

MUNICIPAL VOTER TURNOUT IN NEW BRUNSWICK

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Abstract

Of the 416 municipal elections held in New Brunswick between 1995 and 2004, 322 (77 per cent) featured competitive mayor and/or council races. Of these 322 competitive contests, 28 per cent had turnout rates below 50 per cent. In attempting to suggest how municipal accountability might be increased; this study uses regression analysis to explain why some competitive municipal elections might have higher voter turnout rates than others. Results suggest that turnout from previous years, concurrent provincial referendums, and competitive mayoral races significantly affect municipal turnout rates. Based on these findings, this study suggests indemnities would encourage competition for the mayoral position and in doing so, raise aggregate voter rates in already competitive elections, encourage more candidates to join in non or under-competitive contests and help ensure the overall health of representative local democracy in New Brunswick.

Executive Summary

A key component of democracy is the electoral accountability that a competitive, fair and equal election provides, with electoral accountability being the obligation of elected officials to answer for their decisions and actions within the context of their elected position. Key to this is the opportunity elections provide for voters to inflict penalty on officials for failure. In the case of New Brunswick, low voter turnout may adversely affect this accountability. In New Brunswick, the average municipal voter turnout rate was 47 per cent between 1995 and 2004. However, this number can be misleading for several reasons. First, turnout rates vary widely across municipalities, and in many municipalities turnout is often below 35 per cent. Secondly, there is a high prevalence of acclaimed elections in New Brunswick. Between 1995 and 2004, 51 per cent of all candidates that ran for mayor were either appointed or acclaimed to the position. In 23 per cent of all municipal elections during this period, there was only one council and mayoral candidate for each available position and these acclamations are not reflected in the overall turnout rate.

Starting with the assumption that there is a potential for a lack of municipal accountability in New Brunswick due to low voter turnout, this study examines the determinants of local voter turnout in New Brunswick. Data from the OCEO in New Brunswick provides an opportunity to examine the factors affecting municipal election turnout rates in Canada. The Office of the Chief Elector Officer provides municipal level data from across New Brunswick for the past four municipal elections. Along with Quebec, New Brunswick is the only province in Canada to centralize data from municipal elections (Kushner et. al., 1997). Since the mid 1990s, New Brunswick has standardized its municipal election days to ensure uniform provincial wide municipal elections. The result is a complete portrait of voter turnout rates during municipal elections across New Brunswick since 1995.¹ Many of the factors used to explain voter turnout (such as weather, time of year, if there was a concurrent election during the municipal election) are held constant in the New Brunswick situation as the date for municipal elections is standardized across the province.

¹ Like New Brunswick, Quebec also maintains a centralized database on municipal elections, however municipal elections have only been held on the same day province-wide since 2005.

Electoral data from the OCEO, census data and information from other sources is used to explore the three sets of factors that have been hypothesized to affect local voter turnout including: socio-economic factors (i.e.: median household income, home ownership, and population density etc.) ; political factors (i.e.: incumbency, number of candidates, and competitiveness of the race etc.); and, institutional factors (i.e.: at-large vs. wards). Regression analysis demonstrates that previous voting, a concurrent provincial referendums, and a contested mayoral race are positively correlated with increased voter turnout – with the latter seen as key to increasing turnout rates.

Based on these findings, four policy alternatives are offered to increase the number of competitive mayoral contests including: the status quo; remuneration based on municipal population; remuneration based on the number of hours worked; and remuneration tied to municipal outcomes. These alternatives are evaluated according to their impacts on the three criteria: political feasibility, effectiveness, and cost. Remunerations tied to municipal outcomes emerge as the most viable alternative available to policy makers. All alternatives ranked high in terms of effectiveness, however only remunerations tied to municipal performance ranked high in terms of political feasibility and as such, is the recommended option.

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1 Introduction

A key component of democracy is the electoral accountability that a competitive, fair and equal election provides. Central to this is the opportunity elections provide for voters to inflict penalty on officials for failure. In the case of New Brunswick, low voter turnout may adversely affect this local accountability process. Starting with the assumption that there is a potential for a lack of municipal accountability in New Brunswick due to low voter turnout, this study examines the determinants of local voter turnout. To do so, this study examines the relation of socio-economic factors (i.e.: median household income, home ownership, and population density etc.) as well as political factors (i.e.: incumbency, number of candidates, and competitiveness of the race etc.), and institutional factors (i.e.: at-large vs. wards) in examining their effect on municipal voter turnout in New Brunswick. Particular attention is paid to the prevalence of acclamations at the municipal level and its impact on voter turnout. Interviews with key stakeholders are used to inform policy options including those with the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Association Francophone des Municipalites du Nouveau Brunswick (AFMNB). Policy advice is then generated for the Department of Local Government in New Brunswick to increase voter turnout during municipal elections, and thus increase electoral accountability.

Section 2 explains the relevant background information, such as, the current electoral system in New Brunswick, the current mandate of the OCEO, and an introduction to the public policy problem, as well as a survey of the current literature on the subject of municipal voting, and implications of ineffective elections. Section 3 explains the methodology used in the construction of this study, paying special attention to the data collection and its strengths and weaknesses. In section 4, a detailed explanation is provided on the various regression models created and the overall fit of the models in explaining the determinants of voter participation. Using that information, section 5 generates policy options based on the information obtained in sections 4. Finally, section 6 analyzes the various options against three criteria to determine the best policy approach to address this problem.

2 Policy Problem and Background Information

2.1 Public Policy Problem: Potential for a lack of Municipal Accountability due to ineffective voter participation

This study examines municipal elections in New Brunswick. Specifically, the working hypothesis of this study is that the electoral accountability in New Brunswick is too low, as measured by low voter turnout. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that effect municipal turnout rates in New Brunswick. The public policy problem addressed in this study is that **ineffective voter participation may adversely affect municipal accountability in New Brunswick**. This research examines the crucial role elections play in the accountability of public officials. This study then provides policy options for increasing voter turnout and as a result increasing electoral accountability at the local level in New Brunswick.

Clearly, there is a need to address this lack of accountability. Governments have a finite amount of financial resources they can devote to the various policy problems that arise within their respective jurisdictions. In their 2006 report entitled “Restoring the Municipal Fiscal Balance”, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) discussed the increasing fiscal pressures municipalities face across Canada. “Out of every dollar collected, the federal government receives 50 cents and provincial/territorial governments get 42 cents. That leaves just eight cents of every dollar for municipal governments” (FCM, 2006). The report concludes, “With this, we must deal with responsibilities that include roads, water-supply systems, solid-waste management, recreation, policing, fire services, affordable housing and even social services, public health and childcare, in some jurisdictions” (FCM, 2006). Municipalities are being asked to do more, with less. This means that policy decisions at the municipal level will be more important than ever in the coming years.

In the case of New Brunswick (as is the case elsewhere), there is a need to direct precious government funds in the most efficient way possible. Municipal elections provide a dual purpose; they provide decision makers with the policy preferences of the citizens, and act as mechanism to hold decision makers to account for the decisions they have made. With increased demands placed on municipalities, policy decisions must adequately represent the wishes of a majority of the citizens within a community. The concern is two fold; that there will be no accountability for

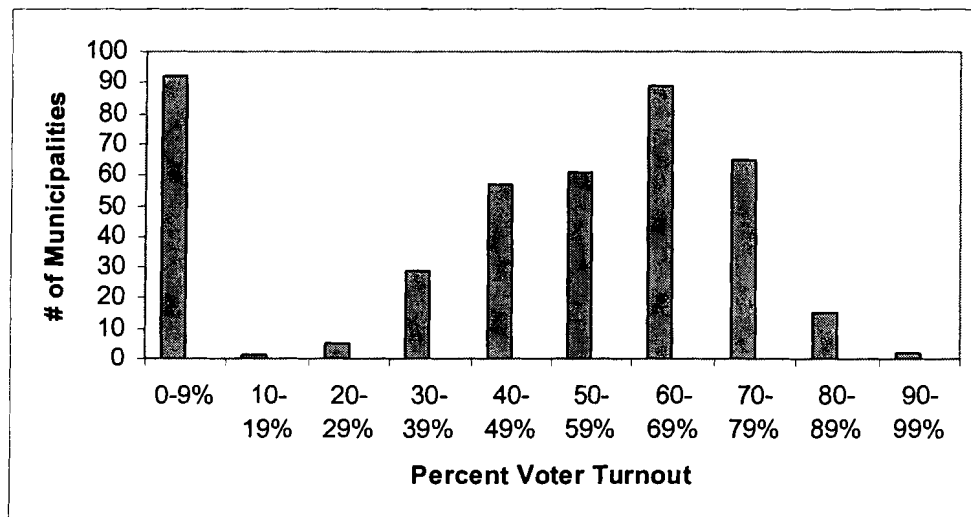
the decisions taken, and as Hamilton (1971) states, “the divergence of the de facto municipal electorate from the composition of the community may affect ‘who gets what, when, and how’”.

2.2 Voter turnout in New Brunswick

Federally, voter turnout rates in New Brunswick average above the 60 per cent level. In the most recent federal elections, the 2004 and 2006 federal elections, voter turnout province-wide was 62.8 per cent and 69.2 per cent respectively (Elections Canada, 2006). During Provincial elections, the voter turnout rates during the study period remained above 65 per cent; during the 1995 provincial general election, it was 74.89 per cent; in 1999, it was 75.59 per cent; in 2003, it was 68.67 per cent, and during the most recent election in 2006, it was 67.52 per cent (Office of Chief Electoral Officer, 2007). Municipally, they have averaged 47.5 per cent during this same period (OCEO, 2007).

This number can be deceiving; while the overall percentage is 47.5 per cent, there are huge variations in the turnout rates across municipalities and across elections. There is also a high prevalence of acclamations, due to a lack of candidates willing to present themselves for office at the local level. Table 2.1 illustrates the prevalence of acclamations in New Brunswick. The largest single grouping in the table is that of acclaimed elections. As there were no municipalities with turnout below 15 per cent, the 0 to 9 per cent category contains only those municipalities that had acclamations or appointments. This means that during the study period those municipalities with neither a contested election for mayor nor a race for council made up the largest number of observations. Put another way, in 22.5 per cent of all elections held between 1995 and 2004, there were not enough candidates to allow for a contested election.

Figure 2.1 Voter Turnout in New Brunswick Municipal Elections (1996-2004).



In their 1998 report to the Government of British Columbia, Smith and Stewart (1998) write, “the generally agreed threshold of 50 per cent electoral participation is the test for all democracies. Anything less essentially represents a real democratic dilemma for political systems. Systems where participation rates run around 1/3 or less are clearly under significant stress” (Smith and Stewart, 1998). In the case of municipalities in New Brunswick, in 51 per cent of the elections for mayor between 1995 and 2004, there was no opportunity to vote at all. In short, any plan to increase municipal accountability in New Brunswick must include the use of competitive elections. Again, this is important for two reasons, the inability of citizens to voice their policy preferences to decision makers, and the resulting lack of municipal accountability for the decisions taken.

2.3 Voter turnout and its implications: what others say

There has been extensive research in the area of representative democracy. Specifically, there has been a great deal of study into the issue of low voter turnout (Gerber & Green, 1999; Miller, 1952; Franklin, 1984; Geys, forthcoming; Aldrich, 1993). Most studies focus on the reasons for low voter turnout, a limited number however focus on an analysis of its implications (Hamilton, 1971; Engstrom and McDonald, 1981, Lipjhart, 1997). The majority of these studies focus on the impact unequal representation has on the policy decisions made by elected officials (Hamilton, 1971; Lipjhart, 1997; Smith and Stewart, 1998). These studies indicate a significant danger in low voter turnout. Those jurisdictions with low voter turnout risk enacting policy

decisions that do not reflect the preferences of a majority of their citizens. Smith and Stewart (1998) address this, stating, “in elections with extremely low levels of voter turnout there is the distinct possibility that entire segments of the population will not have their policy preferences represented” (Smith and Stewart, 1998).

Numerous studies have examined the issue of voter turnout (Gerber & Green, 1999; Miller, 1952; Franklin, 1984; Geys, forthcoming; Aldrich, 1993); however, few have examined the issue of voter turnout within the municipal context. Where there has been study into the issue of municipal voting, it is usually in comparison to aggregate national behaviour or simply focuses on Canada’s largest municipalities (Morlan, 1984; Magnusson and Sancton, 1993; Nakhaie, 2006). The majority of those studies indicate a lower turnout rate at the municipal level compared to the national level (Morlan, 1984; Nakhaie, 2006).

Within the Canadian context, there is significantly less research, this when overall municipal voter turnout rates in Canada are below that of either the federal or provincial elections (Kushner et al., 1997). The situation is not unique to New Brunswick; data from the 2000 Ontario municipal elections shows participation rates well below 50 per cent. In the Regional Municipality of Halton, the turnout rate was 27.8 per cent; in the Regional Municipality of Durham it was 33.3 per cent; and in York Region it was 33.1 per cent (Toronto Community Foundation, 2006). This is particularly troubling, not just for its implications on democracy itself, but also because of the increasingly difficult decisions imposed on municipal governments due to increased fiscal pressures.

There has been limited study into the issue of acclamations during elections and their implications. One of the reasons for this lack of research may be its near non-existence at the national and sub national level in well-established democracies, such as Canada. There has been some study of the issue in the U.S., the majority of the research shows that the issue of uncontested elections is largely an issue of the past (Wrighton and Squire, 1997; Squire, 2000). Wrighton and Squire (1997) in particular argue that the problem of uncontested seats was much more prevalent in the early 20th Century.

There has been even less study into the issue of uncontested elections at the local level. However, in good governance models, the inclusion of “free, fair and regular elections” is a key component in good governance models. There has been a desire in the development community to identify good governance practices. Although developed for the developing world it provides an excellent basis to judge overall municipal governance practices. A brief examination of good governance models is included to illustrate the essential role elections play in good governance. They are included to strengthen the case for effective elections at the local level.

The United Nations development programme in its Governance Indicators Guide refers to governance as “the states ability to serve the citizens. It refers to the rules, processes, and behaviours by which interests are articulated, resources are managed, and power is exercised in society” (UNDP, 2007). The World Bank describes it as “the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good. This includes (i) the *process by which those in authority are selected, monitored and replaced* (ii) the capacity of government to effectively manage its resources and implement sounds policies, and (iii) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them (World Bank, 2004). In general, indicators of good governance focus on the accountability of elected officials though a series of factors including effective elections. Other factors include citizen participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, and equity and inclusiveness (UNDP, 2007).

