease occupancy and create less business!”**

# Administration and Representation in Northern Saskatchewan

## Response demographics

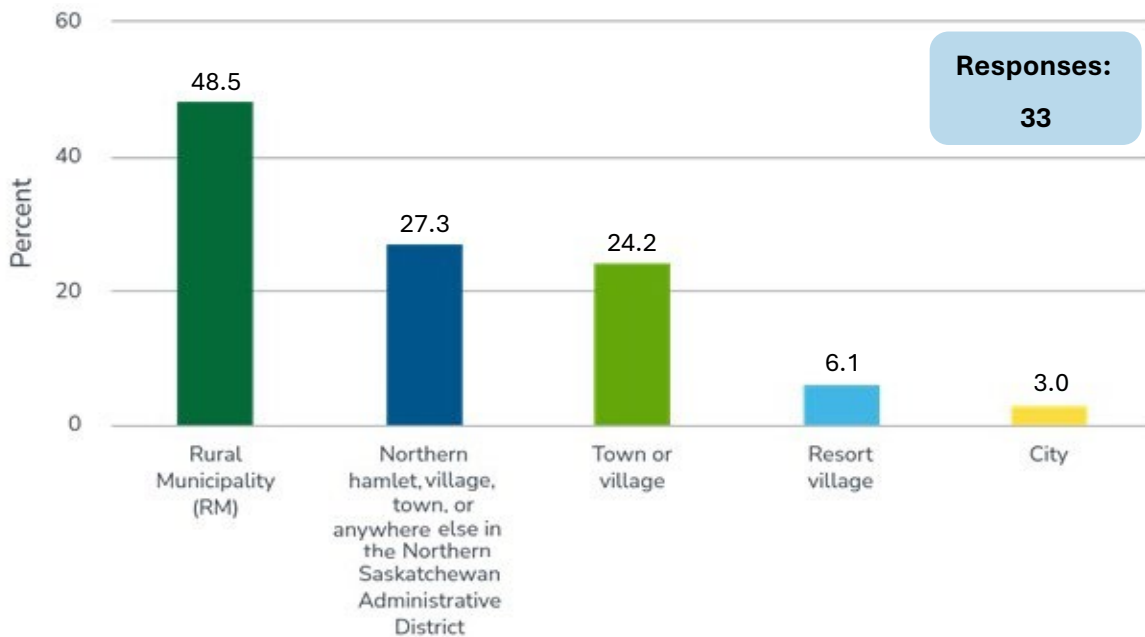
Respondents identified their background as shown below:

### What is your interest in municipal government?



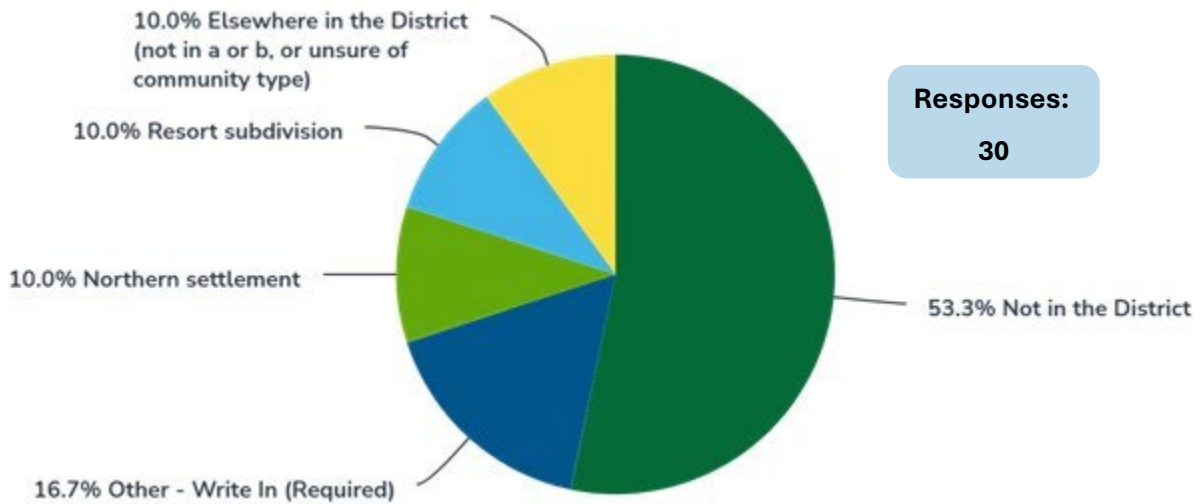
Of the 51.5 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, 44 per cent were from a rural municipality; one quarter were from northern hamlets, northern villages or northern towns; and one quarter were from non-northern towns. The remainder were from cities.

### I live in a: (Please select all that apply)



## Results by Question

### Where do you live (either primary or secondary home)?



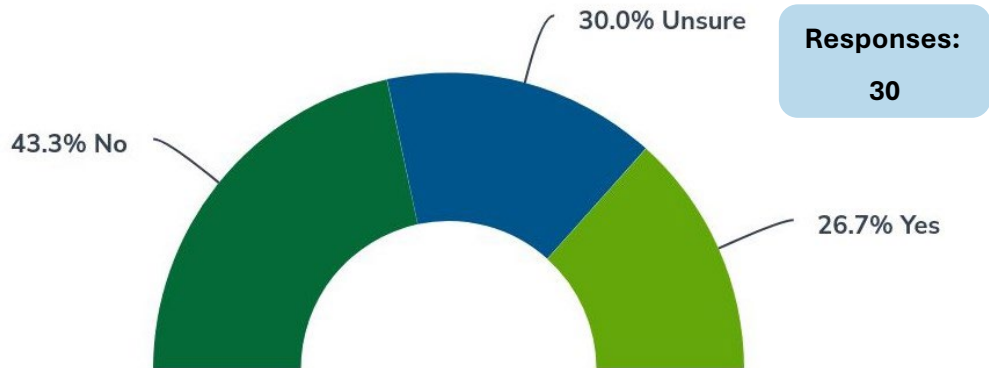
Of respondents who selected the “Other” option, they lived in a small village, in a rural municipality, in a northern village, on a farm and in a city.

### Are you satisfied with the current level of municipal service delivery in your District community?



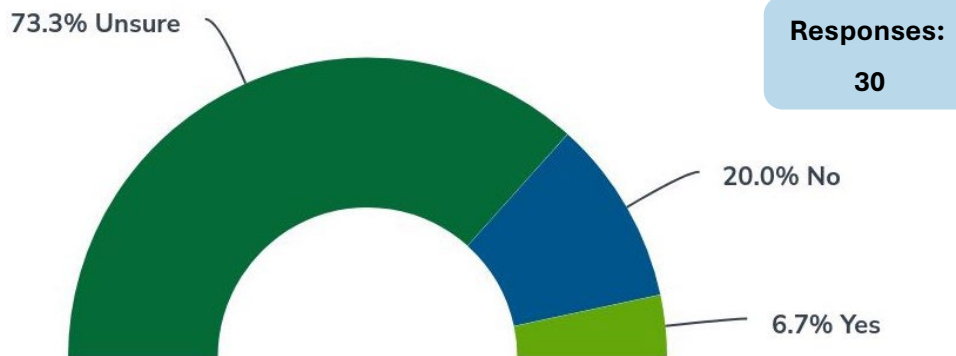
Of these respondents, 16 provided details as to why they chose the answer they did. These responses are incorporated into the summary of comments on page 14.

**Do you think District communities located near municipalities should become part of those municipalities?**



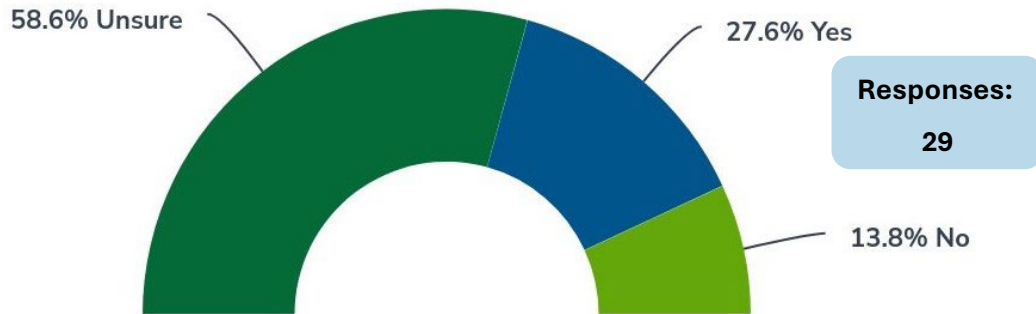
Of these respondents, 16 (three who said yes, eight who said no and five who were unsure) provided details as to why they chose the answer they did and/or offered their suggestions for changes. These responses are incorporated into the summary on page 14.

**Currently, the District is governed by the Minister who acts as its council. Do you think this model is working?**



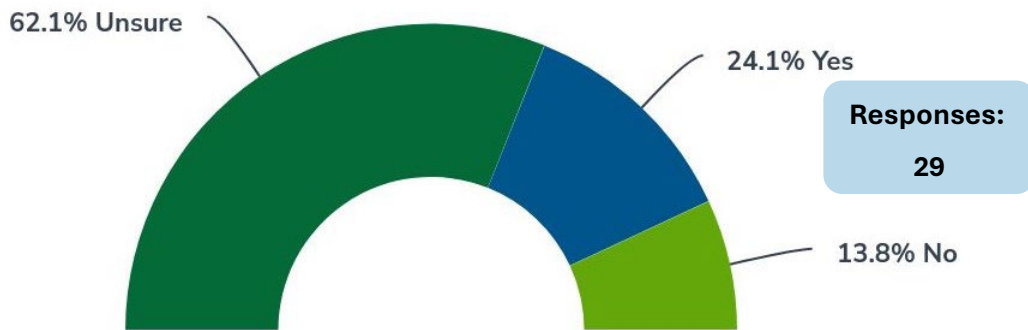
Of these respondents, 12 (one who said yes, three who said no and eight who were unsure) provided details as to why they chose the answer they did and/or offered their suggestions for changes. These responses are incorporated into the summary on page 14.

Currently, legislation sets out different advisory roles for different District community types. Is it appropriate to have different advisory roles for different District community types?



Of these respondents, 10 (four who said yes, three who said no and three who were unsure) provided details as to why they chose the answer they did and/or offered their suggestions for changes. These responses are incorporated into the summary on page 14.

Do you think your local advisory council/cabin owners' association is able to effectively represent the interests of your communities?



Of these respondents, 13 (six who said yes, three who said no and four who were unsure) provided details as to why they chose the answer they did. These responses are incorporated into the summary on page 14.

## What do you think of electing District representatives to a decision-making body (e.g. a board) for the entire District?

This question received 17 responses.

Survey respondents expressed tentative support for the idea of electing representatives from the District to a decision-making body responsible for the entire northern District. Respondents also shared that before any change could be considered, they would like clarity on a number of questions related to form, structure and other potential details regarding the board's function.

### Summary of written responses

The question, "Do you have any other comments or suggestions about administration and representation in the District?" received eight responses. Due to the low number of written responses to this survey, answers to this question and the written answers referred to on pages 11-13 have been combined into a general summary.

Respondents shared their perspectives on the unique challenges facing northern Saskatchewan. Challenges noted by respondents include:

- Low population density putting pressure on both governance and service delivery.
- A lack of qualified professionals in the north, including municipal administrators.
- High costs for items such as travel, tradespeople and insurance.
- A lack of understanding of northern challenges by those who live in the southern part of the province.

Despite these challenges, respondents had positive feedback on the current structure, including the relationship between northern communities and ministry (Government Relations) staff, and the involvement of committed, grassroots people on council and cabin owners' associations.

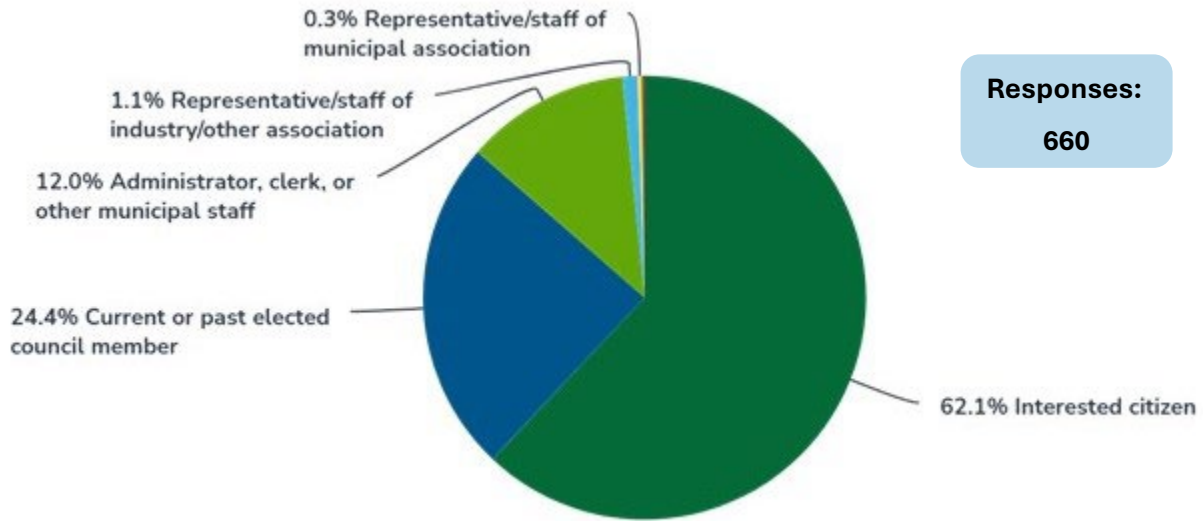
**"I think the south does not understand finer nuances of living off grid, rural, northern experiences. They try to fit us to their model and it is off balance."**

**"Overall I believe that Northern Municipal Services have provided an excellent service in the past to the communities they have represented. However, times have changed and the public wants more input into the decision-making process."**

# Creating Municipal Districts

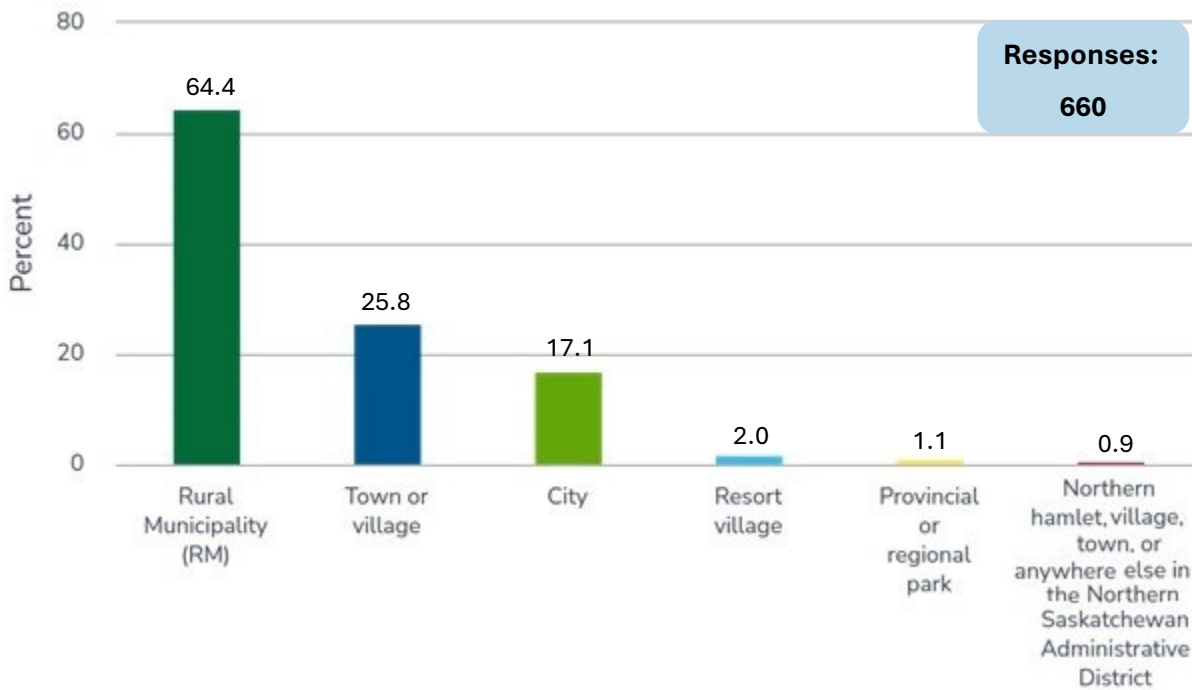
## Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



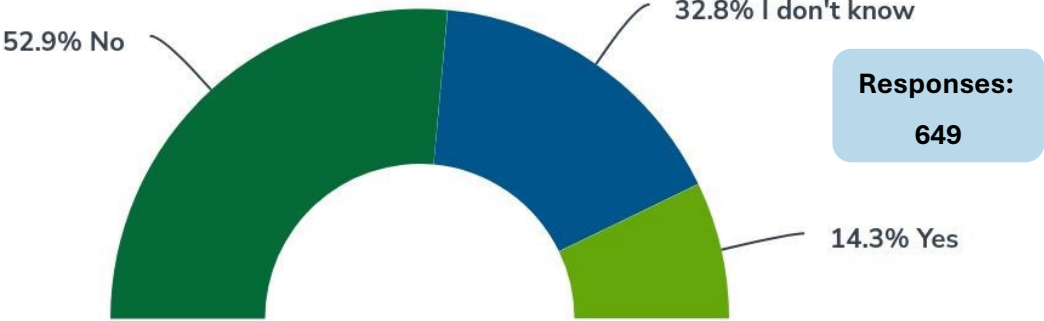
Of the 36.4 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, almost two thirds were from rural municipalities. About one-fifth were from towns, with the rest mainly from villages and cities.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)

