**Voter Registration in Saskatchewan:**

**A Discussion Paper on the Advantages, Disadvantages and Costs of Enumeration and a Permanent Register of Voters**

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# Executive Summary

Since 2004 there have been calls for a permanent register of voters to replace enumeration as the preferred approach to registering voters in Saskatchewan. This move was recommended by an all-party committee looking at amendments to *The Election Act, 1996* and by the head of Elections Saskatchewan. The change was also heralded as an important amendment by the Minister of Justice at the time. Elections Saskatchewan has been preparing for the prospect of this change. Their election management information system was developed to accommodate a permanent register of voters and they have been attempting to better position themselves for the transition by recommending other legislative changes that would support the introduction of a register. While some of the supporting changes, such as set date elections and the ability to conduct enumeration outside of the Writ period, have been put in place, there is still no authority to create and maintain a permanent register of voters for Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is one of only three other Canadian provinces and territories that do not compile their voters list using a permanent register. The other jurisdictions are Yukon and Manitoba. A permanent register for Manitoba may, however, be imminent as the Manitoba Legislature recently passed legislation requiring the Chief Electoral Officer to examine and report on the establishment of a permanent voters list for elections in the Province.

Voter registration is important to determine whether individuals qualify to vote. It serves to protect the integrity of the voting process by ensuring that only eligible voters will be given access to the voting booth. The basic approach is to prepare a comprehensive list of the names of people who meet established voter eligibility criteria. The list is then used at the polls to screen prospective voters – ensuring that only those entitled to vote are given a ballot and that people are only permitted to vote once. The voters list has also become a critical tool for candidates and political parties for purposes of identifying, tracking and campaigning for voter support. It is also essential for election administrators in establishing polling divisions and for estimating how many polling stations are needed and where to deploy election day workers.

The traditional approach to compiling the list of voters has been through door-to-door enumeration. With this approach, either before the Writs of election have been issued or after the election has been called, enumerators visit each residence in the Province, collect voter information and prepare a voters list. The list is usually discarded after the election and the process begins again about four years later in preparation for the next election. This is a labour intensive and costly activity. Lifestyle changes have resulted in fewer people being found at home when the enumerator calls. People are also becoming more reluctant to open their doors to someone they do not know. In addition, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to recruit enumerators. The overall quality of the voters list can suffer from all of these factors. For these reasons, most jurisdictions in Canada have transitioned to continuously updated permanent registers of voters.

A permanent register of voters is a regularly updated database of eligible voters. It is usually produced in the first instance from a “final” enumeration and then is updated and maintained on an ongoing basis using a variety of public sector data sources. In addition to the names and addresses of voters, a permanent register will usually contain date of birth information and may provide a unique identification number that can be used for record linking. Voters lists can be produced from a permanent register whenever they are necessary for use in provincial or local elections or by-elections and can be distributed between elections for use by Members and political parties. Up-to-date lists can also be used to revise polling division boundaries between elections or when constituency boundaries change as a result of redistribution.

In terms of the currency of voter information, it would appear that enumeration has a slight advantage over a permanent register. This is because enumeration usually occurs in such close proximity to the election event. A voters list compiled through enumeration will suffer less from the degradation that naturally occurs over time as a result of address changes and deaths. On the other hand, the coverage or completeness of a voters list produced from a permanent register can be superior to an enumerated list, principally because it is being continuously updated and is not being recollected before each election. The coverage of a voters list prepared through enumeration is also dependent on the completeness of the enumeration effort and is subject to a variety of factors that may not always be within the control of election administrators. Voters lists produced through enumeration and from a permanent register are both subject to a certain amount of error, albeit from different sources. It is difficult to say that one method is more accurate than the other.

Security of voters lists and privacy of the information they contain should always be a concern. Voter information collected through enumeration goes through many hands while it is being collected and data-entered before being compiled into a voters list. While security and privacy breaches are rare, this increases the risk that it may be misused. Once the information is in the form of a voters list both an enumerated list and a list produced from a permanent register are subject to the same security threats.

Both permanent registers and enumeration are very good methods of capturing diverse demographic segments of society. It is not a major concern for either registration approach but both are prone to systemic barriers to full inclusion.

For some jurisdictions, the potential for shortening the election period through moving to a permanent register can result in cost savings for election administrators, as well as political participants. With the requirements for revision, nomination and ever expanding voting opportunities, it is unlikely that Saskatchewan will benefit from shortening its election period further by moving to a permanent register.

The major benefit of establishing a permanent register of voters is significant cost avoidance. Saskatchewan’s last enumeration cost $2.56 million. With continued enumeration, these costs will be incurred at least every 4 years and will only increase over time. Saskatchewan’s enumeration cost per voter compares favourably to other jurisdictions that still enumerate, but the majority of these costs would not need to be incurred with a move to a permanent register. The initial development costs of establishing a permanent register for Saskatchewan have been estimated at $100,000. This minimal amount of upfront expenditure is possible because Elections Saskatchewan already has an election management system that can house records that form the permanent register. The other cost component of a permanent register is the ongoing maintenance. The annual costs of keeping a permanent register up-to-date are estimated to be $328,400. Over a four-year election cycle, cost savings of moving to a permanent register would be over three-quarters of a million dollars.

If the decision is made to move to a permanent voter register for Saskatchewan, legislative changes will have to be made to *The Election Act, 1996* to enable register development. There will also need to be one more enumeration to establish the base of voters that will be continuously maintained.

# 1.0 Introduction

In the 2004 report of Saskatchewan’s all party committee on Revisions to *The Election Act, 1996*, it was unanimously recommended that a permanent register of voters be developed. The development of such a register was to be based on a final enumeration completed outside an election period. When other amendments to *The Election Act, 1996* were introduced in the Legislative Assembly in 2005, the Minister of Justice at the time called the introduction of a permanent list of voters the most important amendment to *The Election Act, 1996*. It was highly anticipated that enabling legislation and regulations would soon follow but no further provisions were enacted to permit the development of a permanent register of voters for Saskatchewan.

Following the 2007 provincial general election, the Acting Chief Electoral Officer recommended to Saskatchewan’s Legislative Assembly that legislative amendments be developed to permit the creation of a permanent register of voters. *The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, 2007* was amended in 2008 to give Saskatchewan a 4-year set date schedule for their elections, setting the date of their next election as November 7, 2011. With a predictable date for its next election, this paved the way for Elections Saskatchewan to conduct a province-wide enumeration before the Writs of election were issued. In August 2011, just prior to the November 7, 2011 general election, regulations were put in place to permit enumeration to occur outside the Writ period.

On February 7, 2012, the Acting Chief Electoral Officer attended a Board of Internal Economy meeting to review Elections Saskatchewan’s 2012–2013 budget request. At that time, the Minister of Justice asked Elections Saskatchewan for an analysis of the costs of a permanent register as compared with enumeration.

This paper begins with a general discussion of the purposes and importance of voter registration. The two dominant approaches in Canada to voter registration - enumeration and a permanent register – are then described and compared.

This discussion also considers the recent challenges of enumeration and how this method of registering voters has changed over the years leading to the establishment of permanent registers in most provinces and territories. Several examples of current practices, trends and the legal underpinnings of voter registration from federal, provincial and territorial levels are discussed.

The advantages and disadvantages of each of these methods of voter registration are presented and the benefits of each approach are weighed. The paper then outlines the cost of enumeration in Saskatchewan and how this would compare to the estimated cost of developing and maintaining a permanent register of voters.

Finally, the paper looks at some important requirements for establishing a permanent register of voters and considers whether those requirements can be met in Saskatchewan.

# 2.0 Purpose of Voter Registration

The fundamental purpose of a voter registration system is to determine whether individuals qualify as voters according to the eligibility criteria established in law and, thereby, prevent voter fraud. It serves to maintain the integrity of the voting process by restricting access to the voting booth. This is accomplished by compiling a comprehensive list of the names of people who are eligible to vote. The list is prepared in advance of the election and is used at the voting station to screen prospective voters. A properly prepared voters list ensures that only those people entitled to vote in a given jurisdiction can do so, and that they can only vote once. It prevents people who are not entitled to vote from voting and contributes to the overall validity of the election process. Lavoie (1995) refers to voter registration as the basis of the democratic process. “Without it, citizens could not legitimately cast the ballot to which they are entitled.”

Lists of eligible voters can also facilitate voting operations by helping election administrators determine how many voting stations they need to set up, how many election workers they need to hire, and to calculate voter turnout. A comprehensive voters list also reduces the number of people that have to register to vote on election day and, thereby, alleviates line-ups and congestion for others. Voters lists are also used by parties and candidates for political purposes - to mobilize the participation of voters during campaigns and between elections. In Saskatchewan, the lists can be used by registered political parties and candidates for communicating with voters, including for soliciting contributions, recruiting party members and campaigning. During elections the lists are used by parties to identify, track and mobilize party supporters. They can also be used by Members of the Legislative Assembly between elections for carrying out their duties and functions. In some jurisdictions, such as British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick, the lists are also used by government agencies to help generate jury pools.

Voters lists, in various forms, have been prepared in Canada since the late 1800s. Today, there are two basic methods used to register voters. One is to conduct an enumeration and the other is to develop and maintain a continuous or permanent list of voters. Both methods assume that government has primary responsibility for ensuring that all eligible citizens are included on the voters list.

# 3.0 Enumeration

Since 1917 and until very recently, voters were registered for territorial, provincial and federal elections through enumeration. For election administrators, this involved subdividing larger political areas variously called constituencies, electoral districts or divisions into smaller geographic units and appointing enumerators to visit each household within an assigned area. The enumerators would go door-to-door to establish a resident’s eligibility, collect the necessary voter information and compile a list of those entitled to vote. The process often required several visits to find people at home. This is always necessary to compile a comprehensive list. Enumeration was usually accomplished within a 10 day to two-week period post-Writ, i.e. after the election had been called. Part of the reason for the tradition of post-Writ enumeration is that, until very recently, the exact date of an election was unknown in most provinces, territories and at the national level.

The time period for enumeration has lengthened over the years in several jurisdictions since, in some cases, the period was as short as 4 days. The lists resulting from enumeration were used solely for the election at hand, or possibly for another proximal event such as a by-election, and then discarded. Until 2011, Saskatchewan’s *Election Act, 1996* required an enumeration to be conducted immediately following the issue of the Writ. However, with the passage of new *Enumeration Regulations[[1]](#footnote-1)* in 2011, enumerations can now take place during a two and a half week period prior to the date set for a general election.

Back in 1987, Boyer noted that, “No other country has a system where the lists of voters are prepared afresh, on a systematic basis, and so close to the time of voting as Canada.” The same point regarding the proximity of enumeration to the date of elections was made in the 1991 report of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. This report also noted the uniqueness among western democracies of Canada’s state sponsorship of voter registration.

