Cast Your Ballot:

Increasing Voter Participation in the Municipality of the County of Kings

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Objective

This outreach and engagement strategy illustrate tools and tactics which could be implemented in the Municipality of the County of Kings (MOK) to increase voter turnout in the upcoming 2020 municipal election, specifically targeting citizens under 40.

Background

By becoming familiar with the Municipality – its environment, community, council, and municipal staff – we were able to identify unique challenges to voter turnout which are specific to the MOK. The factors identified as opportunities and threats to the MOK which played a key role in our analysis included: the rurality of the MOK, the large farming and agricultural sector, access to internet and media, and polling station locations.

Methods

Our team sought to inform the strategy with information gathered from within the community; we attempted to perform three focus groups but were limited in our ability to attract the appropriate participants. Due to our inability to rely upon focus groups, we relied upon expert opinions from within the community, as well as recommendations collected from poll clerks during the 2016 municipal election. We supplemented our findings from within the community with a thorough scan of relevant literature pertaining to citizen engagement and voter participation, as well as a scan of various jurisdictions within Nova Scotia and across contiguous North America.

Analysis

The themes of information distribution, representation, youth engagement, and accessibility emerged from our literature review and when compared alongside the results from our jurisdictional scan and literature review produced five categories of tools, for a total of 16 individual tools. By a mixed method of inductive and deductive analysis we grouped the tools which have been frequently shown to increase voter participation rates into four themes for analysis.

Recommendations

Our 16 tools are grouped into the following five categories: traditional election outreach, digital outreach, candidate involvement, accessibility, and day of election. We believe these tools to be feasible and practical for the MOK to implement, and through our thorough analysis, we believe these tools to be the most likely to increase voter participation rates within the Municipality for the 2020 election. We have included an Evaluation Matrix for the MOK to use to evaluate the effectiveness of the tools which are selected to be implemented – we recommend that the MOK use this matrix to evaluate the success of this project to increase voter turnout in citizens under 40 following the 2020 election.

1. Introduction

The Municipality of the County of Kings (MOK) is a municipal district encompassing the County of Kings, Nova Scotia. The municipality is home to 47,404 individuals (Statistics Canada, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d), but MOK excludes the townships of Berwick, Wolfville, and Kentville which are also within the boundaries of Kings County. The MOK has struggled to maintain, let alone increase, voter turnout, which was 29% in the 2016 municipal election. In the last election, limited resources, such as mailed voter cards and radio and print advertising, were relied on to encourage citizens to vote, which in part contributed to the continuing downward trend. The MOK will be conducting a municipal election in October 2020. The MOK requires an outreach and engagement strategy to increase voter turnout or, at the very least, maintain current levels of turnout, focusing on voters under 40, as that voter group has been harder to get to the polls.

Our research question for this project is "What engagement strategy and outreach tactics can the Municipality of Kings use to increase voter turnout in voters under 40 for the 2020 election?" While MOK requires a voter outreach and engagement strategy, it is believed that by targeting voters under 40, the MOK can increase overall voter turnout. Recognizing that this outreach and engagement strategy is focused toward younger voters, our team recommends a voter outreach and engagement strategy that best suits the MOK's goals and can be used for all voters.

Our main objective is to create an engagement and outreach strategy for the MOK that will increase voter turnout. The strategy will answer the research question and achieve our main objective by:

- Identifying the successful engagement strategies and outreach tactics the MOK has utilized for past elections
- Highlighting what other jurisdictions in Nova Scotia are doing differently in their voter outreach and engagement strategies compared to the MOK
- Identifying barriers and drivers to voting for voters under 40 through feedback obtained from key stakeholders in the community

The purpose of this project will be to identify barriers to participation in the municipal elections and research tactics that can be used to increase voter turnout, which will then be used to develop an outreach and engagement strategy specifically tailored to voters under 40. By increasing participation in the election, it is hoped that the legitimacy of municipal government will be strengthened and there will be sustained and ongoing interest in municipal politics. Based on this, the MOK would like the final product to ensure that the voter turnout remains at 29% but has a bold goal of increasing voter turnout by 12%, putting it in-line with the provincial average. The scope of this project is to look at other Nova Scotia

jurisdictions, as well as rural municipalities outside of the province that are shining examples of high voter turnout, to discover what tools have been used and have been successful. We will then use these findings to create recommendations which can be used to increase voter turnout in the MOK. While this outreach and engagement strategy will be used for the upcoming 2020 municipal election, the hope is that the outreach and engagement strategy can be applied to future elections as well.

2. Methodology

Our research consisted of a literature review, a jurisdictional scan, and a focus group. We utilized these three methods as they provided us the most information for drafting an outreach and engagement strategy. The literature review consisted of academic literature as well as grey literature — journals, papers, and the websites and documents of other municipalities in Nova Scotia, and rural municipalities outside of Nova Scotia. Also, performing a jurisdictional scan helped us learn about existing best practices for voter engagement and outreach strategies as well as any additional statistics to compare to statistics from the MOK. We as well ran only one focus group with community groups identified by our partner organization's contact. The focus group provided feedback on what is needed by the MOK's target demographic for an increased voter turnout.

2.1 Research Design

To identify methods of voter outreach and engagement that the MOK can use in their outreach and engagement strategy, we determined that barriers and drivers to voting, engagement strategies being used in other municipalities and jurisdictions across Canada, and community perceptions should be consulted.

2.2 Literature Review

Based on the results of our PESTE analysis (Appendix C), we identified barriers to explore further through a literature review. Specifically, this literature review examined the political and social barriers and drivers to voter engagement across Canada at a municipal level. Within our search parameters, there was an emphasis on voters under 40, as they are the target demographic for the MOK's voter engagement and outreach strategy, and there was an emphasis on barriers and drivers identified in Nova Scotia as they will be the most similar to the MOK in population demographics and government. We included grey literature as well as peer-reviewed literature in our literature review in order to include municipal documents that may help to identify barriers and drivers in the MOK. For the literature search we excluded literature from outside of Canada.

2.3 Jurisdictional Scan

Based on what we found from our PESTE analysis in terms of MOK's characteristics (Appendix C), we identified comparable jurisdictions to the MOK. The goal of the jurisdictional scan was to examine voter outreach and engagement strategies both in Nova Scotia and across Canada that were implemented and successful in increasing municipal election turnout. Three municipalities in Nova Scotia were assessed; The Municipality of Cumberland County, The Municipality of Lunenburg, and Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). The purpose was to see if there was a significant increase after the voter engagement strategy was executed. Outside of Nova Scotia, we examined Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, which have a similar municipal structure to Nova Scotia. Evaluating at least two other Atlantic provinces helped as they faced a similar problem with low voter participation in their election. The other Canadian jurisdictions scanned were Toronto, Calgary, Markham, and Vancouver, British Columbia. All these jurisdictions saw an increase in turnout due to various engagement tactics they utilized for their municipal election. Most of the resources we acquired the information from were obtained from the municipality's' websites.