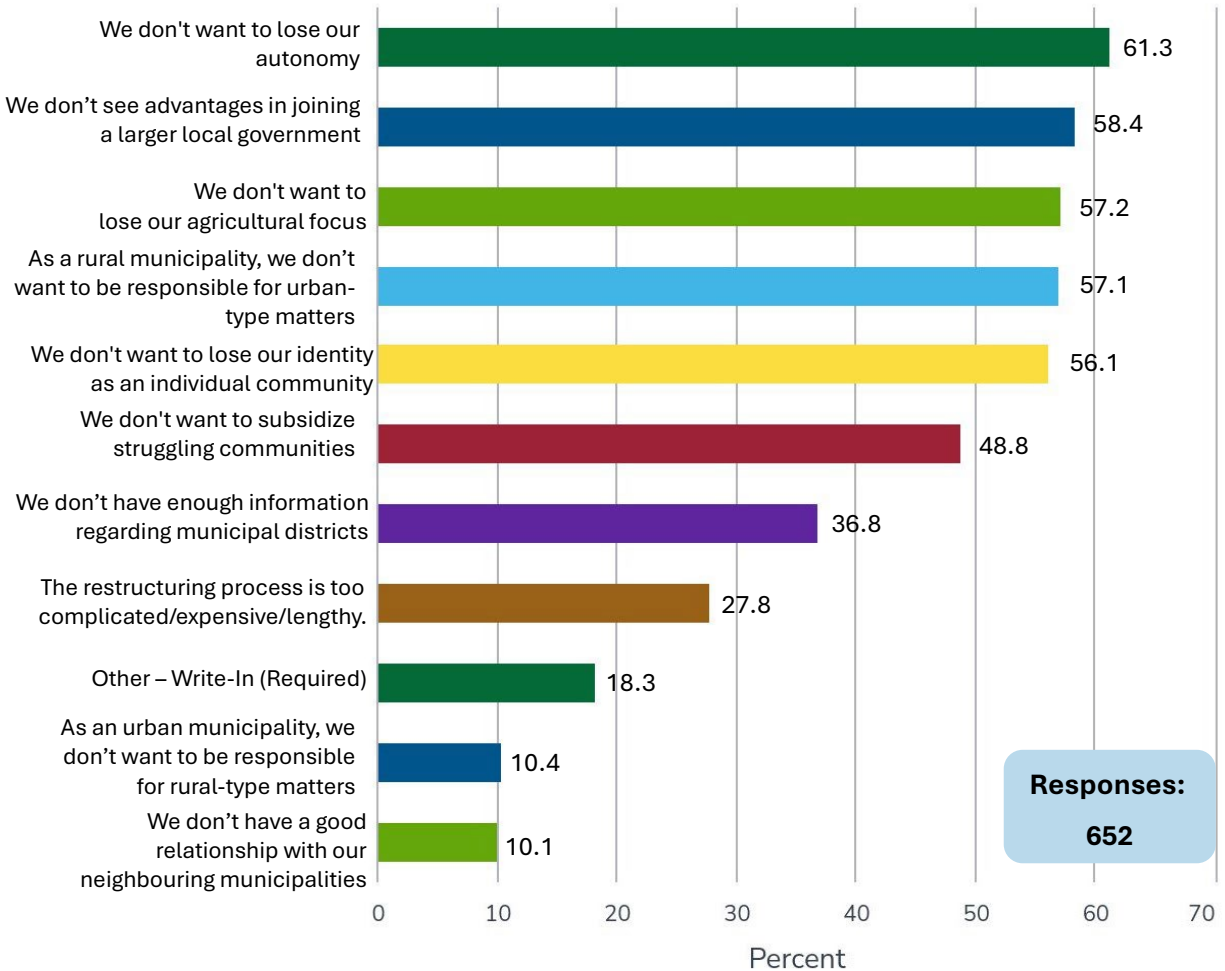


**Results by Question**

**Are you aware if your municipality considered forming a municipal district in the last five years?**



**What are the barriers that prevent municipalities from considering restructuring to form a municipal district? (Please choose all that apply)**



Respondents who selected the “Other” option were heavily concerned with the possibility of losing local representation or local control over municipal issues. Close to a third of respondents used their write-in responses to raise this concern, with some saying that rural and urban priorities are not compatible. Another large group of respondents said that the current municipal system is working well from their perspective.

The most common barriers identified when considering a municipal district were financial, with respondents concerned that their municipalities could lose grant funding or end up subsidizing other communities. Numerous comments also identified the personal attitudes of municipal leaders or citizens, or interpersonal conflicts, as barriers.

## What incentives or additional supports would make it more likely for your municipality to consider forming a municipal district?

This question received 389 responses.

More than half of respondents indicated that there was nothing that would incentivize their municipality towards forming a municipal district or expressed opposition to the idea of municipal districts in general. Several respondents were concerned that urban priorities would take precedence over rural ones in a municipal district, or that rural and urban priorities and lifestyles are not compatible.

About 10 per cent of respondents expressed a desire for more information. In some cases, this was for their own purposes, as they did not feel sufficiently informed on the issue. Others advocated for broader educational efforts to build awareness and help municipal councils and residents better understand the process, benefits and consequences of forming a municipal district.

Another tenth indicated that financial supports or incentives would make it more likely for their municipality to consider forming a district.

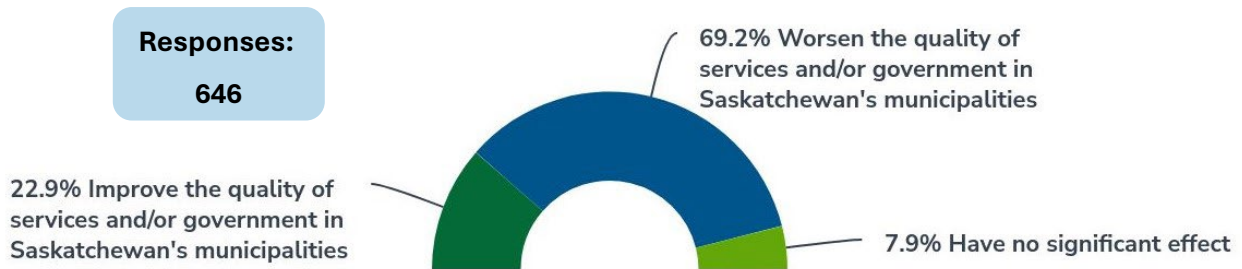
Other themes repeated in the comments included:

- The need for strong provincial support throughout the process of considering and forming municipal district.
- The importance of ensuring that one community or community type does not face an unfair loss of influence or increase in taxation due to the creation of a district.

**“I don't see a benefit of any municipality forming districts. [Smaller communities will] lose their control to the more populous areas. Roads and infrastructure will be maintained in urban and more populated regions leaving rural areas forgotten.”**

**“Financial considerations, such as funding for studies and increasing grant levels and programs for amalgamated municipalities, may assist but will likely create resentment from those who are not ready. Building awareness through public engagement aimed at elected officials, administrative personnel, municipal associations and the general public should be undertaken.”**

### I think creating larger municipalities based on regional interests would:



### Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the creation of municipal districts?

This question received 319 responses.

The responses received reflect the differing priorities of realizing administrative efficiencies and cost savings versus the need to retain local autonomy.

Respondents who supported the idea of forming municipal districts believed that forming districts will help alleviate the current pressure for obtaining certified administrators and will streamline municipal operations and costs.

Respondents who did not support the concept of forming municipal districts believed that the unique, grassroots Saskatchewan system should be maintained. Their responses emphasized the importance of keeping local matters local and ensuring that municipal government is not so large that the decision makers are out of touch with the needs of the community.

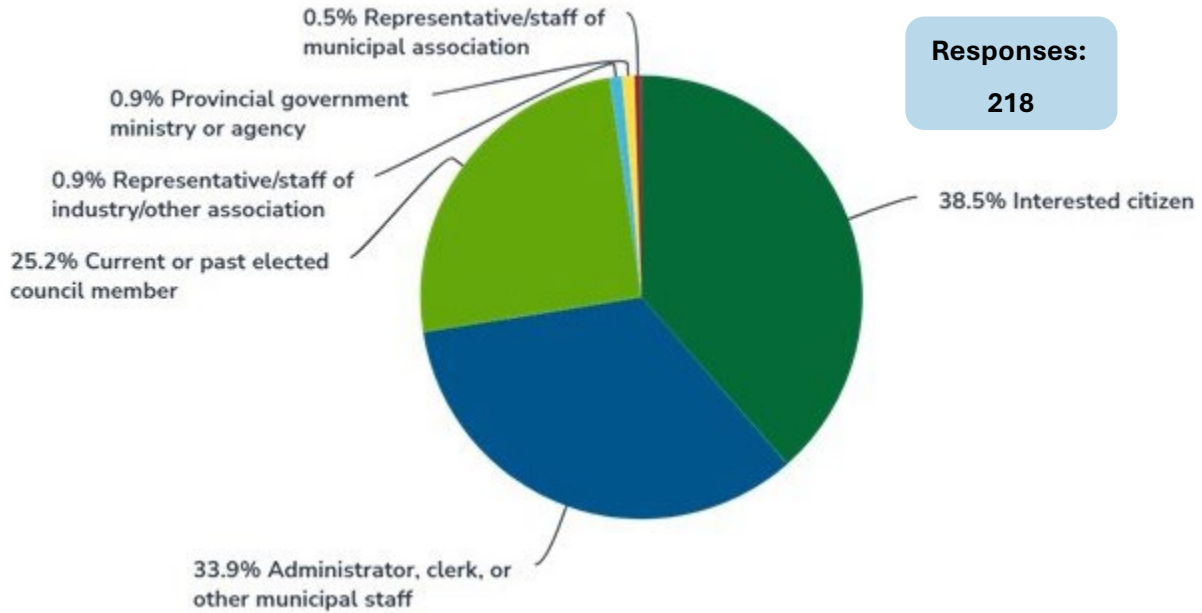
**“The demand for qualified administrators is very high and public works staff are very hard to find. Having municipal districts would help alleviate the demand.”**

**“[A municipal district] moves the power and authority into fewer hands. The larger the district becomes the less of a voice the people have in their local government.”**

# Harassment Complaints

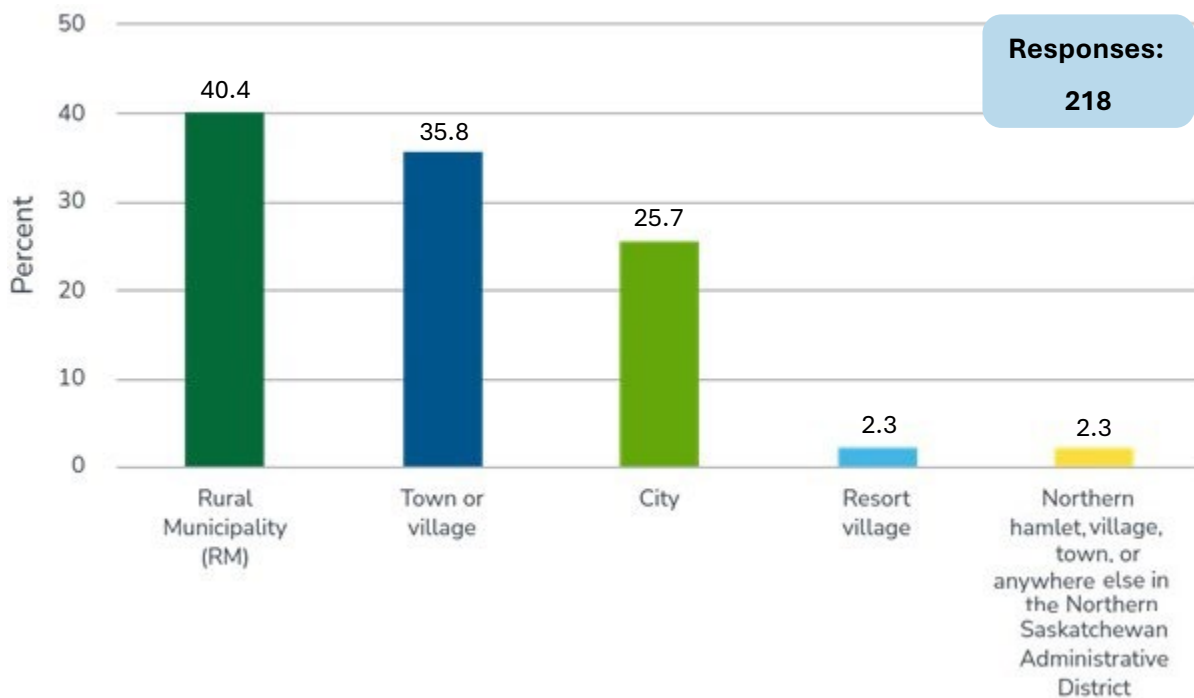
## Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



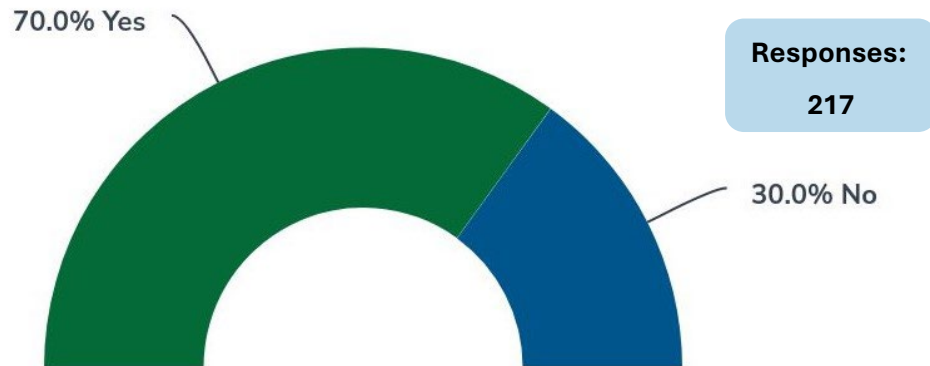
Of the 59 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, more than half were from rural municipalities, a quarter were from towns and the rest from cities and villages.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)



## Results by Question

### Are you aware of a harassment policy for municipal employees in your municipality?



### When a harassment complaint is received from a municipal employee against a member of council, how is it handled?

This question received 162 responses.

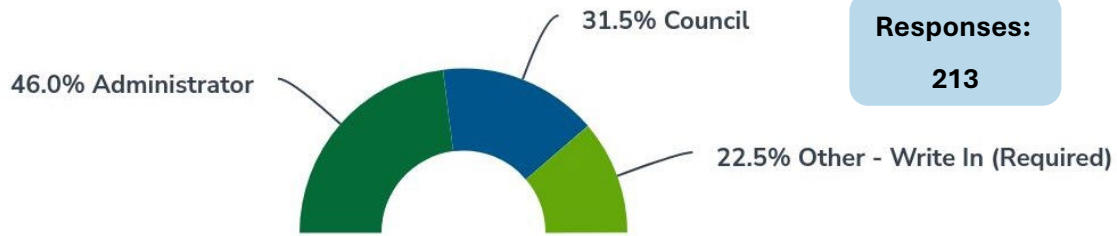
There are differing approaches for how municipalities handle, or would handle, a harassment complaint. Respondents indicated a blend between complaints being handled by the municipal administrator, council themselves or a third party. Many respondents indicated that their municipality would follow an existing policy (e.g. code of ethics, or a specific harassment policy) that contains specific steps for addressing the situation. However, a sizeable number of people were unsure how the process would work with some expressing skepticism that a complaint about a member of council would be taken seriously by that same council. Several respondents indicated a desire for fines to be levied against an offending party directly.

The survey included perspectives from respondents who were unaware of any complaint occurring in their community and respondents who had witnessed or experienced harassment.

**“I don't think enough is being done to protect the staff ... For the small and secluded municipalities, there needs to be safe space to make complaints. Third party investigations would be best as we need to protect the complainants from repercussions.**”

**“We have a Code of Ethics in place for complaints against councilors. Complaints go to the Reeve (unless the complaint is against the Reeve) and an external investigation is launched.”**

**In your municipality, who is responsible for hiring, firing and disciplining municipal employees?**



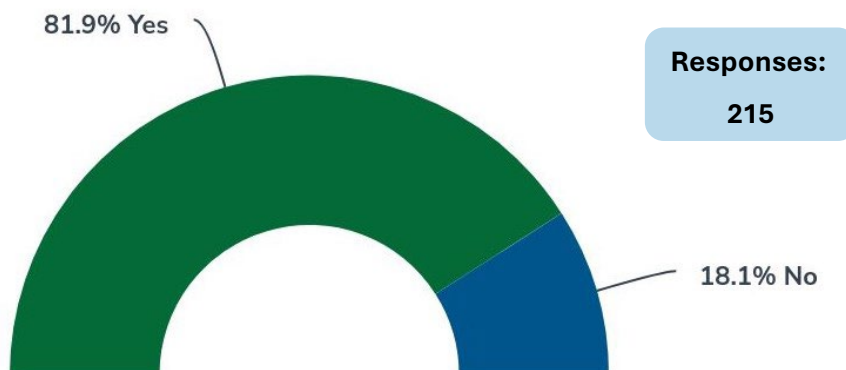
More than a quarter of respondents who selected the “Other” option indicated that they did not know who was responsible for hiring, firing and disciplining municipal employees.

Of the comments that did identify who was responsible, the most common answer was that both the administrator and the council have a role. In some cases, the council had responsibility for certain employees and the administrator was responsible for others. In other cases, the council was responsible for hiring and firing, and the administrator was responsible for discipline.

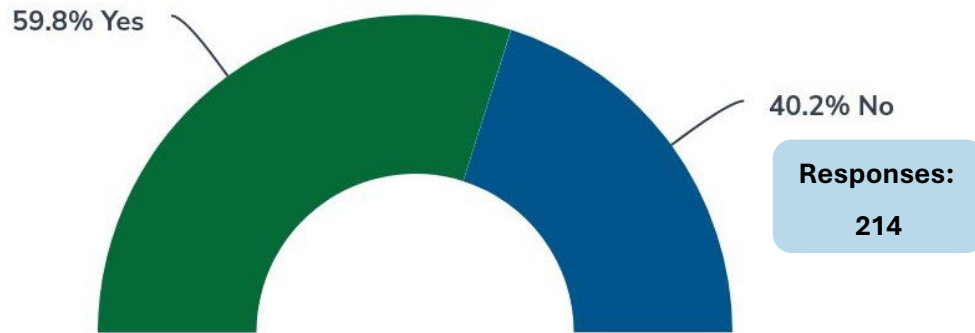
Numerous responses described a different assignment of responsibilities. These involved committees, the foreman or superintendent of public works, the administrator, the city manager and/or municipal staff, sometimes in combination.

Several other responses said that hiring, firing and discipline were the administrator’s job, but done at the council’s direction or with strong input from the council.

**Do you think failure to follow the results of an Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) and/or Ombudsman investigation should be a reason for disqualification of council members?**



**Do you think it would be appropriate for a municipality to be fined for an OH&S violation when a member of council is found guilty of harassing municipal employees?**



**Do you have any other comments or suggestions on harassment of municipal employees?**

This question received 102 responses.

Respondents expressed different challenges associated with the issue of harassment of municipal employees, including:

- Council members are not municipal employees, and therefore the same provisions of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* do not apply as they do to employees.
- Some elected officials misunderstand their role and immerse themselves in the day-to-day operation of the municipality (e.g. instructing municipal staff directly).
- Harassment of municipal staff by members of the public is a growing concern.
- Municipalities may be unable to deal with the costs associated with third party investigations.