In the U.S. the onus for voter registration has been placed entirely on citizens themselves or on third party sponsored registration drives. One-quarter to one-third of all eligible Americans remain unregistered and are unable to cast a ballot. While many states are only now in the process of changing their practices, the majority of Americans are still required to attend a government office and fill out a paper form when they become eligible to vote - and they repeat the process whenever their address changes[[2]](#footnote-2). The system is highly decentralized with over 5,000 municipal and county election offices assembling and managing their own local lists which are aggregated into databases of all registered voters in each state. There is no government managed national voter registration system in the U.S. and no government entity maintains a national database. Rather, political parties and private political data management firms assemble the state lists to create a database of approximately 180 million eligible voters.

In Australia, voter registration is compulsory[[3]](#footnote-3). Door-to-door enumeration was conducted every 2 years until 1999. This was deemed to be a very inefficient approach to voter registration since 60% – 80% of residents made no changes to their voter registration cards and 15% – 20% of the resulting list was outdated during the two-year period between enumerations. Following a study of Canada’s current voter registration system, Australia has since moved to a system of continuous registration that relies heavily on the regular collection of information from other government agencies to keep their voters list up-to-date. However, once unregistered citizens and voters whose information requires updating are identified, the individual must still complete and submit a voter registration form to election officials before their name can be placed on the list.

In Canadian jurisdictions where enumeration is still required[[4]](#footnote-4), the responsibility to get one’s name placed on the voters list rests almost entirely on the efforts of independent election administration offices. Following enumeration, however, the onus to get registered shifts somewhat to the voter during a shorter period of revision. Revision is similar to an appeal process whereby voters not enumerated may be registered and objections to those on the lists may be heard. The responsibility to get registered only becomes entirely that of the individual during the voting period where qualified voters left off the list can usually be registered at the polls through various procedures, such as providing proof of identity and residence, swearing an oath or having another voter vouch for their identity. Vouching is not permitted in all Canadian provinces and territories.

The enumeration process relies heavily on the element of trust – trust that people will honestly report to enumerators their citizenship, residency within the polling division, and age - and thus their eligibility to vote. Enumerators are not permitted to challenge the veracity of the information they receive at the doorstep. The system is prepared to tolerate a minimal number of ineligible voters who falsely report their voter qualifications. Suspect entries on the voters list may be challenged during revision and at the voting station on election day.

# 4.0 The Challenges of Enumeration

The process of going door-to-door to register voters and create a voters list for specific use in elections has met several challenges in recent years. Ever emerging, social, demographic, technological and political changes have made the enumeration approach to voter registration more difficult. These challenges have been reported for decades by election administrators, as well as academics who have studied this method of voter registration.

# 4.1 Access to Voters

It has been widely reported that it has become increasingly more difficult for enumerators to find people at home despite multiple visits at various times of the day. This concern was noted as far back as 1991 in the report of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Large numbers of voters appear to be absent from their homes - quite possibly away for work or lifestyle-related reasons. There are also many residents who simply refuse to answer the door. The Royal Commission report identified new Canadians as among those most hesitant to respond to unannounced callers representing the state, given their experiences in the countries from which they came. Others have identified this as a problem with seniors and those who live alone. It has also been reported by enumerators and returning officers in Saskatchewan and other places that it is becoming more difficult to obtain the contact information for persons in control of multiple dwelling sites and cooperation in gaining access to residential units occupied by voters. While this phenomenon is not new, it is becoming more problematic as the prevalence of multi-residential buildings increases in most urban areas. Despite the fact that the legislated provisions ensuring access rights supersede rules adopted by private organizations, many condominium corporations have developed *ultra vires* bylaws designed to prevent enumerator and candidate access. There have even been instances where enumerator access has been obstructed or denied to First Nation communities, mobile home parks, seniors’ residences, religious communities and gated neighbourhoods. It is difficult to determine how much undercounting results from restrictions on access.

# 4.2 Privacy and Personal Safety

It has been reported that an increasing number of residents, particularly the elderly and those living in urban centres, refuse to answer their doors out of fear for their personal safety or for reasons of privacy. The concern for personal safety has also been shared by enumerators who are required to work during the day and evenings visiting inner city and high crime neighbourhoods, remote locations, and households with guard dogs. Every election there are isolated reports of enumerators who are verbally abused or accosted. Candidates are also not immune from threats and abuse when they campaign door-to-door[[5]](#footnote-5).

# 4.3 Recruiting and Retaining Enumerators

There is also the challenge of recruiting, training and mobilizing the small army[[6]](#footnote-6) of enumerators required for the job. It is becoming more difficult to find a sufficient pool of competent individuals willing to perform this type of work. This problem has been encountered by election administrators for some time across the country and was noted in the report of the 1991 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Considering that the majority of election workers tend to be female, the trend toward more women working outside the home has, no doubt, played a major role in reducing the pool of available enumeration staff. The economic necessity for some people to hold multiple part-time jobs is also likely to have affected the supply of this type of labour.

The scores of individuals hired for this job usually do this kind of work for a two-week period every 4 years or so. While some individuals have done the job before, many have not. They receive minimal training and minimal pay. Frequently workers come to training, receive their enumeration materials, and then fail to do the work or perform their job so poorly that they need to be replaced. This problem is compounded when the date of the election in unknown and enumeration must take place after the Writs have been issued. In such cases there is little time for recruitment and proper training of enumerators. Every election, major areas or streets are left unenumerated and this can affect the enfranchisement of certain categories of people such as those who are economically disadvantaged, First Nations communities, new Canadians, students and voters who travel with their occupations.

There are also age and residency restrictions that reduce the pool of potential workers. In most jurisdictions, enumerators must be eligible voters living in the constituency, which means that they must be Canadian citizens, at least 18 years old and residents of the constituency. These restrictions on eligibility apply in Saskatchewan.

# 4.4 Rural vs. Urban Enumeration

There are unique difficulties experienced in both urban and rural settings. The difficulties of conducting a thorough enumeration in urban settings have long been observed and noted in the annual reports of election administrators. However, it is becoming increasingly more problematic to obtain complete coverage in rural areas as well. One significant factor that can affect enumeration in rural areas is the trend toward more farm families working off the farm and outside of their communities. The vast distances between residences, the time required for enumeration travel and the low payment received for this task, are additional obstacles to a comprehensive rural enumeration. The map products available for some communities can also affect enumeration. In some remote northern constituencies there are few paved roads, no roads into some communities, and weather can often prevent fly-in visits.

Many election statutes appeared to recognize this imbalance and attempted to make accommodations for the unique hurdles faced in rural areas during enumeration. For example, enumerators were usually not required to make as many visits to rural residences to register voters, enumeration by telephone was sometimes permitted, and some jurisdictions allowed voter registration on election day only in rural polling divisions. These accommodations for the difficulty of rural enumeration can lead to the collection of less accurate and less complete information concerning rural voters. In Saskatchewan’s 2011 election, the pre-Writ enumeration period that followed Labour Day coincided with the fall harvest. This made it difficult to find enumerators to do the job and difficult to find residents at home to enumerate in some rural areas.

# 4.5 Quality of the Information Collected

A complete provincial enumeration is a massive undertaking for returning officers to manage. Considerable time pressure exists to compile a comprehensive and accurate preliminary list of voters for distribution to candidates and parties and for use at the advance and regular polls during the election. The legibility, accuracy and overall quality of the information collected are always problematic. The continual re-collection of voter information required by enumeration can introduce errors in the data that may have been accurately captured on previous voters lists. This is not to say that the quality of the information collected has necessarily diminished over the years – it has probably improved from the days when the enumerator was responsible for submitting an alphabetized, handwritten or typed list of voters at the completion of their duties. Now, however, with the information entered into computerized databases, it is much easier to detect duplicate, incomplete, missing and otherwise erroneous records. Correcting these errors is not always possible when the time frame for enumeration is tight.

# 4.6 Labour Costs

Elections are a labour intensive activity. Approximately 75% of the cost of elections goes to fees and salaries. Door-to-door enumeration accounts for a very large portion of these labour costs. Fees and wages paid to workers, training and travel can cost as much or more during enumeration as the cost to conduct the election itself. Efforts to recruit and retain competent enumerators have often focused on increasing the remuneration for this type of work. This strategy is only sometimes successful in achieving a sufficient and stable workforce, but it always adds to the burgeoning cost of elections. Provinces and territories often find themselves trying to compete with the rates paid to census workers, and federal and civic enumerators.

# 4.7 Summary

There is an inherent inefficiency in collecting voter information through enumeration and then discarding the list that has been compiled. Most of the information collected about voters does not change from one election to another. There will always be new voters added to the rolls who gain eligibility by virtue of age, residency or citizenship, and others who must be removed from the list due to loss of residency or death. New housing stock will also continue to be added and some residential properties will be demolished. This is vital information that must be captured for the voters list to be an accurate compilation of citizens entitled to vote.

Most changes to a voters list are due to internal mobility - the movement of voters from one address to another within the province or constituency. There is a fundamental link between voters and their addresses because where they live determines where they vote. Elections Saskatchewan must not only know which citizens are eligible to vote, but where the voter lives at any given time. No voter registration system can accurately track all the demographic and eligibility changes that occur in the intervening time between elections, but there is considerable duplication of effort in an approach to voter registration that begins with a blank slate before each election and continually compiles lists of names and addresses which, for the most part, do not change.

# 5.0 Addressing the Challenges of Enumeration

The detailed prescriptive nature of elections legislation has stymied the ability of election administrators to respond quickly to the challenges of enumeration by restricting the exercise of discretion[[7]](#footnote-7). Important policy, procedural and practical innovations are slow to be introduced because usually the law must be amended to permit their implementation. Fortunately, election administrators across the country have been persistent in making recommendations to their legislatures or parliament for statutory change that would enable the processes of enumeration and conducting elections to keep pace with societal change. The following are some of the changes and innovations that have been made to address the challenges faced during enumeration.

# 5.1 Improving Enumerator Access

There is not a lot that can be done within the context of enumeration to resolve the issues of not finding voters at home or people not answering their door. Election laws can, however, help by prescribing the number of visits that must be made, the times of the days that a household must be canvassed, or permit enumeration over the telephone. Election administrators have also begun to better advertise an upcoming enumeration and supply enumerators with cards to leave in the residents’ mail box indicating that an enumerator has visited and that the resident must call the returning office to become registered. Also, enumerators are being provided with identification to show at the door or they may be outfitted with vests, jackets or carry bags that provide visual identification of their role and purpose.