There tends to be less research into good governance at the local level. Stewart (2006) argues that this lack of research at the local level may be due to data collections difficulties. Where there have been studies (Kauffman et al., 2004), research focuses almost exclusively on “world cities”. World cities are defined as those cities with global economic, political and culture significance. Although focusing on much larger cities, a great deal of Kauffman et al. (2004) findings can be transplanted to the local level in New Brunswick. For example, Kauffman et al. (2004) devise six indicators of good governance models; included in those six is “voice and external accountability”, defined as “the government’s preparedness to be externally accountable”.

The exclusion of effective elections poses serious problems to local democracy. Stewart (2006) argues that voter participation rates provide some idea to the extent to which local interests are considered within the community, and more importantly, whether those considerations are equal or not. The inclusion of voter turnout rates in both the UNDP and World Bank definitions of what constitutes a well-governed jurisdiction is a strong indication of the essential role effective elections have in modern democracies.

In the case of New Brunswick, municipal turnout rates globally are 47.5 per cent over the study period. However, individual municipal voter turnout rates can be as low as 15 per cent and in 51 per cent of the cases, the election for mayors was won by acclamation due to a lack of interest on the part of citizens to present themselves for office. This raises serious questions about the democratic accountability of municipal officials. As Stewart states “measures of citizen participation are essential to any complete assessment of good governance, as they provide some idea of the extent to which interests are considered within an urban community and whether this

consideration may or may not be equal (Stewart, 2006). Smith and Stewart (1998) described two stages in the local government decision-makers' capacity process, the electoral and the legislative stage. With the acclamation of municipal mayors over 51 per cent of the time, the accountability a free and fair election entails is questionable at best. As Stewart and Smith (1998) state, "free, fair and competitive elections generate mandates for governments which guide their actions while they hold office". This simply does not occur in over 51 per cent of the elections for mayor in New Brunswick.

2.4 Office of the Chief Electoral Officer: Background

The current Chief Electoral Officer in New Brunswick is Annes Hollies (OCEO, 2007). The running of both municipal and provincial elections in New Brunswick is mandated to the OCEO. The OCEO is a non-partisan body, and the Lieutenant Governor in Council appoints the Chief Electoral Officer. The OCEO works to ensure that voters lists are up to date, and that the electorate is provided with information on where and when to vote. The responsibility of the OCEO stops short of actually encouraging voters to participate in municipal elections. Unlike other jurisdictions across Canada (Elections Manitoba, 2007; Elections PEI, 2007), the OCEO in New Brunswick does not have a program to encourage voter turnout. In fact, while the OCEO provides for five different public notifications during provincial elections, it provides only two during municipal elections (OCEO, 1996)². Municipally the OCEO only advertises the notice of election, and polling information in local media (OCEO, 1996).

Unlike some jurisdictions in the country, New Brunswick actively tries to maintain its electoral lists through enumerations. In fact, until 1995 the provincial government held enumerations for both provincial and municipal elections throughout the province (OCEO, 2004). Since 1998 however, the province has discontinued its policy of double enumeration, and has begun to use enumeration uniquely for provincial elections. As a result, provincial enumeration data is also used by the OCEO during municipal elections. Where there is a potential for widespread changes in the voter list (i.e.: new housing developments, areas known to be high turnover areas) the province will send out enumerators in the weeks preceding the municipal election to target specific neighbourhoods (OCEO, 1998). In order to ensure the voter lists are the most up to date possible, there is a plan to have changes in address and personal information

² During provincial elections the OCEO provides for five separate notifications: The proclamation, establishing the election date; the grant of poll, indicating the location of the polling station and the names of candidates; notice of advance polls; public notice, advising electors to verify their names are correct on the voters lists; and the notice of revision, advising electors of the revision process itself. (OCEO, 1996).

forwarded from Service New Brunswick to the OCEO. Service New Brunswick is the front-line service provider for most government interactions with citizens, including; driver licence renewals, it operates the personal property registry, and the property tax and assessment services in the province (Government of New Brunswick, 2007).

The exclusive use of voters' lists does pose several problems, in analyzing voter turnout. However, those risks seem to be mitigated within the New Brunswick case. The primary issue with voter lists is the possibility of omitting potential voters, thus artificially inflating voter turnout rates. This is particularly an issue in the U.S., where it is the responsibility of the elector to register himself or herself (Geys, forthcoming). The issue became so acute, that in 1993 the US government passed the National Voter Registration Act, commonly referred to as the Motor Voter Act. It required states to standardize voter registration through their various interactions with citizens, notably at driver licence registration centres (National Voter registration Act, 1993). In the case of New Brunswick, the government still provides enumeration service during provincial elections, mitigating the issue somewhat; it reuses those lists for municipal elections. Furthermore, the OCEO spends considerable effort targeting those areas that were not developed during the last provincial election, or are known to have high tenant turnover rates. The other mitigating factor is the population stability within the province. According to data from the 1996 and 2001 census, the provincial population growth rate averaged -1.2 per cent between 1996 and 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2007).

In 1998 the OCEO, the provincial government of New Brunswick and Elections Canada explored the idea of creating a common list of voters for all three levels of elections (municipal, provincial, and federal) (OCEO, 2004). However, in doing so there would be an added requirement placed on municipal elections that had not been there before. By merging the requirements, municipal elections now require that voters hold Canadian citizenship. Unfortunately, this created a situation in which long-time residents that had been eligible to vote suddenly found themselves unable to vote, the situation was particularly acute in communities along the US border (OCEO, 2004). The common voters list was never completed. Because of this, the OCEO is advocating rescinding the citizenship requirement for future municipal elections.

Although the execution of municipal elections has been centralized through the OCEO, there are variations in some of the municipalities. One of those variations is the differences between at-large systems and ward systems. While the majority of municipalities in New Brunswick are at-large systems, there are nonetheless 16 municipalities with ward systems. Proponents of ward systems argue that ward systems encourage higher voter turnout (Davidson &

Korbel, 1981; Kushner et al., 1997). An examination of the data over the study period would tend to lend weight to the discussion; the average turnout rate of those municipalities with ward systems is 51.8 per cent, compared to 45.4 per cent for those with an at-large system.

2.4.1 The Municipal Elections Act

The 103 incorporated municipalities and one rural community in New Brunswick are subject to the Municipal Elections Act. It is important to distinguish what the Municipal Elections Act covers and what it does not. The act covers the conduct of municipal elections within the province. According to the act, section 13(1), “Every person who: (a) is eighteen years of age as of the day of the election; (b) subject to subsection (1.1) has been an ordinary resident in the Province for a period of at least six months immediately before the election (three months in Oromocto) and is ordinarily resident in the municipality on election day, and (c) is a Canadian citizen, is entitled to vote in an election or plebiscite under this Act held in the municipality in which the person is ordinarily resident”(Municipal Elections Act, 1998).

To become a candidate, a person must be a Canadian citizen, 18 years of age on or before polling day, and a resident of the province for six months immediately preceding the date of the election (Municipal Elections Act, 1998). Under the act, neither a judge, nor an official, or full-time employee of the municipality in which the person wishes to be a candidate can present themselves as a candidate. Those seeking nomination must fill out the appropriate nomination papers (see appendix B). Each prospective candidate must have at least twenty-five nominators sign their nomination forms. Nomination papers must be submitted to the Municipal returning officer no later than seventeen days before the election (Municipal Elections Act, 2007).

Unlike the provincial nomination process, a municipal candidate is not required to provide a \$100 deposit before registering as an official candidate (OCEO, 1996). However, like their provincial counterparts, candidate must obtain 25 signatures from citizens within the municipality in order to run for office (OCEO, 1996).

Like the Provincial Elections Act, the Municipal Elections Act also limits candidate advertising in the lead up to the election date. On the last Saturday before the election, no election speeches, entertainment or advertising are permitted within the province (Municipal Elections Act, 2007). On the polling day itself, no campaigning of any kind may be done, nor can any advertising or campaign material of any kind be conducted within thirty metres of the polling stations (Municipal Elections Act, 2007).

2.5 Examination of the elections during the study period

The following sections examine the situation within New Brunswick during the 1995, 1998, 2001, and 2004 elections. Using information obtained from the respective Chief Electoral Officers Reports, a brief description is provided of the each election and the issues raised by OCEO staff during those elections.

2.5.1 The 1995 election

In order to prepare for the May 8, 1995 election day, the provincial government began a province wide enumeration on March 27, 1995. The enumeration concluded on April 1, 1995, and between April 3, 1995 and April 12, 1995, revisions were made to the list of eligible voters (OCEO, 1995). The nomination process concluded on April 13, 1995. In all 1075 candidates were nominated for the 111 Mayoral positions, and 577 positions on municipal councils (OCEO, 1995). In all 138,436 citizens voted out of an eligible pool of 308,675 for a total participation rate of 44.85 per cent. There were however, great variations in participation rates across the provinces. The highest turnout was in Blackville at 92 per cent, while the lowest turnout was in the municipality of Fredericton at just 15 per cent. There were no concurrent provincial referendums on Election Day.

2.5.2 The 1998 election

The 1998 municipal elections in New Brunswick were held on May 11, 1998. The 1998 election differed from the 1995 election in that it did not include a province wide enumeration. Instead the OCEO used voter lists from the previous provincial election and between April 29, 1998 and May 7, 1998 revisions were made to the list. In all, 966 citizens presented themselves for 99 mayoral positions and 515 positions on municipal councils (OCEO, 1998). Overall, 148,457 citizens voted out of a pool of 313,663 for a provincial wide participation rate of 47.33 per cent (OCEO, 1998). Participation was the highest in Blackville at 85 per cent, and lowest in Pointe-Verte at 27 per cent.

2.5.3 The 2001 election

The 2001 municipal elections in New Brunswick were held on May 14, 2001. The 2001 election differed from previous elections, because it included a provincial wide referendum. "It meant that polls were held throughout the province, even in municipalities and school sub-districts where all candidates were elected by acclamation" (OCEO, 2001). In all 176,832 voters

or 52 per cent of all eligible provincial voters cast ballots. The OCEO also faced a unique situation in 2001 due to changes imposed by Canada Post in addresses in New Brunswick since the last provincial enumeration in 1999 (OCEO, 2001). Revisions to the voters list began on May 2, 2001 and concluded on the 10th of May, 2001. Turnout was the highest in Alma at 91 per cent, and the lowest in Oromocto at 36 per cent (OCEO, 2001).

The 2001 election was of particular importance in Saint John. The turnout rate was close to 75 per cent. This is in stark contrast to elections in 1995, 1998, and 2004. During those elections voter turnout rate remained close to 50 per cent, at an average rate of just 49 per cent. This is also in contrast to the other larger cities: both Moncton and Fredericton turnout rates were lower, at 42 per cent and 44 per cent respectively.

2.5.4 The 2004 election

The 2004 elections were held on May 10, 2004. In all, 989 candidates vied for 101 mayoral positions and 537 positions on municipal councils across the province. Voter turnout was the highest in Saint Hilaire at 79 per cent, and the lowest in Bas-Caraquet at 28 per cent (OCEO, 2004). Provincially the turnout was 46 per cent (OCEO, 2004).

2.5.5 Summary

In the next section, a more detailed analysis of the situation in New Brunswick is provided. By constructing a data set and through interviews, a more detailed picture of the current situation in New Brunswick is obtained. Using the dataset and elite interviews, the next section examines the determinants of low voter turnout in some municipalities in New Brunswick. Using elite interviews, the reasons for the high prevalence of the citizens unwilling to present themselves for public office are examined.

3 Research Objectives and Methodology

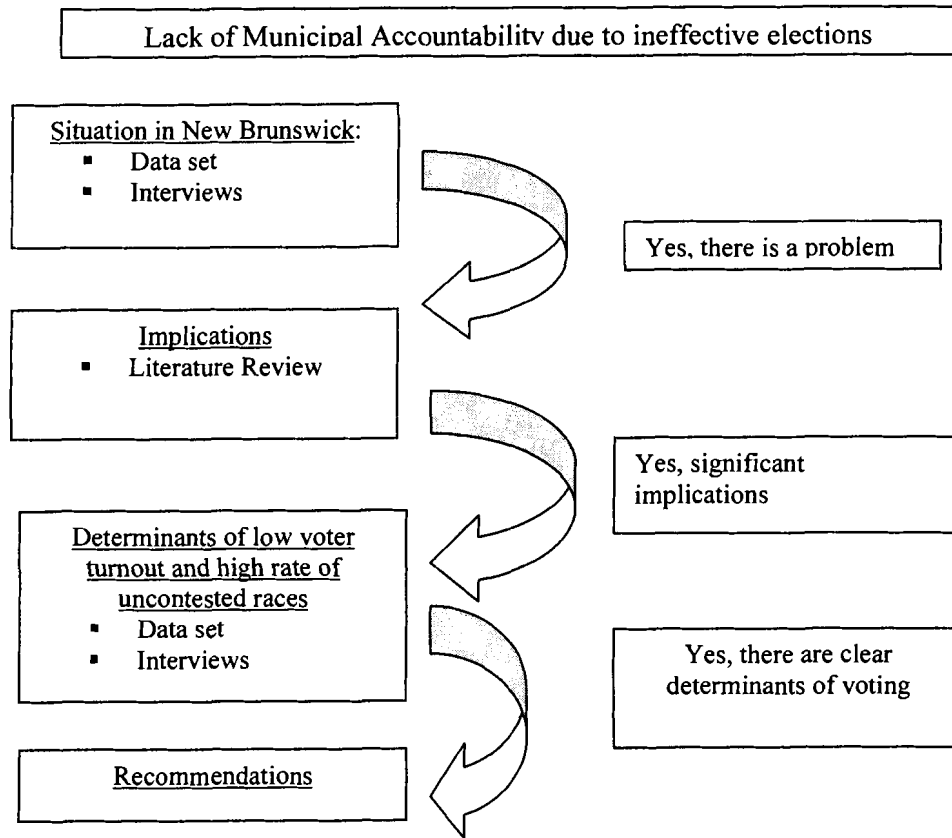
The aim of this study is to examine the role effective elections play in municipal accountability in New Brunswick. The literature is clear on the subject; voting matters. Those citizens in communities with effective electoral accountability, as measured through high voter turnout and competitive elections benefit from more representative decisions, higher accountability, and better-managed municipalities. Using a comparison of municipal expenditures, this study further examined the implications of both low voter turnout and the high rate of uncontested municipal elections in New Brunswick.