**“Many people leave their jobs rather than deal with the harassment.”**

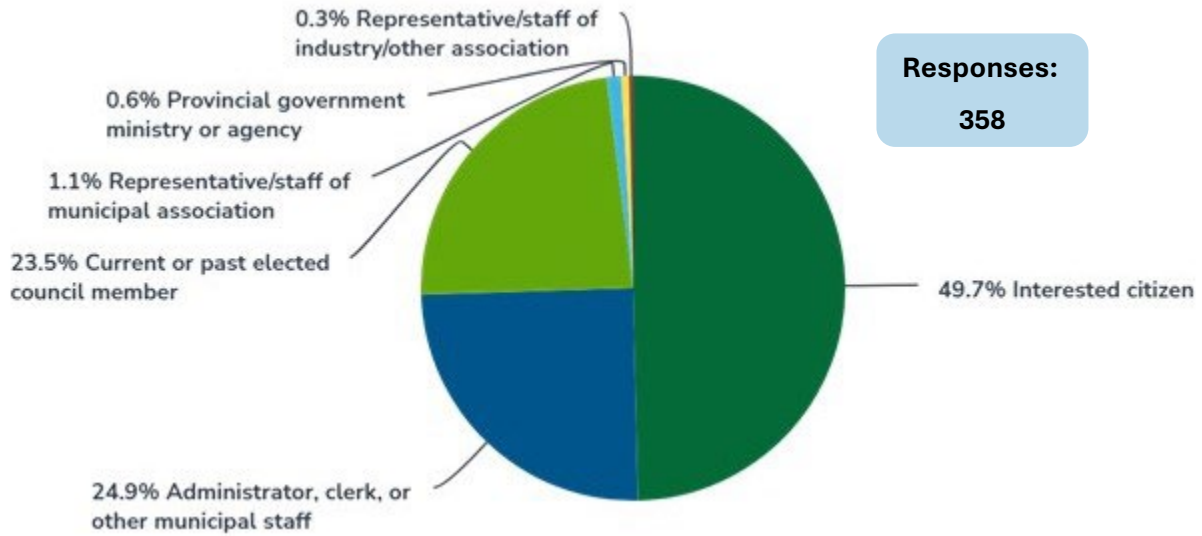
**“Council members seem to view themselves as untouchable and can do as they please.”**

**“Mandatory council training is something that I think would go a long way to solving this problem.”**

# How Do I Hold My Council Accountable?

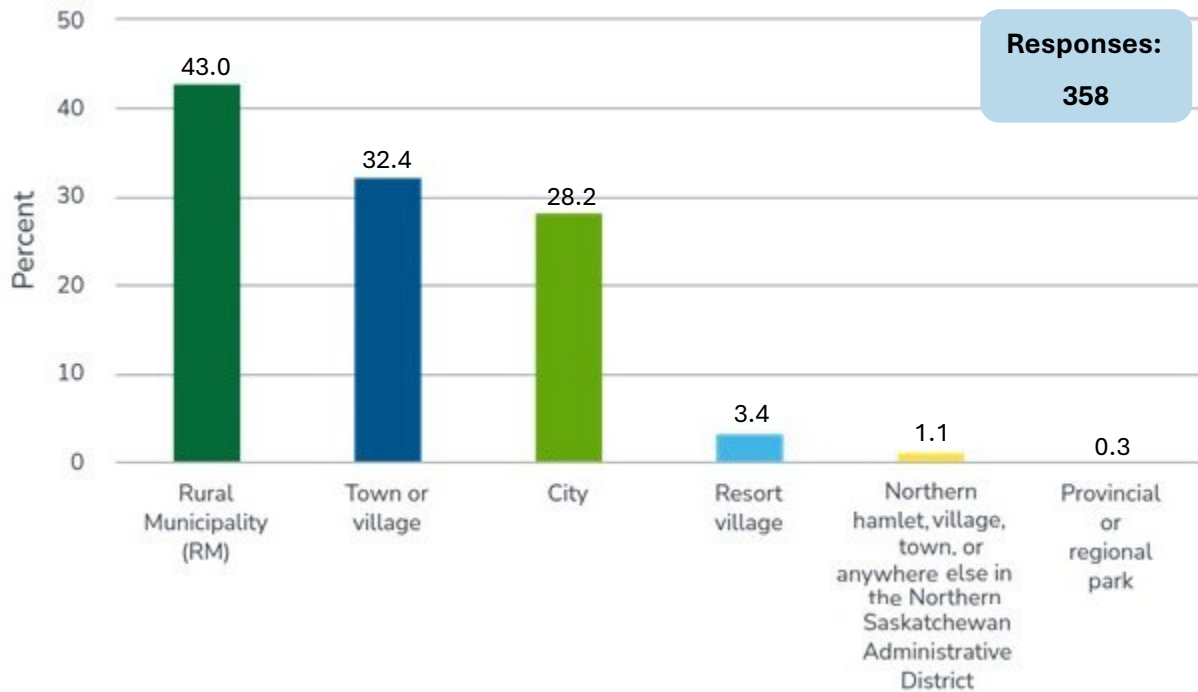
## Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



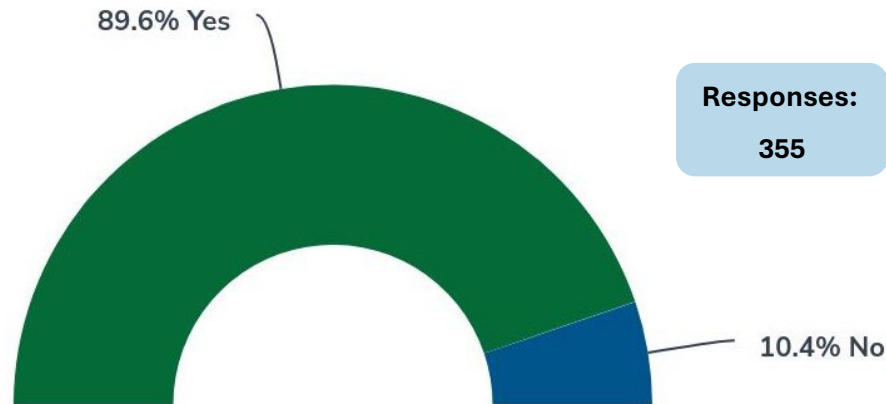
Of the 48.4 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, more than half were from rural municipalities and nearly a quarter were from towns. The rest were mainly from villages and cities.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)



## Results by Question

Would you support adding failure to take an oath of office as a reason for disqualification of a councilor, reeve or mayor?



What additional tools, other than disqualification, could help municipalities enforce their code of ethics?

This question received 223 responses.

A high number of respondents were in favour of fines, penalties and/or suspensions to help municipalities enforce their codes of ethics. Respondents suggested that remuneration could be withheld or that the council member could be personally fined or be removed from council. Many respondents supported the ability to fine members of council for failure to adhere to their code of ethics.

Many respondents expressed support for requiring council members to take training to understand the roles and responsibilities of their position. Specific training topics included codes of ethics, conflicts of interest, roles and responsibilities, harassment and municipal governance.

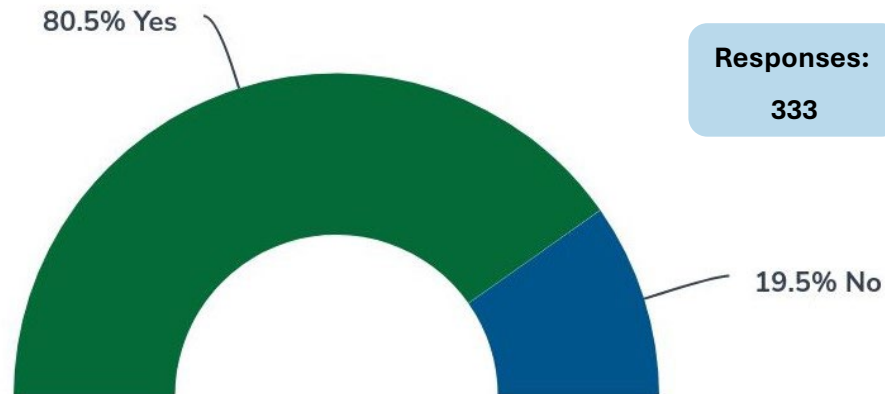
Survey respondents highly supported enforcing the requirement for council members to sign the oath of office and be held to account if they do not follow it. Some called for third-party investigations and/or government intervention if a council member was not following legislation.

A few respondents asked for greater accountability and transparency from their councils regarding code of ethics violations – specifically, for residents to be informed as to when and by whom a code of ethics has been violated.

**“There should be compulsory governance training and an ability to impose sanctions of some type for council members who do not respect how their role differs from that of the administration.”**

**“Other possible tools could include fines and suspension of pay.”**

## Would you support a Recall Act\* in Saskatchewan?



## Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding council conduct?

This question received 155 responses.

Respondents expressed support for adding additional tools to legislation to help municipalities enforce their codes of ethics and procedures' bylaws. They also expressed support for including failure to sign the oath of office among the reasons for disqualification of a council member.

There was also support for mandatory training of councilors and calls for greater transparency from councils.

Some respondents supported a Recall Act\* while others did not see the need for it in Saskatchewan.

**“There need to be better ways to hold councils responsible without having to jump through hoops to make them accountable.”**

**“There needs to be more accountability for councilors and more education that is mandatory.”**

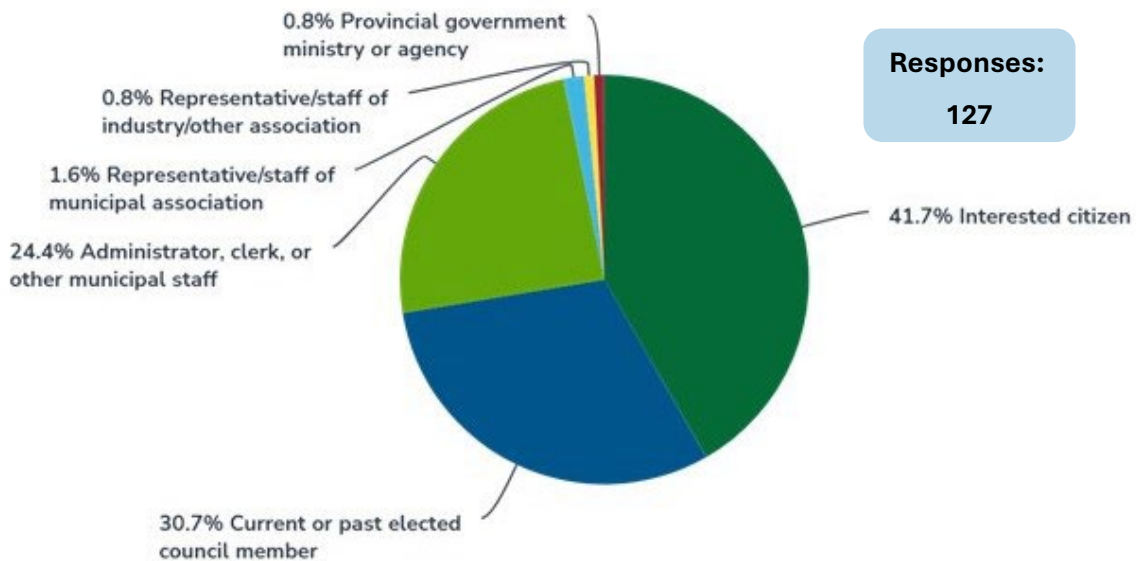
\*A Recall Act, similar to [Alberta's Recall Act](#) or British Columbia's [Recall and Initiative Act](#), would allow citizens to petition to remove certain types of elected officials between elections.

## Incorporation Criteria for Municipalities

This survey gathered feedback about potential changes to the requirements that a community must meet in order to become a municipality or change its status to a city.

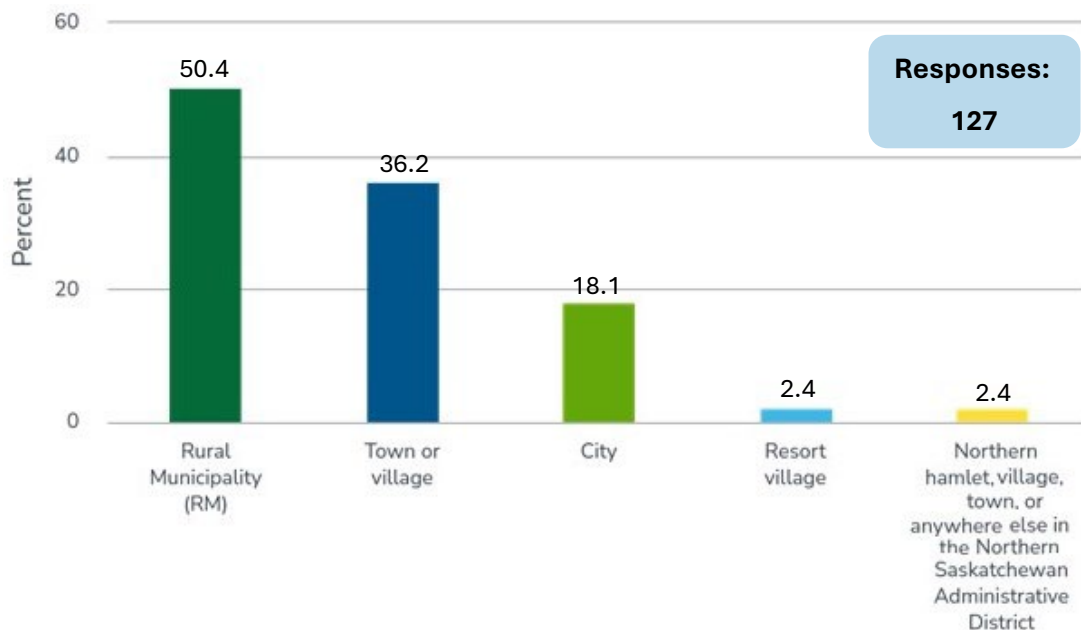
### Response demographics

#### What is your interest in municipal government?



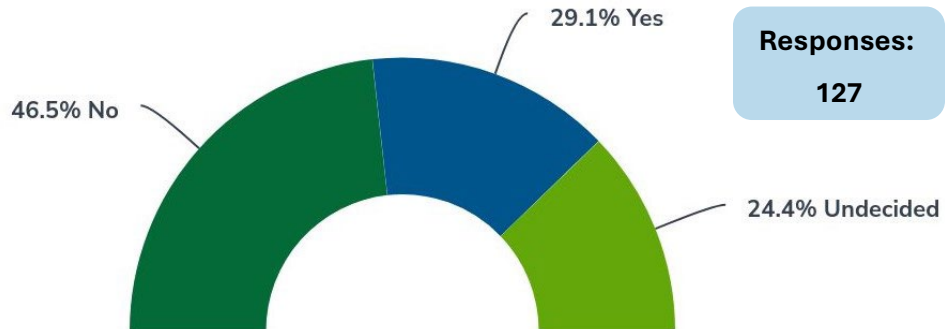
Of the 55 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, half were from RMs and a third were from towns or villages, with a few from cities, resort villages or northern communities.

#### I live in a: (Please select all that apply)

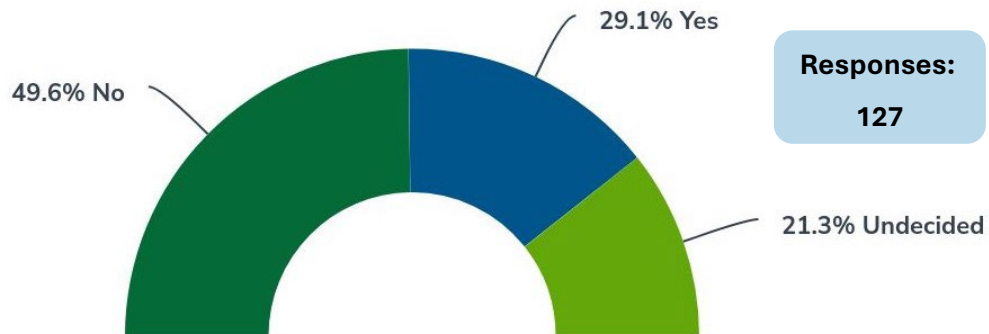


## Results by Question

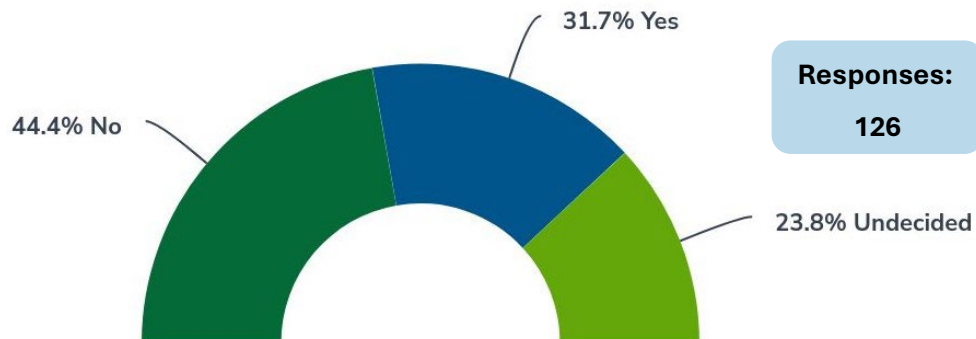
Would you support raising the existing population thresholds for the incorporation of municipalities?



Would you support increasing the number of dwellings or businesses that a community must have in order to incorporate as a municipality or become a city?



Would you support increasing the amount of taxable assessment that a community must have in order to incorporate as a municipality or become a city?



**What factors should be considered by the ministry when reviewing requests for municipalities to incorporate? (These criteria should help measure things that will allow a municipality to grow and sustain itself.)**

This question received 56 responses.

Some survey respondents supported raising existing incorporation thresholds for population, dwelling counts and taxable assessment. A few also suggested that incorporation should require a more diverse tax base. Respondents also suggested additional factors be considered when evaluating incorporation requests, such as evidence of future economic and population growth, ability to provide quality governance and services, balance of different types of assessment (residential, commercial, etc.) and overall sustainability of the community. Some respondents highlighted that the decision to incorporate should be that community’s decision to make.

A smaller number of respondents indicated that there should be no changes to the current incorporation criteria.