The challenge of enumerator (and candidate) access to apartments and other multi-residential buildings has largely been addressed through the introduction of laws permitting access to residential units for the purpose of enumeration and laws prohibiting obstruction or interference with an enumerator who is performing his or her duties. Such provisions now exist in the elections legislation of most jurisdictions, including Saskatchewan’s *Election Act, 1996[[8]](#footnote-8)*. However, as any enumerator (or candidate) will attest, the mere provision of a law permitting access does not solve the problem. Every election there is a need for some intervention of the part of election administrators, and sometimes even the assistance of law enforcement officials, to ensure access is granted to enumerators.

# 5.2 Improving Personal Safety

Attempts have been made to address the personal safety concerns of enumerators in law and through operational changes in the administrative management of enumeration. Saskatchewan’s *Election Act, 1996*, for example, contains provisions that enable a returning officer to engage the services of a peace officer or any other person to provide security for an enumerator. The Enumeration Regulations in Saskatchewan also restrict the hours during which enumeration can take place from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. so that the enumerator is not expected or permitted to perform their duties late at night. Depending on the time of year enumeration takes place, however, it can still be dark when enumerators are canvassing a neighbourhood. Other jurisdictions have made provisions for enumerators to double up where the returning officer feels the circumstances warrant. Out of concerns for personal safety, enumerators have also been supplied with distress alarms or cell phones and law enforcement officials are alerted that an enumeration is taking place. In some jurisdictions “working alone” safety policies and procedures have been extended to enumeration work.

# 5.3 Removing Recruitment Obstacles

As noted above, it is a perennial problem finding qualified and competent enumerators in many jurisdictions. Following Saskatchewan’s last provincial general election, a comprehensive survey of returning officers revealed that hiring enumerators was the most difficult aspect of their pre-Writ duties. While it is not the case in Saskatchewan, part of the problem of recruitment across the country has been that election legislation has often forced election administrators to obtain names of prospective enumerators from the political parties who received the most and second most votes in the preceding election. This practice was first introduced at the federal level in 1930. The task of collecting voter information at the door was seen as a political and adversarial activity as evidenced by the fact that two enumerators – one from each party – were required to enumerate jointly within an assigned area. There were dispute resolution mechanisms built into the law in cases of a disagreement between enumerators as to the eligibility of a voter. It was only after exhausting the names of potential workers from the party lists that returning officers could find qualified enumerators on their own. This recruitment process is still found in the election laws in Nova Scotia and PEI[[9]](#footnote-9) and it was only recently removed from the law in Ontario. The expectation for political parties or constituency associations to refer the names of enumerators by is becoming more difficult to fulfill. Political parties and candidates are having their own difficulties recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteers for campaigning and they are reluctant to offer them up as enumerators.

The inefficiency of having to dispatch two people to every household instead of one to collect voter information aside, the task of enumeration is a relatively straightforward activity that should not have been politicized in this way[[10]](#footnote-10). Most jurisdictions, including Saskatchewan, have delegated returning officers with the authority to independently hire impartial enumerators when an enumeration is required. It has also been proposed in several jurisdictions that some of the restrictions on enumerator qualifications dealing with age and residency, be relaxed. Election administrators have recommended that their returning officers be permitted to hire individuals younger than the age of majority and, where they cannot find a sufficient number who live within the constituency, that they be permitted to recruit from outside the constituency. In Saskatchewan hiring from outside the constituency, while becoming commonplace, must be authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer’s exercise of special or emergency powers which were intended to be used only for unusual or unforeseen circumstances.

# 5.4 Quality Management

Elaborate systems have been developed to address the quality[[11]](#footnote-11) of the information collected through enumeration. It is difficult to say whether the quality has been declining over the years or whether it is now easier to detect with automated systems and databases used to enter, compile, search and sort the information. Better training programs for enumerators, better design of information collection forms, GIS mapping, and the development of automated software systems for data entry and production of voters lists have all been introduced in an effort to better manage the collection and compilation of voter information. Enumeration management software has also been developed by some jurisdictions, such as Manitoba. This software is specifically designed to assist returning officers and election administrators to monitor enumeration progress and achieve acceptable coverage targets. One of the lo-tech solutions to improve management at the field level has been to hire additional experienced staff to assist the returning officer in the supervision of the enumeration.

# 5.5 Enumeration “Phase II”

When full-scale enumeration was prescribed in most jurisdictions, and where it continues to be required today, attempts were often made to rectify its deficiencies during the revision period. A short period of revision following enumeration was originally established to address the occasional issue of exclusion and accuracy by providing a limited opportunity to make additions, deletions and corrections to the list. In some jurisdictions, revision has become a consecutive phase of enumeration. It becomes a “second chance” to infuse the list with an acceptable level of completeness through an additional wave of enumeration in those areas that were not adequately enumerated the first time. Saskatchewan is a good example of this where the previous one day of revision was recently expanded to a period of about two weeks within the election period. In Saskatchewan, the revision of the preliminary voters list has been extended to include a “targeted enumeration” to cover those who were inadvertently missed in the enumeration or to areas where voters are highly mobile, including apartment blocks, personal care facilities, personal care homes and university residences. The previous one-day of revision was simply not enough time to recover from an incomplete enumeration. Manitoba is another province that has recently permitted enumeration outside the Writ period. Manitoba has fewer days of revision than Saskatchewan, so the time needs to be well spent on efforts to continue registering voters.

# 5.6 Enumeration Outside the Writ

Before the process of enumeration was largely abandoned by some jurisdictions, it underwent several structural changes. Some election administrators in jurisdictions whose laws required an enumeration within the Writ period were successful in convincing legislators to change the law to permit enumeration outside the Writ period. This happened recently in Saskatchewan with the enactment of new *Enumeration Regulations* in 2011. This change was recommended in the hope that the increased time that could be allocated to enumeration before the Writs were issued would result in a more accurate and comprehensive list. It also permitted more time for the recruitment of enumerators. In jurisdictions without set (reasonably predictable) election dates, it was still a challenge trying to determine the best time to enumerate prior to the anticipated date of the election, but the increased time that could be devoted to conducting an enumeration outside the writ period was a welcome change. Unfortunately, it does not automatically result in a more complete enumeration. Today, most provinces and territories have set a 4-year fixed date cycle for holding elections that enables election administrators to conduct enumeration activity close to the election event. Pre-Writ enumerations also enable voters lists to be distributed sooner to political parties, thereby permitting them to canvass voters from the beginning of the election period.

# 5.7 Confirmation

In recognition of the fact that eligibility and other voter information does not change from one election to another for the great majority of voters, some jurisdictions have introduced the practice of confirming voter information that had been previously collected rather than collecting it anew. This arrangement still requires enumerators to go door-to-door but rather than having to solicit information about the majority of voters for whom no change was necessary, they can simply confirm that the information on record is correct. For this approach, it is only necessary to record information about new voters and those whose information (usually address) has changed. Prince Edward Island conducts a confirmation of voters over a two-week period within the Writ period for its general elections. Alberta used this method of voter registration prior to its 2004 and 2012 general elections.

# 5.8 Mail Enumeration

Despite having a permanent register of voters for longer than any other Canadian jurisdiction, until very recently British Columbia’s Election Act required a general enumeration in the third calendar year after a general election. The enumeration could be by a door-to-door visitation or by another method authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer. Since door-to-door enumeration was considered to be a costly and inefficient method of registering voters, this method was abandoned in 1989. Various other approaches were used after that and in 1999 British Columbia’s Chief Electoral Officer conducted an enumeration for its 2001 election using a phased series of direct mailings. A postal enumeration was considered the most cost efficient method of canvassing the British Columbia electorate. This method was also used in 2005. Before British Columbia’s 2009 general election, they conducted a mail-based enumeration at a cost of $4.5 million or $.99 per registered voter. In 2009, Elections Alberta also used mail-out enumeration to update their register of electors prior to a Calgary by-election.

There is an inherent inefficiency in collecting voter information through enumeration and then discarding the list that has been compiled. Most of the information collected about voters does not change from one election to another. There will always be new voters added to the rolls who gain eligibility by virtue of age, residency or citizenship and others who must be removed from the list due to loss of residency or death[[12]](#footnote-12). New housing stock will also continue to be added and some residential properties will be demolished. This is vital information that must be captured for the voters list to be an accurate compilation of citizens entitled to vote. But the major change to a voters list is due to internal mobility – the movement of voters from one address to another within the province or constituency. There is a fundamental link between the voter and their address because where one lives determines where they vote. Election administrators must not only know which citizens are eligible to vote, but where the voter lives at any given time - and the address information is subject to even less change than voter eligibility. No voter registration system can accurately track all the demographic and eligibility changes that occur in the intervening time between elections, but there is considerable duplication of effort in an approach to voter registration that begins with a blank slate before each election and continually compiles lists of addresses which, for the most part, do not change.

# 6.0 Permanent Register of Voters

A permanent register of voters is a regularly updated database of all eligible voters. It is maintained and updated from reliable public sector data sources. A permanent register would contain all of the information that would normally be collected through door-to-door enumeration and some additional unique information[[13]](#footnote-13) for linking records from different sources. There are two basic kinds of permanent registers. One type is where there is a specified time for registration or changes in the registration and the subsequent lists are used for all elections occurring beyond a year of a given date. These are referred to as closed lists. The other type is where additions, deletions and corrections are permitted any time up to a set date before election day. These are called continuous lists. The difference is that continuous lists are more up-to-date because they allow the voter to get registered closer to the actual date of the election event. Hereafter, both types of lists will be simply referred to as permanent registers.

Permanent voter registers are not registries of citizens or residents, *per se*. They are not intended to help with the identification of citizens, nor do they serve as a resource for the census of the population. Permanent registers exist for the purpose of allowing individual voters to vote only within a given constituency and at a given polling station.

Permanent registries are used in most western democratic countries for elections at different levels of government. Voter registration is compulsory in Australia, Germany and Belgium, which leads to more complete lists, and voluntary in the U.S., France, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Great Britain.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Elections British Columbia was the first jurisdiction in Canada to develop a permanent voter register. Their register was developed in the 1940s. British Columbia’s first digital register was established in the late 1980s. Despite having such a registry, British Columbia’s election law also required enumeration every three years to update the voters list. This requirement has, however, just recently changed. In May 2012, British Columbia’s law requiring enumeration was repealed with British Columbia’s Attorney General citing a cost saving of approximately $25 million. British Columbia's Chief Electoral Officer at the time long argued that dropping the requirement for enumeration was necessary because of difficulties in recruiting enumerators, lifestyle changes making enumeration less effective, and the substantial cost of conducting a general enumeration.