2.4 Focus Groups

The purpose of the focus groups was to identify factors within the MOK that residents felt affected their decision to vote, both positively and negatively. Participants in the focus group were asked to answer a series of questions around voting information to determine what barriers and drivers affect residents of the MOK when deciding whether to vote in municipal elections. Following ethics approval, the MOK reached out on our behalf to community groups identified as important or interested stakeholders in the upcoming election. The target population for the focus groups were residents who are eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 40. We used semi-structured questions to allow a greater depth of information to be gleaned from the participants' answers. The results of the focus groups were analysed qualitatively. We conducted one focus group with eight participants, facilitated by two research team members at the MOK's office in the County and observed and recorded by a third research team member. The session was audio recorded with an MOK-issued recorder for ease of data analysis. The participants were made aware at the start, prior to filling out the consent form, that they would be audio recorded. The focus group ran for an hour, with a more unstructured focus group approach that allowed participants to talk to primarily to each other rather than the facilitator. Demographics such as age were not recorded; however, our participants identified themselves as being at least 30 years of age and included a mix of different levels of civic engagement, as well as roles within the municipality.

3. Results

To determine drivers and barriers we undertook a mixed methods research approach that employed a literature review, jurisdiction scan, and focus group to gather qualitative data. The results of this research identified a number of challenges that voters under 40 face when making the decision to vote.

3.1 Literature Review

In 2019, the MOK determined that they would look to implement traditional methods for increasing voter outreach and engagement for the 2020 election prior to any future talks of implementing electronic voting in the municipality. The decision by the MOK to develop a voter outreach and engagement strategy requires an understanding of the barriers and drivers to voter outreach and engagement, as well as potential mitigation opportunities in Nova Scotia and the rest of Canada. The current approach to voter outreach and engagement in the municipality has not had much success, and as such the MOK is interested in identifying ways to increase voter turnout particularly among the voters aged 40 and under as they appear to be less inclined to vote. With a voter engagement and outreach strategy, it is important to understand the social, as well as the political, aspects to voter engagement as leverage points for increasing voter participation in a community. The goal of this literature review was to identify the social and political barriers and drivers to voter outreach and engagement in Canada and understand how they affect the MOK voter outreach and engagement strategy.

3.1.1. Election Structure and Information Distribution

Municipal services and structure can play a part in engaging community members to participate in the voting process and can both increase and decrease voter turnout. In this section we looked at the barriers and drivers to voting in municipal elections, as well as those that affect voting in Canada overall. One aspect of municipal elections that has been identified as attributing to the downward trend in voter turnout in municipal elections in Ontario is how complicated voting in municipal elections is (Bueckert, 2018). There are multiple positions to vote for: mayor, councillor, school trustee, as well as countless others depending on the municipality. It can also be difficult for even the most civically engaged citizen to find information on the various positions, who is running, and the political platforms of the various individuals running (Bueckert, 2018). In some municipalities voting information is tied to property tax mailouts, and as such, does not reach those who rent or do not pay for these services themselves. This contributes to a lack of information for citizens as in some areas like the MOK, media covers a region rather than any specific municipality and so information about a municipal election may not reach its intended audience or provide cues that would encourage people to go out and vote (Cutler, 2005). Municipalities in Nova Scotia are required by law to advertise municipal elections in the media and if the information about the election is

not easily accessible in traditional media, a less involved individual who cannot distinguish candidates from one another may fall back on the names that they recognize or may not vote at all (Municipal Elections Act, 2018, s.34; Gludovatz, 2014). The MOK should consider alternative ways of fully informing their voters, as relying on traditional media to inform voters about upcoming elections and providing information through tax mailouts may be a barrier to voter turnout.

3.1.2 Representation

Youth and racial minorities are more likely to feel ignored and misunderstood by government and, as such, are unlikely to feel a connection to politicians or electoral politics and less likely to see the point of voting if the government was not going to act with their needs in mind (Bastedo, 2015; Gludovatz, 2014). Bastedo (2015) found that having politicians who were willing to visit these communities and actively listen to the concerns of youth and racial minorities was enough for youth to sense a connection with the candidate regardless of age; however, youth are more likely to turn up to vote for a candidate that appears closer in age to them (Pomante & Schraufnagel, 2014). Indigenous communities were more likely to vote when the candidate was also Indigenous (Howe & Bedford, 2009). They were otherwise less likely to vote in an election because of the history of colonialism, exclusion, and abuse that they did not want to support by legitimizing through participation (Dabin, François, & Papillon, 2019). Indigenous communities should be considered alongside other marginalised communities in voter outreach and engagement because they face the same socio-economic factors as non-Indigenous communities (Howe & Bedford, 2009). This points to a need for emphasis on representing groups that are not traditionally represented in government in the developed voter outreach and engagement strategy for the MOK.

3.1.3 Youth Engagement

Young voters are less likely to be involved in electoral politics through mobilisation from political parties, candidates, or being socialised about politics through family (Elections Canada, 2015). Importantly, Elections Canada defines youth voters under the age of 30. They tend to focus on non-traditional forms of political engagement and feel that voting lacks efficacy in making change at the government level which may be due to a lack of education in schools on the importance of civic engagement making youth 20-30% less politically literate than older generations (Clarke, 2010; Stockemer, 2017). Increasing civic engagement through increasing political literacy may help raise youth voter turnout by 15% but it may not be enough to be considered a solution to engaging younger voters in elections (Stockemer, 2017). Nakhaie (2006) suggests that the way to increase voter turnout is to encourage civic engagement and several ways of doing that are through being engaged socially in activities like volunteering or achieving major life events such as getting married. Social engagement that was observed as having

increased civic engagement with past generations may not work for current youth as they are making the transition to adulthood slower than previous generations, and attaining milestones such as marriage and parenthood are significantly delayed compared to past generations (Clarke, 2010; Smets, 2012). Despite a lack of voting interest within youth demographics, there is evidence that registering youth to vote while in high school before they are eligible (ages 16-18) promotes voting later in life (Elections BC, 2018). This is evidence that the civic engagement and voter education is important in the MOK if the aim is to increase voter turnout in the Municipality.