**“The main factor is whether the municipality has a large enough population and assessment that it can be self-sustainable.”**

**“Nothing should change. No new municipalities should happen.”**

**Would you support the automatic reversion of status if a municipality no longer meets some/all of the criteria required for incorporation and or status change?**



## **Do you have any other comments or suggestions about incorporation criteria for municipalities?**

This question received 34 responses.

There was consensus amongst survey respondents that in order to incorporate, a community should be capable of providing good governance and services to its residents, meeting all legislative requirements, and showing that it has potential for growth and an ability to continue meeting the long-term needs of its residents. Respondents also indicated that meeting all the above expectations is hard for municipalities with low populations. Some respondents stated that automatic reversion would be costly for those municipalities declining in size and there should be a process in place to ensure nothing happens automatically.

**“There should be some criteria that the municipalities must meet. A village of 25 should not be allowed. If a low population is combined with inability to get a council or a qualified administrator, or the village not getting their required information together quick enough, the government needs to step in sooner. Non-compliance for multiple years is not acceptable.”**

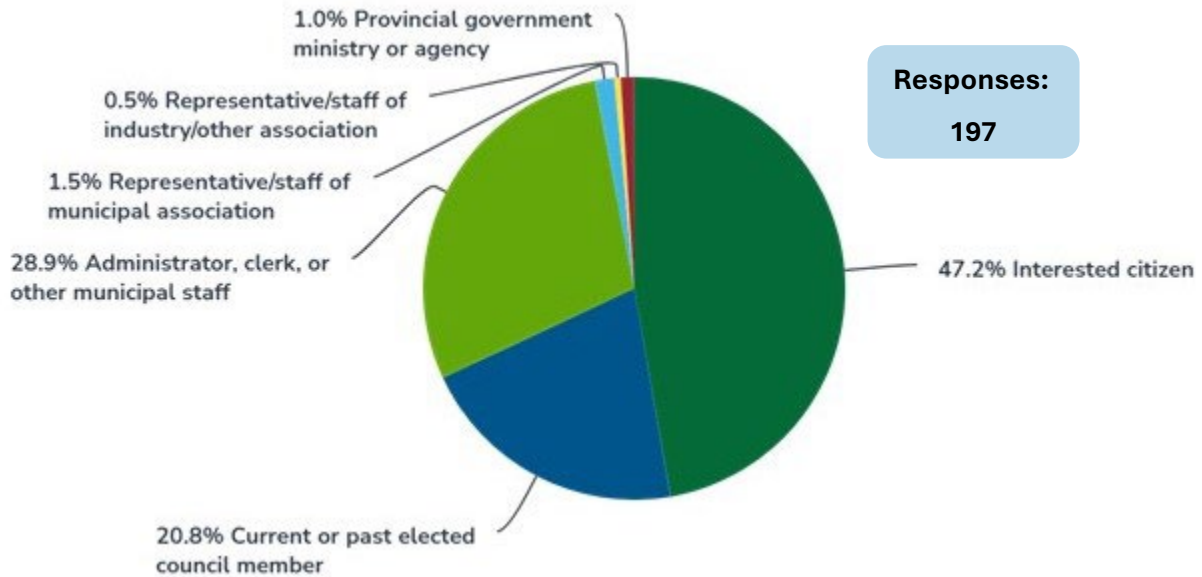
**“Automatic reversion of status could be costly for Towns or Villages who are declining in size. A name change is a major undertaking, and would require a lot of administrative work.”**

## Inspection of Municipal Documents

This survey gathered feedback about how Saskatchewan residents access important documents from their municipalities, and about what changes they would like to see regarding access to these documents.

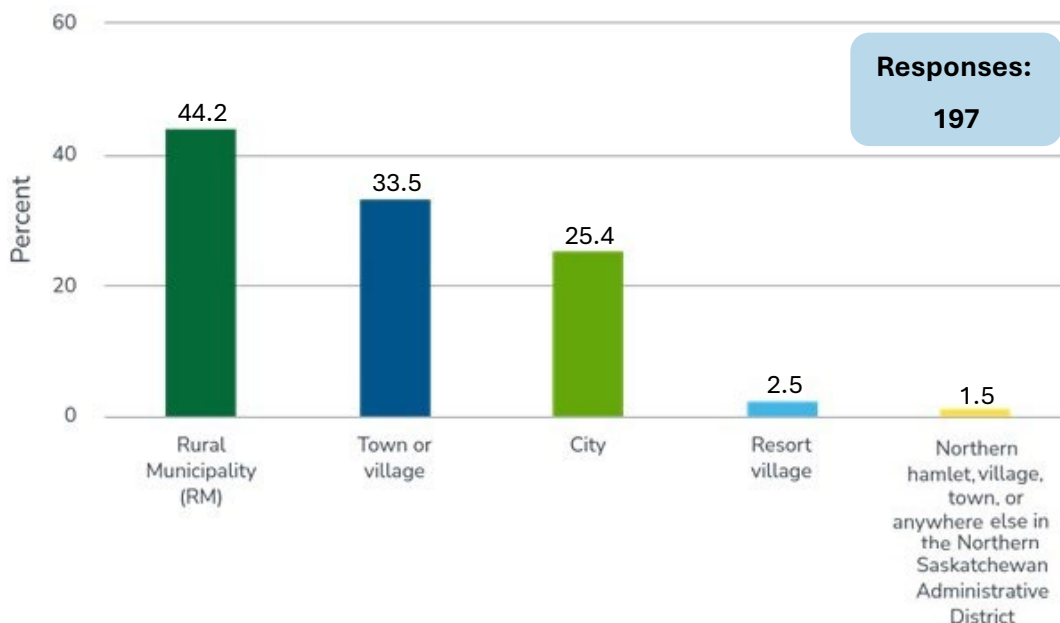
### Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



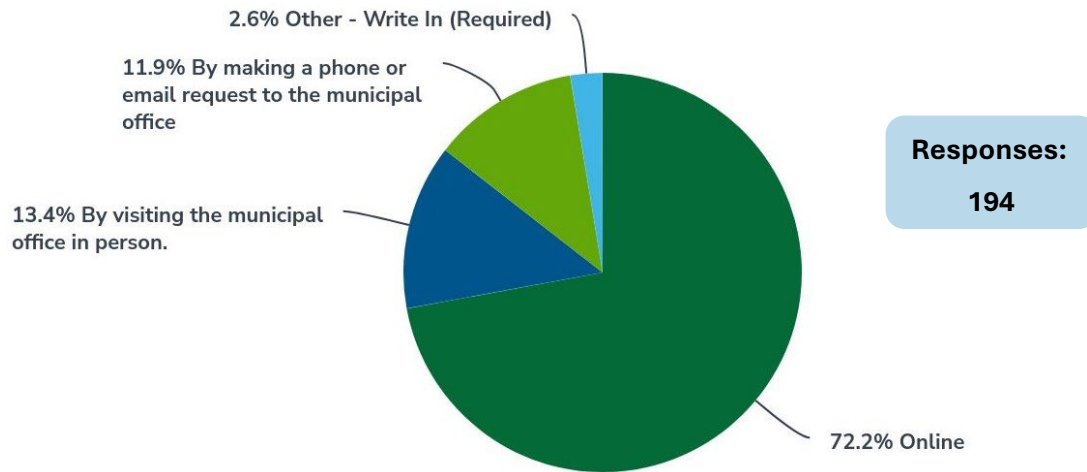
Of the 48.9 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, half were from RMs, a quarter were from towns and the rest mainly from villages and cities.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)



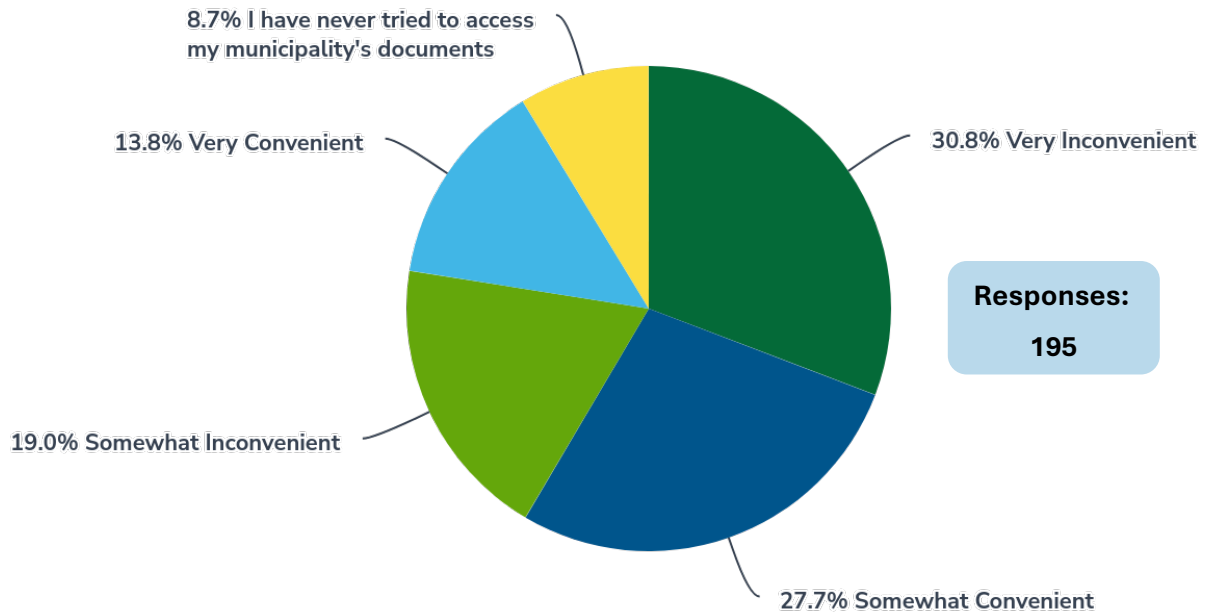
## Results by Question

### What is your preferred method for accessing municipal documents?



Respondents who selected the “Other” option used their answers to support multiple methods for accessing documents.

### In your experience, how convenient is it to access your municipality’s documents?



**If only some municipal documents are required to be posted online, these documents should be posted: (Check all that apply)**

Municipal financial statements and auditors' reports	92.1%	
Bylaws and resolutions	91.1%	
Minutes of council meetings	90.0%	
Minutes of public meetings	82.6%	
Financial statements and auditors' reports for corporations controlled by the municipality	72.6%	
Council members' public disclosure statements	63.7%	
Information related to municipal waterworks	60.0%	
Minutes of organized hamlet board meetings	58.4%	
Contracts approved by council	56.8%	
The oaths of office taken by council members	51.6%	
Policies related to organized hamlets	50.5%	
Payments made by the municipality in the course of its business	48.9%	
The register of debentures (debts that use the municipality's general revenues as collateral)	47.4%	
Reports on rural municipalities' division boundary reviews and municipal ward reviews	45.8%	
Reports submitted by contactors, municipal employees, committees, and other bodies established by council	45.3%	
The municipality's assessment roll	45.3%	

This question received 190 responses.

## Do you have any other comments or suggestions about access to municipal documents?

This question received 59 responses.

Many respondents supported municipal documents being accessible online, as well as easy access to municipal documents in general. A small number of respondents opposed the idea of making it mandatory to post municipal documents online, often citing the increased burden this would place on the municipality and/or its administrator.

Many respondents also used this question to describe the difficulties accessing municipal documents that they currently face.

A few responses raised concerns around privacy and confidentiality of information, the timeliness of document availability, cybersecurity and the charging of fees for documents.

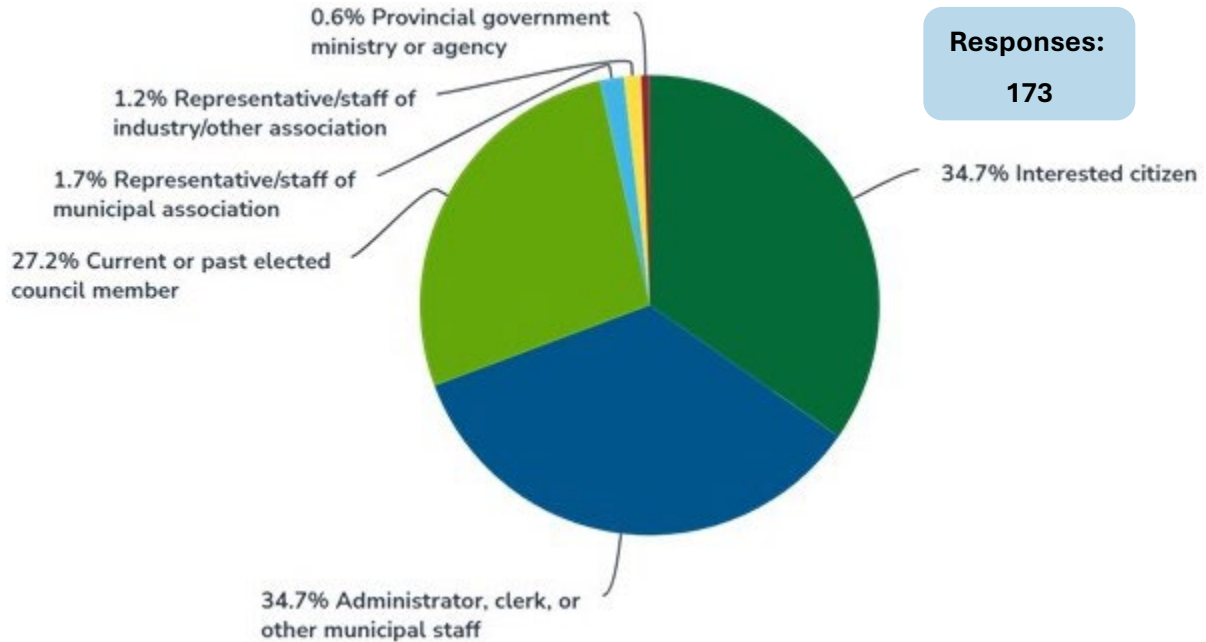
**“There is no reason these cannot easily be put online. This would increase trust in the process and in elected officials and reduce concerns of lack of transparency and conflict of interest.”**

**“People have to contact the office and beg the administrator to send them the minutes ... This is public information and we have a right to have it.”**

# Intermunicipal Cooperation

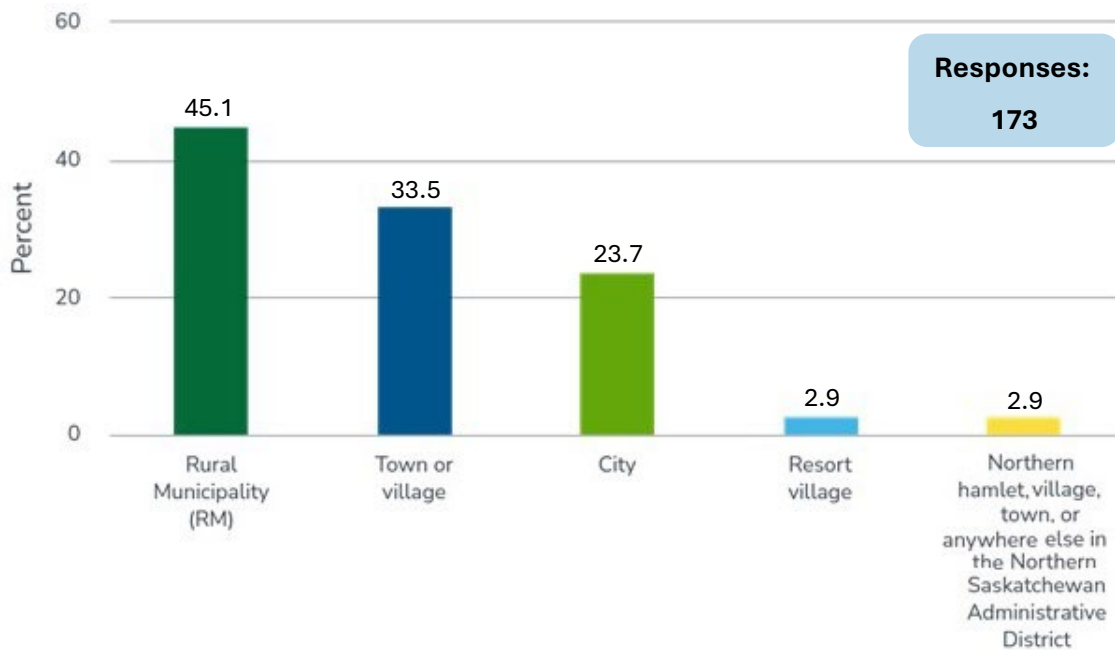
## Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



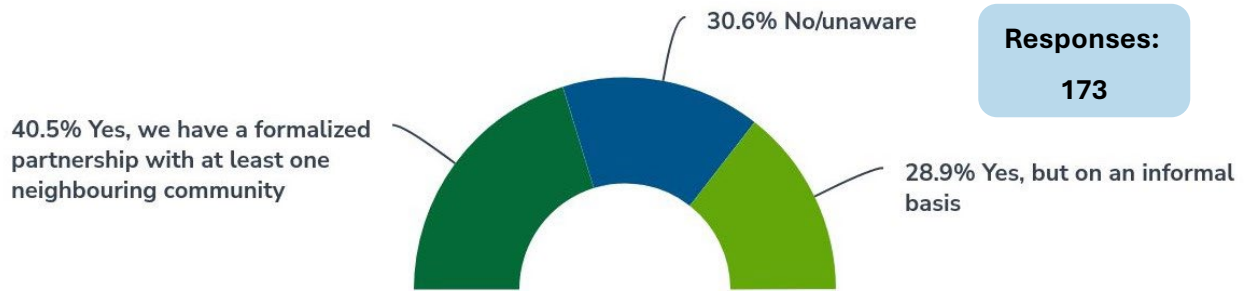
Of the 62 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, more than half were from rural municipalities, a quarter were from towns and the remainder were mainly from cities and villages.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)

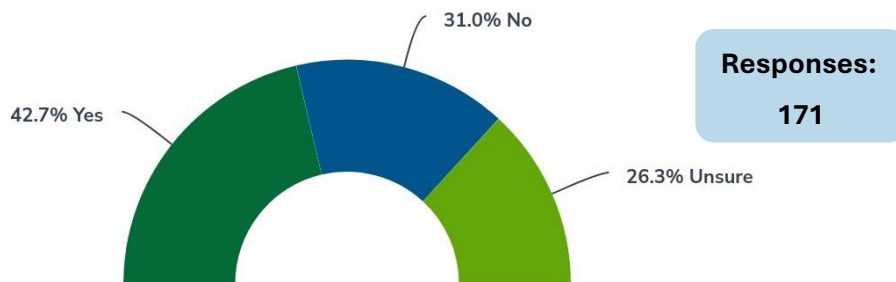


## Results by Question

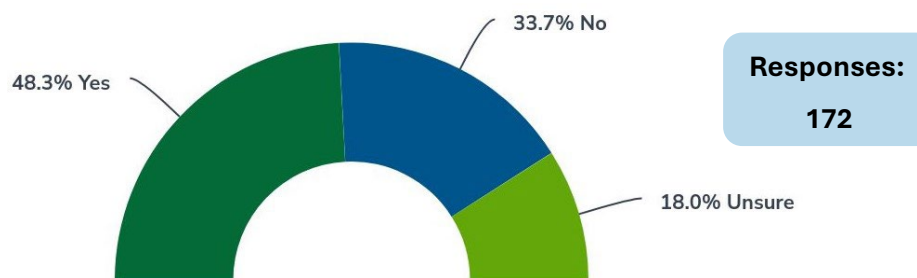
### Has your organization been involved in intermunicipal collaboration?