British Columbia was the only jurisdiction in Canada to have a permanent voter register until the 1990s when a number of other jurisdictions in Canada moved to continuously maintained voter registers. Elections Canada studied the feasibility of creating a permanent register of electors in 1995 and 1996. The resulting report, *“The Register of Electors Project: A Report on Research and Feasibility”*, paved the way for a permanent register approach at the federal level in Canada. The report estimated the cost of developing the new system to be $9.3 million and for each subsequent election the cost avoidance was forecast to be in the order of $40 million[[15]](#footnote-15). The long established post-Writ enumeration system was replaced with a continuous national voters list called the National Register of Electors by a change in legislation in 1996. This occurred after a final door-to-door enumeration in April 1997. The National Register was first used during the 2000 federal general election. Soon after, eight other jurisdictions (Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Ontario, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Alberta) adopted their own registers joining British Columbia and Canada.

Until 2005, New Brunswick required enumerations for both provincial and municipal elections. That year, two complete enumerations had to be conducted – one in March/April for municipal elections and then again 20 weeks later in August for the provincial election. The combined cost of these enumerations was $1.5 million raising questions from voters about duplication and waste. This prompted New Brunswick to adopt a permanent register of voters in 2006.

At the provincial level, the existence of a permanent register of voters means the information can be used for other electoral purposes, such as supporting local government elections. This is particularly important in provinces such as New Brunswick and Quebec that have responsibility for administering or supporting the conduct of municipal and school board elections. But many other jurisdictions with no mandated responsibility for municipal or school board elections, such as Alberta, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, also create customized voters lists for use by local authorities.

All provinces and territories also share voters list information with Elections Canada through data sharing agreements whether voter registration is conducted through enumeration or a permanent register is maintained. This helps to improve the quality of voters lists used by Elections Canada within the province or territory for federal elections. In turn, Elections Canada supplies voter register information to provinces and territories that maintain their own permanent registers (with the exception of Quebec) for the purpose of improving the coverage, currency and accuracy of those lists[[16]](#footnote-16).

# 7.0 Advantages and Disadvantages of Enumeration

Every system of voter registration has its merits and shortcomings. In this section, the advantages and disadvantages of enumeration will be discussed. One way to gauge the relative merits of a particular method of registering voters is to look at the quality of the information that it produces. To some extent, one’s assessment of quality depends on the use to which the information will be put and the interests of the various users, e.g. voters, administrators, parties and candidates. Nevertheless, there are three components typically used to measure the quality of a voters list – currency, coverage and accuracy. Currency is a measure of the relative decay of information from the time it was collected to the time it is needed. It refers to whether the list is up-to-date, i.e. whether an individual named at a specific address continues to live there. Coverage or completeness refers to the percentage of voters on the list compared to the number of eligible persons in the constituency or province. Accuracy refers to whether the information on the list is correct in terms of not containing spelling mistakes, data entry errors or other inaccuracies such as, the inclusion of ineligible voters. It is the percentage of correctly listed names and addresses compared to the total number of names on the list.

# 7.1 Currency

Enumeration can yield very current information. Obviously, the degree to which a voters list produced through enumeration is current depends on how close the enumeration occurs prior to the election event. The greater the gap between the collection of the information and its use, the more the information quality can degrade over time. Generally speaking, a post-Writ enumeration would be more current than one conducted pre-Writ. The primary source of voters list degradation and loss of currency is voter mobility. With a post-Writ enumeration there is a minimal chance of listing people who recently moved within the province at the wrong address considering the proximity of collection.

Mobility also refers to broader internal migration, such as interprovincial movement and to external migration as well. The false listing of those who have left the province or country and those who have passed away is kept to a minimum with enumeration. The inclusion of people who have recently moved to the province but not yet achieved the residency requirement[[17]](#footnote-17) to vote is more difficult to prevent. After all, enumeration relies on whether the voter has been asked the question, understands the requirement and provides a truthful answer.

# 7.2 Coverage

Enumeration involves a small army of staff going door-to-door to collect voter information. The massive canvassing effort is able to capture a very high proportion[[18]](#footnote-18) of the eligible voter population. Enumeration can yield very good coverage. In a growing province like Saskatchewan, new residents and new citizens are constantly entering the electorate and enumeration can effectively capture these new voters. No voters list will, however, be 100% complete. The voters lists compiled through enumeration in Saskatchewan’s 2011 provincial general election included 551,818 voters. This represents only 71.5% of eligible voters in the province. It is estimated by Elections Canada that there are actually 772,036 eligible voters in Saskatchewan. Following Alberta’s last provincial enumeration/confirmation in 2011, it was reported that there were approximately 300,000 voters whose names were left off the voters list[[19]](#footnote-19). There are always residents that are not at home, residents that do not answer the door, and households, streets, or entire areas that are missed during enumeration. The coverage of a list depends on the comprehensiveness of the enumeration effort as determined by such factors as the number of enumerators deployed, the training they receive, the diligence with which they perform their jobs, the supervision they receive, the duration and the timing of the enumeration.

Enumeration coverage can suffer in the summer months because of the relatively large number of people who are on vacation or otherwise absent from their homes during that time of the year. Enumeration coverage in the spring and fall can be affected in rural areas by agricultural operations such as planting and harvesting. In winter, inclement weather can adversely affect the recruitment of enumerators and their willingness to make repeated calls, not to mention the resident’s eagerness to answer the door. There are also isolated events that can occur in specific geographic areas, such as forest fires and floods that temporarily displace residents and can affect the quality of the enumeration. Legislation recently introduced in Saskatchewan would see the date set for the next general election moved from the first Monday in November, 2015 to the first Monday in April 2016. This would require enumeration to be conducted in February. Winter is not a good time to enumerate in Saskatchewan.

# 7.3 Accuracy

The accuracy of a voters list compiled through enumeration depends on the competence and conscientiousness of the enumeration workers, the quality of their training, the design of the information collection tools, data entry and proofing procedures, the accuracy of the responses from those enumerated, and the overall management of the enumeration process. Incomplete and inaccurate information recorded at the door sets the stage for inaccuracies on the voters list. Common errors are: failure to list all eligible voters at a particular address, spelling voter and street names incorrectly, failure to record information such as postal codes and illegible handwriting. To illustrate the point, during one enumeration in Manitoba, there were no less than 13 different spellings of a particular street name recorded. This is a particularly easy error to detect and correct by pre-loading the range of possible street names within the data entry application such that incorrect spellings of a street are not possible. Similarly, postal code generation software can be included with the data entry tool to automatically associate the correct postal code for a given address. Data entry tools and proofing routines are becoming more sophisticated in an effort to eliminate error at this stage of the compilation process. Designing data entry input masks to mirror the data collection tool, double data entry procedures, and the production of proofing, duplicate and exception reports can all improve the quality of list production.

In evaluating list accuracy, what plagues enumeration is the fact that the voter information is being captured and recompiled fresh each election with ample opportunity to make mistakes. What is particularly troublesome is that information that was previously recorded accurately or corrected by the voter at the polling station, can be re-recorded erroneously during a subsequent enumeration. Not only can this be frustrating for the voter, errors on the voters list can affect the ability of an election administrator to assign voters to the correct poll and to inform the voter where they should go to vote. Every election there are numerous voters who are sent information cards advising them to go to the wrong polling station. These inaccuracies can also affect the sorting of the voters list and the election officials’ ability to find voters on the list on polling day. This results in the time-consuming and frustrating process of having to correct the voter record or to re-register the voter at the polls. In some cases it can lead to disenfranchisement.

In addition to the quality measures addressed above, there are several other criteria that can be used to assess the merits of a particular system of voter registration. These are discussed below.

# 7.4 Timeliness

Timeliness of the voter information that is collected and produced can also be an issue. At no time is this information more crucial than when an election is called unexpectedly, such as when a government falls in a minority situation. Election administrators plan for sudden election calls, but it is not ideal to be scrambling to prepare a voters list. For a party strategist or candidate, this information is needed earlier rather than later. It is also very helpful for election administrators and returning officers to have an up-to date voters list to be able to create polling divisions and assign voters to their correct poll. Unexpected election calls will force an enumeration to be conducted within the Writ period and prevent the voters list from being available until campaigning is well underway.

# 7.5 Security and Privacy

Canadians have become increasingly more aware of and concerned about privacy of their personal information. Securing the voters list from unauthorized use is very important. There are provisions in most elections legislation to prohibit unauthorized use of information contained on voters lists. Besides being used by election officers for the purpose of carrying out their official duties, voters lists can also be used for “electoral purposes” by political parties, candidates and Members elected to the Legislative Assembly. Any other use is prohibited. In Saskatchewan, it is the Chief Electoral Officer’s duty to take all reasonable steps to protect the voters list against unauthorized use. The penalty upon conviction for breaching these provisions of the law is a fine of up to $5,000, imprisonment for 2 years, or both. Voters list information can be quite valuable to marketers, businesses, and predators. Some elections legislation even authorizes the practice of “salting” the lists by the inclusion of fictitious information for the purpose of tracing unauthorized use.

The information from an enumeration is collected by thousands of individuals going door-to-door and is later inputted by hundreds of data entry operators, sometimes using computers within their homes. Records can and do go missing in all the transfer of information back and forth. For example, during Alberta’s most recent enumeration for their 2012 election, it was reported that a worker lost an enumeration binder containing the names, addresses, phone numbers and, in some cases, dates of birth of voters for 153 residential addresses. Three weeks later it was reported that two more enumeration binders were lost containing similar information for voters at another 381 different addresses. These sorts of things happen during enumeration. As for the people who are responsible for handling this information, there is no guarantee that they will honour their oath of secrecy, nor does the fear of legal sanctions assure us that they will not retain and misuse this personal information.

Public inspection of voters lists is fundamental to the revision process and contributes to the integrity of elections. Over the past several decades we have begun to impose tighter restrictions on the distribution of voters lists from an era where they were posted openly on telephone polls and in other public places. The practice of late has been for them to be available for public inspection only in the returning office or at the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. We also limit the amount of personal information displayed on the voters list to that which is essential for the purposes of establishing the identity of the voter.

An emerging trend has been for the inclusion of personal privacy protection provisions within elections legislation. These provisions permit those with personal safety concerns to have their names or addresses obscured or removed from the voters list and replaced by an identification number.

There seems to be a high degree of acceptance that some personal information would need to be kept by election officials in order to preserve the integrity of the voting process. However, at election time when the voters lists are distributed to political parties and candidates, complaints are received by voters who appear genuinely surprised that they are being contacted by telephone or at the door during the campaign period.