3.1.4   Accessibility

Accessibility can affect the ability of community members to vote and has the potential to reduce voter turnout in the MOK. One of the most common reasons people provide for not voting in municipal elections is that they did not have enough time to vote. Giving people more time to vote through advanced voting reduces time as an accessibility factor, while also reducing pressure on poll staff on election day (Gludovatz, 2014). Likewise, offering more voting options during advanced voting, placing voting stations in high traffic areas, and letting people vote at any polling station makes voting more accessible for busy individuals (Halifax Regional Council, 2018). Physical access to voting stations is also a factor affecting voter turnout. In a survey conducted by the HRM it was determined that some of their polling stations in the 2016 municipal election had parking and accessibility issues that had created a barrier for individuals wishing to vote (Densmore, 2017). In an article on e-voting and disabled voters Spagnulo & Shanouda (2017) suggests that while e-voting is viewed as a potential solution to accessibility issues, elections should not move solely to online voting as it may marginalize individuals with disabilities by separating them from the rest of the voting population. Elections Canada (2018b) recommends taking reports on the level of accessibility at polling stations and working with disability groups and programs to raise awareness and build knowledge on the barriers for participating in electoral processes to address these kinds of issues. Ease of access to election information and online voting tools have been shown to help overcome accessibility issues, as websites can help make information more accessible with larger font sizes and more user-friendly colours and signage (Elections Canada, 2018b; Hendren, 2018). Using community food centers to distribute important election information can also help to make voting accessible to voters in low income areas and areas with low voter turnout by raising political literacy. (Dartmouth North Community Food Center, n.d.). This shows that there are ways to make voting more accessible to voters in the MOK as a way of increasing voter turnout.

3.1.5   Findings

A thorough review of literature found four themes that act as barriers and drivers to voter turnout in the municipality. Election structure and the method for disseminating election materials can attribute to confusion around voting in municipal elections that can deter potential voters. Likewise, voters from minority and underrepresented groups are less likely to vote if they cannot find candidates who they feel will provide representation of their groups in election candidates (Bastedo, 2015; Gludovatz, 2014). As society norms have evolved, reasons for youth to vote have changed and they are no longer as politically literate or civically engaged as older generations. Lastly, lack of accessibility to voter information, physical polling stations, and voting convenience have proven to be a barrier to individuals across all levels of physical ability and economic status.

Few drivers were determined for voters; however, according to the literature reviewed, there is evidence that voter education and utilizing local resources in communities can help to make elections more accessible and increase awareness and voter outreach and engagement in municipal elections. One recommendation from this literature review for the MOK is to consider the use of community centers to overcome the barrier of a lack of election information and representation. The MOK should also consider working alongside schools to increase civic engagement in youth within the municipality as part of their voter outreach and engagement strategy to combat the decline in youth voters.

3.2   Jurisdictional Scan

A broad jurisdictional scan of various local governments within Nova Scotia and across Canada reveals that local government elections generally have significantly lower voter turnout than provincial and federal elections. According to the most recent Elections Canada statistics, as of 2014, an average of 60.4% of eligible voters over the age of 25 voted in the last municipal election, while 74.6% of the same group voted provincially (Statistics Canada, 2019), and in 2015, 68.3% of all eligible citizens cast a ballot federally (Elections Canada, 2018a). In Nova Scotia, voter turnout amongst those over 25 in local elections was comparatively high at 67.7% as of 2014 (the highest in Canada), but was still much higher provincially at 77% (Statistics Canada, 2019), and of all eligible citizens in Nova Scotia, 70.6% voted federally in 2015 (Elections Canada, 2018a).

3.2.1.   Nova Scotia

While voter turnout rates are, on average, lower in municipal elections than in federal or provincial elections, we found that participation rates in municipal elections vary widely compared to provincial elections. Some municipalities continually see voter turnout as high as the federal or provincial averages,

including in Nova Scotia municipalities of Argyle, Richmond, and Clark's Harbour, for example (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019b). In 2016, other municipalities saw voter turnout for municipal elections drop as low as 20.3% (County of Colchester, Nova Scotia), while the MOK saw voter turnout at 29.5% in 2016 (Appendix D).

This provokes the question: what variables can explain this massive variation in voter turnout across municipalities? Are there tools which have been shown to successfully increase voter turnout being used by other local governments which could be applied in the MOK? Our findings suggest that in Nova Scotia, voting patterns are difficult to change, with failures to greatly increase voter turnout in recent elections apparent in many municipalities, regardless of their efforts to switch to e-voting (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019b), or to reinvent their citizen engagement strategies, as identified in Cumberland County (Municipality of the County of Cumberland, 2012), the Halifax Regional Municipality (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2018), and the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg (Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, n.d.-a).

While some local governments in Nova Scotia have had high voter turnout, not all voter outreach and engagement strategies in the Province have proven wildly successful at increasing voter turnout, and it is still worth comparing the efforts of those which have tried unsuccessfully to evaluate their efforts and learn from their mistakes. Further, while municipalities within Nova Scotia have shown limited success at influencing voter turnout, we find that municipalities in Ontario have had success. We will compare the engagement strategies used within Nova Scotia to those used elsewhere; by making this comparison we aim to determine whether the failure of local governments to influence voter participation rates within Nova Scotia is endemic to Nova Scotia as a province, or a failure of strategy and implementation.

Voter participation rates in local government elections have been trending downward across Nova Scotia since at least 2008, from an average of 52.6% in 2008 to 46.7% in 2016 (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019b). In the midst of this general downturn in participation rates, many local governments within Nova Scotia were seen to enact e-voting strategies, hoping this simple strategy would prove a quick key to increasing participation. However, as shown in a September 3, 2019 Request for Decision to the MOK Council, this has not been the case in Nova Scotia (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019b). In fact, the voter participation rate of municipalities which had e-voting available over the period of 2012 to 2016 was shown to have fallen from 59.3% in 2012 to 50.5% in 2016 (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019b).

Appended to the same document we found commentary and recommendations from Poll Clerks who staffed the 2016 election in the MOK – generally, the biggest complaint from residents was the lack of information available about candidates and their platforms (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019b). The concern of residents, that there is no information available about candidates, provides an interesting variable to examine. Although the MOK has its councillors' biographies and contact information readily available on its website, there is little to no news coverage of candidate profiles leading up to the election (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019a). In contrast, when examining the local government in Nova Scotia which has the highest average voter turnout over the period from 2008 to 2016, the Municipality of the District of Argyle, we find that the local newspaper gave close and direct coverage of each of the councillor's platforms before the election, providing a summary of each candidate's top three election issues, which went far beyond having biographical and contact information available on the municipal website (The Vanguard, 2010).