This research begins with the hypothesis that there is the potential for a lack of municipal accountability in New Brunswick due to the combination of low voter turnout and the high rate of uncontested elections. The research focus is multi-faceted. First, I examine the issues of low voter turnout and the high rate of uncontested municipal elections in New Brunswick. Using quantitative analysis, this study examines in depth, the issue of voter turnout and the determinants of voter participation. In order to examine the determinants this study draws from previous research in the field. Unlike past studies that focus solely on one type of variable, this study employs 17 variables to explore the determinants of voter participation. This study attempts to fill the void in literature on the subject of voting determinants within the municipal context. Unlike the majority of past studies, and inline with Geys (forthcoming), and Blais and Dobrzynska (1998), this study examines three types of factors when trying to explain voter turnout, namely, socio-economic factors, political factors, and institutional factors. The study examines the relationship between these three categories and their effect on overall voter turnout in civic elections in New Brunswick from the 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004 municipal elections.

Using qualitative analysis, this study examines the reasons behind the lack of citizens willing to present themselves for municipal office. Elite interviews are conducted with representatives within the OCEO, and the director of the AFMNB in order to supplement information obtained from the data set. Specific attention is paid to the reasons for the lack of candidates willing to present themselves during municipal elections.

The final goal is to provide the Minister of Local Government a set of recommendations to improve the overall electoral accountability of municipalities in New Brunswick by encouraging candidates to run for office and by increasing municipal voter turnout rates.

Figure 3.1 Research Objectives.



3.1 Methodology

This study uses a mixed-method approach in the examination of municipal governance in New Brunswick. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this research project. Three major sources of information are used: a constructed data set from OCEO data, supplemented with demographic information from Statistics Canada and the Government of New Brunswick; and interviews with key informants. This section outlines the methodology employed

to examine the issue of low voter turnout and the high prevalence of uncontested elections and their implications in New Brunswick.

To begin, a dataset is constructed. The dataset provides a dual function in this study. It is beneficial to understand the prevalence of uncontested elections, and to discover the determinants of low voter turnout in New Brunswick. In order to ascertain the key determinants of voter turnout additional variables are included to those obtained from the OCEO.

There have been a large number of studies conducted on the issue of voter turnout rates throughout the democratic world. However, most studies focus on national level or to a lesser extent the provincial or state level data. Canada is no exception. Although the majority of research is at the federal level, it is also beneficial when examining the issue within a municipal context.

Even within the often-examined national context, there is a dizzying array of different, sometimes conflicting, theories about determinants of voter participation. Several studies have aggregated the factors into three overarching factors (Geys, forthcoming; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Powell, 1982). Studies were broken into three groups based on determinants examined: those that examine socio-economic determinants, such as population size, population concentration, and population homogeneity (Lijphart, 1997); those that examine the political factors themselves, such as political closeness of the race, and previous turnout (Matsusaka and Palda, 1993); and those that examine institutional factors such as electoral system, and concurrent elections (Millner, 1997; Blais and Carty, 1990).

As mentioned, several studies examine a number of factors taken from the three overarching groups discussed above (Powell, 1982; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). Both studies determined it was a mix of all three factor groups that influenced voter turnout. Unfortunately, in both cases they were set within the context of the federal-provincial electoral participation. Although some of characteristics are not easily transferred to the municipal context, they do provide a basis to examine municipal voting.

In their 1998 study, Blais and Dobrzynska examined turnout across 324 democratic lower house elections in 91 countries between 1972 and 1995. They examined three factors that affect voter turnout: socio-economic, environment institutions (compulsory voting, voting age, electoral system, decisiveness of the vote, degree of democracy) and the party system in which the election is taking place. They find that overall socio-economic factors play a significant roll on voter turnout (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). Their study is relevant to this study as it examines data in a time series and compares a number of variables over several elections.

There have been several studies that exclusively examined the issue of municipal voter turnout (Hamilton, 1971; Morlan, 1984; Kushner et al, 1997). In his 1971 study, Hamilton (1971) examined the issue of voter participation exclusively within the municipal context in the US. Hamilton hypothesizes that in municipal elections, political affiliation will matter less, and that as a result perceived political efficacy and interest would have a strong relationship on voter turnout. His findings concluded that within the US case, the psychological, demographic, and socio-economic variables have a much higher impact on voter turnout than in National level elections (Hamilton, 1971).

Unfortunately, where there is research in the municipal context there tends to be disagreement. For example, with reference to population size, some have argued that smaller rural communities should have higher rates of participation (Verba & Nie, 1972). They argue that the smaller size ensures that citizens will see results of their political decisions more quickly and as a result have a strong sense of political effectiveness, thus encouraging their continued participation (Verba & Nie, 1972). While others (Milbrath, 1965) have argued that in large urban centres there is more social interaction and as a result citizens will feel more engaged in the political process and thus are more likely to vote than their rural counterparts.

Kushner et al (1997) examined the issue of municipal voting in Ontario within the context of a growing provincial trend to amalgamate cities. Accordingly, they focused on population size as a determinant of voter turnout. The Kushner et al (1997) study aggregated Ontario's 800 municipalities into three categories based on population size (small, medium, and large). The study is particularly insightful as it points to the difficulties in obtaining information for Canadian municipal elections mentioned earlier. After grouping the municipalities based on population, they then sent questionnaires to a representative sample of the 200 small municipalities, and questionnaires to all the medium and large municipalities within the province. Kushner et al. (1997) stated there were issues with data collection with their study. In order to increase responses from municipal officials, the questionnaire was limited to solely the election of councillors (Kushner et al., 1997). Furthermore, of Ontario's 667 small municipalities (less than 10,000), a representative sample of 200 questionnaires were sent out, of that 49 municipalities responded (Kushner et al., 1997).

Information obtained from the dataset in this study is supplemented through elite interviews with key stakeholders in the province on the issue of uncontested elections. Elite interviews are conducted to better understand the high incidence of uncontested elections in New Brunswick. Interviews are conducted with officials within the OCEO, and the director of the AFMNB.

The purpose of this study is to examine ways in which the provincial government can raise aggregate voter turnout during municipal elections. This study attempts to address a lack of literature in the field of voter turnout in civic elections and uncontested elections and their implications in Canada. Based on those findings, a series of policy options are devised. The options are then analyzed against a set of criteria to determine the best possible route for government to proceed.

3.2 Variables examined

Data for this study is compiled from numerous sources, including: the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer in New Brunswick (OCEO), Statistics Canada, municipal websites, and municipal officials. The OCEO provides data on voter participation rates across municipalities in New Brunswick in years 1995, 1998, 2001, and 2004. By combining the data, a dataset of 416 cases is constructed. In order to examine the independent variables, the information obtained from the OCEO was supplemented with data available from Statistics Canada, municipal websites and where necessary correspondence with municipal officials.

Once compiled, an OLS regression is employed to test the relationship between the dependant and independent variables. These regressions are used to investigate why voter participation is higher in some municipalities as compared to others within the province. Specifically, regressions examine the relationship between high (and low) voter turnout and the independent variables. Within each of the election years there are 104 cases, for a total of 416 potential cases to analyze.

Table 3.1 Variables and Hypothesized Effects

Variable Name	Hypothesized Effect
Voter turnout (Dependent Variable)	
Community population	Negative
Population density	Positive
Median Household income	Positive
Household ownership rates	Positive
Mayor running in election	Positive
Councillor running in election	Positive
Number of candidates for Mayor	Positive
Number of seats available	Positive
Incumbency – Mayor	Negative
Incumbency – Councillor(s)	Negative
Competitive race – % of margin of victory between winner and second place candidate	Negative
Concurrent referendum held	Positive
Concurrent plebiscite held	Positive
Previous turnout	Positive
Electoral system (ward v. at large)	Positive
Local news coverage of election	Positive

**the dependent variable is voter turnout during a given municipal election.*

3.2.1 Dependent Variable

The issue of defining voter turnout is much less trivial than it would appear at first glance. A survey of previous studies (Geys, forthcoming; Matsusaka, 1999; Denver and Halfacree, 1992; Foster, 1984; Scarrow, 1961) shows that there are significant differences in the definition of voter turnout within the body of literature. The majority of similar studies define voter turnout as either (1) the number voted divided by the voting age population, or (2) the number voted divided by the number of registered voters. A more detailed analysis of the literature however shows a bias towards the second definition of voter participation (Crewe, 1981; Blais and Carty, 1990; Black 1991). Furthermore, in those studies that used the broader first definition of voter participation, most acknowledged the problems with such a technique. “In

most democracies, voting eligibility is limited to citizens. Populations figures usually include non-citizen residents,” it goes on to conclude “we do not have good data on the percentage of residents who are aliens of voting age, and cannot systematically adjust our turnout data to remove them” (Powell, 1986). Within New Brunswick, the OCEO uses the second definition of voter turnout in its calculations.

An analysis of various other jurisdictions in Canada shows a consensus in the definition of voter turnout as the number of votes cast divided by the number of registered voters (Elections Ontario, 2007; Elections BC, 2007; Elections Manitoba, 2007). Voter turnout in Canada is defined as “the number of those voting divided by the number of those entitled to vote” (Toronto Community Foundation, 2006). Voter turnout data is compiled directly from OCEO data available on their website. There were however, some inconsistencies in the data that had to be verified through correspondence with the representatives within the OCEO. For example, the OCEO does not distinguish between a full election (both an election for mayor and an election for councillors), and a partial election in which one of the two components may have been acclaimed. The voter turnout data is thus the number of ballots cast during an election. This required a more detailed examination, because in a large number of municipalities either the mayoral or the councillors’ races had to be acclaimed but not both. An initial examination of the data shows that 94 municipal elections out of the 416 were acclaimed. However, the total number of acclamations was actually much higher. In the case of elections for mayor, there were 211 acclamations; in the case of councillor races there were 101.

In New Brunswick, municipal voter lists are maintained by the province and are updated using voter lists compiled from the preceding provincial election (OCEO, 2004). Furthermore, representatives within the OCEO in the weeks leading up to the province-wide municipal Election Day will target areas of particular concern within the various municipalities. In most cases, these would include new residential developments and areas of high population turn over (OCEO, 2004).

An examination of the data shows vastly differing rates of turnout across the province. Furthermore, those municipalities that enjoyed high turnout rates during one election did not necessarily enjoy sustained high levels of voter turnout. Figure 2.1 graphically illustrates the issue of voter turnout in New Brunswick during this study period.

Table 3.2 *Aggregate Turnout for Municipal Elections in New Brunswick.*

Election year	Provincial Turnout
1995	45%
1998	47%
2001	52%
2004	46%

Source, Data compiled from OCEO Reports 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004.

Using previous research in this area, this section began by examining the relationship low voter turnout and high levels of acclamation have on representative democracy and its implications. A preliminary examination of the situation in New Brunswick indicates a serious problem of not only low voter turnout at the municipal level, but also a high number of uncontested municipal elections across the province.

3.2.1.1 Rationale for Dependent Variable chosen

In order to examine the effectiveness of the chosen dependent variable, and more importantly the way in which it is calculated, several tests were performed. One of the issues that can arise from using this definition of voter turnout is that it can prove to be inaccurate if large numbers of the voting population are left off the list. In the case of New Brunswick, several factors suggest this risk is mitigated within the province. The first is the stability of the population. Unlike other jurisdictions that deal with large population increases between elections, the population of New Brunswick has remained constant throughout the study period 1995-2004. Furthermore, when a regression is run with both the population and the total number of eligible voters, the result is a highly correlated adjusted R squared of 0.989. As Black (1991) notes, this does not indicate that a full enumeration has occurred. However, the high adjusted R squared implies that there is no great variation throughout the dataset between the ratio of population to the eligible voter lists.

3.2.1.2 Prevalence of Acclamation throughout the dataset

Table 3.3 Prevalence of Acclamations.

	1995	1998	2001	2004	Total
Competitive Mayor/ Competitive Council	47 (45.2%)	54 (51.9%)	52 (50%)	52 (50%)	205 (49.2%)
Mayor Acclaimed/ Competitive Council	30 (28.8%)	29 (27.8%)	33 (31.7%)	25 (24%)	117 (28.1%)
Mayor Acclaimed/ Council Acclaimed	24 (23.1%)	20 (19.2%)	17 (16.3%)	25 (24.0%)	86 (20.7%)
Mayor Appointed/ Council Acclaimed	3 (2.8%)	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.9%)	2 (1.9%)	8 (1.9%)
Total Races	104 (100%)	104 (100%)	104 (100%)	104 (100%)	416 (100%)

Source, OCEO, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004.

The prevalence of acclamations in New Brunswick cannot be overstated. Table 3.3 shows the high prevalence of municipal acclamations across the four election years. Acclamations are key to the issue of low voter turnout. With half of all mayors being acclaimed in the past four municipal elections, there is no question that there are a high proportion of ineffective elections.

Due to the acclamation of both the mayor and the municipal councillors, 94 municipal elections were *completely* non-competitive. As a result, the total number of cases with a dependent variable with which to analyze was cut to 316 cases. In a larger number of elections, either the mayor or municipal councillors were acclaimed, but not both. For example, there were at least two mayoral candidates in only 205 races, and the minimum number of councillors required running in 311 races. In those cases where there may have been one contested race, but not another, the OCEO uses the total number of ballots cast irrespective of whether it's a full election (i.e.: both a race for mayor and a race for municipal council). As a result, an initial examination would indicate an election had taken place, when in fact it may have only been a partial election. In order to account for this, a detailed examination of each election was required to determine whether the turnout rate quoted by the OCEO was in reference to the election for mayor or whether it was in reference to the municipal councillors' race.

One of the major consequences of the high level of acclamations is the artificially high voter turnout rates. Upon first examination, the voter turnout rates are relatively high overall. Granted they are still lower than both the federal and provincial turnout rates in New Brunswick.

They are nonetheless above 50 per cent in 232 municipal elections out of 416 observable cases. Again, the problem arises in the way in which the OCEO tabulates the voter turnout rate. A strong argument can be made that in those elections that are acclamated; the voter turnout should be viewed as zero.

Table 3.2 demonstrates the seriousness of the issue. Overall, the position of mayor is acclamated over 50 per cent of the time. During the individual election years, acclamations for mayor never account for less than 49 per cent of the cases observed. In 50 per cent of the municipal elections between 1995 and 2004, the citizens of New Brunswick are not able to vote in contested elections for mayor.

An examination of the data reveals a strong link between voter turnout and a competitive race for mayor. While the overall turnout rate during the study period was 47 per cent, the rate in those municipalities with a contested election for mayor rises to 64.3 per cent. There is a strong relationship between a competitive race for mayor and increased voter turnout. Any policy options devised much account for the negative effect acclamations have on the overall municipal turnout rate.