# 7.6 Inclusion

Inclusiveness is a measure of the likelihood that individuals from different geographic locations and/or from different demographic backgrounds will become part of the voters list. When properly conducted, an enumeration can capture the full range of diversity among the voter population**.**  Courtney and Smith say, “Enumeration possesses the potential for incorporating those with special needs into the eligible electorate. These include voters in hospitals and prisons, those with physical and mental disabilities, and the homeless, the poor and the illiterate. For such people, a system that depends upon self-registration may well have a representative effect on their willingness or capacity to be included on the list of voters.” Enumeration also casts its net broadly to cover those who have just turned 18, new residents, and new citizens – those who are less likely to show up on official data sources that are relied upon for maintaining a permanent register of voters and those who are less likely to initiate the registration process.

Enumeration has the potential to be very inclusive by treating all segments of society equally and without exception. Enumeration is able to achieve this because it involves physically finding voters, wherever they happen to be. Usually that is at their place of residence but it even extends to those without a residential address - people living at a shelter for the homeless and those with other institutionalized living arrangements. Despite the fact that there continues to be an inequality of participation in electoral politics, a voters list compiled through enumeration has the potential to include all within its rolls giving them the opportunity to exercise their franchise.

# 7.7 Alerting Voters

One of the often-cited advantages of enumeration is that the process of going door-to-door to compile the list prior to an election serves the purpose of informing the voter that an election has been called. The Royal Commission report remarked that conducting an enumeration after an election is called makes voters more aware that they must be registered to vote and alerts voters to the election. Courtney and Smith also state that “A system that places the onus for registration on the state rather than on the citizen and that is coupled with door-to-door enumeration serves as a personal reminder by the community of the positive value that it places on the electoral participation by its citizens.”

While it is no doubt true that some voters may benefit from such a reminder, the impact of this form of “advertising” for the election event should not be over-stated. Those responsible for administering elections are required by law to post notices and place ads in newspapers announcing the particulars of an election. They often also conduct broader advertising using traditional media such as television, radio, and billboards. More recently Facebook, Twitter, Internet forums, blogs and other social media have been used to push the message to the public. Most election offices also mail voter information cards to eligible voters informing them of the various voting options available and where to cast ballots on polling day. Finally, there is no shortage of advertising using these same approaches by election campaigns in the weeks, and sometimes months, leading up to an election. Considering all this activity, it is difficult to imagine that most voters are not aware of an impending election by polling day. Nevertheless, media surveys suggest that only 30% of people pay attention to public affairs. Furthermore, while most people may have a vague awareness that an election is underway, they may not be clear which level of government – federal, provincial or civic – is involved.

It has also been suggested that the contact with the voter that takes place during enumeration may have a positive impact on voter participation. This is the notion that a personal visit by an enumerator arouses a voter’s sense of civic duty and prods them to take action in a way that receiving a notice in the mail cannot. It may be logical to make such a connection because the research on voter participation commonly cites “civic duty” as one of the reasons for voting. Unfortunately, no empirical evidence could be found of a positive correlation between jurisdictions that enumerate and voter turnout. For whatever positive benefits there may be to receiving a personal visit from an enumerator, they should be weighed carefully against the safety concerns noted above.

# 8.0 Advantages and Disadvantages of a Permanent Register of Voters

Many of the concerns about establishing a permanent register of voters are grounded in the assumption that a post-Writ enumeration is the most effective method of compiling a very current list with near complete coverage. We know also through experience that the extra time afforded to enumerating outside the Writ period can produce voters lists of equal or better quality to lists produced within the Writ period. But enumeration will always be, to some degree, incomplete – a certain percentage of people will be omitted and some of the information will be inaccurate. By comparing the number of voters on lists compiled through enumeration with official population statistics for a province or constituency, we find that enumeration does not capture all eligible voters.

# 8.1 Currency

When we talk about a permanent register of voters, it is important to remember that these lists are usually compiled in the first instance through enumeration. Therefore, at the time it is created, a permanent register will be as up-to-date as a voters list compiled through enumeration. The major challenge is determining how to maintain the currency of these lists in a manner that is efficient, cost effective and acceptable to the public. It requires a greater degree of collaboration between agencies supplying the information than they are accustomed to. It also requires a standardization of information. It is particularly problematic keeping information current where high mobility exists. To assist with the issue of updating voter registers, some jurisdictions, such as British Columbia and Alberta, have developed secure applications that enable on-line registration for new voters and the updating of information by those already registered. Naturally, the effectiveness of this approach depends on voter initiative but as experience is gained in the use of on-line registration, new ways are being developed to prompt voter action[[20]](#footnote-20).

In addition to the updating that goes on continuously between elections, register information is often updated at election time through a more limited enumeration process, referred to as targeted enumeration. The information is also updated through the same processes that are used during the revision period and on polling day to add and correct information about eligible voters. Over time, the currency of a permanent register of voters can be maintained provided good data sources are available and used to track changes in voter status and residency. Through studies of voters list quality, we have found that a permanent register of voters can contain very current voter information. For example, the currency of the National Register of Electors information for Saskatchewan as of March 1, 2012 was estimated to be 87.6%[[21]](#footnote-21).

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# 8.2 Coverage

Above it was noted that enumeration has the potential to produce very good coverage. Naturally, this depends on how good the enumeration is at any particular election. The completeness of the resulting voters list will be poor if the enumeration was poor and, as argued earlier, it is becoming more difficult to enumerate. The coverage of a permanent register of voters will depend largely on the data sources used to create and maintain the information. In the interval between elections, voter records are continuously updated from a variety of overlapping databases. The value of these data sources in ensuring the register is complete depends on whether they are able to track voter moves[[22]](#footnote-22), identify new voters and purge or eliminate those who are deceased or otherwise lose their voter eligibility. The National Register information for Saskatchewan as of March 1, 2012 was estimated to be 92.2% complete[[23]](#footnote-23). This coverage rate has the potential to be increased if Saskatchewan was to create and maintain its own permanent register of voters.

# 8.3 Accuracy

The major source of inaccuracy in permanent registers stems from database characteristics in general. Databases have errors that are usually caused by mistakes in data entry, such as the transposition of numbers or letters, but also from inaccurate information supplied by the individual. This would be no different for records created through enumeration or within a register. However, the more complex the database, the easier it is for errors to occur. In some cases, the percentage of records with errors can be quite large. To determine eligibility, the records in a voter registration database may be compared with those in another database such as that of licensed drivers within the province. In such a case, mistaken entries in either database regarding an individual could cause an erroneous “administrative disenfranchisement.” Such errors would almost always result in erroneous exclusion rather than erroneous inclusion. This is because the criteria set for record matching routines would typically exclude any records that don’t correspond to eligibility criteria. The way a database handles such mismatches will affect the rate at which such erroneous exclusions occur. It is, therefore, common for database administrators to not demand a perfect match of a voter registration record with a verification database because such procedures may result in the rejection of a large number of eligible voters. This problem is not insurmountable. Many jurisdictions now have a wealth of experience with record matching to draw upon.

The use of multiple data sources to update a register also creates the risk of receiving different information about the same person or receiving incomplete or incorrect information. The lag between the date a change is made to the source data and the date the register receives the new data may cause a problem. Discrepancies may also be caused by the fact that the organization maintaining the data source is collecting different information from the data the register administrator requires. In order to deal with these potential problems, register administrators must put controls in place to prevent voters from being listed under old information, from being removed in error, or ineligible voters from being added to the register.

# 8.4 Timeliness

Timeliness of the voters list information is important at any time, but never more crucial than when an election is called unexpectedly. Election administrators plan for “on demand” events, but it is not ideal to be scrambling to prepare a voters list. It is important for election administrators and returning officers to have an up-to-date voters list to create polling divisions and assign voters to their correct polls – and parties and candidates need this information sooner rather than later for campaigning. Unexpected election calls will force an enumeration to be conducted within the writ period and prevent the voters list from being available until campaigning is well underway.

Voter information is always available with a permanent register. The information is continuously updated and voters lists can be produced on very short notice. Obviously this comes in handy with an unexpected election call, but also between elections when lists can be provided to political parties and elected Members. For example, in Alberta a list of electors is furnished to each registered political party and to each Member of the Legislative Assembly who is not a member of a registered political party 2 years after a general election, during the 4th and 5th years after a general election, following a boundary redistribution and after an election is called. The ability to produce a voters list at any point in time during the planning and preparations for an election greatly assists election administrators and returning officers with the creation or revision of poll boundaries. It also affords them more time to conduct critical “in the field” proofing of the lists before going into an election.

# 8.5 Security and Privacy

Canadians have become increasingly more aware of and concerned about the privacy of their personal information. Privacy concerns exist whenever uniquely identifiable data relating to an individual are collected and stored in digital form or otherwise. In some cases these concerns refer to how the data is collected, stored, and linked. In other cases the issue relates to who is given access to the information. Concern over privacy protection is often raised when jurisdictions move to the creation of a permanent register of voters. This is because the increased ability to gather, store and transmit information can have negative implications for the preservation of privacy. This was the concern in Quebec when they first considered setting up a permanent register of voters. In 1978, Le Directeur Général des Élections du Québec was authorized to establish a registry of voters, but the registry was not set up and used in an election for almost 20 years - until 1997 - owing to fears about the protection of personal information.

As large-scale information systems become more common, there is so much information stored in so many databases that an individual has no practical means of knowing or controlling all of the information about themselves that others may hold or be able to access. As technology has advanced, the ways in which we can share information can lead to new ways in which privacy can be breached. Such information could potentially be used for purposes not known to or sanctioned by the individual concerned.

It is clear to the voter when information is collected through enumeration that it is intended to be used only for election purposes. The fact that it is collected each time there is an election reinforces this belief. It is not always as apparent when the information is being collected from multiple sources, linked to other databases and stored for future use as is the case with a permanent register of voters. More stringent laws that protect the privacy of voters list information can allay some of the concerns.

It is probably true that there are greater measures taken to protect the information stored in a permanent register than there are to protect voters list information compiled through enumeration. Permanent register information is securely stored on servers at the election office or at a secure remote location[[24]](#footnote-24). When lists are produced from registers and transmitted to users they are routinely encrypted. The information within a permanent register is shared with a more limited sphere of individuals and organizatons[[25]](#footnote-25), thereby minimizing the opportunity for breaches of security. Nevertheless, breaches of privacy do occur.

The first reported case of such a breach occurred in 1999 when Elections Canada lost confidential data on 675,000 Manitobans. As part of its data sharing agreement, Manitoba had sent Elections Canada a computer tape with the name, address, birth date, gender and driver’s license number of all registered drivers in Manitoba in order to update the National Register of Electors. The data tape arrived at Elections Canada’s mail room, but no one knows what happened to it from there. Elections Canada conducted an extensive search and concluded that the tape was inadvertently deposited into their non-recyclable waste destined for a landfill site. The Privacy Commissioner who also investigated the matter concluded that the loss was a result of human error. An independent security firm was also hired to examine Elections Canada’s electronic security pass logs and video-camera tapes for the period during which the agency had the data and could not determine precisely what happened to the tape.