While the coverage of councillor profiles in the media may play some role in invigorating public participation, it is evidently not the only factor. When we examine voter turnout in the HRM, the local government with the highest amount of news coverage for councillors in Nova Scotia, we find that the HRM has a consistently low voter turnout, averaging 38.2% between 2008 to 2016 (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2019b). The HRM has actively tried to increase its participation rate over the same period, implementing its "Your Ideas, Your Vote" campaign in 2015, only to have its voter participation rate drop from 46.7% in 2012 to 31.8% in 2016, the lowest turnout in the past 20 years (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2018).

The "Your Ideas, Your Vote" campaign had three main pillars: reach people where they are, more informal conversations with voters, potential candidates, and other interested parties, and engage citizens in tangible ways whether or not they are eligible to vote (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2018). Interesting ideas which came out of the development of this strategy included: placing polling stations in high-traffic areas, increased activity on social media, more avenues for the public to find information and to ask questions about the election, the recruitment of immigrants and adolescents (16 and 17 years old) as elections staff, and the development of a communications plan (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2018).

Similarly, the Municipalities of Cumberland and Lunenburg counties have recently developed their own engagement plans. Lunenburg's plan has three pillars at its foundation, those being: first, to communicate using the right method and clear language; second, to receive feedback from the community, and use it to address policy issues, ideas and concerns; and third, to offer ways for citizens to directly inform

the policy-making process (Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, n.d.-b). Similarly, Cumberland County has a plan with three objectives, those being: to create informed citizens, staff, and Council, to ensure the municipality receives input from a broad section of the public, and to acknowledge and implement public feedback in decision-making (Municipality of the County of Cumberland, 2012).

While none of the strategic plans which were examined have proven to be successful at increasing voter turnout, they do provide us with interesting tactics which the MOK could consider implementing on a theoretical, though not empirical, basis. For instance, some ideas from Cumberland County's engagement strategy which could prove to be of use to the MOK include:

- Creating accounts on several different social media platforms that are regularly maintained and monitored and to begin using them as soon as possible to communicate with the public.
- Encouraging councillors to utilize social media platforms on some level in order to increase their contact with constituents.
- Holding an interactive school session with students in order to inform them of the role of municipal government. Because the MOK would like to target individuals between the ages of 18 and 40, hosting school sessions could be an avenue to connect young people with the municipality.
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While Cumberland County did not find these strategies to be successful at increasing voter turnout, the first two could have potential to address the concerns of residents voiced by MOK poll clerks following the 2016 election.

3.2.2   Maritime Provinces

As evidence of the potential for success of these tactics, we must turn the scope of our jurisdictional scan beyond Nova Scotia. Evidence of Canadian jurisdictions which have successfully raised voter turnout through increased public engagement is sparse, though not impossible to find. In our review of local elections in other provinces, we found that while some local governments have successfully increased voter participation through rigorous engagement, all of the examples we found were in cities, and they lack the size and rurality of the MOK, making them difficult to compare. For instance, some major Canadian cities such as Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto have parties at the municipal level, and while the successes and failures of these jurisdictions are still worth discussing, for obvious reasons some strategies may not be applicable to the MOK.

Case studies examining voter turnout in rural Canada are virtually nonexistent, however, some general information can be gathered. We first examined local governments in other maritime provinces, believing them to be a good proxy for Nova Scotia. Our findings suggest that local governments in New Brunswick and PEI face similar challenges to those in Nova Scotia, showing a similar lack of success at increasing voter participation, although offering us a wider range of tools to evaluate in our discussion.

New Brunswick has a similar population composition to Nova Scotia, and we find a similar pattern of widely varying voter turnout at local elections, with turnout rates in 2008 averaging 48% and ranging from as low as 20% in Woodstock to as high as 77% in Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska (Tindal, 2017). Following the 2016 municipal elections, with a voter turnout of 34.6%, New Brunswick's provincial Chief Electoral Officer noted that a big factor in explaining low voter turnout in municipal elections is that, "Nearly half of the mayoralty campaigns were filled by acclamations — 49 mayors acclaimed out of 105 municipal contests" (McHardie, 2016). Although all ridings in the MOK had some form of competition in 2016, this could be a valid consideration applicable to the MOK in future elections, as voter turnout may be thought of as skewed by uncontested ridings. When we exclude ridings in which there were no candidates running, we find that the participation rate was actually 48% in 2008 (Tindal, 2017).

Prince Edward Island (PEI) has been called the "beacon of engagement", being known for fostering high levels of engagement (Van Passen, 2011); however, when examining raising participation in local elections we find that the municipality faces similar challenges to those seen in Nova Scotia. For instance, Charlottetown has made significant attempts to modernize its engagement methods, yet from 2000 to 2018 participation varied a modest 4%, averaging 57% turnout over that period (Elections PEI, 2018). Although Charlottetown does not provide an example of a municipality which has managed to increase voter turnout, it has managed to maintain relatively high levels for many years, which could be in part to Charlottetown's outreach strategies.

Interestingly, in New Brunswick and in PEI, local elections are supported by the provincial agency responsible for elections, i.e. Elections New Brunswick, and Elections PEI. Elections PEI has developed its own engagement strategy to work alongside municipal outreach strategies, with tools aimed at increasing engagement amongst youth, including special registration days for university and college students, and coordinating a "social media blitz" to encourage voters to pre-register for the elections (Elections PEI, 2018). PEI provides an excellent example of how to effectively use the media to influence voter turnout, with CBC TV, radio, and web services that cover municipal election throughout the month leading up to the campaign, providing citizens with on and off camera interviews, and further coverage being provided

in the Guardian and Journal Pioneer (Elections PEI, 2018). While it may not be possible for the MOK to receive the same commitments from Elections Nova Scotia as local governments in PEI and New Brunswick receive, it is still worth noting that the province's involvement in local elections could be, in part, responsible for differences in participation rates between the provinces.

3.2.3   The Rest of Canada

While the similarities between Nova Scotia and the other Maritime Provinces make them excellent for comparison but beyond the Maritimes, due to cultural, economic, and geographic differences, it is more difficult to find examples of strategies which are both effective and can be readily applied in the MOK. In major cities such as Toronto, Calgary, and especially in Vancouver we find examples of robust outreach strategies which have been shown to be effective; however, some of the tools used may be beyond the capacity of the MOK.