3.2.2 Independent Variables

All municipal elections in New Brunswick are all subject to the Municipal Elections Act, which among other things, means that all municipal elections in the province are held on the same day. As such, a large number of independent variables are held constant. Variables such as the electoral system, concurrent elections, and voting requirements are held constant. This provides an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship certain variables have on voting, while keeping a number of key institutional and political variables constant through the analysis.

The following sections examine the independent variables included in this study and an explanation of how each was compiled. An explanation of the variables inclusion is also presented, as well as a hypothesis estimating the impact each variable will have on the dependent variable. In total, there are 17 independent variables included in this study. In choosing the independent variables during this study, several factors needed to be considered, including time constraints and difficulty obtaining the data. That being the case, the variables chosen are in accordance with past studies in this field (Geys, forthcoming; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Kushner et al., 1997; Miller, 1952). The independent variables chosen have been grouped into three overarching categories, namely: socio-economic factors, political factors and institutional factors. A survey of similar studies shows that where the independent variables are categorized

there is a consensus on grouping them along these lines (Geys, forthcoming; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998).

3.2.3 Socio-economic variables

The variables included in the socio-economic category are those variables dealing with the socio-economic characteristics of the electorate throughout New Brunswick. These variables are listed below. Table 3.2 outlines the hypothesized effect each variable will have on the voter participation rate in a given municipality.

3.2.3.1 Population

The inclusion of population in the calculations was necessary, as the vast majority of literature assumes that the larger the metropolitan area the lower the voter turnout (Kushner et al., 1997). In accordance with past studies, this study hypothesizes that population will be negatively correlated with voter turnout. Population statistics were gathered from 1991, 1996, and 2001 census data. In the case of the 1995, 1998, and 2004 election, municipal level population data was unattainable and as a result using data from the 1991, 1996, and 2004 census was used to create population projections. Population projections were created for years 1995 and 1998 using census data from 1991, 1995 and 2001 as benchmarks, and calculating the average growth rate per year between the those dates to calculate the estimated population in a given municipality in 1995 and 1998. In the case of 2004, a population projection was created using excel software and data from the 2001 census. While not ideal, this is somewhat mitigated by the *very low* population growth rates in New Brunswick. The population of New Brunswick in 1995 was estimated by the Department of Finance in New Brunswick to be 750,979 (Government of New Brunswick, 2007). By 2001, it had fallen to 749,890, in 2001 it was 752,080 (Government of New Brunswick, 2007). The population growth rate in New Brunswick is negligible, fluctuating during the study period between 0.1 per cent and -0.2 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2007). In short, population rates remained relatively constant during those years.

3.2.3.2 Population density

The inclusion of population density was included in line with previous research conducted on voter participation (Lipset, 1981; Studlar, 2001). As with previous research in this area, this study hypothesizes, there will be a positive relationship between population density and

voter turnout. The assumption is that citizens will have a stronger sense of community and as such are more likely to participate in local elections. Population density statistics were obtained from census data during years 1991, 1996, and 2001. The total number of inhabitants was divided by the municipality square km size provided by Statistics Canada. As was the case with population data, there was no data available for years 1995, 1998, and 2004. As a result, calculations were made using census data from years 1991, 1995, and 2001. In the case of election years 1995, 1998, and 2004 population projections and estimations made for the previous variable population were used to calculate population density. In the case of the municipality square km size, data was used from the 1991, 1996, and 2001 census data. For election years 1995, and 1998, data from the census was used to estimate the density based on the growth rate between census years. For election year 2004, a projection was made using excel, based on the growth rates from the 1996 to 2001 data. Here again, it is worth noting that population density remained relatively constant throughout the study period, as a result any differences between the actual population density and those projected for this study should be minor.

3.2.3.3 Median Household income

As with most studies on voter participation, this study includes a variable for income distribution. This study hypothesizes that there will be a positive relationship between citizen income levels and voter participation rates. Similar studies have concluded a positive relationship between income and voter participation (Filer et al., 1993). Median household income data was compiled from census data from years 1991, 1995, and 2001. For election years 1995 and 1998 data was used from census years 1991, 1996, and 2001. Using the average growth rate per year between census years, estimation was made of the Median Household income during years 1995 and 1998. In the case of the 2004 election, data from the 1996 and 2001 census was used to project the median household income in election year 2004. The median household income in New Brunswick during the study period was as follows: \$33,638.82 in 1995, \$34,634.04 in 1998, \$36,480.90 in 2001, and \$38,119.51. During the entire study period, from 1995 to 2004, the lowest median household income was found in Lac Baker at \$19,454; while the highest median household income was found in New Maryland at \$75,473.

3.2.3.4 Household ownership rates

In line with median income, this study assumes that as citizens own property, they will have more of a stake in local decisions. As a result, “rational voters” will be more apt to

participate in civic elections. Similar studies on the determinants of voter participation have concluded that as with income, homeownership is positively correlated to voter participation (Lijphart, 1997). Data was collected from census data from years 1991, 1996, and 2001. In order to obtain household ownership rates, calculations were made using data on household ownership numbers and total dwellings listed by Statistics Canada in the given municipality. The census provides a total of all private dwellings within a given municipality; it also provides a total of all rented private dwellings within the municipality. In order to obtain the homeownership rate, the total number of rented dwellings was added to the total number of privately owned dwellings. The percentage of owned dwellings was then determined. In the case of election years 1995, 1998, and 2004, projections and estimations were used to obtain the required data. In the case of election years 1995 and 1998, data from the 1991, 1996 and 2001 census were used to create annual changes in rates, with that information estimations were used for the years 1995 and 1998. In the case of election year 2004, census data from 1996 and 2001 was used to create a projection based on the average annual change in the rate between 1996 and 2001. A projection was then made to estimate the ratio in 2004. Household ownership rates in New Brunswick remained high, averaging just over 75 per cent. There was little variation in ownership rates over the study period. The rate was 75.5 per cent in 1995, 75.9 per cent in 1998, 77.4 per cent in 2001, and 76.9 per cent in 2004. For the entire study period, the lowest ownership rate was in 1995, in Ocomocto at 27 per cent; and highest in Saint-Leonard in 2004 at 99 per cent.

3.2.4 Political Variables

Political variables are those variables related to the political sphere itself. These variables have been examined in previous studies and have been found to be significant influence on voter turnout (Downs, 1957; Endersby et al., 2002). Table 3.2 shows the hypothesized effect each variable will have on the dependent variable.

3.2.4.1 Mayoral Race during election

This refers to whether there was a mayor running during the civic election in a given year. Of the 416 cases examined there were 204 elections in which there was a contested race for mayor. In other words in 208 of the 416 elections, the mayor ran uncontested. This information was obtained directly from the OCEO. In accordance with previous research in this area (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Blais and Carty, 2000), the hypothesized relationship is thought to be positive. Other studies, while not on the municipal context, have shown a relationship between

voter participation and the competitiveness of the race. Other studies have shown that information plays a key role in voter turnout (Nakhaie, 2006). In the case of smaller communities, as has been mentioned before, there is little or no information about candidate platforms, or policies. The voter has to rely on name recognition when voting. If there is no contested race for mayor, the *major* reference point of the election is void. The average voter turnout rate in those municipalities where there was a contested mayoral race was 64.4 per cent, well above the overall average of 47.5 per cent for all municipalities.

3.2.4.2 Councillor running during election

This refers to whether there were councillors running during the civic election in a given year. In 101 of the 416 elections, all councillor positions were filled by acclamations. The hypothesized relationship is predicted to be positive. Much of the research in this area is at the national level, but the argument can be transferred to the municipal context. The hypothesis is that the greater the number of candidates, the greater the choice for electors and thus the higher turnout (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). Much like the previous variable the information for this variable was obtained directly from the OCEO.

3.2.4.3 Number of candidates for mayor

The number of candidates is also important, as it is important indicator for a competitive race, with specific emphasis on the race for mayor. The hypothesized relationship is a positive one, the more candidates running for mayor, the greater the turnout. The hypothesis for this variable is based on the arguments put forward for the number of councillors running in the election. The more candidates running for mayor the more choice electors have, and thus the higher the turnout (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). The information gathered for this variable was compiled through data provided by the OCEO.

3.2.4.4 Number of seats available

The number of seats available refers to the overall number of seats available during the election. The number is an indication of not only the size of the council but the size of the community as well. It is generally assumed the larger the number of seats available, the closer the councillor is to the population. The hypothesized effect is a positive one. Information for this variable was gathered with data provided by the OCEO.

3.2.4.5 Incumbency - Mayor

Incumbency refers to whether the previous mayor is currently contesting in the given election. This study hypothesizes that there is a negative correlation between incumbency and voter turnout. Information for this variable was obtained from statistics provided by the OCEO. Previous studies have shown that incumbent candidates hold a significant advantage against new candidates (Studlar, 2001; Kushner et. al, 1998), as a result it is hypothesized that voters may view the election of an incumbent as inevitable, and stay away from the election altogether. The number of incumbents running varies across the province and across election years; there were 77 in 1995, 60 in 1998, and 74 in 2001 in 62 in 2004.

3.2.4.6 Incumbency – Councillors

Not unlike the hypothesized relationship between the incumbency of the mayor and voter turnout, it is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between councillor incumbency and voter turnout. Information for this variable was obtained from statistics provided by the OCEO. Similar to the incumbency of mayor, it is hypothesized that the election of incumbent councillors may be inevitable by voters in New Brunswick and as a result, voters may abstain from voting. The number of council races with at least one incumbent councillor running is high throughout the study period. In 1995 the number of incumbents was 87, in 1998 it was 98, in 2001 and 2004 it was 99.

3.2.4.7 Closeness of race

A survey of similar studies shows a consensus that a major determinant of voter turnout is the perceived closeness of the race (Downs, 1957; Scarrow, 1961; Blais and Carty, 1990; Endersby et al., 2002). This study hypothesizes that there is a positive correlation between the competitiveness of the race and overall voter turnout rates. Information on the closeness of the race was obtained by calculating the percentage of votes the winning mayor candidate obtained and the percentage the second place candidate received. The difference between the two is an indicator of the closeness of the race, the smaller the difference the closer the race. This method of calculating the competitiveness of the race is standard practice in similar studies (Geys, forthcoming). The average spread between the winning mayoral candidate and the next closest candidate remained fairly constant during the study period. The spread was 24.79 per cent in 1995, 24.44 per cent in 1998, 25.91 per cent in 2001, and 22.73 per cent in 2004. However, this

varied across municipalities; it was only 0.1 per cent in Grand Manan in 2001, but reached 77 per cent in Fredericton in 1998.

3.2.4.8 Concurrent Provincial Referendum held

In 2001, the provincial government of New Brunswick included a referendum question during the municipal elections. The question asked voters, “Should the Province of New Brunswick continue to permit the legal and regulated operation of video gaming devices (commonly referred to as video lottery terminals or VLTs)?” (OCEO, 2001). The hypothesized relationship is a positive one. There are several reasons for this hypothesis. The first, relates to the media attention. It is probable to expect that media outlets across the province, in focusing on the issue raised in the referendum, would also devote more time to the election itself. Secondly, it is plausible that those that were drawn to vote in the referendum for ideological, moral or personal reasons would take the opportunity to also vote in the local election. Information for this variable was gathered from OCEO data. Jackman (1986) found higher turnout at the national level where voters perceived the election to be of significant importance. In the case of a concurrent referendum, it is probable that the election itself will be seen as garnering more importance.

3.2.4.9 Concurrent Local Plebiscite held

Surveys of related studies (Everson, 1981; Jackman, 1987) show there is a positive correlation between concurrent plebiscites or referendums and elections. This is in accordance with Downs (1957) and his assertion that voters are rational beings that vote rationally based on the impact of voting or not voting has on their well being. In accordance with these findings, this study hypothesizes that there will be a positive correlation between voter participation and elections in which a municipally initiated plebiscite was held in conjunction with the election. There were seven municipal plebiscites during the study period.

An important distinction needs to be made between the independent variables local plebiscite and provincial referendum. A referendum is initiated at the insistence of the provincial government, and as a result, the full costs of the referendum are borne by the province. Municipally initiated plebiscites fall under the jurisdiction of Section (46) of the Municipal Election Act. Under the requirements of the act, the municipality must first submit the proposed question to the Chief Electoral Officer “ A plebiscite shall not be held under subsection 68(2) of the Municipalities Act except where (a) the Municipal Electoral Officer determines that the question that is the subject of the plebiscite is within the powers of the municipality and is not

vague, confusing or unclear” (Municipal Election Act, 1985). In the case of a plebiscite, it is initiated at the insistence of the municipality itself; as a result, the costs associated with the plebiscite are borne directly by the municipality.

3.2.4.10 Previous turnout

Previous studies into voter turnout have found a strong correlation between previous turnout and current voter turnout (Downs, 1957; Endersby et al., 2002; Gerber et al., 2003). Voter behaviour it is argued, is learned and as a result a citizen who has previously voted is more likely to vote again. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that past turnout will be positively correlated to current turnout. In order to examine this variable, the previous turnout rates for the municipal election immediately preceding the election in question was used. For example, data from the 1995 election was used for the 1998 election, and so on. One major drawback of this approach was the elimination of the 104 potentially observable cases in 1995, as it was not possible to obtain the previous turnout rates prior to 1995.

3.2.5 Institutional Variables

While most institutional variables are held constant due to the standardization of municipal elections in New Brunswick, nonetheless two institutional variables can be examined. The importance of institutional variables on voter turnout has been widely discussed, and particular attention has been paid to the type of electoral system in a given jurisdiction (Lijphart, 1997). Below is a brief description of the variables and their hypothesized effect on voter participation in New Brunswick.

3.2.5.1 Electoral system (ward system v. at large)

This study hypothesizes that voter turnout will be higher in those municipalities that enjoy a ward system, as opposed to those municipalities with at large system. An at-large refers to a system in which elected officials represent the entire community, as opposed to a ward system in which representatives from a given subsection of the community are elected to represent a particular subsection in the overall community. The information on whether the municipality was an at-large system, or a ward system was compiled directly from statistics provided by the OCEO. There are sixteen municipalities with wards within New Brunswick. The number of municipalities that have wards did not change during the study period, as a result the total number of observable cases is 64 out of 416 cases being examined.

3.2.5.2 News coverage

Surveys of recent research into the impact news coverage and voter knowledge have on overall voter participation shows that there is a positive correlation between effective media coverage and voter turnout (Nakhaie, 2006; Milner, 2001). In the Milner (2006) study, he found a significant relationship between daily newspaper readership and tendency to vote in *municipal elections*. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that where there is local newspaper coverage of the election, the policy issues, the platforms, and more generally the issues; there will be higher turnout levels. The information on community newspaper coverage was compiled from information gather from the Government of New Brunswick website. Of the 104 municipalities in New Brunswick, local newspapers serve 21 municipalities.