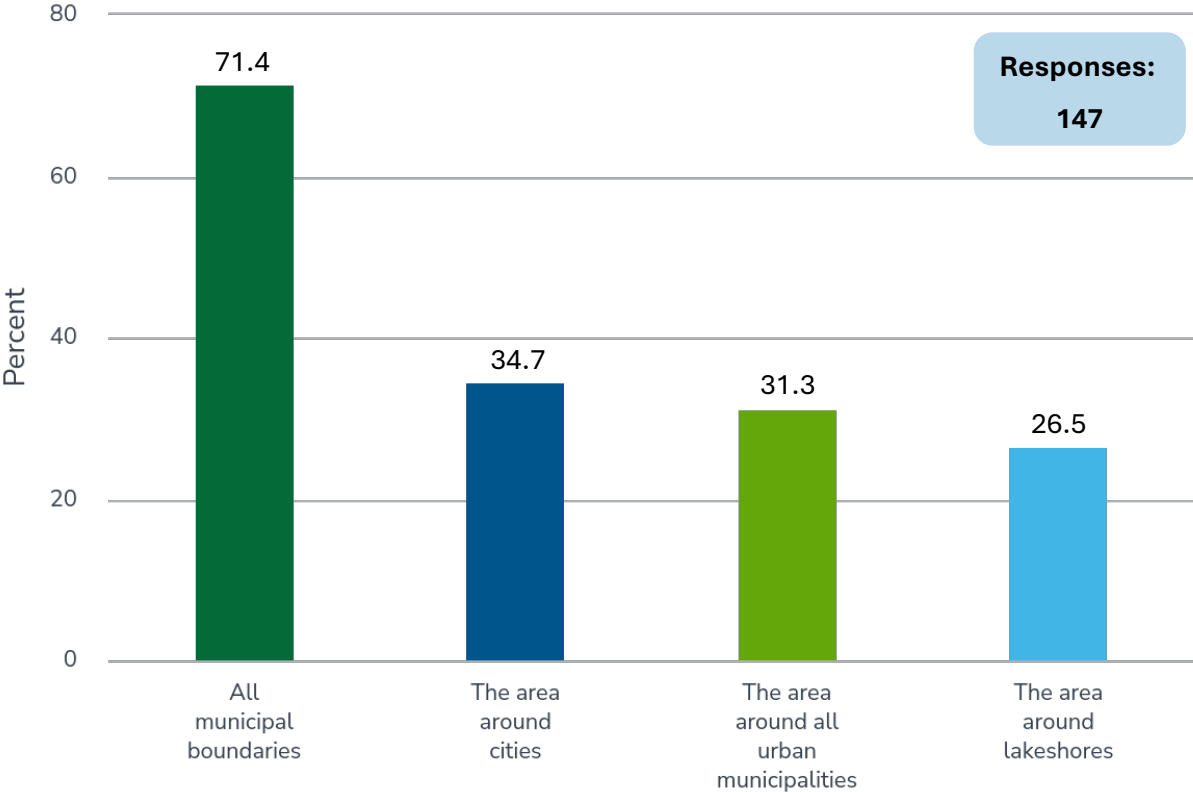
### Has your organization experienced challenges with providing services or accommodating development in a rural-urban fringe?



### Should intermunicipal cooperation be required in Saskatchewan?



If required, where should intermunicipal cooperation apply? (Please check all that apply)



## Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding intermunicipal collaboration?

This question received 73 responses.

When asked to provide any comments regarding intermunicipal cooperation, the majority of respondents indicated they believed intermunicipal cooperation was valuable and important. Some respondents indicated that the provincial government should require intermunicipal cooperation.

A sizeable number of respondents did not favour a mandatory option and suggested that government support or incentives need to be available for intermunicipal cooperation to work. Many respondents' support for intermunicipal cooperation came with caveats that it remain voluntary.

Finally, a number of respondents noted challenges with a rural/urban divide. Some said that small regional urban centres take on an unfair share of the costs of servicing surrounding communities. Others said that it is important to prevent rural interest from becoming overshadowed by larger populated areas.

**“RMs and towns rarely cooperate despite them serving the same population. RM residents benefit from town services, and the town benefits economically from industries in the RM. Sharing costs for the provision of services and supporting industry should be mandatory.”**

**“Funding opportunities should be made available for regional efforts. We have established rural fire boards and airport boards as well as regional long-term health care. Grants should be focused on these types of developments to promote regional cooperation.”**

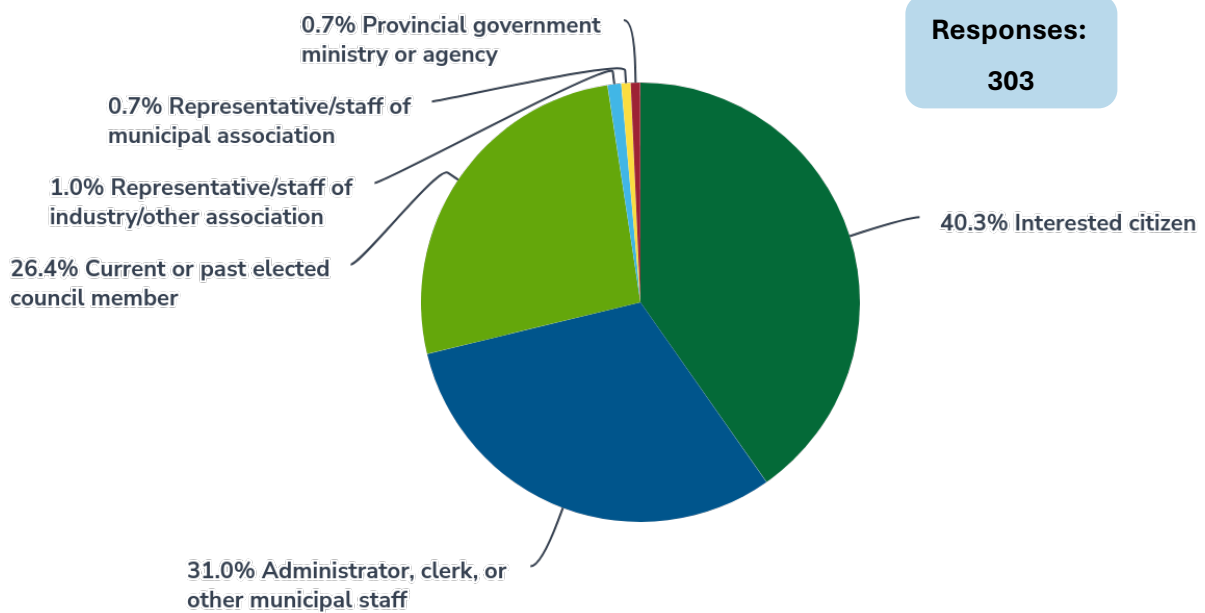
**“You can't force partnerships. We work together with neighbouring municipalities because we want to, but that would not work as well if it was forced.”**

## Mandatory Training for Council Members

This survey gathered feedback about whether municipal council members should be required to take training and, if so, what the details of that training should be.

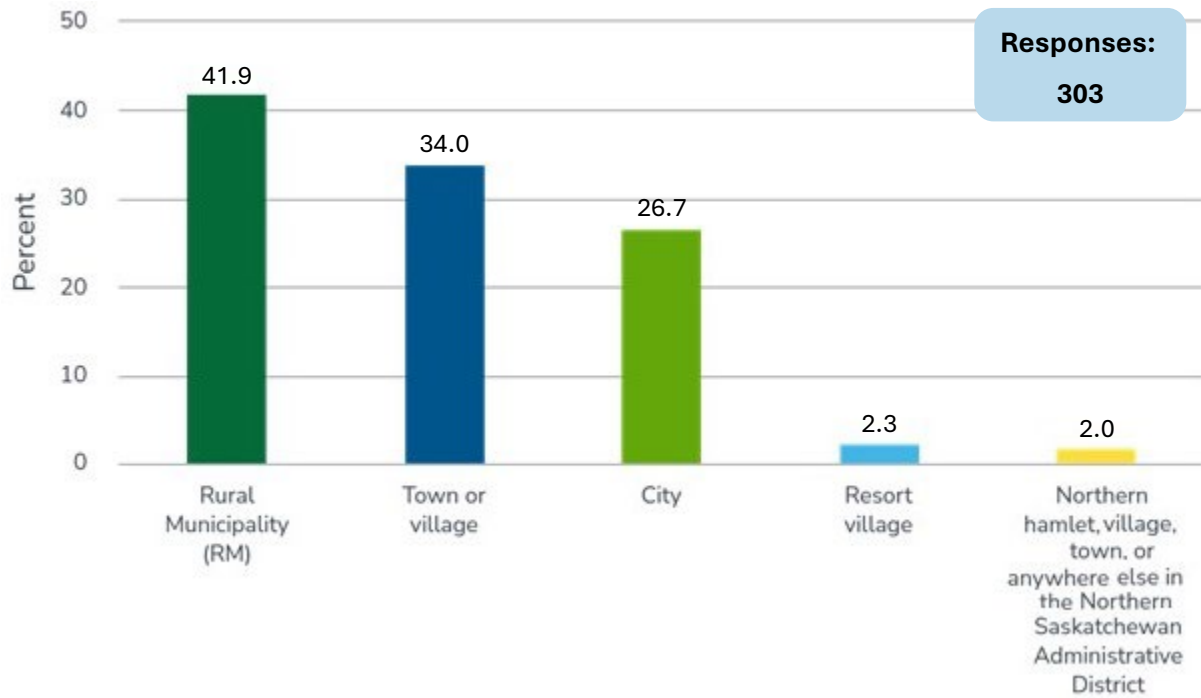
### Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



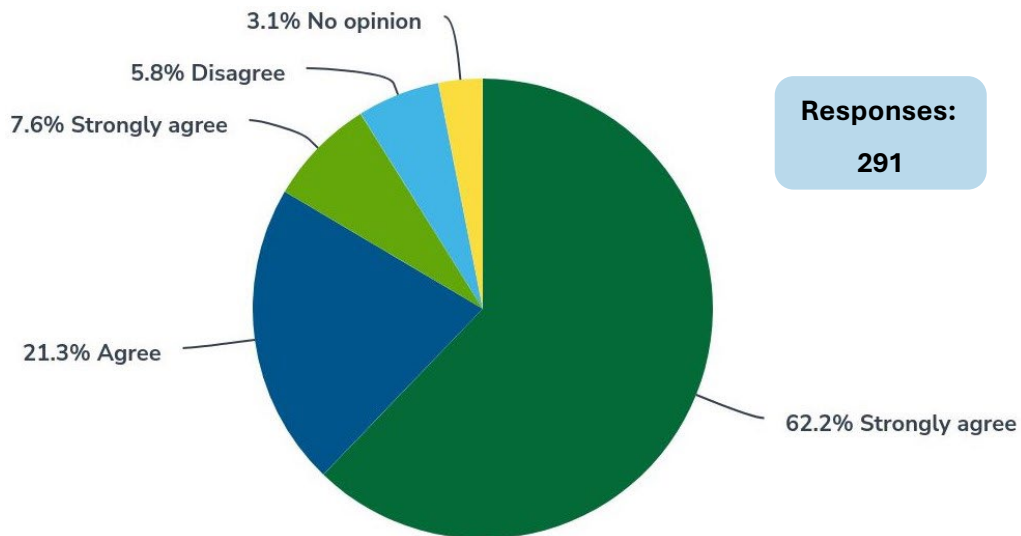
Of the 57.4 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, half were from RMs and a quarter were from towns. About one tenth were from villages and another tenth were from cities, with the rest from resort villages or northern communities.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)

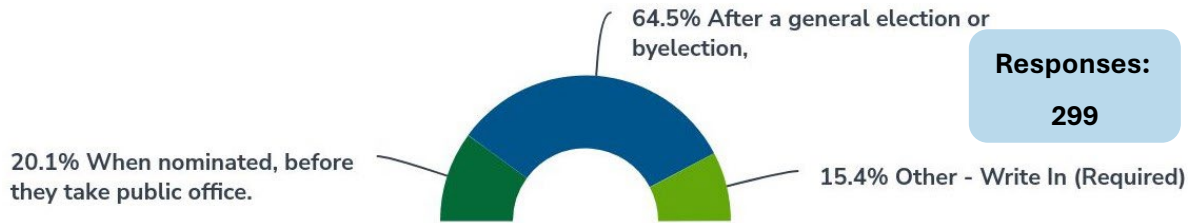


Results by Question

Please rate your agreement with the following statement: “Municipal council members should be required to complete training related to their position.”

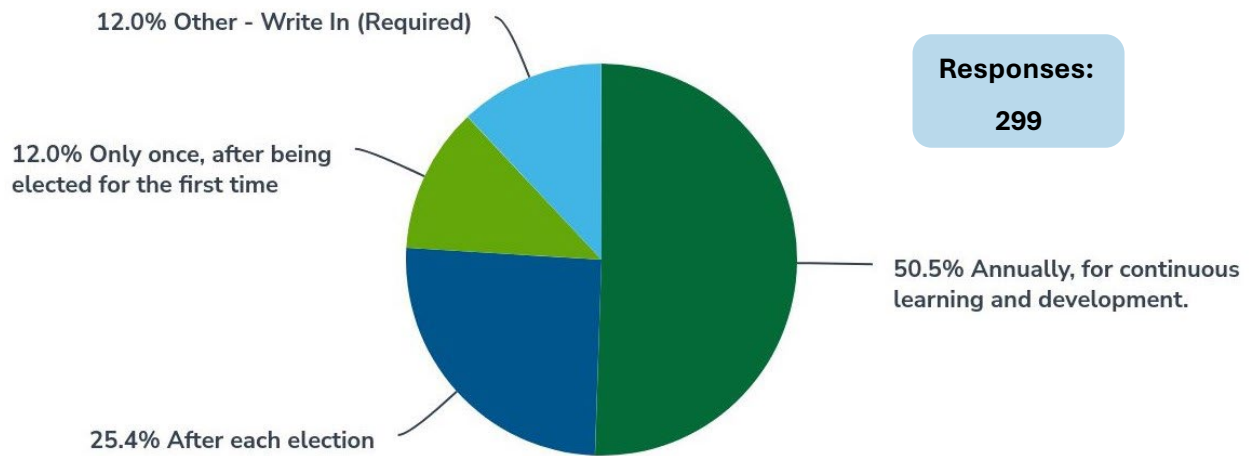


### When should council members take training?



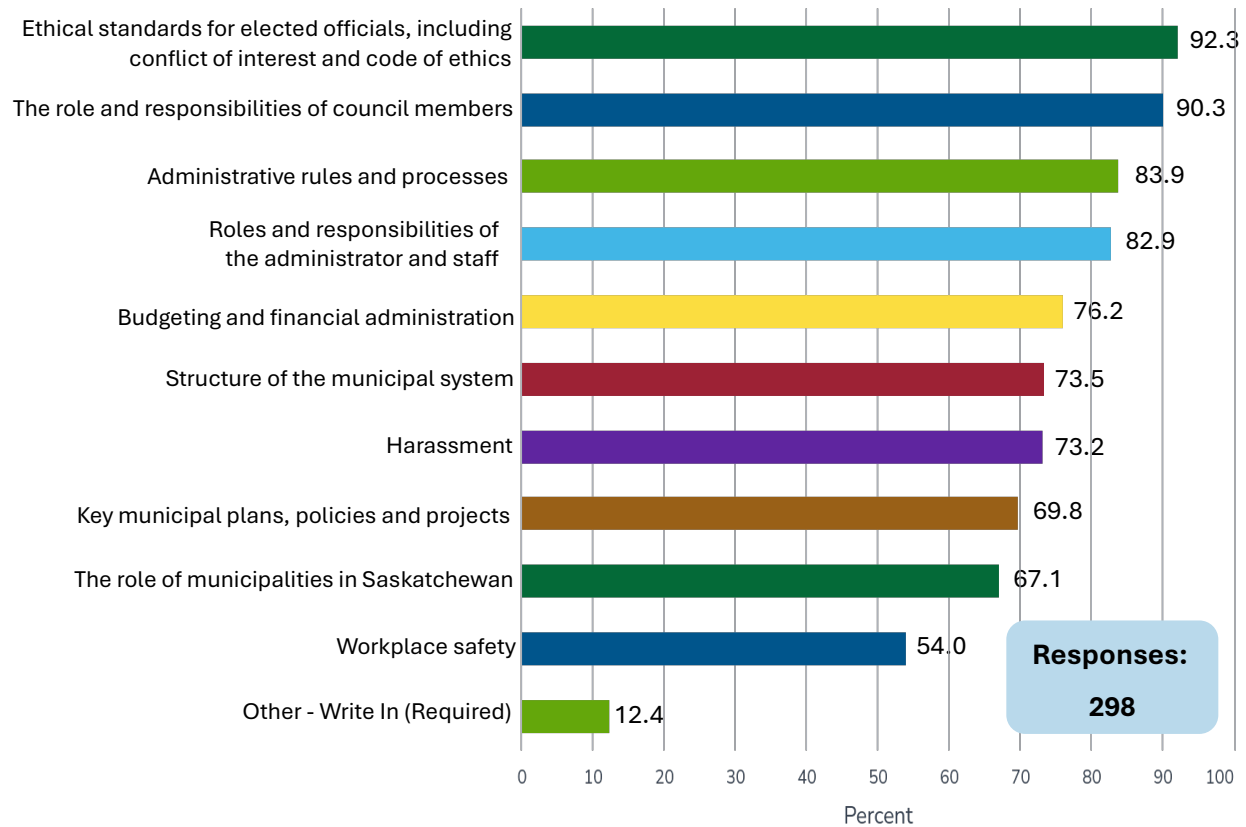
Of the respondents who selected the “Other” option, more than a third used their write-in answers to oppose the idea of mandatory training for council members. Amongst the rest of the responses, most favoured taking training after an election, but there was no consensus on when specifically post-election training should happen, with some suggesting a window of up to six months or one year. Several responses suggested training should take place either prior to or upon being nominated to run for a council position. (This included some suggestions that there should be pre-nomination training, with further training for those who are elected.)