For instance, Vancouver implemented a massive engagement strategy after its 2011 election, seeing an increase from 34.6% participation in 2011 to 43.4% in 2014 (Chief Elections Officer, 2015). The strategy included displaying ads at bus shelters, high traffic locations, and outdoor billboards. Vancouver also focused on a strong social media campaign, using hashtags, stickers for selfies, and trivia contests to entice voters. Maybe most strikingly, voters in Vancouver no longer need to vote at their ward's polling location but can instead vote at any polling station in the city – this is called a Vote Anywhere model and could prove to be of interest for the MOK (Chief Elections Officer, 2015). The Vote Anywhere model was made possible by using real-time electronic voter lists, which allowed for voters to be checked off the list at any polling station. This technology had been used in other municipality within B.C. prior to the Vancouver election, and is also used in HRM and Toronto (Chief Elections Officer, 2015).

Again, while implementing new technologies, such as e-voting and Vote Anywhere may be beyond the MOK's scope, certain cheaper methods, such as strong social media outreach, have been a reoccurring theme throughout this scan. This trend continues in Calgary, where the 2017 municipal election had a 58% voter turnout, higher than it has been for the past 40 years (Franklin, 2017). According to the Calgary YWCA, a selfie wall and drive-up voting booth were implemented in 2017 as tools aimed at increasing youth participation – both of which could be viable low-cost tools to increase participation in the MOK.

While Toronto has also had success at increasing voter engagement, with participation increasing 19.8% in 2014, much of its strategies are aimed at reaching an ethnically diverse and multi-lingual constituency, which is not applicable to the MOK. However, certain parts of Toronto's strategy, such as

hosting a "why voting matters to you" poster contest, or general door knocking could prove useful tools in the MOK (Hendren, 2018). Similarly, in Markham, Ontario, while the majority of its outreach is aimed at reaching its diverse constituency, certain ideas, such as hosting community and cultural events, meet and greets with candidates across the municipality, and engaging with places of worship and youth and social service organizations, could be applicable in the MOK (Kelly, 2018).

In sum, this review has found that there exists no one size fits all strategy to increasing voter outreach and engagement in local government across Canadian jurisdictions. Different municipalities are using different tools, and while these tools have not been shown to be effective one hundred percent of the time, they are still useful to consider when establishing a voter outreach and engagement strategy for the MOK. Our jurisdictional scan did not reveal any revelatory ideas, but it did confirm beliefs which we held already; for instance, it is difficult to change voter behaviour but campaigns that build understanding between councillors' platforms and constituents' needs while employing a strong media presence can improve voter turnout.

3.3   Focus Group

Our focus group provided insight into the issue of voter turnout in MOK, and we were able to hear what community members felt were drivers and barriers to voting in the municipal election and were also to hear what changes they think may impact voter outreach and engagement in future municipal elections. Surprisingly, most participants noted that they have always voted in provincial and federal elections, but when asked if they vote in municipal elections, and why, almost all participants said that they had not consistently voted in municipal elections. While the reasoning as to why – with some citing accessibly and others citing municipal voter apathy – were different, they all agreed that they now vote because they believe it is their civic responsibly to do so.

3.3.1   Drivers

Throughout the focus group, the only driver to voting in municipal elections that was mentioned by all revolved around an individual's civic duty and privilege. Most agreed that, while voters may not always agree with government decisions or views, it is a community member's responsibly to cast a vote. Additionally, participates commented on the fact that voting is a right that should not be taken lightly or overlooked, as there are many individuals who are not afforded the same right in other parts of the world. There were members of the municipal government participating in the focus group, and they noted a driver for voting was simply that they were voting for themselves, which although a driver, is not one that is useful for creating our voter outreach and engagement strategy.

3.3.2 Barriers

A plethora of barriers were brought up during the focus group, far exceeding the number of drivers that were discussed, which in and of itself is indicative of a voter outreach issue. The barriers that were mentioned by the focus group also showed clear themes (Table 1), which included information distribution, accessibility, candidates and representation, youth and civic engagement, polling stations, and municipal government's role. Notably, these barriers align with those that appeared in the literature review, and similarly, can be addressed through several of the strategies that were noted in the jurisdictional scan. Below, the key barriers that focus group participants brought up are categorized bases on these six themes.

Table 1: Themes of participants' identified barriers and drivers to voting

Theme	What participants said
Information distribution	Information is more readily available at the provincial and federal level, not municipal
	Lack of information about polling stations
	More information sharing for those not politically inclined
	Would like to see more mail outs; radio is not enough
	Polling stations not obvious;
Accessibility	Inability to leave work to vote or run for municipal government
	Proxy voting process is intense
	Polling stations too far away
Candidates and representation	Lack of information on candidates; must be brief but available
	Lack of parties and platforms, making it hard for electorates align their views with candidates'
	Candidates do not knock on everyone doors because of the remoteness
	Number of candidates running – either not enough or too many
	Not being able to meet and talk to candidates face-to-face
Youth and civic engagement	Not enough youth engagement
	Need to educate the youth
	Need to focus on the idea of civic responsibly
Polling stations	Polling stations not obvious
Municipal government's role	Electorates not understanding the role of municipal government and its importance to their everyday lives
	Municipal government lacks drama compared to provincial and federal elections

3.3.3   Engagement Tactics Suggested

Based on the above barriers to voter turnout, it is suggested that the outreach and engagement strategy attempt to address as many themes as possible. While some issues are beyond the control of MOK, such as the number of candidates running in each municipal election, many of the other barriers brought up can be addressed. Furthermore, there were specific recommendations brought up by focus group participants that are worth further investigation to determine the practically and usefulness at increasing voter turnout in the next election. These recommendations included free public transit the day of the election, a mobile voting station, election information stickers on green bins, more of a presence in elementary and high schools, e-voting, newspaper mailouts about candidates, better use of the MOK website, and a voter education course.

4. Discussion

The barriers and tactics that emerged from the literature review, jurisdiction scan, and focus group, were compared to ensure that the recommended tactics have been proven effective in addressing the identified barriers. This discussion will touch on the themes which we examined and assess how the tools, which will be discussed in the recommendations, can be applied to the issued raised in the themes. The limitations and delimitations will be looked as well since they had an effect on the results acquired.

4.1   Themes

The MOK has the potential to increase its voter turnout by addressing the issues raised in the themes. One set of issues we would suggest addressing is information distribution, which involves information about the political candidates, voting polls, and what the voting process entails in general. There is currently a disconnect in terms of information access which the focus group participants identified. The voters need to know who they are voting for and where the voting will take place. Information distribution should be carefully considered as a portion of potential voters could be missed if only one method is utilized. This is something we found support for in both our jurisdiction scan and literature review. There are several opportunities for the MOK to promote the election and share candidate information without social media. One of the limitations the MOK has is its rurality and small size, which could mean some ways of informing voters are not applicable. Making use of MOK's newsletters, as well as mailouts, would consider people that do not use social media or listen to the radio.