3.2.6 Summary of Variables obtained

In collecting information for the independent variables a great deal was learned about the situation in New Brunswick during the study period³. Of the 104 incorporated municipalities in the province, the vast majority are under 5000 inhabitants. The stability of the population throughout the province during the study period is also significant. A number of variables had to be estimated using census data from 1991, 1996, and 2001, the stability of the population ensures that any variation between the actual population and the estimations made are minor.

Of particular note, the number of acclaimed positions for mayor was highest in those communities with populations below 5,000. An examination of the data also revealed a high number of incumbents running in municipal elections across New Brunswick. The data also showed that where there were competitive elections for mayor, the spread between the first place candidate and the second place candidate averaged 19.5 per cent across the study period. Indicating that even if there was an election for mayor (something that only happened in 52 per cent of the elections), the election was far from competitive.

There was a province-wide referendum during the 2001 municipal elections. The overall turnout was highest during this election, surpassing 50 per cent. This is to be expected, the referendum acted as a major catalyst to encourage citizens to participate in the electoral process. There were seven municipal plebiscites during the entire study period. An initial analysis of those communities reveals that the plebiscites had little effect on the overall turnout rates. Of the 104

³ A more detailed descriptive statistics section based on the election year has been included in Appendix D.

municipalities, 14 have ward systems. Those communities with wards are exclusively larger communities.

Overall, the information provides a picture of the situation in New Brunswick during the study period. A regression model is required however, to examine the impact each of these variables has on voter participation rates across the study period. The next section includes three OLS regression models in order to ascertain the relationship between the 17 independent variables and voter turnout in New Brunswick.

4 Model Results

The next section uses regression analysis to explore the impacts of the independent variables on voter turnout. In the first model, only the socio-economic variables are included. The second model includes the socio-economic variables and the political variables. The final model includes the socio-economic, political and institutional variables. As a further check on the dependant variable, a fourth model is included in the appendix C⁴. The fourth model uses the absolute number of voters divided by the total population to arrive at the participation rate. As mentioned earlier, this is far from ideal as it will include all residents within a given municipality, including those unable to vote due to legal restrictions, but it is nonetheless important in verifying that there were no major irregularities in the voter lists during the study period.

In this section, 17 independent variables are examined against the independent variable to explain the determinants of voter turnout rates across New Brunswick. The results of this analysis is presented below, and is subsequently used in section 6 to determine the best possible policy alternatives to increase municipal voter turnout in New Brunswick.

4.1 Regression Model

A multivariate linear Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression is used to examine how well the independent variables explain the variation in municipal voter turnout levels. Similar to a simple linear model, in which “the outcome variable Y is predicted using the equation of a straight line, the sum of the squared differences between the line and the actual data points is minimized” (Field, 116; 2000), a multiple regression “is an extension of these principals to situations in which there are several predictors” (Field, 116; 2000). In a multiple regression, each independent variable has its own coefficient, and the outcome variable is predicted from a combination of all the variables multiplied by their respective coefficients plus a residual term (Fields, 116; 2000).

⁴ To ensure the integrity of the dependent variable, and that there were no significant issues with the voter lists, in Model 4 the dependent variable is derived from the total number population of a given municipality divided by the number of ballots cast.

Three statistical models are used to examine how various independent variables effect voter turnout. The first includes only socio-economic factors, the second includes political variables, and the third includes institutional variables. This is in accordance with previous research, which is important when entering variables into the model, as independent variables should be selected based on past research (Field, 119; 2000). In order to ensure the accuracy of the regressions, diagnostic tests are performed on all independent variables and on the model overall. These tests ensure that there are no problems of collinearity or issues with heteroscedasticity or autocorrelation within the model.

The *variance inflation factor* (VIF) “indicates whether a predictor has a strong linear relationship with the other predictors” (Field, pg. 153; 2005). The VIF expresses the degree to which there may be collinearity among the independent variables within the regression model, the larger the VIF statistic, the greater the degradation in the predictive value of the model. In general, a VIF larger than 10 and the tolerance below 0.2 indicates potential problems with the regression (Field, pg. 153; 2000). In the final model, the VIF statistics for all independent variables falls within the acceptable range; they are all below 5. The tolerance was larger than 0.2 in all cases.

Another diagnostic tool is the F-test; the F-test is a measure of “how much the model has improved the prediction of the outcome compared to the level of inaccuracy of the model” (Field, 109; 2005). A good model should have a large F-ratio greater than one (Field, 109; 2005). The F-ratio in the final model is 9.182. Finally, an examination of an output scatter plots indicate no signs of heteroscedasticity.

4.2 Overall Fit of Statistical Models

In order to examine the issue of the determinants for voter participation, three regression models are constructed. Each model is examined not only to see its overall influence on voter participation, but also to see how these variables interact with one another. This study uses a blockwise entry method. This method involves the selection of independent variables based on past studies and research in the same field of study (Field, 119; 2000). The variables are entered into the models in order of their expected importance. Accordingly, Model 1 incorporates only those variables classified as socio-economic. Model 2 includes political variables as well as the variables in model 1. Model 3 consists of the variables included in both models 1 and 2, and introduces the two institutional variables. Table 4.1 outlines the three statistical models and the importance each variable is given in each model. The coefficients below are unstandardized.

Unstandardized beta coefficients show the effect each variable has on voter turnout in terms of their own units of measure.

Table 4.1 OLS Regression, 3 Models.

Variable Name	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Socio-economic Variables</i>			
Population	-.002*	-.001	-.001
Population density	-.018**	-.012*	-.011*
Homeownership	-.041	-.012	-.017
Median Household income	-.005**	-.003**	-.004**
<i>Political Variables</i>			
Contested election for Mayor		.130*	.113*
Councillor running in election		.019	.021
Number of candidates for Mayor		-.002	.000
Number of Candidates for Councillor		.000	-.004
Number of seats available		-.006	-.008
Incumbent in Mayoral race		-.017	-.015
Incumbent in Councillor race		.010	.010
Competitive race – spread between winner and Second place candidate		-.017	-.030
Provincial Referendum held during election		.060**	.063**
Local Plebiscite held during election		-.039	-.041
Previous turnout		.396**	.386**
<i>Institutional Variables</i>			
Local news coverage			-.032
Ward system			.044
N	320	136	136
Adjusted R-squared	.194	.606	.615

*Significant at <.05, **<.01

4.2.1 Model 1

Model 1 consists of only those variables classified as socio-economic. The purpose of this regression was to isolate those socio-economic factors that are most correlated with higher voter turnout levels. The variables were chosen in accordance with previous research in the field. The ability of this model to explain voter turnout during municipal elections in New Brunswick is low, indicated by an adjusted R squared value of just .194, meaning that the combined predictive power of the socio-economic variables can only explain 19 per cent of the variation in voter turnout. Of the four variables included in this model, three variables were significant at the 99 per cent confidence level or greater: population, population density, and median household income, only homeownership is not found to be significant. The coefficient values for both population density and Median Household income remain significant, consistently across all three models. Through all three models, those with higher median household incomes are less likely to vote in municipal elections. Those communities with higher population densities are also less likely to have high rates of voter turnout.

4.2.2 Model 2

Model 2 consists of the socio-economic variables mentioned above, but adds political variables as well. By including the political variables, the strength of the model rises to an adjusted R square value of .606. The predictive capacity of median household income falls from -.005 to -.003. Of the political variables, three variables are found to be significant at the 95 per cent confidence level or higher. The significant variables include, whether a mayor was running during the municipal election, whether a provincial referendum was held during the municipal election, and previous turnout rates in that municipality. All three significant variables remained significant in the third model as well.

4.2.3 Model 3

Model 3 includes the variables from both models 1 and 2, and introduces the variables news coverage, and ward systems. By including the institutional variables, the overall strength of the model increases slightly to a value of .615. However, neither new variable is significant in this model. Adding news coverage and ward system decreases the predicting power of previous turnout, population density, and whether there was a mayoral race running in the election. However, the model increases the predictive power of a concurrent referendum, while decreasing

the predictive power of both previous turnout and whether a mayor was running during the election or not.

4.3 Analysis of Variables

The following sections examine the variables that are statistically significant in the final regression model. The results are compared to the initial hypotheses presented in section 3. The policy alternatives devised in section 5 are generated from only those variables shown to be significant throughout the regression analysis.

4.3.1 Non-Significant variables

Table 4.2 *Non-Significant Variables.*

Variable Name
Population
Homeownership
Councillor running in election
Number of candidates for Mayor
Number of candidates for Councillor
Number of seats available
Incumbent in Mayoral race
Incumbent Councillor race
Competitive race – Spread between winner and second place candidate
Local Plebiscite held during election
Local News coverage
Ward System

Table 4.2 indicates the 12 non-significant variables in this analysis. While surprising, some of these variables provide valuable insight into possible policy avenues available to decision makers in New Brunswick. The inclusion of the number of candidates for mayor and incumbency as non-significant variables indicates that policy makers need only ensure there is a race for mayor, irrespective of the number of candidates or competitiveness of the race, there needs only be two candidates to encourage voter participation.

The inclusion of a number of variables related to municipal councillors (i.e.: running in the election, number of candidates for council, incumbents) indicates the relatively minor role councillors in determining voter participation. It is important to distinguish that this is no way is an indication of the importance of the position itself. It refers only to the inability of the position to attract voter participation.

Of the social-economic variables, neither population nor homeownership were found to be significant determinants of municipal voter turnout. This is important, as it is unrealistic to expect policy makers would implement policies to correct any deterrents that either population or homeownership caused to voter participation. In terms of institutional variables, both local news coverage and ward system were not found to be significant determinants of voter participation.

4.3.2 Statistically significant socio-economic variables

When examining the socio-economic statistics in the final model, the most statistically significant variable is that of Median Household income. Contrary to both the literature and the hypothesized direction however, there was a negative relationship between Median Household income and voter turnout turning municipal elections. Consequently, those with higher levels of median household income are less likely to participate in municipal elections than those of lower incomes. This finding is not consistent with the hypothesized direction. However counterintuitive this appears, Filer et al., (1993) have come to the same conclusion through their own analysis.

The rationale for higher turnout rates among those of higher incomes is based on a fundamental assumption of voting itself. Under the rational choice model, voting is seen in terms of costs and benefits. If the benefits are seen to outweigh the costs (i.e.: time, hassle to vote etc.), than an individual is likely to participate. Inversely, if the costs are seen as outweighing the benefits, then the voter, it is assumed, will stay home⁵. An extension of this model, the group majority voting model (Schram, 1998; Morton 1991) argues that voting may be rational for a group individuals with similar characteristics, in this case income (Filer et al., 1993). As government is the primary vehicle for income redistribution, those individuals with higher incomes “have more to gain or lose from the election, and will exhibit higher turnout rates” (Filer et al., 1993). Municipal elections pose several problems for this theory. In order for those with high incomes to be induced to vote they must first (1) view the municipality as a major source of

⁵ Morton (1997) graphically represents this as an equation. $P \times B > C$. Whereas P is the change in the probability that their preferred candidate will win if they vote, B is the difference in benefits to the voter when the preferred candidate is elected, and C is the cost in utility of voting.

income redistribution and (2) see the election as an important event, enough so to offset the costs associated with voting.

As we have seen so far in this analysis, the current situation in New Brunswick violates both these assumptions. In the first case, municipalities are not a major source of income redistribution. The major source of income redistribution in Canada is handled through the federal and provincial income tax systems. Under the second assumption, the municipal election must be seen as important enough to offset the costs associated with voting. With over 48 per cent of mayoral elections being uncontested due to a lack of citizens willing to present themselves, it is hard to see how anyone would view the election as important. The result would be a greater cost associated with voting for higher income individuals than their less affluent citizens.

4.3.3 Statistically significant political variables

The most important political variable, and indeed overall variable, is the previous year's election turnout rate. Previous voter turnout rates had a Beta value of .386. This is significant as it shows that once citizens begin to vote they are more likely to vote in subsequent elections. This is of vital importance for policy makers, and those interested in raising aggregate voter turnout in general. It shows that at the aggregate level once citizens vote, they are likely to continue this into the future. Municipalities that turned out en masse in the previous election are likely to continue in subsequent elections.

The second most important political variable was whether there was a provincially run referendum held concurrently with the election. In this case, the referendum variable had a Beta value of .063 at the 99 per cent confidence level. This indicates a significant relationship between the variable and voter turnout. This is in accordance with the hypothesized positive relationship in section 3. The third most important variable was that of a mayor running in the election. In over 48 per cent of the elections held in New Brunswick during the study period (1995-2004) were without a contested election for mayor. In those instances, the sole candidate was acclaimed to office. The regression shows a strong relationship between those races, which included mayoral candidates, and higher voter turnout. The mayor variable had a Beta value of .113 at 95 per cent confidence level.

The regression analysis indicates that in those municipalities where the voter turnout was high in the previous election, voter turnout remained high in the subsequent election. However, the data is of an aggregate nature, and thus does not provide information on the individual voter. It is still significant as it shows that at the aggregate level, those communities with high voter

turnout are likely to continue to enjoy high turnout. The regression analysis also indicated a significant relationship between the holdings of a concurrent referendum with municipal elections. The implication for policy makers is that, where there was a concurrent province-wide referendum, there was increased voter turnout. The third and final finding was the significant relationship between those municipal elections with a mayoral race enjoyed higher overall turnout.

4.3.4 Statistically significant institutional variables

Under model 3, there are no significant institutional variables. The direction of local newspaper coverage is troubling however. This is contradictory to what was both hypothesized in section 3, and in previous studies. Most studies indicate that information is a major determinant of voter turnout. The rationale is that the more information a citizen has the more involved they will be and the more likely they will be to vote. A possible explanation for this inconsistency is that many smaller communities have the same community newspaper. As a result, the amount of local coverage during an election is questionable at best. Furthermore, as there are no political parties at the municipal level, there are few municipal platforms if any to report on. As a result, the amount that can be reported about an upcoming municipal election is minimum at best.

4.4 Summary of major findings

The regression analysis performed during this study provided both concurrent findings with those of previous studies, but also results that ran not only against what previous analysis have found, but some results that even seem counterintuitive. An analysis of significant variables indicates that municipal voter turnout is higher in those areas where voters have previously voted in higher numbers. This is important to policy makers and those that advocate for greater voter turnout, as it shows that if citizens vote, they are increasingly likely to continue voting in subsequent elections. There also appears to be a stronger relationship between higher voter turnout rates and the inclusion of a contested election for mayor than an election for councillors. As there are no political parties in municipal elections, the race for mayor acts as a major catalyst for voter participation. With little policy platforms, particularly in small towns, name recognition plays an important role in deciding the election. Naturally, the position of mayor garners the most attention, without it, the draw for voters to vote is weakened even further.