### How often should a council member take training?



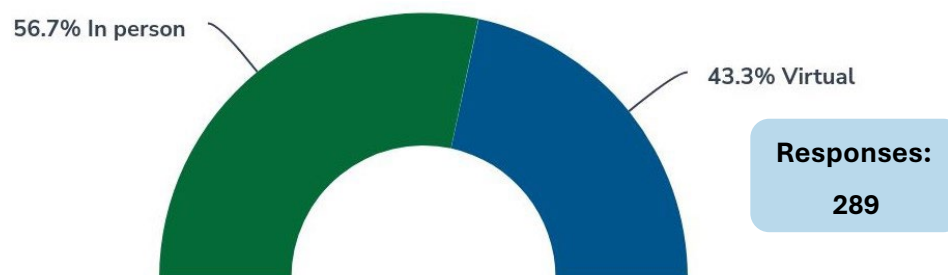
Of the respondents who selected the “Other” option, a third used their write-in answers to oppose the idea of mandatory training for council members. The rest of the write-in answers offered a range of suggestions for how often training should be taken. A common suggestion was that in addition to training after either their first election or each election, there should be some form of ongoing or refresher training for council members afterward. A few responses suggested that when they take training should be at the council member’s discretion, or that training should be more frequent than any of the options provided.

**Below are some of the subjects that mandatory training for council members could cover. Please check each subject that you believe council members should receive training on.**



Of the respondents who selected the “Other” option, a fifth of respondents used their write-in answers to oppose the idea of mandatory training for council members. The rest of the write-in answers offered a range of suggestions for additional topics that mandatory training could cover, such as: governance, access and privacy, asset management, strategic planning, emergency management, respect in the workplace, and diversity, equity and inclusion. A few respondents highlighted the importance of expectations of the job and requiring experience before an individual decides to run.

**If this training was required, would you prefer in person or virtual training?**



## Do you have any other comments or suggestions about council member training?

This question received 110 responses.

A majority of responses expressed support for mandatory training for all council members. These respondents indicated that training should occur after a general election or by-election because many new members are elected and are unsure what their roles and responsibilities are. Many survey respondents noted that many other boards or committees require some kind of training or orientation before starting their duties and that should be also a requirement for elected officials. A few respondents opposed mandatory training, and suggested training should be optional. Concerns were raised about the potential impact this requirement could have on recruiting people to run for council.

Many survey respondents said that the training should be accessible, but there was no consensus on whether in-person or virtual training would be the best option. Those that suggested in-person training cited the opportunities for networking and unexpected conversations. Those that suggested virtual training cited more flexibility for individuals to attend outside of normal work hours and minimal travel time. Some respondents suggested that offering both would be the best way to make mandatory training accessible for all.

Respondents supported a range of potential topics for inclusion in mandatory training, including administrative rules and processes, conflict of interest and codes of ethics, roles and responsibilities, budgeting and financial administration and harassment. Some respondents indicated that proof of training should be provided to all participants and there should be a penalty if a council member does not complete the mandatory training. Concerns were raised about the potential difficulty of persuading long-time council members to take the mandatory training.

**“If the training is required too often or is too time consuming, no one will want to run for council.”**

**“Training is essential for new and returning council members ... it is incredible how much there is to know.”**

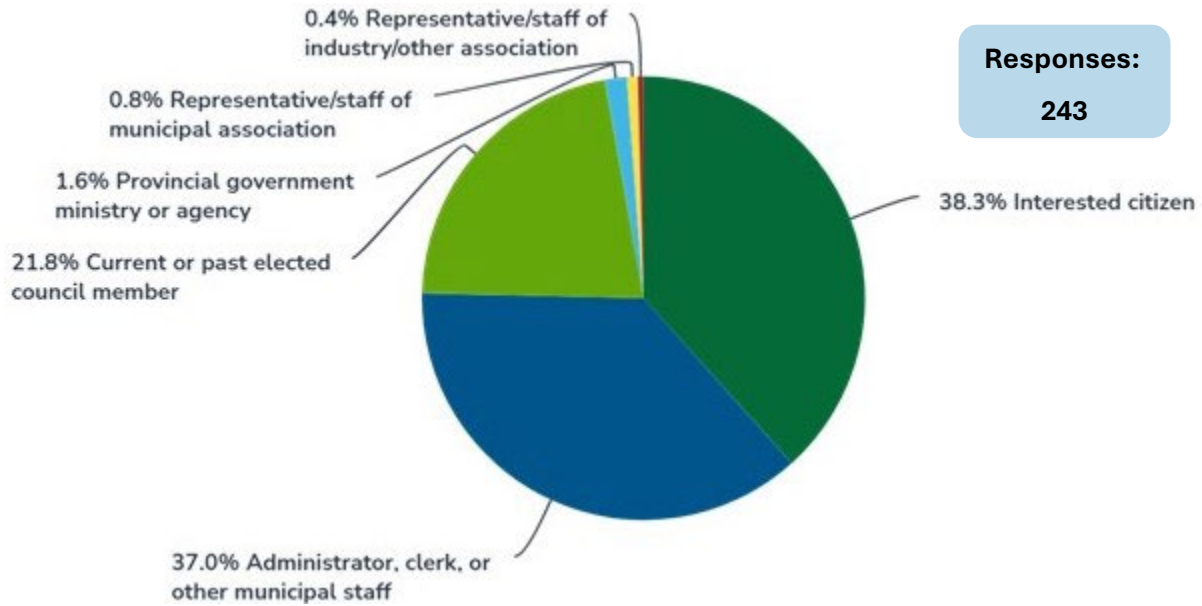
**“There is a need for councilor education and in-person training carries more weight than online/virtual training.”**

## Municipal Office Standards

This survey gathered feedback about what standards municipal offices should meet in areas such as hours of operation, location, means of contact and online presence.

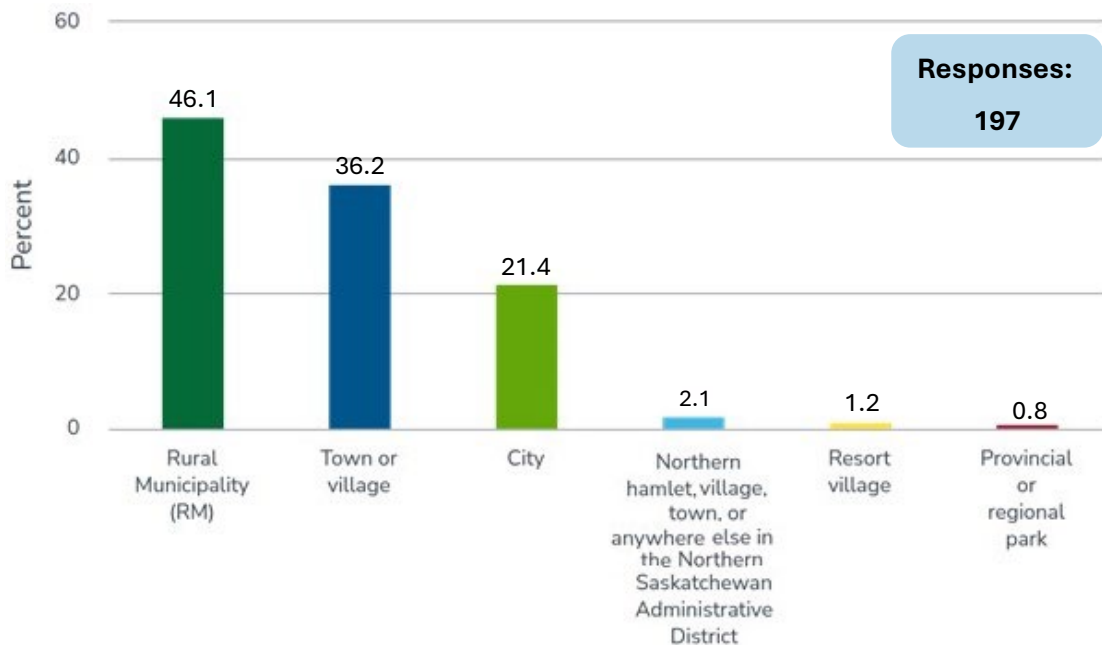
### Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



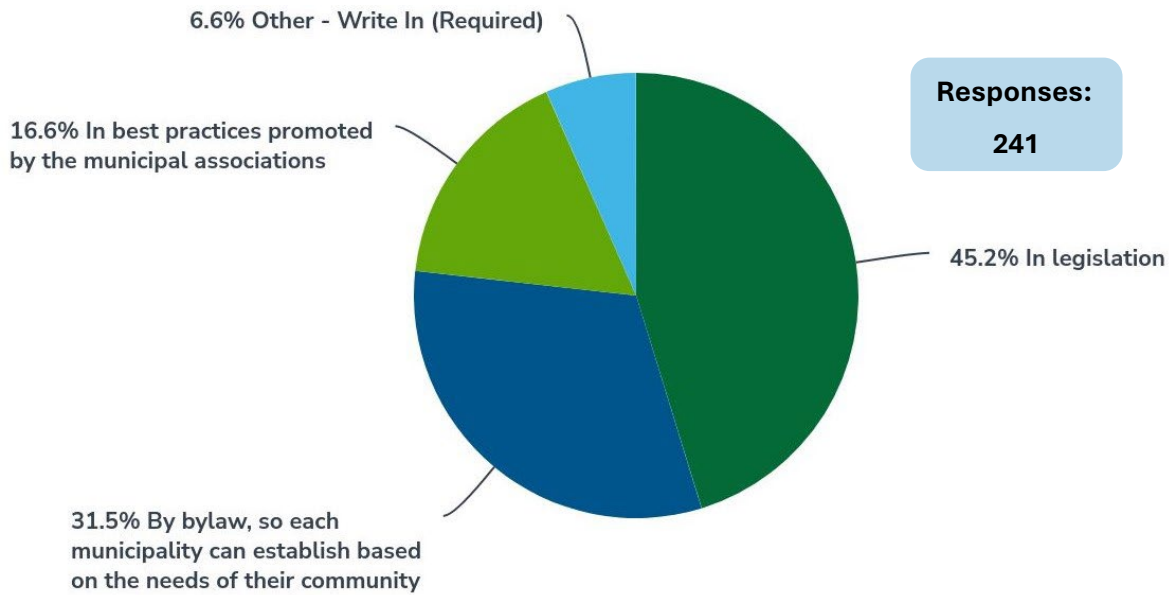
Of the 58.8 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, half were from RMs and a quarter were from towns, with the rest mainly from villages and cities.

I live in a (please select all that apply):



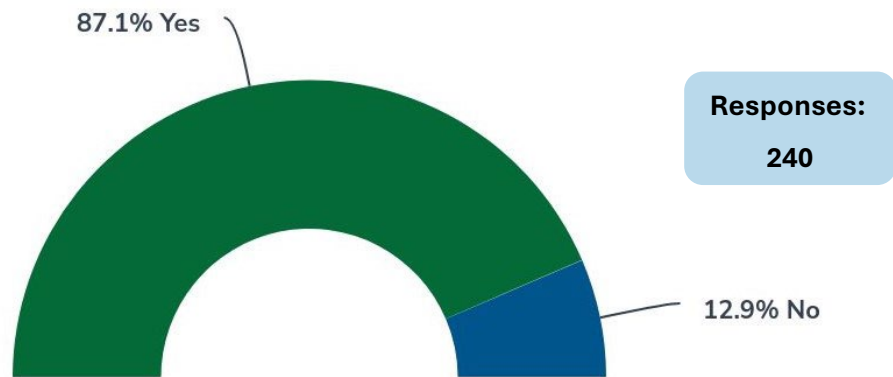
## Results by Question

What is the most appropriate way for administrative service standards for municipalities to be set?



Respondents who selected the “Other” option most often used it to suggest that standards be set using a combination of these methods. Others emphasized the importance of flexibility at the municipal level or suggested additional training for municipal administrators.

Should all municipalities be required to have a physical office that is open to the public?



## How many hours each week should a municipal office in your type of municipality be open to the public?

The table below shows the number and type of respondent, and the average number of hours they said a municipal office should be open to the public each week, broken down by municipality type. Only cities, RMs and towns/villages received enough responses to feature in this chart.

Some respondents gave only a minimum number of hours they felt municipal offices should be open. For those who provided a range of hours, the low end of the range was used to calculate the average. The number of hours per week listed in this table should therefore be considered at the low end of what respondents considered appropriate.

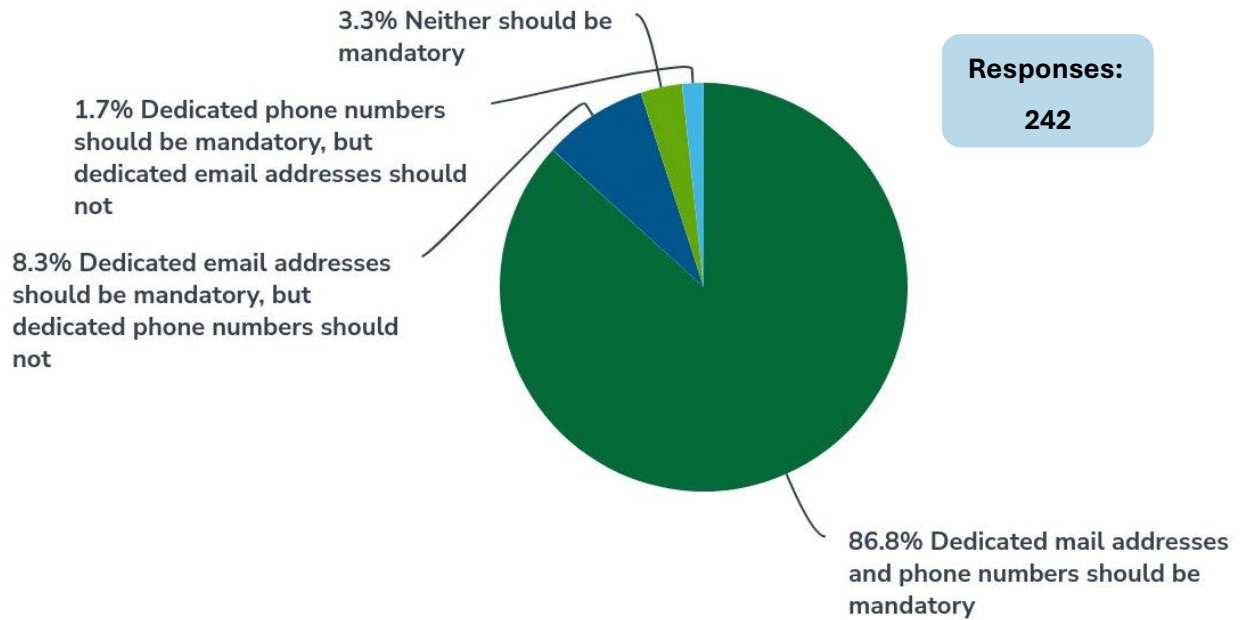
	<b>Respondent Type</b>	<b># of responses</b>	<b>Average hours/week</b>
<b>Town or Village</b>	Municipal Staff	24	25
	Council Members	16	32
	Citizens	16	31
	<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Rural Municipality</b>	Municipal Staff	36	30
	Council Members	11	33
	Citizens	31	30
	<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>City</b>	Municipal Staff	2	35
	Council Members	6	40
	Citizens	16	37
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>37</b>

Many respondents also offered longer answers that could not be factored into this chart. Several themes were repeated in these answers:

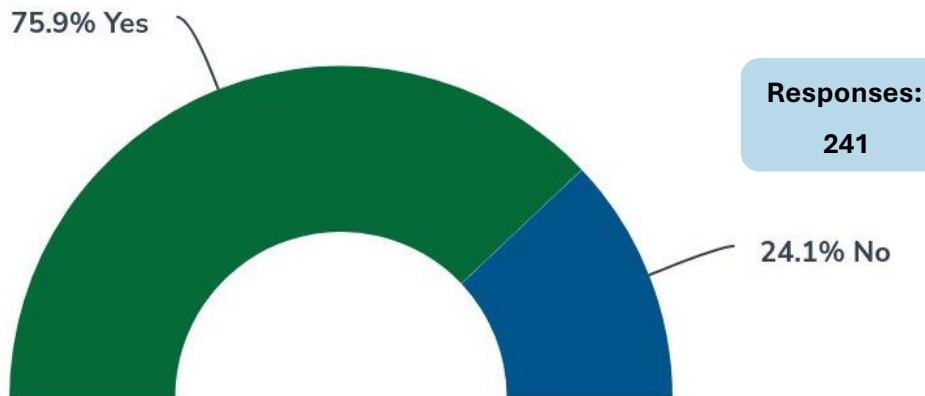
- That the minimum necessary hours vary by a municipality's size and finances, the community's needs and other local circumstances.
- That municipal offices should be open for the standard 8 a.m.- or 9 a.m.-5 p.m. workday, the standard Monday-Friday work week, or both.
- That municipal offices should be open a minimum number of days per week, instead of or in addition to a minimum number of hours.
- That municipal offices should sometimes be open outside normal business hours to accommodate citizens who cannot visit during the usual workday.

This question received 201 responses.

Should municipal governments be required to have a dedicated email address and phone number? (A dedicated address or number would be one that belongs to the municipality, not the personal number or address of an employee or council member.)



Should all municipalities be required to have a publicly accessible website? (For purposes of this question, social media accounts like Facebook pages are not considered websites.)



## Do you have any other comments or suggestions about municipal office standards?

This question received 88 responses.

Many respondents expressed support for the idea of all municipalities having websites, though not all felt it should be mandatory. A few respondents encouraged municipal use of social media. A smaller number of respondents voiced support for the use of dedicated municipal contact information and physical office locations.

Few respondents expressly opposed legislated requirements for office standards. However, many responses raised concerns about the potential impact on municipal finances and resources or said that municipalities should have discretion in setting their own standards.

Other recurring themes, in order of the number of responses that raised them, were:

- The importance of transparency in municipal government.
- The importance of timeliness in responding to requests and updating information.
- The idea that communities that cannot meet minimum office standards should not remain as incorporated municipalities.
- A need for higher standards and more documentation or guidance for municipal administrators.