The analysis identified issues with accessibility, which include; lack of time to go to the polling station, distance to the polling station, lack of transportation, etc. These factors have an effect in deterring residents from voting since the municipality is still using ballot voting for its elections. Additionally, the polling stations should be accessible for people with disabilities in terms of assigning them to the location that is closest to them since they face more barriers, which could potentially prevent them from voting. The development of programs that enable people to vote when it is most convenient for them is something the larger jurisdictions in Canada such as HRM have found to be effective tools for addressing voting accessibility. The MOK could implement such programs and make transit free on the day of the election and increase the frequency of the bus on the polling station route.

With candidate involvement, this mirrors some of what was mentioned earlier about information access regarding voters not having enough information about who is running. The MOK is a small municipality, and with the election next year being its second mayoral election, there might still be some confusion about what each candidate is running for and where to vote. The tools for candidate involvement, which will be discussed below in the recommendations, are feasible for the MOK since it could easily be done in places regularly visited by residents. This includes libraries, community centers, even in front of grocery stores.

Lastly, the target group which the focus group was attempting to gather information from were those under the age of 40, since the municipality recognized that turnout is low for that demographic. This lack of engagement could be a result of several things. One of which could be no information about how to get involved in the MOK or during the election. The information gathered from the focus group identified the importance of educating voters under 40 about the importance of voting. The MOK has the capability to involved those under 40 during the election through working at the polls, and while there is no guarantee that it will significantly increase youth turnout, but it could have an effect in promoting civic engagement. Our research also shows that youth and visible minorities might feel ignored due to less involvement in the election process, and this can deter them from voting. Therefore, political candidates should consider the tools in the recommendations to rectify this issue.

4.2   Limitations

Limitations emerged within the literature review, jurisdictional scan, and focus group which should be taken into consideration.

4.2.1   Literature Review

There was a significant lack of literature on voting in rural communities in Canada, which meant that several of the barriers and drivers for voting in municipal elections that we discovered were not relevant to the MOK. Barriers like the municipal election structure in Nova Scotia and voter representation, and the factors influencing them are outside of the MOK's controls and cannot be changed by the MOK in the voter engagement and outreach strategy. Despite this, the drivers we identified can help to mitigate some of the effects of these factors on voter turnout.

4.2.2   Jurisdictional Scan

A major challenge was the lack of a voter outreach and engagement strategy for municipalities in Nova Scotia. A couple of the strategies which we found focused on increasing engagement with a brief reference made to increasing participation in elections. Even with the engagement strategy, there was no significant increase in their election turnout, which points to it not having been successful. Also, some of the successful recommendations proposed from voter outreach and engagement strategies outside Nova Scotia may not be applicable for MOK due to its size. As the strategies we found were from bigger cities that have more resources and are urbanized.

4.2.3   Focus Group

The plan was to initially conduct between two to four focus groups, but due to the lack of willing participants, only one was held. With the one group, there was only one person who fell within the age criteria we wanted. This was one of the few challenges we encountered in terms of having participants that were representative of the sample we needed to inform our research. We also only had two people from the MOK while the rest were councilors from other nearby townships. This lack of information from the core demographic we were targeting could have a slight effect on our work but could also reflect the larger issue of community engagement in the municipality.

4.3   Delimitations

Three delimitations that impacted our research were time, literature, and focus group participation. Due to the time constraint which came with the course, there was not enough time to find more participants to do a second focus group. If the course happened to run for two semesters instead of one, this likely would not have been a challenge. Since the focus of the resources was in Canada, literature from outside Canada had to be excluded even though it may have had some useful insights. The exclusion of people over 40 also had the effect of eliminating people who could have informed the research.

5. Recommendations

Based on the results of our literature review, jurisdiction scan, and focus group we have developed a five-part toolkit designed around the MOK circumstance. This toolkit is intended to provide a flexible set of tools that will allow the municipality to approach the challenge of improving voter outreach and engagement from multiple approaches. For this toolkit to be as effective as possible we would encourage the Municipality to employ all five parts in their outreach and engagement strategy as our research has shown that engagement strategies that focus too heavily on one aspect of outreach rarely produce the desired improvements in voter turnout.

5.1. Voter Outreach and Engagement Toolkit

Based on our findings, we assembled a toolkit of our recommendations for the MOK and grouped them under five different themes: traditional election outreach, digital outreach, candidate involvement, accessibility, and day of election.

5.1.1 Traditional Election Outreach

Providing easy access to voting information has been shown to improve voter turnout (Hendren, 2018). As such, we propose that the MOK should take advantage of traditional outreach tactics as part of their engagement plan. By employing both traditional alongside digital outreach strategies we believe MOK will be able to reach the widest number of potential voters. Tactic we propose include:

- Strategic placement of posters and other forms of advertisement a high traffic area within the Municipality, such as churches, grocery stores, community centers. The municipality may also wish to involve the community in the creation of such materials by way of poster creation contest and other similar activities (Hendren, 2018).
- Involvement of local news sources in media campaigns to raise awareness and share important information, such as radio stations, local newspapers (Gludovatz, 2014; Focus Group Participants).
- Mailing of mailouts containing important information on the election (Focus Group Participants).
- Distribution of information pamphlets by volunteers, candidates, and local businesses (Hendren, 2018).
- In the long term the Municipality may also wish to develop school visits and education programs to raise civic awareness and political literacy among youth (Stockemer, 2017).

5.1.2 Digital Outreach

While we do propose use of digital outreach it is worth noting that such strategies often do not result in the upswing of voter turnout that is expected. As a result, while we do consider the following tactics highly valuable any engagement strategy must also employ other non-digital tactics to improve voter turnout. In terms of digital outreach, we propose the following tactics:

- Use of social media to carry out awareness campaigns (Elections Prince Edward Island, 2018).
- Use of Municipal website to provide improved access to important election information (Hendren, 2018).
- Use of MOK website to provide improve access to candidate information and platforms (Hendren, 2018).

5.1.3   Candidate Involvement

Candidate involvement in raising election awareness should be one of the primary focuses of an outreach strategy. Candidate involvement will help raise awareness of individual platforms, identities, and serve to help encourage involvement among youth voters by forming more personal connections with politicians (Bastedo, 2015). To facilitate this, we propose the municipality encourage the follow types of candidates activates:

- Municipality hosted events such as meet and greet, public debates, and photo ops to allow candidates to better interact with voters (Ontario Library, n.d.).
- Door to door distribution of information pamphlets should be done in part by candidates themselves (Focus Group).