There was no correlation between population density and voter turnout. Previous studies (Blank, 1974; Davis, 1991) found a negative relationship between population density and voter

turnout. The argument is that density is a proxy for the differences between rural and urban areas, and that the social connections between individuals are much weaker in urban areas. As a result, there is less incentive to voter. Those studies found that voter participation was generally higher in rural areas opposed to urban areas.

Median household income was negatively correlated with voter participation. Previous studies (Powell, 1982) found there was a positive correlation between income and voter turnout. However, other studies have found no significant correlation between the income per capita and voter turnout (Jackman, 1987). Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) provide one rationale for this apparent contradiction; they theorize that the relationship between income per capita and voter turnout is non-linear. Meaning, the relationship is a positive one to a certain point, after which it no longer has a positive relationship with voter turnout. This may have to do with the perceived benefits and costs associated with the election. In the case of municipal elections, the costs may be seen to outweigh the benefits especially those with high socio-economic status.

Another major finding was that the competitiveness of the race was not significant factor in explaining voter turnout. However, the fact that local news coverage played such a limited role during municipal elections in New Brunswick can help explain why the closeness factor was not as significant as one had initially expected. Simply put, if there is no way for voters to know the closeness of the race ahead of the election, then it is no surprise it has little effect on voter turnout.

The exclusion of incumbents as a predictor of voter turnout is surprising. This is the case in both elections for mayor and councillors. Many jurisdictions at the national and sub-national level in liberal democracies have implemented term limits on those holding office. One of the rationales for term limits is that it encourages new blood in the political process and thus increases voter turnout. The evidence in this study suggests that incumbency is not a significant predictor of voter participation, in either the mayoral or councillor races at the municipal level.

5 Policy Alternatives

Policy alternatives are a set of options available to policy makers in order to influence a given situation. These alternatives are then assessed using a set of criteria to determine their overall value as well as their value in relation to one another. Having assessed the various policy alternatives, a set of recommendations is created.

5.1 Relevant Variables and their implications for policy alternatives

As shown in section 4, five variables were significant determinants in explaining the variation in municipal voter turnout in New Brunswick during the 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004 elections. These variables provide valuable insight into the most effective policy options available to policy makers to improve aggregate voter turnout levels across New Brunswick. The variables found to be significant in the OLS regression were,

- *Previous voting*
- *Concurrent provincial referendum held*
- *Contested mayoral race*
- Median Household income
- Population density

Key informants were asked to comment on the linkage between a contested race for mayor and voter turnout rates. AFNMB director Lise Ouellette noted that municipal officials are the first line of contact for many citizens, as a result they are the ones contacted in cases of citizen discontent. She also commented that many municipalities are currently under enormous financial pressures due to a lack of provincial funding and as a result, municipal leaders are being asked to do more with less. The result is increased stress, increased citizen unhappiness, and little incentive to undertake such stresses (Ouellette, 2007). In many cases, municipal officials are elected with little or no formal training in municipal governance. A fact that was highlighted during the 2006 AFNMB Conference. During the annual congress, the AFMNB decided to

further expand its current municipal training program for newly elected officials, as there was a high level of interest by its members.

Ann McIntosh, assistant Chief Electoral Officer, commented that municipalities are mandated to handle a great deal of high visible services, such as fire protection, garbage collection, and road repair. As a result, if something is not to the satisfaction of the community, the elected officials are the first to hear about it. She commented that it can be very challenging for officials and there is little payoff in return (McIntosh, 2007).

The OCEO addressed this issue as well, in the 2004 Municipal elections report. The report detailed the issue, “No amount of voter education will result in higher turnout or interest in the electoral process if there are not enough candidates to create contested elections. [...] This office is not in a position to know or guess at the reasons for the lack of candidates in some areas or for some offices, but if, as a larger community, we believe it is important to have publicly elected bodies to serve various community needs, we need to find out what those reasons are and address them” (OCEO, 2004). Using information obtained from the regression results and interviews with municipal officials and officials within the OCEO, as well as an examination of selective municipal budgets, this section devises a set of three policy alternatives available to the Minister of Local Government to increase municipal voter turnout and thus increase municipal accountability.

As a result, policy alternatives are devised to directly influence the inclusion of mayor. Both analyses of the dataset and elite interviews confirm the vital role this office plays in encouraging voter participation. All policy alternatives will as such, focus on the issue of encouraging participants to run for the office of mayor.

5.2 Policy Alternative 1: Status Quo

Current research suggests there is a major disconnect between the increasing responsibilities placed on municipalities and municipal voter turnout. Studies have noted the tendency across liberal democracy for lower municipal voting compared to sub-national (i.e.: provincial, regional or state level) or national level elections (Kushner et. al, 1997). The situation in New Brunswick as noted in Table 2.1 is far from ideal. Municipal turnout rates are well below the federal and provincial rates, which consistently average above 60 per cent in the province. The rates are nonetheless higher than other some notable municipalities in Canada.

Maintaining the status quo would mean that the Government of New Brunswick and the OCEO would continue to provide limited resources for voter information and analysis. As the 2004 OCEO report states, “it has never been the mandate of this office to Office to engage actively in voter education or awareness campaigns, beyond the basic administrative requirements of notifying voters of the fact that an election is pending, where the polls are, and who the candidates are in each contest” (OCEO, 2004). Under this scenario, the onus for informing local voters would remain squarely in the hands of those seeking office. However, given the volunteer nature of most municipal positions within the province, it is unlikely that candidates will have the financial resources to communicate effectively with the electorate. Furthermore, under the status quo it is unlikely that the rate of uncontested municipal positions will diminish. However, as an analysis of the data suggests, irrespective of these challenges a large proportion of municipalities in New Brunswick are able to attain participation levels above 50 per cent *in those municipalities with contested elections*.

Under this scenario, the OCEO would continue its role in advertising the upcoming election and providing voters with relevant information in terms of the location of polling stations, and the hours of operation during the election. There would be no voter awareness campaign; instead, voters would only be advised of the upcoming election, the hours of operation, and their appropriate polling station. Currently, the OCEO does not have a program to advertise the merits of voter participation. However, Ann McIntosh, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer stated, “in the coming months we are hoping to expand the information we provide on the website” (McIntosh, 2007).

Under the current status quo, the remuneration of elected officials would remain a matter for individual municipalities to determine independently. Because the rate is set independently in each municipality, there would continue to be wide variation in the amounts. Remuneration rates can be divided in terms of municipal population; in the larger municipalities, positions are fully remunerated, while smaller communities tend to provide very limited remuneration (Ouellette, 2007). In Moncton for example, the current rate is \$50,296 for the mayor and \$17,877 for a councillor (City of Moncton, 2007). In the smaller municipalities, the remuneration is limited or non-existent (Ouellette, 2007).

Currently elected municipal officials across Canada can offset some of their costs associated with their positions through the Federal Income Tax Act. Section 81(3) allows for an elected officer of an incorporated municipality to claim an amount (not greater than one-half of the total amount paid to the officer as salary or other remuneration) as an allowance for expenses

incurred in the person's duties as an elected official. The amount claimed as the allowance is excluded from the official's income for that year (Federal Income Tax Act, 1985).

5.3 Policy Alternative 2: Remuneration for municipal officials I (population based)

One of the significant factors affecting voter turnout was the inclusion of candidates during the race for mayor. Currently the vast majority of municipal positions in New Brunswick are volunteer positions, with little or no indemnity for elected municipal officials. As Mme Ouellette indicated, it is difficult to obtain the exact figures, as the remuneration of municipal officials is the responsibility of the municipality itself. While difficult to obtain, she stated that the vast majority of smaller municipalities were either volunteer positions or at best municipal officials received approximately \$3,000 a year (Ouellette, 2007). One of the consequences of this is that many elected municipal bodies in New Brunswick meet only once or twice a month. Ann McIntosh, the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer commented on the significant expenditures, both in terms of time and inconvenience, an elected municipal official faces. She stated that as municipal officials are responsible for day-to-day events in citizen lives, such as roads, water, and garbage collection, if there is a problem, municipal officials are the first to be contacted (McIntosh, 2007).

There are those that would argue municipal officials should not need significant financial incentive to run for office. In fact, some would argue on philosophical grounds that those running for office should run for higher reasons, such as a sense of civic duty. Unfortunately, there are financial realities that must be considered. A recent report in Ontario from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario (OICO) on the issue Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) indemnities concluded "there is absolutely no doubt that there are competitive forces at work. These forces apply to potential candidates who may have an interest in entering public life and to sitting members [...] If compensation arrangements at one level of government, such as those in place for members of the House of Commons, are substantially better than compensation arrangements in place provincially, there will inevitable be a movement from Toronto to Ottawa" (OICO, 2006).

This alternative directly addresses the issue of uncontested mayoral elections. There is precedence in some municipalities in New Brunswick, where municipal officials meet infrequently, to receive a small indemnity for the municipal work. Currently in the vast majority

of municipalities, the indemnity can range from several hundred dollars, to several thousand (Ouellette, 2007).

Currently the province of New Brunswick provides unconditional grants to municipalities. **Under this plan, municipal grants will be increased to account for the increased cost of indemnifying municipal officials based on population.** The income received by municipal officials, would serve, as a counter-balance to the increased workload municipal officials are facing. Under the plan, the amount of the indemnity would be based on population size, the larger the municipality the larger the indemnity. The amount of the indemnity is drawn from the 2001 study by the Institut de la Statistique Quebec, Quebec's provincial Statistical agency, entitled "Enquete sur la Remuneration Globale" (ISQ, 2001). The study examined the remuneration of all officials within municipalities of 10,000 inhabitants or more in Quebec in 2001. The report did not specifically look at remuneration amounts for elected officials, but rather divided officials into 49 positions, grouped into six categories ranging from managers, to front line service providers such as police and fire services. The report examines the average salary per year and per hour by municipal size, and function within the municipal government. Based on those findings, this option derives an average annual indemnity for elected officials based on population. In the Quebec case, the report only examined those municipalities with 10,000 inhabitants or more. Therefore, in order to determine an appropriate indemnity for those municipalities with populations below 10,000, a calculation was made. The average municipal remuneration was 95.4 per cent of the indemnity of the next largest category. As a result, the indemnity for those municipalities between 5000 and 9999 was derived from calculating 95.4 per cent of the next highest category.

Table 5.1 Indemnity Based on Municipal Population.

Population Size	Number of Municipalities in New Brunswick	Indemnity	Total Cost
0-999	38	\$39,202	\$1,489,676
1000-4999	49	\$41,093	\$2,013,557
5000-9999	7	\$43,074	\$301,518
10,000-24,999	7	\$45,151	\$316,057
25,000-49,999	1	\$46,110	\$46,110
Above 50,000	2	\$49,548	\$99,096

In New Brunswick, the Municipal Finance Corporation Act allows for the provision of direct provincial aid to municipalities for the payment to Municipal officials. Section 15 of the Act states “The administration expenses of the Corporation shall be paid by the Corporation. 15 (2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the Minister may, in such amounts and on such terms as are mutually agreeable, assist the Corporation in the payment of its administration expenses” (New Brunswick Municipal Finance Corporation Act, 1982).

5.4 Policy Alternative 3: remuneration for municipal officials II (hours worked)

Like the previous policy option, this alternative draws from the 2001 study by the ISQ. This option uses the average hourly wage of level 3 municipal works in Quebec (those in professional, managerial positions such as Director General, or Treasurer). The average rate per hour was \$36.97 (ISQ, 2001). Based on this amount, **elected municipal officials would be paid directly from the provincial government based on the number of hours they worked** in their capacity as mayor within the municipality. Under this plan, municipal officials would submit their monthly totals, and their indemnity would reflect the total number of hours worked. Currently, the Auditor General of New Brunswick (AGNB) has the authority to audit municipal budgets. As with municipal budgets, the AGNB would audit municipal officials to ensure the integrity of the process.

This alternative reflects the different capacities of the individual municipalities and corresponding responsibilities mayors have across the province. A mayor in a village of less than

500 inhabitants may not work the same number of hours as a mayor in a large municipality such as Fredericton or Saint John. In fact, many elected municipal officials from smaller municipalities meet only several times per month. Under this alternative, mayors would be indemnified according to the number of hours they spent in their duties as mayor.

5.5 Policy Alternative 4: Remuneration for municipal officials III (merit based)

As with the previous alternative, this policy would compensate elected municipal officials for their contribution to their respective municipalities with little regard for demographic factors within the municipality. Instead of calculating the indemnity based solely on demographic factors, **the provincial government would tie the amount of the indemnity directly to a mandatory performance measurement program for municipalities province-wide.** This option draws on the comprehensive Municipal Performance Measurement Program (MPMP), created in Ontario. The plan requires municipalities to report annually on 54 measures of effectiveness and efficiency in key service areas (MPMP Summary of 2001 Results, 2003). Under this alternative, elected officials would receive a minimal base salary, to which an additional indemnity would be added based on the municipal performance against a standardized set of performance indicators.

Municipal officials would be required to file MPMP reports annually, reporting their performance relative to the 54 measures of effectiveness and efficiency. Based on those indicators, municipal officials would receive an additional indemnity. The indemnity would be calculated directly from the municipal performance relative to those measures.

The exact ratio of base indemnity to supplementary indemnity is flexible, and policy makers within the Department of Local Government will eventually determine the exact amount. For this analysis however, a ratio of 70/30 is used. In order to arrive at the total cost, the indemnity rates of the population-based alternative are used. A calculation is made of 70 per cent of each of those rates. Using the assumption that 75 per cent of all municipalities are able to achieve their MPMP targets, an overall cost is determined.

Table 5.2 Base Indemnity Amounts and Overall Cost.

Population Size	Number of Municipalities in New Brunswick	Base Indemnity	Supplementary Indemnity
0-999	38	\$27,441	\$11,760
1000-4999	49	\$28,765	\$12,327
5000-9999	7	\$30,151	\$12,922
10,000-24,999	7	\$31,605	\$13,545
25,000-49,999	1	\$32,277	\$13,833
Above 50,000	2	\$34,683	\$14,854

5.6 Criteria for evaluating policy alternatives

The following section outlines the three criteria with which the various policy alternatives will be evaluated. The criteria chosen for this analysis are in accordance with established methods of evaluation in the field of public policy (Dunn, 2004). In critically examining the various alternatives against these criteria, policy makers can be secure in the fact that the best overall policy alternative was chosen.