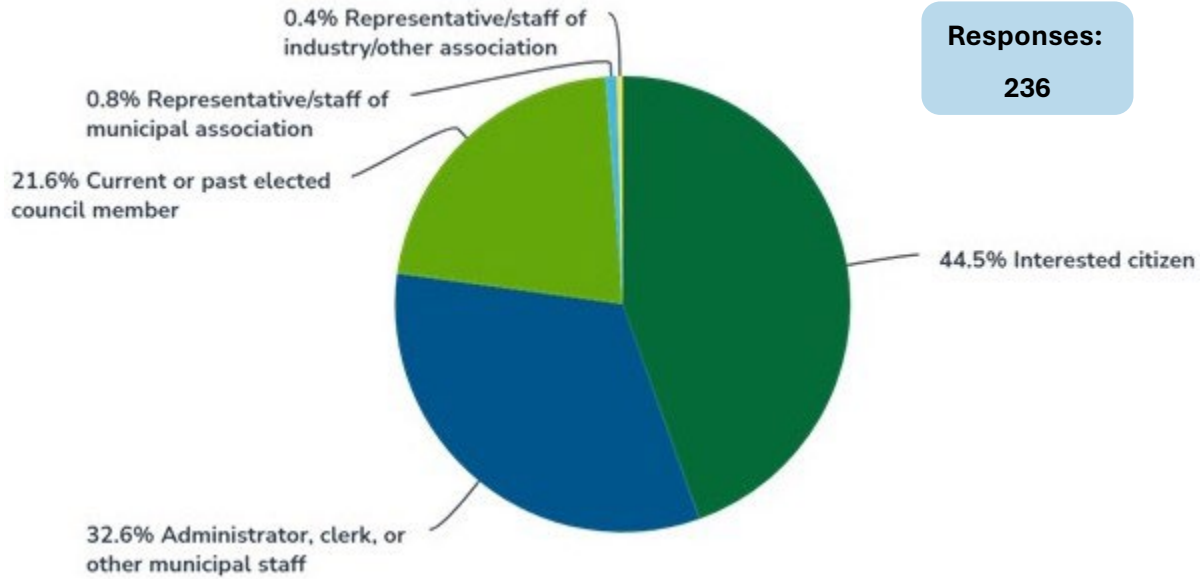
**“If a municipality is not big enough to have an office, dedicated phone number, email address, or website, it is not big enough to be a standalone municipality!”**

**“Although my municipality has a website and public office, I see where smaller municipalities would not have financial resources to have a website or office (although I wonder where documents and private property files are stored).”**

# Public Notice in Newspapers

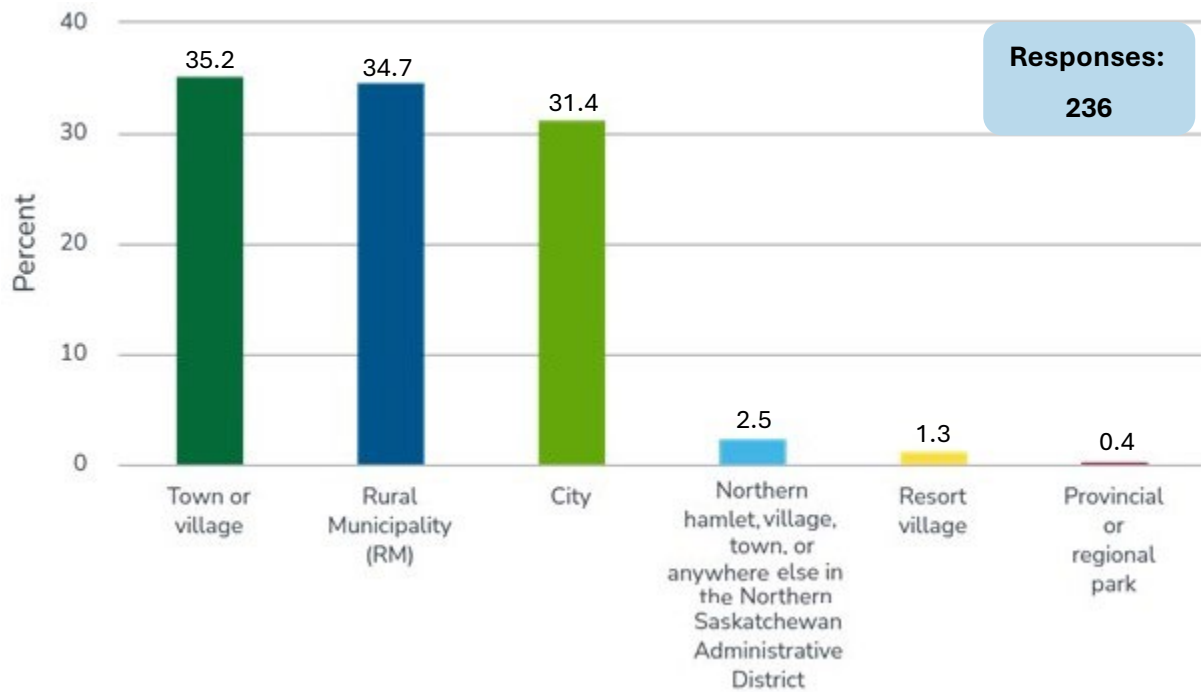
## Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



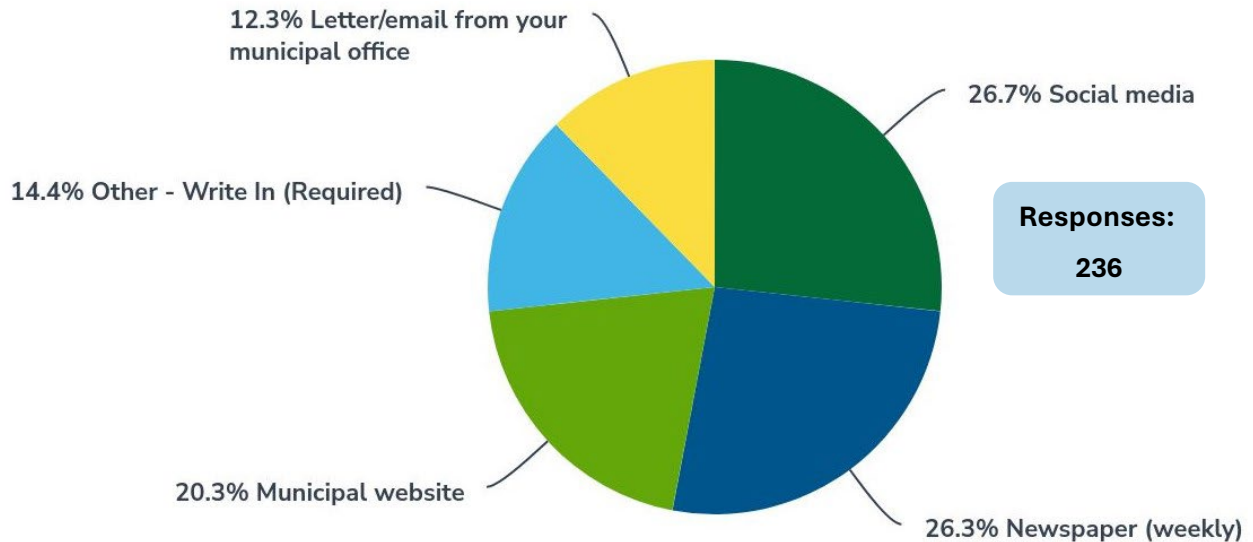
Of the 54.2 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, half were from rural municipalities, one quarter were from towns and the remainder were mainly from cities and villages.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)



## Results by Question

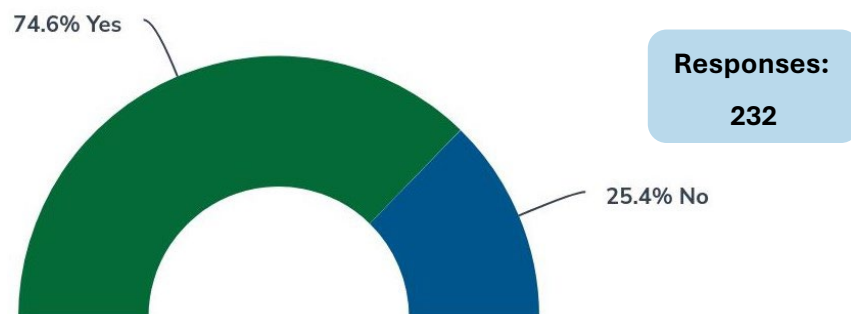
As a citizen, where do you most often see notices from your municipal government? (Please check all that apply)



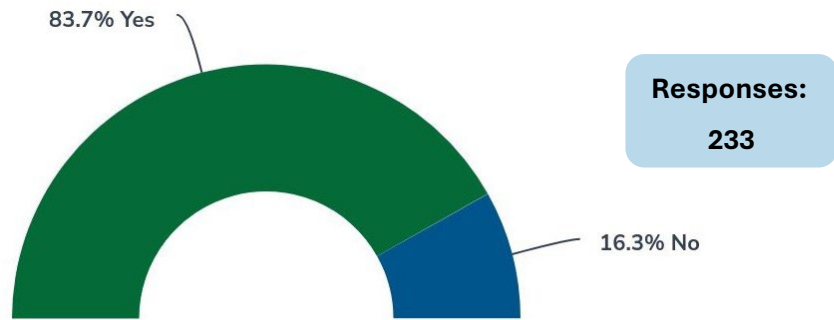
Several respondents used the “Other” option to identify multiple ways they see notices from their municipal government.

Several write-in answers said respondents see notices posted in their post offices, municipal offices or local businesses. Others said they receive notices on the radio, in newsletters or via a municipal app. About a third of write-in options said the respondents see few or no notices from their municipal government.

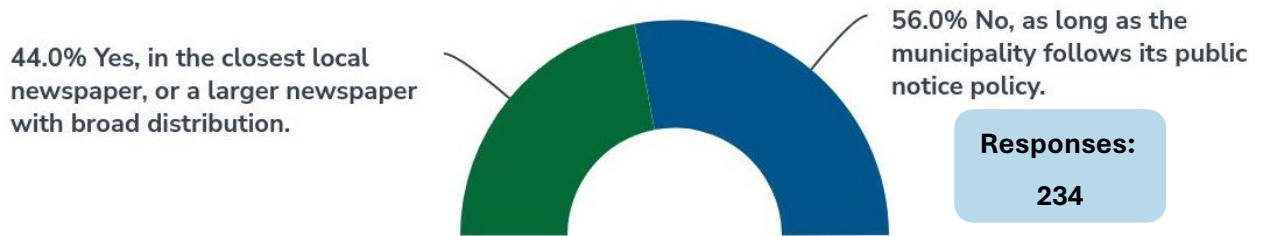
Should requirements for public notice be the same for all legislation affecting municipalities?



**Should local governments be required to publish all public notices online?**



**Should municipalities be required to advertise public notice in newspapers for restructurings, status and boundary changes, completion of assessment roll and assessment notices and the last day for assessment appeals?**



## Do you have any other comments or suggestions about requirements for public notice in newspapers?

This question received 114 responses.

Most respondents preferred websites and other electronic means for publishing public notices. Many felt that newspapers are becoming obsolete and wanted a transition to publishing notices using websites and other electronic means. There was particular concern for small communities, which often have no local newspaper, meaning that newspaper notices don't reach their residents.

However, some respondents felt that newspapers notices are still needed. They noted that newspaper notices provide physical evidence that a notice was posted and create a permanent historical record, whereas online notices can be changed or deleted. They also noted that not everyone has reliable internet access.

Many respondents thought that public notice bylaws should reflect the choices of individual municipalities, since they know best how to reach their target audience.

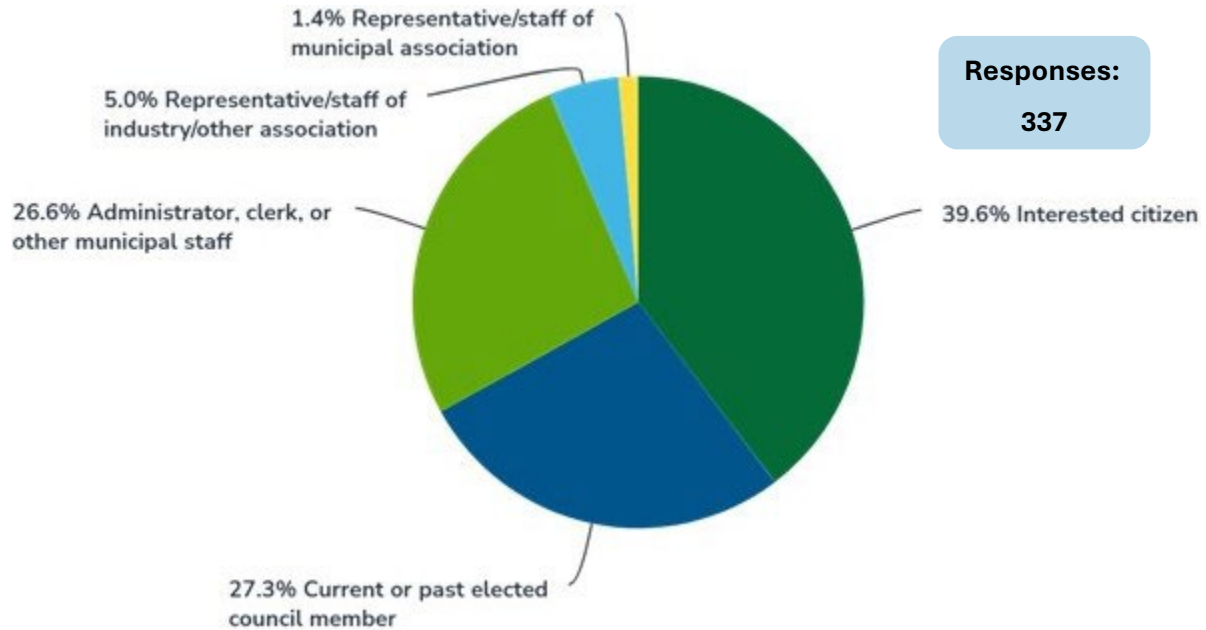
**“The challenge would be smaller municipalities that lack capacity to keep up their own website . . . regardless, municipalities shouldn't have to utilize newspapers, which few of their residents may even read. Allowing them to set a policy that fits their community makes the most sense.”**

**“No newspaper circulates within our boundaries. It feels like a waste of taxpayer dollars to pay \$200 to publish a notice regarding assessments, elections, etc., in a place our ratepayers don't see. Our local posters and emailed notices reach way more residents than the newspaper.”**

## Subclass Authority

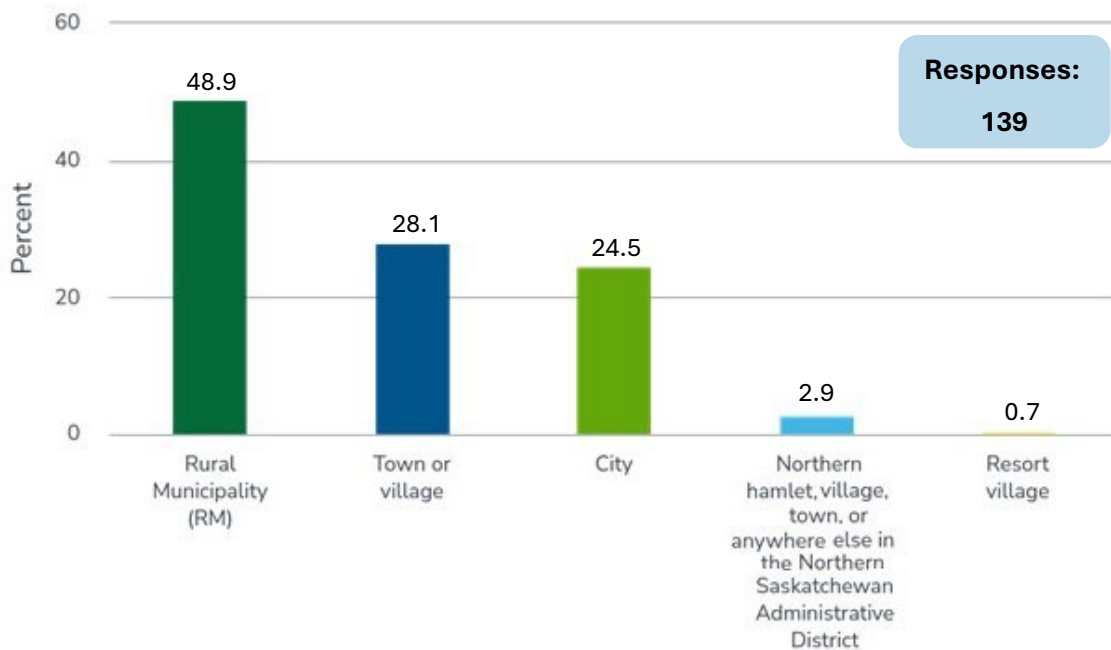
### Response demographics

What is your interest in municipal government?



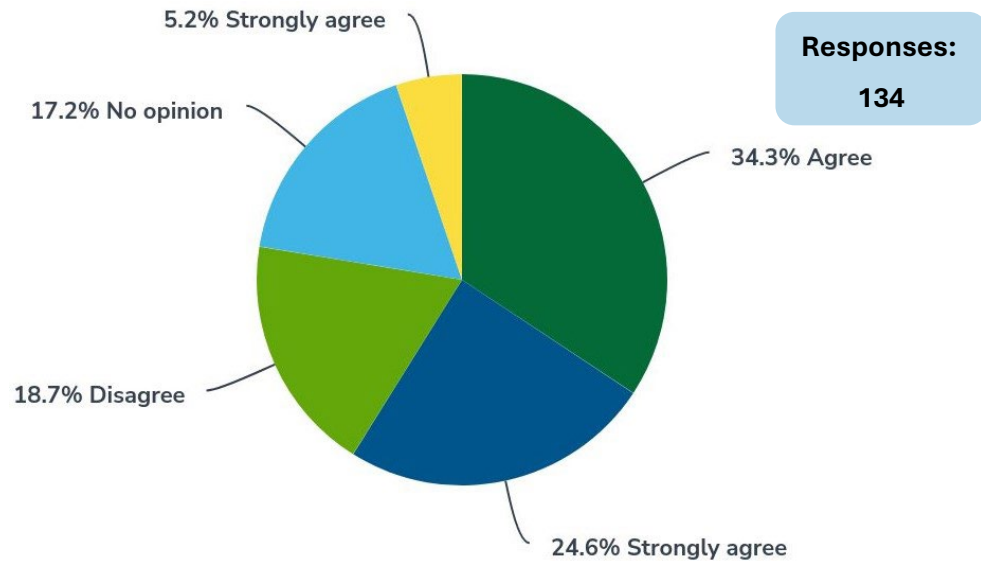
Of the 54 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, more than half were from rural municipalities. One fifth were from towns, with the remainder mainly from cities and villages.