5.1.4   Accessibility

To encourage voter engagement, we propose that the Municipality employ several accessibly tactics. While on their own these tactics will not create an upswing in voter turnout, combining tactics that making voting easier with tactics that increase political involvement and awareness should have a positive impact on voter turnout in the Municipality. We propose the following accessibility tactics:

- The development of a vote anywhere program, in which voters would be able to vote at any poll booth of their choosing (City of Vancouver, 2015).

- The creation of a mobile poll to allow for easier access for those who live in retirement homes, hospitals, or locations whose residents may not be able to easily travel to their voting poll (Focus Group).
- Free transit on election day to allow for better access to voting polls (Kembhavi, 2013).

5.1.5   Day of Election

Aside from outreach and engagement leading up to the election there are also tactics we would propose the Municipality employ on the day of the election to help raise awareness. We would suggest the following tactics:

- The use of visual cues to improve election awareness, such as I voted stickers and other similar paraphernalia (Thompson, 2012).
- The municipality should take care to make sure that the voting polls are marked with clear signage and easily accessible to all members of the community (Elections Canada, n.d.).
- We would finally suggest that the Municipality hire youth to work voting polls as a means of involving their age group more civically engaged and involved in the election process (Vasilogambros, 2018).

6.   Conclusion

Voter outreach and engagement is a complex issue, and even in cases we observed where municipal voter turnout increased, it was hard to determine how much of an impact voter outreach and engagement had, or what specific factors of outreach and engagement were successful. However, in this report we have outlined numerous actions that the MOK could take to increase voter turnout, and we are confident that these actions will lead to a rise in voter turnout, in addition to having an electorate that is more aware of and engaged with municipal affairs. What follows are the next steps we believe the MOK should take.

Some of our recommendations for voter outreach and engagement strategies we think are quite feasible in terms of cost and time commitment. Examples would be placing election posters in high-traffic areas, reaching out to local media to encourage them to cover municipal elections, and provide election information to voters, mailing out mailouts with election information to voters, visual cues such as "I voted" stickers, clear signage for polling locations and hiring youth to work in municipal elections to get them engaged. Some recommendations, such as going to local schools to talk to youth about municipal government and elections, are more of a long-term strategy to increase voter turnout in the MOK but should

not be discounted. Making transit free on election day and creating a mobile poll for those in assisted living homes or hospitals are supported by literature and were supported enthusiastically by the focus group.

In the Appendix, we have attached an Evaluation Matrix as well, which we recommend to the MOK for reference when choosing which voter outreach and engagement strategies to implement. It includes relevant evaluation criteria (voter turnout, cost, barriers and drivers to voting), and for each of these criteria, key questions, specific sub-questions, data sources, data collection methods/tools, indicators/success standards, and methods for data analysis. For any voter outreach and engagement tactic the MOK may choose to implement, they can use the Evaluation Matrix to assess its success.

We recommend that the MOK evaluate the effectiveness of this voter outreach and engagement strategy after the 2020 municipal election, to see if voter turnout among youth in the MOK saw an increase, and if it did, then to identify which strategies may have been responsible for the increase.

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APPENDIX A – Focus Group Guide

Questions for Focus Groups

1. Do you vote in municipal elections?

   - If you do not vote, what are your reasons for not voting?
   - If you do vote, what are your reasons for voting?

2. During the last municipal election did you see or receive information about the election and how to vote? For example, what information did you receive pertaining to:

   - Candidate platforms and importance relative to your needs
   - Location of polling stations
   - Election date and advanced polling dates
   - If you saw or received any information, did you find any methods were particularly effective? Ineffective?

3. What method of receiving information would have the broadest reach to potential voters throughout the municipality? How do you, your family, and friends access information, and which communication tools do you find most appealing?

   - Print media
   - Radio
   - Social Media/online resources (what about PlaceSpeak?)
   - Posters in community centres, grocery stores, common gathering places

4. What kinds of barriers to voting do you foresee if any i.e. Distance, time, etc.?

   - If so, how would you propose that the municipality help you and others overcome these barriers?
   - * Do you think free public transit for the day would help to overcome these barriers?

5. What other barriers have influenced your decision to vote, and how can the municipality work to help overcome said barriers? What else would increase the likelihood that you decide to vote in the next municipal election?

Additional questions depending on time:

   - Do you think it is important to vote in Municipal elections?
   - What would you think about busses being free on election day? Would you use this service if it was available? Do you know of anyone who might benefit from a free bus ride?
   - Are there any cultural, social or economic reason you see as a barrier to voting?

APPENDIX B – Evaluation Matrix

Voter Toolkit Evaluation Matrix

Relevant Evaluation Criteria	Key Questions	Specific Sub Questions	Data Sources	Data collection methods/tools	Indicators/ Success Standard	Method for Data Analysis
Voter Turnout	Did the percentage of voter turnout increase, decrease, or remain the same?	If voter turnout increased how many of those were youth?	Municipal election results	Municipal voting statistics	Voter turnout increased	Quantitative analysis of election results by demographic
		Who voted compared to past elections within the 18-40 age category			Youth voter turnout increased	
Cost	Were the engagement strategies worth the cost?	Did they help to achieve increased voter turnout in the Municipality	N/A	N/A	Implementation of strategies was relative to cost	N/A
		What drove people to vote?				
Barriers and Drivers to voting	Did the toolkit address barriers and drivers to voting in the MOK?	Where there any improvements over past elections?	Community members in MOK	Follow up focus group with youth and target demographics after the 2020 election	Barriers to voting were addressed and drivers were applied effectively	Deductive analysis using questions found in the initial focus group guide to determine effectiveness to address voter engagement
					Community feels civically engaged and has few suggestions for drivers for the following election	

APPENDIX C – PESTE Synthesis

Developing an outreach and engagement strategy in the MOK is impacted by many threats and opportunities. The forces that impact outreach and engagement strategy the most in the MOK are political, social, and technological in origin. The primary factors that affect outreach and engagement strategy in the MOK are the relationship between the current political structure and available technology to share information, significant differences in social and economic convenience across the municipality that tie into election environments, and the interaction of civic engagement and socio-economic status in the political landscape. These factors will be assessed as threats and opportunities to the MOK's overall outreach and engagement strategy.