5.6.1 Political Feasibility

Political feasibility refers to the level of public acceptance the various policy options would receive throughout New Brunswick. Specifically, political feasibility refers to the ability of policy makers to implement the given policy alternatives, and the reaction such implementation is likely to garner in the general population. This is important to any public policy analysis, as the implementation is key to any significant policy change. The political feasibility of a given alternative is assessed through elite interviews with municipal officials and representatives within the OCEO. During the interviews, the various officials were asked to comment on the various alternatives.

5.6.2 Effectiveness

All options are assessed based on their effectiveness in achieving the stated goal of raising municipal voter turnout in New Brunswick. In order to analyze the impacts of the various alternatives on equity, elite interviews as well as qualitative analysis of similar situations in other jurisdictions were undertaken. Effectiveness refers to assessing the measurable success of a given option by the amount of resources devoted to that option. In the current political context within Canada, the effectiveness of a given policy alternative to achieve its stated goal is very important. Within the New Brunswick case, the provincial government has identified budget shortfalls as a major concern; as such, any future expenditure must be efficient in their ability to achieve the stated policy goal.

5.6.3 Cost

The cost criterion refers to the overall level of government expenditure needed to achieve the implementation of the various policy options. The current provincial government in New Brunswick has signalled its intension to rein in public spending to pursue its policy of maintaining a balanced budget. One of the main considerations within the New Brunswick case is cost. One of the first acts the new government did was to commission an independent study on the fiscal situation in New Brunswick. The Minister of Finance as repeatedly stated his determination to balance the budget, “We have clearly stated that we are committed to balance budgets, and we fully intend to deliver on our platform commitments over the course of our mandate. This means that our government will have to make important decisions to bring revenues and spending into line with one another” (New Brunswick Department of Finance, 2006). The criterion will be crucial in determining the impact of the various policies on the Government of New Brunswick. In order to asses the related costs of the various alternatives generated, elite interviews were conducted with municipal officials as well as officials within the provincial government of New Brunswick.

Table 5.3 Criteria, Definition, Measurement, and Source

Policy Alternative	Definition	Measurement	Source
Political Feasibility	Evaluated on how acceptable it is to key stakeholders in the province (including the Minister of Finance and Local Government, and Municipal Officials)	<p>Low - The policy option does not address the concerns of policy makers stakeholders</p> <p>Moderate – The policy option addresses some but not all of the concerns of policy makers and stakeholders</p> <p>High – The policy option adequately addresses the concerns of both policy makers and stakeholders</p>	Interviews with OCEO officials and AFMNB
Effectiveness	Evaluated on the alternative's ability to achieve the stated goal of increasing voter turnout at the municipal level in New Brunswick	<p>Low – The policy option does not adequately achieve the goal of increasing municipal voter turnout</p> <p>Moderate – The policy option achieves modest success in increasing municipal voter turnout</p> <p>High – The policy option achieves adequate success in increasing municipal voter turnout</p>	Literature review and Examination of other jurisdictions
Cost	Evaluated against the status quo	<p>Low- Significant financial cost associated with the implementation and administration of this option</p> <p>Moderate – Some important costs associated with the implementation and administration of the policy option</p> <p>High – low financial cost in the implementation of this option</p>	Costing of options

A brief explanation of the table 5.2 is required. The measurements have been assigned a numerical value; from 1 to 3, 1 being low, 2 being medium, and 3 high. These numerical representations provide the reader with a quick means to examine the various policy alternatives in relation to one another, and the status quo. The higher the overall score, the better the policy alternative is in terms of its impact on the three criteria.

6 Evaluation of Policy Alternatives

6.1 Introduction

This section focuses on a comprehensive analysis of the policy alternatives described in the above section. However, several overarching considerations must first be addressed. The current fiscal climate in New Brunswick is an important consideration that cannot be ignored. The provincial government commissioned an independent study of the fiscal situation in New Brunswick. On December 20, 2006, the Independent Fiscal Review report was released. In the report, the authors conclude that New Brunswick will face significant fiscal challenges in the near future. The report concluded projected provincial deficits in the range of \$300 to \$416 million in 2007-08, \$548 to 719 million in 2008-09, and \$573 to \$773 million in 2009-2010 (Grant Thornton, 2006).

Another important consideration is the involvement of the OCEO in the conducting of municipal elections in New Brunswick. New Brunswick is one of only a few provinces in which the provincial OCEO plays such a large role in the procedural running of municipal elections. This is particularly important in the evaluation of the various policy alternatives. It means a more streamlined implementation process than it would otherwise be if the various municipalities ran their own elections. Furthermore, there is already a framework in New Brunswick for the provincial government to indemnify municipal officials. Under section 25 of the New Brunswick Municipal Finance Corporation Act, the provincial government is mandated to provide financial aid municipalities. Under the act, the funds are directly earmarked for municipal administration expenses (New Brunswick Municipal Finance Corporation Act, 1982).

6.1.1 Comparative Ranking Matrix

The policy alternatives are entered into a comparative matrix in table 6.1. By graphically representing the various alternatives and their impact on the three criteria, it is evident to the reader the strongest policy options available.

Table 6.1 Comparative Ranking Matrix.

Policy Alternative	Political Feasibility	Effectiveness	Cost	Total/ out of 9
Municipal Remuneration (III) – Merit based	3	3	2	8
Status quo	3	1	3	7
Municipal Remuneration (II) – Hours worked	2	3	2	7
Municipal Remuneration (I) – Population based	1	3	2	6

6.1.2 Evaluation: Status Quo

An analysis of the current situation reveals a higher level of municipal voter participation than previous studies would tend to suggest. Past elections have shown voter turnout averaging above 45 per cent; in some municipalities it consistently ranks above 60 per cent. Maintaining the status quo would mean continuing to allow Municipal officials to be indemnified on a case-by-case basis. Municipalities would be free to choose the level of indemnity they feel is appropriate.

It is politically feasible, in fact politically desirable, in the current fiscal climate in New Brunswick for the provincial government to exercise fiscal constraint. Municipal voting is already higher than previous studies suggest it might be. In fact, in many municipalities the voter turnout rate consistently ranks above 60 per cent. Furthermore, an analysis of municipal budgets was inconclusive in determining the impact of low voter turnout and high rates of uncontested elections on municipal budgets. However, the status quo ranks low in effectiveness. Under the status quo, it is possible, indeed likely, that there will continue to be high levels of uncontested elections throughout the province. The current system does not allow for citizens the opportunity to voice their opinions at the ballot box. Furthermore, those that decided to seek office will continue their dual role during elections; they would encourage voters to vote for themselves, but they would also need to encourage all voters to participate in general, as the OCEO has no policy for encouraging voting.

The financial costs of the status quo would also be nil, and as such ranks high. Due to its high ranking in terms of its cost and political feasibility this option ranks low. Overall, the status quo receives a total of 6 out of 9 when compared on the criteria grid.

6.1.3 Evaluation: Municipal Remuneration I (Population based)

Statistical analysis shows a relationship between the inclusion of mayoral candidates during a municipal election and higher rates of turnout. This alternative would require a cash injection from the province of \$4,266,014 per year.

The alternative ranks low on political feasibility. There is little appetite in Canada during the best of times for increasing politician compensation. Under the current fiscal situation New Brunswick finds itself, there is even less political will to increase compensation to politicians – however warranted it may be. Recall that Lise Ouellette director of the Association Francophone des Municipales du Nouveau Brunswick, stated there is a strong correlation between those municipalities with municipal pay and the inclusion of mayoral candidates (Ouellette, 2007).

In terms of effectiveness, this policy alternative ranks high. The policy would certainly create an incentive for those contemplating office to run. There is the issue of municipalities that currently compensate their elected officials. Should they receive a provincial indemnity on top of the compensation offered by the municipality itself? The solution would appear to be that any compensation provided by the province be used to subsidize the municipal compensation already offered.

Under the plan, elected municipal officials would receive compensation directly from the provincial government. This would centralize the process and ensure that all municipal officials across the province are treated in a similar manner. The disbursement of funds would not pose significant problems for provincial officials, as municipalities currently receive grants from the provincial treasury. Furthermore, the New Brunswick Municipal Financial Corporation Act, section 15, allows for the direct provision of financial aid to municipalities.

There is significant cost involved in the implementation of this policy alternative, and as a result, it scores low on the cost criterion. A costing of this option shows that the increased financial cost to the provincial treasury would be \$4.2 million. This represents a significant expense for the Department of Local Government, and in the current climate of budget cuts and austerity measures it is unlikely the province would be willing to undertake such an initiative. Overall this alternative ranks 6 out of a possible 9 based on the three criteria.

6.1.4 Evaluation: Municipal Remuneration II (Hours worked)

This alternative ranks moderate on the political feasibility criterion. Accountability has become the new buzzword in Canadian politics. By tying municipal pay to actual hours worked,

this alternative increases the political feasibility of municipal remuneration from low to moderate. However, there are issues with verifying the actual numbers of hours worked. While mayors in certain larger municipalities may work 40 hours or more a week, in smaller municipalities the number of hours per week may only be a few. As a result, provincial officials would need to verify the actual number of hours elected municipal officials worked.

In terms of effectiveness, this alternative ranks high. The overall cost of the alternative is lower than the previous alternative, and there is a direct correlation between the work completed by officials and the provincial governments' expenditures. As earlier discussed, AFMNB director Lise Ouellette highlighted the correlation between those municipalities in which elected officials are remunerated and those with competitive mayoral races. The current provincial government has stated its goal of maintaining a balanced budget through increased fiscal restraint. As unconditional municipal transfers account for more than \$100 million dollars in fiscal 2006, this policy option provides for greater accountability of government expenses in general. The funds paid to municipal officials would be made public and citizens would have a direct understanding of the amount of work involved in the operation of running municipal government in the province.

Under the plan, municipal officials across New Brunswick would receive an indemnity based on the amount of work they perform in direct relation to their position as mayor. There is a direct link between the time officials put in and the amount of compensation they receive. New Brunswick already has in place a sophisticated framework with which municipalities receive fiscal transfers to aid in their delivery of public services. Furthermore, under the New Brunswick Financial Corporations Act, section 15, the province is authorized to aid municipal governments in the financial expenses associated with municipal administration costs. Under this policy Ministry of Local Government officials would be required to compile information from municipal officials across the province on a monthly basis, which would require significant effort. There would also have to be a sophisticated system of audits in place to verify the actual number of hours works.

Finally, this alternative ranks moderate in terms of the cost criterion. There is significant uncertainty about the actual expenditure amount the policy would entail. The exact amount of hours each individual municipal official works is not known, and there may be a desire on the part of local officials to inflate the number of hours they have actually worked. For that reason, significant safeguards would have to be put in place to ensure the integrity of the plan. This may

include ceilings on the maximum number of billable hours a mayor could submit per month. Overall, this alternative receives 7 out of 9 when judged against the three criteria.

6.1.5 Evaluation: Municipal Remuneration III (Merit Based)

Remunerating elected municipal officials based on the performance of their respective municipalities ranks high in terms of political feasibility. It is clear that any increased funding for elected officials may be viewed negatively, as evidenced by the recent raises to Members of Provincial Parliament in Ontario. However, by tying municipal pay directly to municipal performance indicators in publicly available MPMP reports, citizens are made aware of a clear link between performance and pay. This should mitigate any public opposition to the policy alternative.

The effectiveness of this option is high. By first indemnifying elected officials with a base amount, this alternative will decrease the prevalence of uncontested mayoral races in New Brunswick. Secondly, pay increases tied to municipal performance ensure increased municipal improvements and success, and further increase the draw for citizens to become involved in the political process.

Under the plan, municipal officials across New Brunswick would receive a base indemnity. This would ensure that all elected municipal officials are remunerated within the province. A second indemnity based on the performance of the municipality against a set of performance measurements, will ensure that those elected officials that make productivity gains in terms of their municipal delivery of services to citizens will be adequately compensated for those efforts.

There are some challenges in implementing and administering this type of performance based pay structure. The provincial government would need to implement a MPMP plan similar to the one currently in Ontario. This would require the creation of a standard set of performance measures with which to judge individual municipalities, and compare municipalities against one another. This would require significant effort within the New Brunswick Department of Local Government. Once implemented, the municipalities would need to file MPMP reports annually, and Department staff would have to analyze the results. Annual bonuses would then be processed and sent to elected municipal officials that met or exceeded the performance targets for that year.

The overall cost of this alternative depends on several factors. The first is the amount of the base indemnity. The second is the supplementary amount based on the individual performance

of the various municipalities in the MPMP. For this analysis, the base indemnity was chosen as a percentage of the population-based indemnities. Using the assumption that 75 per cent of municipalities will be able to meet their targets under the MPMP, a final total is calculated. The total of this alternative is calculated to be \$3.9 million. For comparison, an analysis of the 2006 New Brunswick provincial budget indicates that the total overall budget for the OCEO in 2004-2005 was \$1,002,000.

The overall cost of the plan depends on several factors, the individual performances of the municipalities, the chosen amount for the base indemnity, and the amount of the increases based on performance. However, as the performances of the municipalities increases, the province should be able to obtain significant cost savings from the resulting increases in efficiency in the delivery of public services. The overall ranking of this alternative is 8 out of 9.

6.2 Evaluation Summary

It is clear that with the current fiscal situation in New Brunswick, and with current climate of budget constraints, there is little appetite in the province for *increasing* politicians pay without tying it to some sort of accountability measure. An analysis of municipal budgets showed a weak correlation between voter turnout and competitive elections and municipal expenditures. However, this may be due to difficulties in obtaining information from individual municipalities. In terms of policy choices, the literature is clear the impact low voter turnout. Policy decisions may be taken that do not reflect the preferences of a majority of citizens within the municipality. The danger is that those policy decisions will not reflect the true preferences of citizens within the municipality.

There is also significant effort involved for those that are elected to office. As municipalities are shouldering more service delivery areas, the position is becoming much more demanding. Evidence of this can be found in the creation of the 2006 AFMNB-University of Moncton municipal training program. There is a disconnect between the increasing responsibilities elected municipal official must undertake and the remuneration they receive. While the policy window for any substantial funding increases appears limited – at least for now. The increased municipal accountability resulting from performance based salaries, would certainly increase acceptance of any additional funding. As a result, only remunerations tied to performance indicators would appear acceptable to decision makers in New Brunswick. It remains to be determined what level of base indemnity would be appropriate. Clearly, it would have to be more than the current amount of under \$3000 dollars in most municipalities.