I live in a: (Please select all that apply)



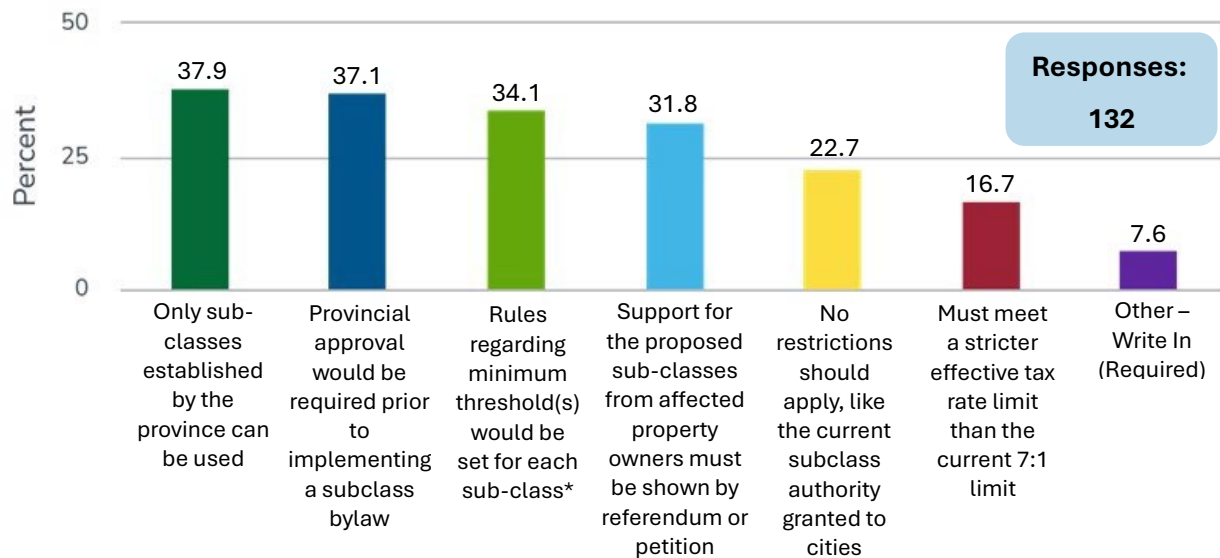
## Results by Question

Do you agree that all municipalities in Saskatchewan should be able to create subclasses by bylaw?



This question contained an error that may have affected its results: the “Strongly agree” option appears twice, and there is no “Strongly disagree” option.

If municipalities are given the authority to create subclasses by bylaw, should any of the following restrictions apply? (Please choose all that apply)



\*Examples might include minimum number of properties, or minimum amount of taxable assessment.

Respondents who selected the “Other” option stressed the importance of consulting, involving and transparently sharing information with the public.

## What advantages or disadvantages might occur if subclass authority was granted to all municipalities in Saskatchewan?

This question received 62 responses. Overall, respondents made roughly as many comments about potential disadvantages of subclass authority as they did about potential advantages.

Comments about disadvantages focused almost entirely on the potential misuse of subclass authority. Numerous respondents said there is a risk that municipal governments will unfairly target certain types of business, or even individual businesses, with excessive tax rates. A few comments indicated that provincial oversight or the use of specific thresholds might mitigate this risk.

Comments focused on the advantages of subclass authority were more diverse. Most commonly, respondents said that subclass authority would allow for fairer taxation, typically by better matching tax rates to the services a property receives or the impact it has on municipal resources. Several respondents gave specific examples of how increased differentiation of property types could be applied in their municipality, such as creating subclasses for seasonal recreational properties or heritage properties, or taxing small businesses differently than large industries.

Comments also highlighted the increased flexibility that this would provide local councils to meet their communities' specific circumstances. A few respondents suggested that subclass authority would help to develop or sustain municipalities economically.

**“The largest issue with this proposal is the abuses that will occur. I can see a lot of [the tax burden] shifting towards the railroads and oil.”**

**“Not all commercial and/or industrial land uses draw equally on municipal resources, and the tax system should reflect this. A municipality should be able to decide whether an industrial plant with significant water and roadway needs should be taxed at the same rate as a retail storefront.”**

## Do you have any other comments or suggestions about subclass authority?

This question received 35 responses.

Some respondents supported extending the authority to create subclasses to all municipalities in Saskatchewan. Those in support felt that all municipalities should have access to the same tools. Some respondents felt that all councils should have the ability to fine-tune property tax policy by creating subclasses and that access to subclass creation would allow municipalities to ensure their level of taxation is better aligned with the level of services provided.

Other respondents stated that the flexibility to create subclasses should be offset by having a measure of provincial controls to ensure consistency in the subclasses created in municipalities and to address concerns regarding the fairness of property tax policy. Some suggested ideas included only using the subclasses already established in regulations, requiring support by vote from property owners in the municipality or having a provincial approval process.

Some people do not support extending subclasses to all municipalities. These respondents believe that access to more tax tools will allow municipalities to target specific industries and business in a way that is unfair and may be detrimental to further growth.

**“Cities should not have more discretion over their taxation systems than any other level of municipal government. All levels of local government are accountable to their residents and ratepayers. Let the voters hold governments accountable rather than restricting council’s discretion.”**

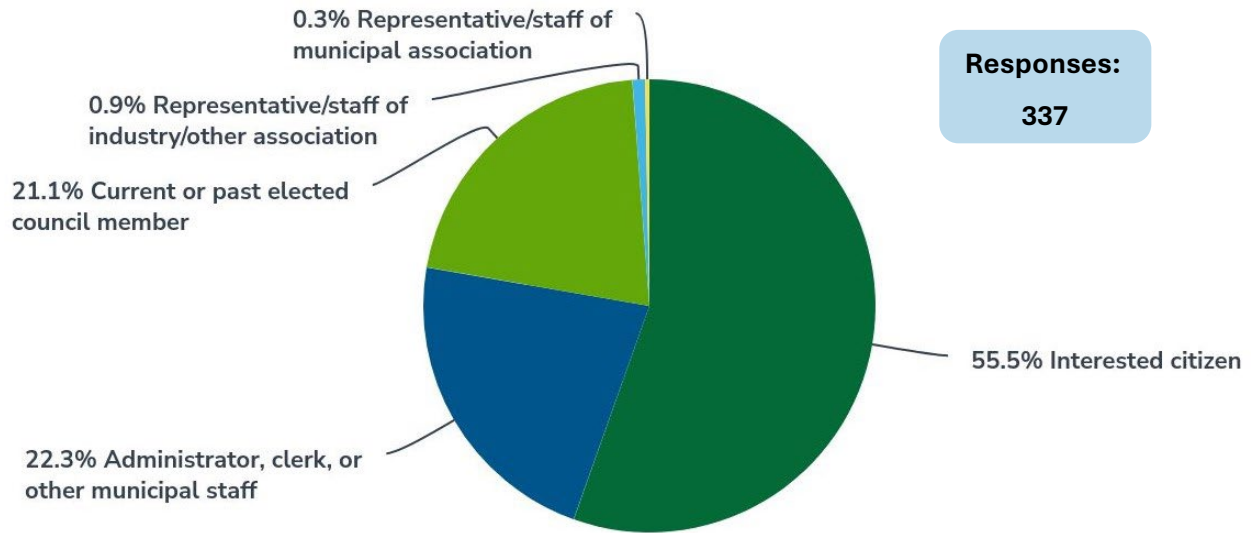
**“Keep the status quo. This could hurt us economically by driving away businesses, as subclasses are typically created to increase the commercial and/or industrial property tax burden.”**

## Vacant and Derelict Properties

This survey gathered feedback about concerns regarding vacant and derelict properties, and how municipalities can best address this issue.

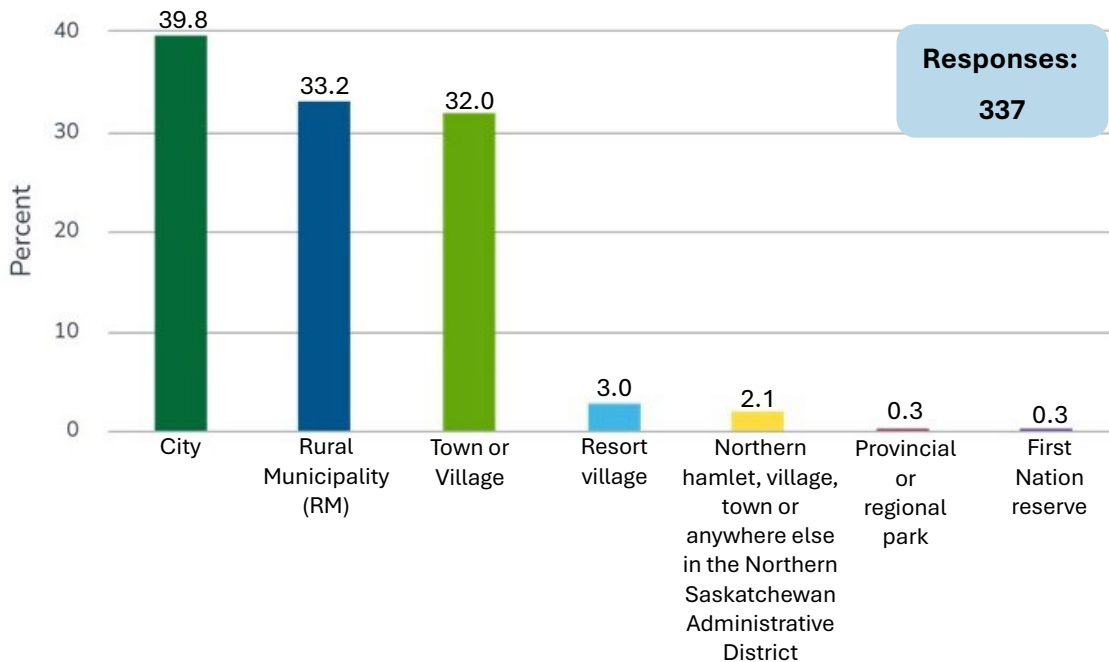
### Response demographics

#### What is your interest in municipal government?



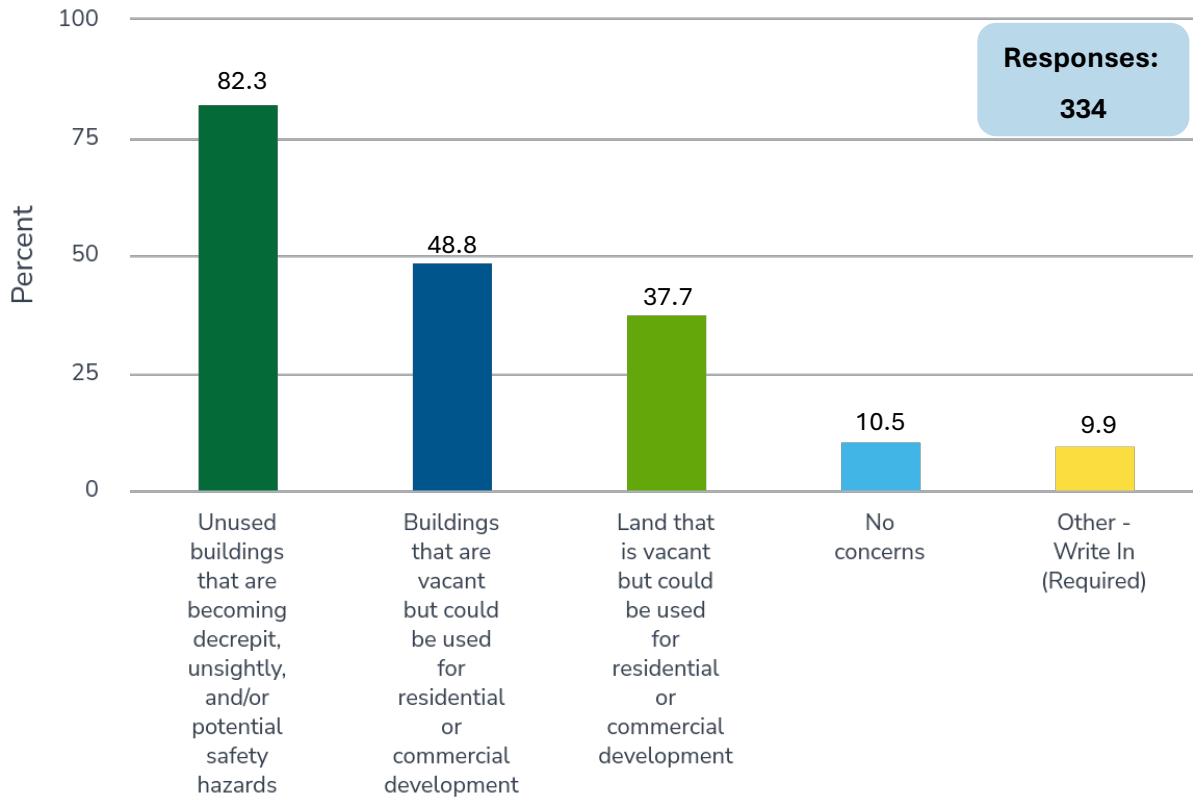
Of the 43.4 per cent of respondents who were municipal staff or council members, more than a third were from rural municipalities and nearly a third were from towns, with the rest mainly from villages and cities.

#### I live in a: (Please select all that apply)



## Results by Question

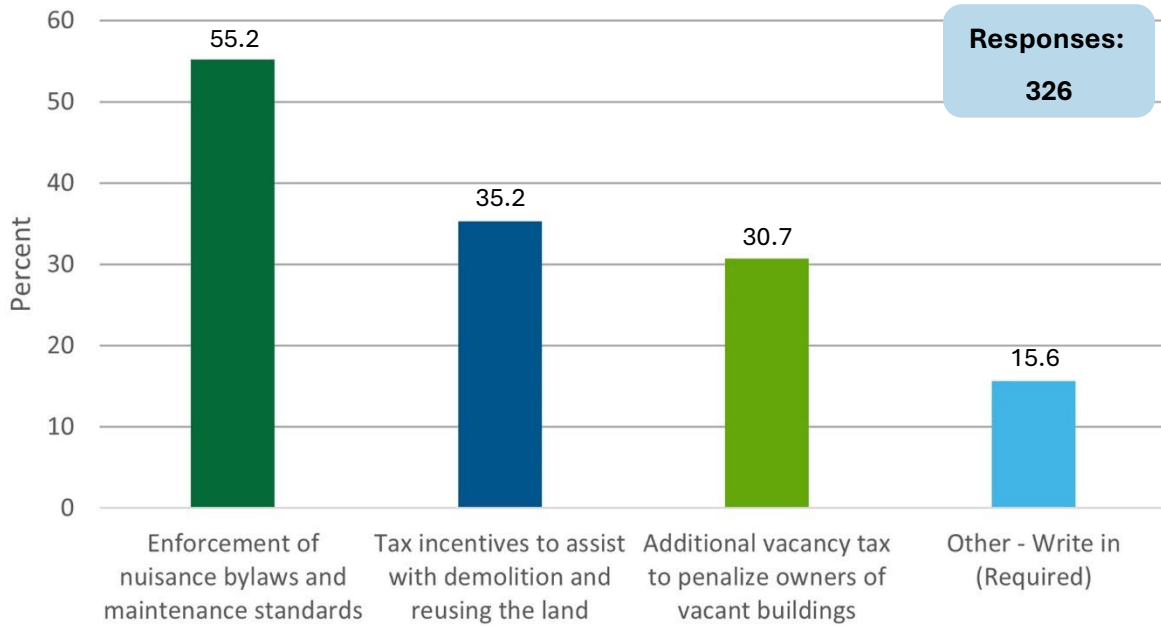
Which, if any, issues concern you about privately-owned vacant buildings and land? (Check all that apply)



Some respondents who selected the “Other” option offered opinions about who is responsible. Some indicated that property owners have the right to do what is in their best interests, however, municipalities should work with land and building owners to correct the issues. Others noted that each municipality should have autonomy to deal with the issues.

Comments noted that some properties are in poor condition and a safety risk to the communities and the environment, attracting squatters, rodents and other illegal activities.

**What approach should a municipality use to deal with vacant and derelict buildings? (Please check all that apply)**



Due to a survey design error, the first 194 respondents were unable to select more than one option. Where those respondents used the “Other” option to identify multiple options, that has been incorporated into the results. However, percentages of support for these options would likely have been higher if all respondents had been able to select multiple options. In addition, 29 respondents who selected the “Other” option were unable to enter a written answer.

Comments written into the “Other” option included:

- The taxes owing should be reflected in the credit records of property owners.
- Historic buildings should be used or sold to someone who will use them. They should not be allowed to be neglected.
- The local government should not be allowed to override the rights of property owners.

## Do you have any other comments or suggestions about vacant land and buildings?

This question received 158 responses.

Answers to this question varied widely. Some felt that additional taxes would encourage property owners to clean up or demolish derelict buildings, but many others did not think additional taxes or tax penalties would be more than a short-term solution. It was suggested that incentives to clean up properties and effective nuisance bylaws would work the best.

Some mentioned that enforcing bylaws is difficult, but that targeting problem properties may increase overall compliance. Others said that as long as taxes are being paid, the property owner should be left alone or there may be appearance of council singling out certain individuals for other reasons.

Most agreed that the problem of derelict buildings is increasing, with financial implications on municipal budgets.

**“Vacant and derelict buildings pose a great risk to our urban municipalities. Either a derelict/vacant home tax or the ability to give tax incentives toward people renting vacant homes would be helpful.”**

**“Especially in smaller rural settings it is hard to enforce nuisance bylaws on derelict buildings ... owners have no incentive to get rid of old buildings and they become hosts to squatters, critters etc.”**

## Conclusion

The Ministry of Government Relations would like to thank everyone who took the time to read the issue papers, fill out surveys and submit comments.

The Ministry of Government Relations regularly amends legislation governing municipalities in Saskatchewan to keep the legislative framework current and responsive. These surveys provided valuable input for the ministry as it considers potential changes to *The Cities Act*, *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010* and *The Municipalities Act*. Public and stakeholder engagement is an important step when considering legislative amendments.

It is important to note that this public engagement does not announce any changes in policy, legislation or municipal taxation authority and that no decisions have been made. These surveys are one of the tools used by government to gather suggestions for improvements to municipal legislation to meet the evolving needs of municipalities.

## For more information

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