Another case in point was reported at the time of writing. As part of its annual requirement to provide voters list information to provincial legislative Members and political parties, Elections New Brunswick distributed lists between April 3 and May 1, 2012 inadvertently containing driver’s license numbers, birthdates and, in some cases, phone numbers for the province’s 553,000 voters. This serious privacy breach was not a technological glitch but, rather, was caused by human error. This kind of mistake could be made with voters lists produced from a permanent register or lists produced through enumeration. However, some of the private information that was inadvertently released in New Brunswick had been collected and stored on the permanent register to facilitate voter identification and record linking.

Shortly after the New Brunswick incident was reported, it came to light that two unencrypted memory sticks containing personal information on up to 2.4 million Ontario voters in as many as 25 provincial ridings had gone missing from an Elections Ontario warehouse. The discovery of the data loss occurred on April 26, 2012, but was not made public until July 17, 2012. This incident was investigated by the Ontario Provincial Police and the province’s Privacy Commissioner. The Privacy Commissioner’s report found that Elections Ontario failed to put in place reasonable measures to protect the physical security, and the privacy and security of the personal information in its custody and control and, in particular, failed to ensure that the personal information stored on mobile electronic devices was encrypted. Also, it was found that Elections Ontario failed to take steps to ensure that existing policies were reflected in actual practice; failed to ensure that senior staff were accountable and responsible for privacy and security; failed to adequately train its staff; and, failed to respond adequately to the privacy breach by continuing to store unencrypted data on USB keys after having learned of the privacy breach.

It is probably safe to conclude that this type of error could occur anywhere, but when it does, it has the potential to be a more serious breach of privacy when more private information is collected and stored.[[26]](#footnote-26)

# 8.6 Inclusion

It is difficult to say whether a permanent register or enumeration is more inclusive. Earlier it was said the enumeration has the potential to be very inclusive but, likewise, it can in a systematic way exclude certain groups. Those living in very remote locations are often not enumerated. The time and the cost to make a personal visit to every isolated household are too great. Some First Nations communities and religious communities have been known to prohibit or limit enumerator access. Decisions are also made by election administrators or enumerators themselves on the basis of perceived safety risk to exclude certain residences from an enumerator visit. Work camps and university campuses may also be intentionally left out of the enumeration depending on the rules of residency in a particular jurisdiction. The inclusiveness of enumeration depends on the comprehensiveness of the exercise, which has implications for its cost and timeliness.

The inclusiveness of a permanent register of voters depends largely on the variety and quality of official data sources used for updating. The wider the range of sources used, the greater the likelihood all eligible voters will be included. It would not be advisable, for example, to rely solely on driver license records since not all voters are included in this database. This is why multiple sources are necessary. Once solid databases for updating are acquired, the maintenance of a permanent voter register is a fairly mechanical process. The decisions that are made to include or exclude certain individuals from the register are not subjective but, rather, are based on objective criteria for eligibility. Therefore, a permanent register can enhance the capacity to register voters who are most likely to be missed by an enumeration process.

# 8.7 Shortened Election Campaigns

Another advantage of moving to a permanent register is that the election period can sometimes be shortened[[27]](#footnote-27), thereby reducing costs. Most elections legislation contains a range of dates or a flexible period of time from the issue of the Writs to polling day. In Saskatchewan, for example, the election period is a minimum of 28 days to a maximum of 34 days. In Manitoba the length of the election period is 28 to 35 days in the case of a fixed date election and between 32 and 39 days in the case of any other election. The maximum lengths are to accommodate additional time for enumeration to occur within the election period. The minimum length election period can be used where enumeration is conducted before the Writs have been issued. This was the case in Saskatchewan during the 2011 election where the election period was set at 28 days and enumeration was conducted outside the Writ period. However, this simply transfers the administrative costs of enumeration from within the election period to before the election. If enumeration was discontinued in Saskatchewan in favor of establishing a permanent register, the shorter duration election period could be used with attendant cost savings. This occurred in Quebec when their National Assembly authorized a computerized permanent list system. It allowed for a reduction of their election period from 47 to 33 days.

There are significant advantages for all stakeholders to having a shortened election period. For election administrators it can mean reduced staffing and office lease costs. For political parties and candidates, it can mean reduced costs for advertising, campaigning and renting campaign office space. Also, a shorter election period is often viewed favorably by the public who can tire of the political campaigning during a long run-up to an election.

# 8.8 Confusion and Annoyance

From the voter’s perspective, the ideal registration system would be one that did not require any direct action to be included on the voters list. One would think that state-sponsored enumeration fits this model. However, in the last provincial election in Saskatchewan when enumeration was conducted in the pre-Writ period, it was reported that voters were confused and annoyed that they were being enumerated. Voters complained that they did not know why there was an enumeration being conducted when the election had not been announced. Apparently some voters did not know that the dates of Saskatchewan’s provincial elections are now on a set schedule and that enumeration was occurring outside the Writ period. Voters also complained that they thought they were already on the voters list because there had just been a federal election. Some voters thought that they had already given authorization to be included on the voters list by providing consent on their income tax return. Many voters do not understand the distinction between federal and provincial elections, that the authorization they provide only extends to the National Register of Electors, and that there is no administrative overlap between these events. Others complain that they lived at the same address for all or most of their lives and thought they were already on the voters list. They wonder why their information has not been kept from the last time they were enumerated. Still others who had been missed during enumeration complain of the inconvenience of having to visit their returning office and produce identification in order to be placed on the list.

While many of these problems could be attributed to a failure of advertising and education, much of the confusion and annoyance over voter registration could be eliminated with a permanent list. With a permanent list, there is minimal effort required on the part of the individual. Individual voter records are initially created (usually following a final enumeration) and can be updated from various official sources, such as the National Register of Electors, Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) records, Saskatchewan Health Records, Saskatchewan Vital Statistics records, expressaddress.com, change of address information from Canada Post, etc. The scheduled updating of voter records involves record linking from these agencies to capture address changes, age eligibility, deaths, name changes, etc. The authority for the Chief Electoral Officer to request this information and the authority and requirement for external sources to provide it can be contained in the legislation that authorizes the establishment of a permanent register of voters. Also, the cost to develop an online voter registration application can be minimal[[28]](#footnote-28).

# 9.0 Weighing the Benefits

The above discussion illustrates that both enumeration and a permanent register can be effective methods of registering voters. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses and some of the characteristics are difficult to quantify. Deciding which approach is preferable will depend on the interests of the user and the importance that is attached to each of these qualities. This section attempts to summarize the benefits of enumeration and a permanent register in the hope of bringing this assessment into sharper focus for decision makers.

Enumeration can produce extremely current voter information. To a large extent, the currency of enumeration data will depend on when it is collected prior to an election event. Obviously, an enumeration conducted within the election period will yield more up-to-date information than an enumeration conducted 6 months earlier. However, the currency gains of conducting an enumeration within the Writ period can be offset by losses in coverage considering the tight time frames available after an election has been called. Enumeration coverage can be improved by enumerating over a longer period outside the Writ. Knowing the date of an election can enable election administrators to maximize currency and coverage of the information collected through enumeration, but the timing of an enumeration can also be severely affected by weather and other seasonal events.

There are only 3 jurisdictions in Canada that do not have permanent registers of voters – Saskatchewan, Manitoba[[29]](#footnote-29) and Yukon. Other provinces, such as, Alberta, sometimes choose to enumerate before elections. Table 1 displays recent enumeration coverage data for selected jurisdictions to compare with Saskatchewan. Manitoba was included due to its size and the recency of its enumeration. Alberta, while it has a register of voters, was included because it also conducted a province-wide enumeration/confirmation in preparation for its 2012 general election. Yukon was included because it is one of few remaining jurisdictions that still enumerates. All of the enumerations with the exception of Yukon’s were conducted outside the Writ period.

**Table 1: Enumeration Coverage for Selected Jurisdictions**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Province** | **Enumeration Dates** | **# of Days** | **Total Voters on List After Enumeration** | **Total Eligible Voters** | **Coverage (%)** |
| **Saskatchewan** | Sept 8/11 – Sept 26/11 | 19 |  551,818[[30]](#footnote-30) |  772,036[[31]](#footnote-31) | 71.5% |
| **Manitoba** | July 21/11 – Aug 22/11 | 33 |  710,590 |  889,943[[32]](#footnote-32) | 79.8% |
| **Alberta** | Aug 26/11 – Sept 19/11 | 25 | 2,265,000[[33]](#footnote-33) | 2,716,624[[34]](#footnote-34) | 83.4% |
| **Yukon** | Sept 9/11 – Sept 22/11 | 13 |  18,018 |  22,643[[35]](#footnote-35) | 79.6% |

Another source of coverage and currency information comes from

Elections Canada. As can be seen in Table 2, voter registers can also produce very high levels of currency. For instance, the currency rate of the National Register for Saskatchewan was 87.6% in March, 2012. Coverage would also appear to be more complete for a permanent register compared with enumeration. As of March 1, 2012 the National Register for Saskatchewan was 92.2% complete compared with the 71.5% coverage achieved in Saskatchewan’s last enumeration.

**Table 2: National Register of Electors Coverage and Currency for Selected Jurisdictions (as of March 1, 2012)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Province** | **Estimated Size of Electoral Population[[36]](#footnote-36)** | **Adjusted Electors on Register Release[[37]](#footnote-37)** | **Adjusted % of Electors on Release[[38]](#footnote-38)****(Coverage)** | **Adjusted % of Electors at Correct Residential Address****(Currency)** |
| **Saskatchewan** |  772,036 |  711,616 | 92.2% | 87.6% |
| **Manitoba** |  891,060 |  802,884 | 90.1% | 80.4% |
| **Alberta** |  2,716,624 | 2,456,060 | 90.4% | 80.1% |
| **Yukon[[39]](#footnote-39)** |  26,193 |  24,112 | 92.1% | 74.9% |

Enumeration data is not particularly prone to problems of inaccuracy, at least not more than voter information contained within a permanent register. The major cause of inaccuracy stems from the recollection of voter information each time an enumeration is held but the sources of error can be managed to keep them to a minimal level through moving to a system of voter confirmation and through better management of the collection and data input processes. With a permanent register the opportunity exists for database errors to be corrected over time as voter data is continuously updated. The availability of high quality administrative data sources for updating a register can limit the amount of error that is reintroduced to the database. Certain elements of a register, such as address information, can be standardized and cleansed using proprietary software products, such as Streetsweeper, to produce high quality civic-geographic and mailing address information.