6.3 Recommendations

Through the regression analysis it was determined that a major factor in turnout rates was the inclusion of a competitive race for mayor. In those communities where there was such a race, turnout averaged 64.4 per cent, compared to the overall average of 47.5 per cent during the study period. The inclusion of mayor is vital in increasing voter turnout. In order to increase those willing to run, interviews with both the AFMNB director and OCEO officials indicate the need to financially compensate elected officials adequately.

Through detailed analytical work, interviews with informed stakeholders, and a survey of municipal expenditures, this report recommends that the Minister of Local Government of New Brunswick adopt a policy of remunerating mayors across the province, while tying that indemnity to municipal performance. This policy alternative scored the highest when evaluated against the three criteria.

It is based on this analysis that I recommend that the Department of Local Government implement a system of remuneration for the position of mayor throughout the province tied to municipal performance. This alternative consists of two components,

1. A base indemnity for all mayors within the province;
2. Implement a second system of municipal remuneration, based on municipal outcomes against province-wide performance indicators.

6.4 Implementation

The implementation of a system of remunerations tied to municipal outcomes within a MPMP type system will require significant effort on the part of the provincial government. To begin, the province must first determine the base indemnity for all municipal officials. Under this analysis, 70 percent of the indemnities calculated under policy alternative 1 are used. The bonus amount is derived from the remaining 30 per cent of the indemnity from alternative 1. This report assumes that 75 per cent of municipalities will achieve their stated goal under the MPMP and as such would receive the full indemnity. For the remaining 25 per cent of municipalities, the mayor would receive 70 per cent of the indemnity calculated under alternative 1.

The province will have to create a program of mandatory reporting for all municipalities in the province, much as Ontario did in 2000. Many of the evaluation measures and categories from the Ontario MPMP are easily transferable to municipalities in New Brunswick. Once

implemented however, the system requires little revisions. Municipalities would be sent information on the types of information required for the program and once completed, Department of Local Government staff would then analyze forms. Based on the municipal outcomes, the mayors would receive a supplementary indemnity. The amount of the supplementary indemnity is also at the discretion of provincial officials. Depending on the amount of the base indemnity, the supplementary indemnity may vary considerably.

It is important to note the flexibility available to provincial officials with this policy alternative. Provincial officials may emphasize municipal performance, and as a result give greater weight to the performance-tied indemnity over the base indemnity. It is important to note that in no case should the base indemnity be below the current \$3000 in most municipalities.

Special mention needs to be given to the key role the OCEO plays in the running of municipal elections. This role can be strengthened further however. An analysis of other jurisdictions shows that in several other jurisdictions, the OCEO has a much more interactive mandate (Elections Manitoba, 2007; OCEC Saskatchewan, 2007; Elections Ontario, 2007). There seems to be widespread acceptance in other jurisdictions of an expanded mandate for their respective Chief Electoral Officer Office. In Prince Edward Island for example, the OCEO has recently completed an educational program in which students are taught the importance of voter turnout as early as grade school. According to the Chief Electoral Officer, Lowell Croken, the OCEO website in PEI receives over 80,000 hits a month. Clearly, there is public appetite for more knowledge.

As the data in this study is aggregated to a community level, it is unclear whether on an individual level, those citizens that voted in previous elections were the same that voted in subsequent elections. A survey of previous studies that examined voter turnout at the *individual* level (Kanazawa, 2000; Plutzer, 2002; and Gerber et al., 2003) found a correlation between past turnout and current voter turnout. Statistical analysis has shown that the largest determinant of voter turnout is past voter turnout. The importance of educating the electorate early and often on the merits of voting seems to be paramount in increasing voter turnout. The question remains whether citizens who receive public service announcements regarding the merits of voting – will vote. In short, if the advertising does not significantly entice citizens to vote, they are not likely to vote in the future.

The OCEO has shown itself to be an extremely capable organization. The OCEO would have little trouble with an expanded mandate to actively promote citizen participation. Evidence from other jurisdictions, notably Manitoba, has shown the relative ease with which the OCEO

was able to update, and expand their education, and promotion materials. Currently, the OCEO sees its mandate to “ensure the democratic rights of all New Brunswickers through the conduct of free and fair elections, by ensuring compliance with election laws and by enhancing public confidence in and awareness of the electoral process” (OCEO website, 2007). The OCEO can actively engage the public with little increase to current funding levels. The most recent figures from the Department of Finance in New Brunswick indicate that the 2006 provincial budget allotted to the OCEO was \$1,002,000. With little increase, the OCEO could create educational material for local schools, as well as enhance its website to include information on the merits of actively participating in elections. Furthermore, as Ann McIntosh noted, the OCEO has begun to actively seek the employment of youths in the running of municipal polling stations. This provides an excellent opportunity for youths to engage in the political process and learn about the merits of voter participation (McIntosh, 2007).

This expanded role could take various forms,

- The OCEO could enhance the content on its website, providing educational material and public service information on the benefits of voter participation at the local level.
- The OCEO could buy advertising space in local newspapers, on local television and on local radio to provide public service announcements on the importance of voter participation in the lead up to the municipal election date.
- The OCEO could continuously run voter awareness campaigns in local schools. This is common practice in several other jurisdictions (elections Ontario, 2007; OCEO of PEI, 2007; Elections Manitoba; 2007). This would involve the creation of an education toolkit for teachers across New Brunswick. The toolkit would be comprised of various exercises in educating local children on the merits of municipal voting, or voting in general.

Furthermore, as has been tried in Ontario, the OCEO could run mock elections in local schools in conjunction with the actual municipal election. Students would be able to vote in the mock-elections, and the results would be provided to local media. The students’ results would be broadcast, and reported on in local media throughout New Brunswick.

One of the most comprehensive plans for increasing voter turnout can be found in Manitoba. Election Manitoba runs several educational programs throughout the province, including mock elections in schools, presentations to schools, and creates toolkits for teachers across the province (Elections Manitoba, 2007). Manitoba also provides an excellent comparison, as it is demographically similar to New Brunswick. Even with the increased educational

component the total budget for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer in Manitoba is \$1,254,500 (Manitoba Department of Finance, 2006), compared to \$1,002,000 for New Brunswick in fiscal 2006 (New Brunswick Department of Finance, 2006).

7 Conclusion

The issue of voter participation is key in our democracy itself. An informed and active electorate ensure that policy preferences are reflected in policy decisions. Furthermore, previous studies have shown the dangers of low voter turnout on the accountability of elected officials. With municipalities shouldering a larger and larger fiscal burden, the issue becomes even more important. As municipalities shoulder more responsibility in the delivery of public services, and increasingly with less provincial funding, they will undoubtedly face increasing pressures. It is important for citizens to express their preferences, and decision makers are held accountable for the decisions they have made during their mandate. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this is through the democratic process at election time.

Current levels of voter turnout in New Brunswick, while far from ideal, are nonetheless enviable in a number of jurisdictions. However, the rates of acclamation are extremely high, and should be viewed as unacceptable. It is unthinkable to imagine a situation in the provincial or federal context in which MLA or MP elections were won by acclamation, yet that is what is happening in municipalities across New Brunswick.

The provincial government has stated publicly that it has made reducing the deficit its primary goal (New Brunswick Department of Finance, 2006). Under the current climate, any significant expenditure will be difficult. However, the political capital gained through the increased municipal accountability through performance linked municipal remuneration should not be underestimated. While there may be little appetite for increasing politicians pay, these minimal increases in government spending can actually increase accountability and efficiencies at the local level. These increases can translate into significant savings throughout New Brunswick.

Credit should be given to the people of New Brunswick. Irrespective of the lack of a coherent government policy actively encouraging citizens to vote, in many municipalities they have voted nonetheless. It is worth noting that this active participation is not the result of a rigorous government policy to encourage voter participation – it is *in spite* of a lack of a government policy in the field of voter participation.

Appendices

**Appendix A: Municipal voter turnout rates in selected Canadian cities
(as a percentage)**

Table 7.1 Municipal Turnout Rates Across Canada.

City	1990/91/92	1993/94/95/96	1997/98/99
Fredericton	43.5 (1992)	15.1 (1995)	34.3 (1998)
Montreal	36.1 (1990)	47.5 (1994)	50.9 (1998)
Ottawa	40.9 (1991)	38.7 (1994)	26.4 (1997)
Toronto	43 (1991)	39.5 (1994)	50.8 (1997)
Winnipeg	58.4 (1992)	53.5 (1995)	53.6 (1998)
Calgary	34.2 (1992)	23.4 (1995)	45.8 (1998)
Vancouver	51.7 (1992)	32.1 (1996)	36.2 (1999)

Source: The Community Foundation, 2007.

Appendix B: Nomination Form

NOMINATION PAPER – Municipal and Rural Community Elections (Municipal Elections Act, SNB, 1979, c. M-21.01, s. 17)

PART A: To Be Completed By Candidate or Witness:

The persons named below in Part C, being entitled to vote at a municipal election in the municipality or rural community of _____ under the *Municipal Elections Act*, nominate:

CANDIDATE'S NAME AS IT IS TO APPEAR ON BALLOT			SEX <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> F	OCCUPATION
First Name	Second Name or Initial	Surname		
Civic Address			as a candidate for the office of:	
Postal Code			Mayor <input type="checkbox"/>	Incumbent? Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone:			Councillor <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Mailing Address (if different from civic address above):				

at large ward number or name of ward _____
in the pending Municipal Election to be held in the city town village rural community
of _____ and County of _____ on
the ____ day of _____, 20__.

PART B: To Be Completed By Candidate in Presence of Witness:

CONSENT OF CANDIDATE TO BE NOMINATED:

I, _____, consent to this nomination, and confirm that the address for service of any legal documents on me under the *Municipal Elections Act* is as above stated. I certify that I am a Canadian citizen; that I will be eighteen years of age or more as of the day of the election; that I will have been ordinarily resident in the municipality or rural community of _____ for at least six months immediately before the election; and that I expect to be ordinarily resident in the Province and in the municipality or rural community on election day.

Witness my hand at _____ in the County of _____
and the Province of New Brunswick, this ____ day of _____, 20__.

In the presence of:

Witness Candidate

PART C: To Be Completed By Witness and Nominators:

Candidate: _____ Municipality/Rural Community: _____

IMPORTANT: 25 nominators are required; more are allowed. Nominators must be qualified to vote in the election in the municipality, and ward, or rural community where the candidate is running. The witness may not be a nominator.

No	Name of Voter (please print)	Signature of Voter	Civic Address (please print legibly)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

ELECTIONS MUNREG16-MB (06/2005)

Source, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, 2007.

Appendix C: Descriptive Statistics per election year

The following sections provide an overview of the information obtained from the compilation of the data set. The observed data is broken down by election year. The following information provides insight into the situation during those election years.

7.1 1995

The voter turnout rate for the 1995 municipal elections in New Brunswick was 45 per cent. In 63 elections for mayor and 88 elections for council there were incumbents running. It is important to note the high number of uncontested elections for mayor, 56 in 1995. Put another way, in 53 per cent of the elections for mayor in New Brunswick there was only one citizen willing to run for the position. In the case of municipal councils, 26 councils were completely acclaimed. That represents 25 per cent of all municipal councils in the province. Where there was an election for mayor, the median spread between the winner and the second place candidate was 21.45 per cent. Demographically, the median population density per square kilometre was 123.9; the homeownership rate was 75.5 per cent, and the median household income was \$32,348.

Table 7.2 *Descriptive Statistics from 1995 Election.*

Variable	
Turnout	45%
Median population density	123.9/KM sq
Median homeownership rate	75.5%
Median household income	\$32,348
Number of uncontested elections for Mayor	57
Number of uncontested elections for council	26
Number of council elections with at least one incumbent running	88
Number of incumbents running for mayor during election	63
Median spread between winner and second place candidate	21.45%
Number of plebiscites held	0

Source, OCEO, 1995.

7.2 1998

In 1998, the overall turnout rate was 47 per cent. There were incumbents running in 97 elections for municipal council, and 76 incumbents in the various elections for mayor. There were 50 uncontested elections for mayor, and 24 uncontested elections for municipal council. Where there was a contested election for mayor, the spread between the winner and the second place candidate was 22.8 per cent. There were municipally initiated plebiscites in four municipalities across the province. The median persons per square kilometre in the 104 municipalities examined was 120.4. The median homeownership rate was 75.9 per cent, while the median household income was \$33,653.

Table 7.3 *Descriptive Statistics from 1998 Election.*

Variable	
Turnout	47%
Median population density	120.4/KM sq
Median homeownership rate	75.9%
Median household income	\$33,653
Number of uncontested elections for Mayor	50
Number of uncontested elections for council	24
Number of council elections with at least one incumbent running	97
Number of incumbents running for mayor during election	76
Median spread between winner and second place candidate	22.8%
Number of plebiscites held	4

Source, OCEO, 1998.

7.3 2001

Overall, the voter turnout rate during the 2001 municipal elections was 52 per cent. The number of uncontested elections for mayor totalled 51 and 21 for municipal council elections. The number of incumbents running for mayor totalled 60, while the number of council elections with incumbents running totalled 99. The median spread between the winner for mayor and the second place candidate was 14.8 per cent. There were no municipally initiated plebiscites. The

median household income during 2001 was \$37, 275. The household ownership rate was 77.4 per cent.

Table 7.4 Descriptive Statistics from 2001 Election.

Variable	
Turnout	52%
Median population density	121.9/KM sq
Median homeownership rate	77.4%
Median household income	\$37,275
Number of uncontested elections for Mayor	52
Number of uncontested elections for council	21
Number of council elections with at least one incumbent running	99
Number of incumbents running for mayor during election	60
Median spread between winner and second place candidate	14.8%
Number of plebiscites held	0

Source, OCEO, 2001.

7.4 2004

The overall turnout rate during the 2004 municipal elections was 46 per cent. The number of uncontested elections for mayor was 51, for council it was 30. There were 74 incumbents seeking the office of mayor. There were 99 municipal elections with incumbents running. Where there was an election for mayor, the median spread between the winner and the second place candidate was 18.9 per cent. The median population density in those municipalities was 112.1 people per square kilometre. The median household income in 2004 was \$37, 527, and the median household ownership rate was 76.9 per cent. There were three municipally initiated plebiscites during the 2004 elections.

Table 7.5 Descriptive Statistics from 2004 Election.

Variable	
Turnout	46%
Median population density	112.1/KMsq
Median homeownership rate	76.9%
Median household income	\$37,527
Number of uncontested elections for Mayor	50
Number of uncontested elections for council	30
Number of council elections with at least one incumbent running	74
Number of incumbents running for mayor during election	99
Median spread between winner and second place candidate	18.9%
Number of plebiscites held	3

Source, OCEO, 2004.

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