The relationship between political, social, and technological forces comes into play with the methods of distributing election materials to voters as a threat to voter turnout and engagement. While the MOK, like all municipalities in Nova Scotia, hold their own separate elections, they are subject to the Municipal Elections Act (2018) which determines how certain aspects of local elections are organized such as the date and election information; all municipal elections in the province are to be held every four years, on the third Saturday in October and jurisdictions are expected to provide information about location and time through a medium of their choice. As municipal elections are run concurrently in Nova Scotia, they must compete with other municipalities that fall within the same coverage area for the use of traditional media in sharing pertinent information about their election. Media outlets must determine which aspects of a municipality's election they are willing to cover in each county and are a threat to voter turnout, as their rationale for covering or not covering an election is from an economic standpoint rather than from the inherent need for communicating and informing voters (Gludovatz, 2014). Traditional methods of sharing voter and election information may yet be needed in the MOK due to the barrier of inconsistent internet access and internet illiteracy. This factor is due to change in the next two years, as 85% of the county is due to receive update internet services (McPhee, 2019). Improved internet access means an increase in people in the county able to access online election information (Blais & Loewen, 2011). Although access to election information is a barrier to voter engagement, the opportunity for voter participation in elections is greater when you include the potential of online social platforms to engage and inform MOK electors (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

Polling locations are a primary force to the voter turnout and engagement strategy as in some of the more rural districts within the MOK, voters were quite far from their designated polling station which becomes a barrier for both those who drive and those who do not. Distance to a polling station and availability of transit and time to get there can be key threats to whether a citizen decides to go out and

vote on election day (Haspel & Knotts, 2005). With a growing elderly population in the MOK, polling stations become inaccessible when they are not available by transit and they do not have access to someone able to drive them (Kembhavi, 2013). For those who work in the agricultural industry or commute a long distance for work, taking the time out of their day to go vote can be impossible (V. Brooke, personal communication, Sep. 23, 2019) or not worth it if the time spent voting negatively impacts the rest of an individual's daily activities (Dyck & Gimpel, 2005). Considering whether to go out and vote can also be affected by the weather (Eisenga, Grotenhuis, & Pelzer, 2011) as people are more likely to feel that voting in municipal elections is not as significant as provincial or federal election.

The recent recognition by the MOK that voter turnout is an issue and the following research into community engagement and outreach and development of a community engagement strategy is a positive political force (Municipality of the County of Kings, 2017). The MOK has the ability to make changes to community engagement and is willing to work towards engaging the communities in the council by addressing the issues that affect their civic participation which is an opportunity to tackle voter frustration and apathy. Factors such as poverty, low levels of education, and unemployment, and health can have a negative influence on voter turnout and are serious problems for many indigenous and non-indigenous communities in Nova Scotia ("Top Five Issues," 2017; Howe & Bedford, 2009). Kushner and Siegel (2008) identify non-voters as having one of three reasons for not voting: a lack of interest, negativity towards candidates, and being too busy/personal reasons. This includes youth voters who may feel disenfranchised by the current political system and feel as though their vote does not count amongst those from older generations (Berry, 2014). The MOK's utilization of a community engagement strategy is an opportunity to encourage community members to feel a sense of belonging and civic duty in their district which in turn makes them more likely to go out and vote (Nakhaie, 2006).

The interaction of these factors means that the MOK has several opportunities for increasing voter turnout through a voter outreach and engagement strategy. Firstly, while current municipal election trends of using traditional media for election information persists, expected developments for internet access and online technology in the county will allow for greater participation in the events leading up to a municipal election as information becomes more widespread and easily accessible. The impacts of polling station locations on willingness to go out and vote and voting accessibility are threats that have the potential to negatively influence other forces such as civic duty and voter apathy. Lastly, by actively implementing the MOK's community engagement strategy and regularly having positive interactions with community members addressing their concerns, the MOK can increase voter interest and develop an effective voter turnout and engagement strategy for the 2020 municipal election.

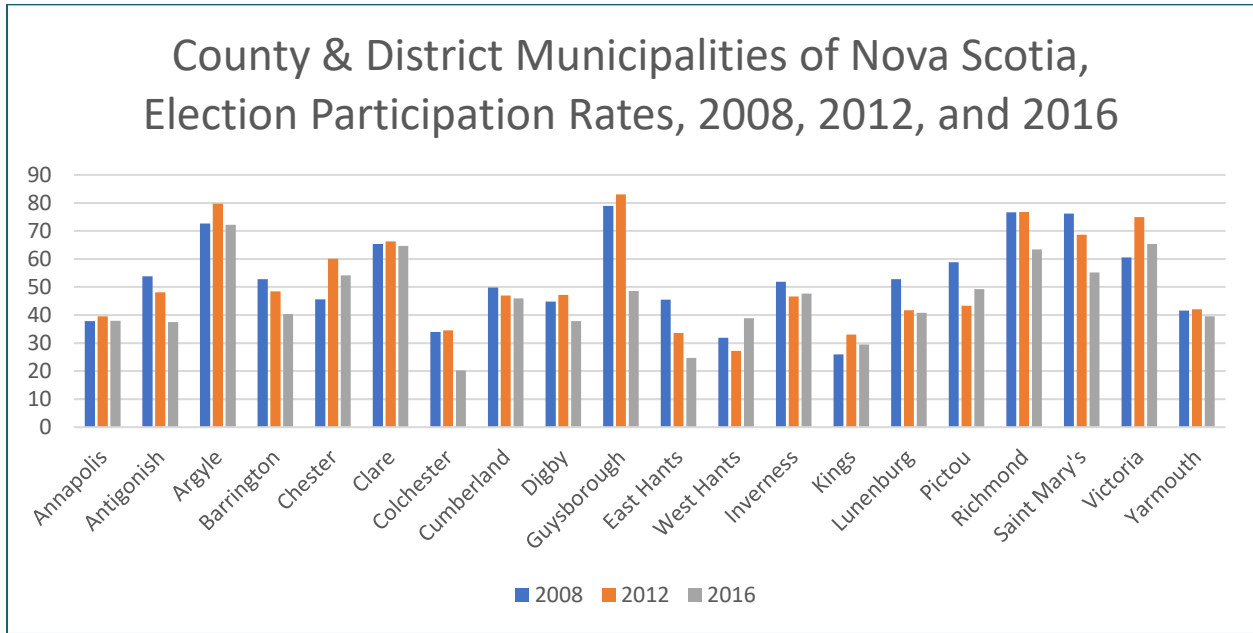**APPENDIX D – Voter Participation Rates in Nova Scotia for Municipal Elections**

Figure 1: Election participation rates in Nova Scotia's Municipalities as identified by the Municipality of the County of Kings (2019b)