Enumeration data is typically produced “just in time” for an election event and, therefore, does not serve the needs of political parties, elected Members, or election administrators particularly well. On the other hand, permanent register information is continuously updated and always available to serve the needs of administrators and other stakeholders.

Breaches of security and privacy of voter information are rare. Nevertheless, greater potential exists for breaches of privacy as a result of enumeration due to the large numbers of individuals physically required to collect and compile the information to produce the voters lists. Once the lists are produced, the same security measures need to be taken to protect the privacy of voter information whether it is generated through enumeration or a permanent register and the same risks to security are present for both. However, there is typically more personal information contained in a permanent register and, therefore, breaches of privacy can be more of a concern to the individual.

Enumeration does a very good job of including diverse segments of the citizenry within the voters lists it produces. There are, however, several systemic barriers to full inclusion faced by enumeration. For example, the extent to which certain groups, such as seniors, are less likely to answer the door, will affect their representation on an enumerated list. The same is true for other demographic groups, such as youth, students and the economically disadvantaged, who are more likely to live in multi-residential buildings that are becoming more difficult to access. Therefore, enumeration can suffer from self-selection bias and limitations due to physical access. Permanent registers are prone to different, but no less severe, limitations that can prevent certain groups from being included. For example, those who move frequently and fail to report address changes are more likely to be excluded from a register database. The range and quality of the administrative sources used for updating a register, as well as the affirmative efforts of database administrators, will determine the extent to which individuals are excluded.

For some jurisdictions there may be administrative cost savings in moving to a permanent register if it can also reduce the length of the election period. For Saskatchewan, the minimum length election period of 28 days was set for the last two general elections – one with enumeration occurring within the Writ period and one with it occurring outside. Considering the requirements for revision, nomination and ever-expanding voting opportunities, it is unlikely the election period can be shortened in Saskatchewan.

Finally, it has been frequently cited in the political studies literature that enumeration alerts voters that an election will be held in the coming weeks and that they are eligible to vote in it. The idea has also been advanced that enumeration encourages participation by reminding voters of their civic duty to take part. Considering all the communication channels that are being leveraged today to inform voters on an impending election, the contribution of an enumerator on the doorstep is probably minimal. No research could be found to support the contention that enumeration increases voter participation in the election process.

Table 3 provides a comparative summary of selected factors to consider in assessing the quality of voter registration methods.

**Table 3: Quality Comparison of Voter Registration Methods**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Factors to Consider** | **Enumeration** | **Comments** | **Permanent Register** | **Comments** |
| **Currency** | High | * When voters list compiled close to election
 | Medium | * Depends on the frequency of information updates
* Can be updated continuously
 |
| **Coverage** | Medium | * Depends on duration and completeness of enumeration
* More challenging to collect information at the door
 | High | * When using multiple data sources to update
* Depends on the quality of overlapping data sources
 |
| **Accuracy** | Medium | * Recollection of information every election leads to error
 | High | * With continuous updating, errors can be caught and corrected
 |
| **Timliness** | Low | * Produced just before an election
* Not available between elections
 | High | * Always available to Members and candidates
* Available at any time for election officials to prepare for an election
 |
| **Security/Privacy** | Medium | * Greater potential for breaches
 | High | * More precautions can be taken to protect voters
 |
| **Alerting Voters** | High | * Enumerator on doorstep serves as a reminder of the election
 | High | * Greater potential for accurate and timely communications
 |

# 10.0 Weighing the Costs

It is difficult to obtain a detailed accounting of the comparative costs between enumeration and a permanent register. At the time most jurisdictions moved from enumeration to a permanent register, few conducted this type of analysis. Nevertheless, one of the major advantages of a permanent voter register is that it can eliminate sizable costs during the election. As noted earlier, the costs of enumeration are considerable and they are growing every election as efforts are made to overcome the ever-increasing hurdles to obtaining a complete list of eligible voters. Enumerating outside the Writ, while beneficial for election administrators trying to manage the process and achieve an acceptable level of coverage, extends the time of the task and its costs. Many of the other recent enumeration changes introduced across the country designed to achieve greater coverage, increased accuracy, and better management of the process, also contribute to its ever-burgeoning cost.

There have been a few studies of the costs and potential benefits[[40]](#footnote-40) of moving to a permanent list of voters. The White Paper on Election Law Reform (Canada, Privy Council Office 1986) advised against a permanent register for federal elections. The Paper argued that a permanent register would be far more costly than the enumeration process in use at the time. The Paper also said that Canadians would be unreceptive to regularly providing information needed to maintain an accurate and current list, and that a permanent list would prompt political parties to use it for other than political purposes. However, at the time of developing its registry of electors, Elections Canada estimated that they would break-even after the first election and realize potential savings of over $40 million in the following election. In 1995, Elections Alberta conducted a cost benefit analysis of various voter registration options and concluded that an optimum savings could be achieved from a joint venture with Elections Canada on the development of a registry that estimated cost savings to be over $10 million over a 10-year period. Elections Quebec is one of the few jurisdictions that prepared an extensive implementation plan and costing of the move to a permanent register. In 1993, they estimated the cost saving would amount to over $40 million over the period from 1994 to 1998.

The initial cost of a permanent register for a given jurisdiction can, however, be substantial in terms of systems development, including hardware, software and personnel[[41]](#footnote-41). But one of the major benefits of a permanent register appears to be its long run savings. The costs of maintaining a permanent voter register are also offset, to some degree, for all jurisdictions that obtain National Register of Electors information from Elections Canada. The cost of maintaining the National Register is borne entirely by Elections Canada and this information can be readily obtained by Elections Saskatchewan. Data sharing agreements are already in place with all provinces and territories whether or not the jurisdiction has its own permanent register. The difference between jurisdictions that enumerate and those that have permanent registers is that, for the latter, the sharing is two-way. Right now, Elections Saskatchewan provides the information it compiles from an enumeration to Elections Canada, but it does not receive National Register information in return. Unlike voter information from other lists compiled through enumeration and shared with Elections Canada, such as Manitoba’s list, the Saskatchewan information is of greater value to Elections Canada because it contains date of birth information that is vital for record linking.

The creation of a permanent voter register by the Province of Saskatchewan and the sharing of that information with municipalities and school boards can also result in considerable cost savings for the recipients. Most local governments would benefit from receiving high quality voters list information customized for their political boundaries. The creation of a permanent list can achieve overall cost savings through the elimination of duplication at all three levels of government. Even where local governments rely on other existing lists, such as tax rolls, or where voter eligibility is otherwise established at the voting station, formal sharing of a provincially-prepared voters list could prompt a change in voter registration practices at the civic level and contribute toward greater integrity of the election process.

# 10.1 Cost of Enumeration in Saskatchewan

It was noted earlier in this discussion paper that enumeration costs are made up largely of labour costs – fees for enumerators, revising agents, data entry operators and salaries for returning officers, election clerks and other office staff. A much smaller portion of enumeration costs go towards supplies, equipment and office rent. In accounting for all of these costs, election offices typically do not separate the costs of enumeration and revision because one process closely follows the other and often the same individuals act as enumerators and revising agents.

In 2011, Elections Saskatchewan conducted a province-wide enumeration outside of the Writ period. The enumeration employed nearly 3,000 workers and occurred over a 19-day period beginning on September 8/11 and ending on September 26/11. The total cost of the enumeration/revision was $3,225,000. Labour costs were $2,010,025 or 62.4% of the total. In trying to determine the cost savings associated with moving to a permanent register, it is necessary to exclude the costs of revision since revision would be conducted under either scenario. In doing so, the $645,000 in fees paid to revising agents, and a portion of returning officer and election clerk salaries, mileage, data entry, office and equipment rental and supply costs were removed from the total. The resulting amount strictly for enumeration was estimated to be $2,580,000[[42]](#footnote-42).

Following the 2011 enumeration in Saskatchewan there were 551,818 voters on the list. This represents a cost of $4.68 per voter. Following revision there were 603,084 voters on the list. The added number of voters and the added cost to register them increases the per voter cost to $5.34. The increase in per voter cost is due to the fact that revision is a more expensive process than enumeration. There are certain fixed costs for staff and operations, but fewer voters added to the voters list during the process.

While there are not many comparisons to make owing to the fact that there are so few jurisdictions that still conduct province-wide enumerations, Saskatchewan’s costs compare favourably to the examples that could be found. For example, the per voter cost for Manitoba’s last enumeration/revision in 2011 was $6.00. Yukon’s 5-day enumeration held in the fall of 2011 cost $7.77 per voter. As noted previously, Alberta conducted a confirmation/enumeration prior to their last election. The cost was $6.1 million and they ended up with 2,265,000 electors confirmed or enumerated through this exercise. The cost per voter for this exercise was $2.70.

As mentioned previously, jurisdictions that have permanent registers, in addition to including a revision period, will usually also conduct some form of targeted enumeration prior to an election. The purpose of this more limited form of enumeration is to increase the coverage and currency of the voters lists by focusing efforts on areas of new growth and high mobility. It is designed to capture voters who may have recently moved within the province or who have just become qualified to vote in the election by virtue of gaining residency or age eligibility. Often student residences and large work camps will be targeted for enumeration as well. The amount of enumeration in each constituency will vary depending on the particular characteristics of voters and housing within it. For instance, constituencies that are highly stable will have less targeted enumeration and ones with lots of apartments, student housing, and new growth will have more. For British Columbia’s next election in 2013, they have indicated they will be concentrating targeted enumeration efforts in the Northern part of the province where the register coverage is lacking. New Brunswick, which is fairly confident in the completeness and currency of their register, targets less than 1% of their elector population for enumeration. Elections Nova Scotia had been restricted by legislation to enumerating only residential centres, seniors’ residences and assisted living facilities within the election period. With recent amendments to their elections legislation, Nova Scotia will be able to target their enumeration to a broader range of areas prior to their next election.

For purposes of establishing the enumeration costs that would be avoided if Saskatchewan were to develop a permanent register of electors, it was estimated that 15% of the total enumeration costs, or $387,000, would continue to be incurred for targeted enumeration prior to an election. This is probably an over-cautious estimate of the amount of enumeration that would be required, but prudent nonetheless until the register has been tested and proven. This brings the cost avoidance of discontinuing province-wide enumeration to approximately $2,193,000 every 4 years or close to $550,000 ($548,250) annually.

# 10.2 Estimated Cost of a Permanent Register of Voters for Saskatchewan

In order to decide if moving to a permanent register is justifiable on the basis of cost, it is necessary to estimate the initial cost of establishing a register and the continuing costs of maintaining it. By comparing these costs with the known costs of continuing to enumerate, it can be determined if a permanent register will be more or less costly. The two basic cost components to establishing a permanent voter register are development costs and ongoing maintenance costs.

# 10.21 Development Costs

Elections Saskatchewan has its own customized election management software called ESPREE. ESPREE stands for Elections Saskatchewan’s Permanent Register of Eligible Electors[[43]](#footnote-43). The system was based on an application called VES (Voter Enumeration Software) that was originally developed by Elections Manitoba. The system was then redesigned as a web-based application by Elections Alberta. It is now used by Alberta, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and Nunavut to manage elections. The original application was designed to create a listing of voters for use at election time. Enumeration records can be entered into the system, stored, sorted and recompiled to produce voters lists for polling divisions and constituencies. This is the main transaction processing function of the system. Many other modules have been added to the system over time to assist in the efficient and effective management of other election activities. This election management system is essentially the same system that is currently being used by Elections Alberta to house and maintain its Register of Electors that contains records for over 2.5 million voters.

In order to serve as a register for Saskatchewan, ESPREE could benefit from new functionality to allow elector and address information to be updated from external data sources. This would include databases from other agencies. The estimated cost for this work to be performed by the external developer, Professional Systems Limited (PSL), is $50,000. This does not include the development of an on-line application to permit voters to manage their own voter registration. An on-line application similar to Alberta’s VoterLink, would cost approximately $50,000 to build for Saskatchewan, but would not need to be developed until a year or so after the 2015 or 2016 general election.

A permanent elector registry will also require a more robust server environment that has the ability to handle an increase in requests and is able to scale up to accommodate periods of high demand. Two new servers and software will be required to bring the current environment to a level that will meet these requirements. One application/web server and one database server would need to be added to the server environment. The cost per server is $5,000 and Windows server and database licensing costs would be approximately $15,000 for both.

While not essential to the development of a permanent register, it would also be highly desirable to bring fibre optic communication service to the offices of Elections Saskatchewan located at 1702 Park Street, Regina. Right now the connection from the data centre located at the Legislative Assembly Building can achieve a maximum speed of 5MB. Fibre optics would allow for speeds of up to 1GB, but even speeds of 20MB or 100MB would be a significant improvement. This upgrade would benefit all IT related services at Elections Saskatchewan but would be particularly helpful in providing users with improved (faster) access to a large register database stored on the servers. The one-time cost of this upgrade is estimated to be $15,000.

The system would initially be populated from the last enumeration, but data from other sources will be required to help build and keep the voter database up-to-date. Processes, agreements and audit controls will have to be developed that will detail how information is exchanged in a secure, timely and accurate fashion, as well as the rules for incorporating new voters and modifying existing records.

These tasks would take approximately six months to complete with resources from Elections Saskatchewan, PSL and the agencies providing data. These entities should be involved in the planning and execution of a permanent register. The development of a permanent register could begin immediately once the legislative authority is in place and existing vacant and proposed IT positions are filled. At the time of writing both of Elections Saskatchewan’s approved IT positions, the Manager of Information Technology and Register of Electors and the Senior Technical Analyst positions were vacant.

Below is a table summarizing the development costs for a permanent register of electors.

**Table 4: Estimated Development Costs for a Permanent Register of Electors[[44]](#footnote-44)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity/Item** | **Cost** |
| ESPREE Register Module–external developer | $50,000 |
| 2 Servers | $10,000 |
| Server & Database Licensing | $15,000 |
| Fibre optic communication | $15,000 |
| Miscellaneous, hardware, software, furniture & supplies | $35,000 |
| **Total** | **$125,000** |

# 10.22 Maintenance Costs

A permanent register of voters would need to be continuously updated to maintain acceptable levels of currency and coverage. This involves significant organization and management of the database, as well as programming to establish automated routines for matching databases and updating records. If there is a decision to establish a register of voters for Saskatchewan, 2 additional in-house technical positions would need to be added to the IT staff complement. These positions are a Business Analyst and a Database Programmer. It would be highly desirable for these additional positions to be filled at the outset of development so that they could be involved in the planning and development of the new register system. Position classifications for these additional technical staff members would have salaries in the range of $90,000 to $95,000 per year.

Once the register system has been designed and implemented and once additional databases have been acquired for purposes of updating the register records, 2 additional Data Analyst positions[[45]](#footnote-45) will be required to continuously review register records, manually input registration additions, changes and deletions, perform “look-up” functions, and resolve isolated issues. Based on current rates, in a typical four-year cycle the maintenance costs for a permanent register of voters for Saskatchewan would be $1,313,600.

For purposes of comparison, Nova Scotia has 716,660[[46]](#footnote-46) electors on their register and annual costs for register maintenance are estimated to be about $20,000 to $25,000. Also, New Brunswick has a register with 552,000[[47]](#footnote-47) electors and its annual maintenance cost is estimated to be approximately $60,000. These maintenance costs have declined significantly over the years since the registers in these jurisdictions were first developed.

Below is a table summarizing the estimated ongoing maintenance costs for a permanent register of electors in Saskatchewan.

**Table 5: Estimated Annual Maintenance Costs for a Permanent Register of Electors in Saskatchewan**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Position/Item[[48]](#footnote-48)** | **Annual Cost** |
| Business Analyst (MCP5/6) | $93,500 |
| Database Programmer (MCP5/6) | $93,500 |
| 2 Data Analyst (MCP2) | $92,400 |
| Fibre optic communication charges | $ 9,000 |
| Miscellaneous hardware, software & supplies | $40,000 |
| **Total**  | **$328,400** |

Based on current rates, in a typical 4-year election cycle the maintenance costs for a permanent register of voters in Saskatchewan would be $1,313,600[[49]](#footnote-49). Although these costs are significant, they are not expected to increase at the same rate as the costs of enumeration. Evidence from other jurisdictions suggests that these costs are also unlikely to increase substantially over time as staff becomes more efficient at maintaining it.

Therefore, based on the actual costs of enumeration in Saskatchewan and the estimated costs of maintaining a permanent register of voters, it can be seen in Table 6 that a net saving of $882,400 could be realized every four-year election cycle by moving to a permanent register of voters. The cost of continuing to enumerate would be almost 38% greater than the cost of maintaining a permanent register. However, the net saving would be $125,000 less in the first year due to the initial development costs

**Table 6: Comparison of Election Cycle Costs**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **4-year Cycle Cost Components** | **Enumeration** | **Permanent Register** | **Total 4-year Cycle Cost Saving** |
| **Enumeration** | $2,580,000 |  |  |
| **Revision** | $645,000 | $645,000 |  |
| **Target Enumeration** |  | $384,000 |  |
| **Maintenance Costs** |  | 1,313,600 |  |
| **Total 4-year Cycle Costs** | $3,225,000 | $2,342,600 | $882,400 |

# 11.0 Guiding Principles for the Establishment of a Permanent Register of Voters

In deciding whether to move forward with a permanent register of voters for Saskatchewan, it is helpful to consider a list of principles that should be upheld by any change in the way voter registration is carried out. Decision makers may feel more comfortable authorizing the establishment of a permanent register when they are satisfied these conditions can be met. Following is a list of principles for the establishment of a permanent register of voters derived, in part, and adapted from information included in the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing report (1991). The ability of Elections Saskatchewan to meet these principles is assessed below:

* 1. **A permanent register of voters should be adopted only if it is comparable to enumeration in terms of currency, coverage and accuracy.**

As can be seen from the experience of other Canadian jurisdictions that have already established permanent registers, their currency and coverage compare quite favorably with the results of enumeration. There has not been a need to conduct empirical studies of the currency of voters lists derived through enumeration since, having been compiled only weeks before their use in an election, it can be assumed that they are reasonably up-to-date. Permanent registers can also achieve a very high level of currency. For example, the currency of the National Register of Electors for Saskatchewan was 87.6% as of March 1, 2012. Permanent lists can achieve even higher levels of currency as evidenced by the National Register of Electors rates of 95.2% in PEI, 92% in Quebec, and 90.1% in Nova Scotia, for this same time period.

Coverage of the voters list following Saskatchewan’s last election was 71.5%. This rate is fairly low compared to the rates achieved in the most recent enumerations in Manitoba (79.8%) and Alberta (83.4%). The timing of Saskatchewan’s enumeration, the fact that it was conducted over fewer days than in Manitoba and Alberta, and the administrative decision to conduct the enumeration of personal care facilities during revision may, in part, account for the lower rate of coverage. The coverage rates of Elections Canada’s permanent register for these same provinces are: Saskatchewan – 92.2%, Manitoba – 90.1%, and Alberta – 90.4%. The National Register of Electors has achieved an even higher coverage in Quebec (98.3%), New Brunswick (96.9%), and Nova Scotia (95.4%).

There have been very few studies that measure accuracy as a distinct factor of list quality. Having said that, both the lists derived from enumeration and permanent registers are subject to the kinds of errors, albeit from different sources, which contribute to inaccuracy of voter records.

* 1. **A permanent register should only be adopted if it is nearly as efficient as enumeration.**

From the above delineation of the actual costs of enumeration in Saskatchewan and the estimated costs of establishing and maintaining a permanent register of voters for the Province, it can be seen that the annual cost of continuing to enumerate would be $220,600 more or approximately 38% greater than the cost of maintaining a register - $806,250 as compared with $585,650. In the first 4-year election cycle, which would include development costs, the cost saving of moving to a permanent register would amount to $757,400 (current cost). In the next full 4-year election cycle, the savings would be $882,400[[50]](#footnote-50).

* 1. **A permanent register must ensure that it is at least as easy as it is through enumeration for eligible voters to be placed on the voters list.**

Registering voters via a permanent register requires minimal effort on the part of the voter. Registers are, for the most part, kept current with information that has already been provided to other agencies. Voters are also able to initiate their own registration and view register information about themselves - sometimes online - and make any changes that are required. Most often this would entail updating residential address information. For some voters, this may be preferable to completing their voter registration at the door during enumeration. If a voter is not on the register prior to the election, they could also be added or have any necessary changes made during revision, at the advance polls or at their polling place on polling day. This is the same process as is currently available for voters who are unenumerated or who need changes to the information that appears on the voters list.

* 1. **A permanent register must be designed to include all eligible voters.**

Both enumeration and permanent registers have as their goal the inclusion of all eligible voters. Both systems of voter registration have their advantages and disadvantages when it comes to inclusiveness. The challenge for a permanent register is to draw upon many and varied official sources for the purpose of including new voters and keeping voter records up-to-date.

* 1. **A permanent register should be open, such that voters can be included on the list after the Writs for the election have been issued up to and including on polling day.**

Keeping a permanent register open, such that eligible voters will not be disenfranchised simply because they were not on the list prior to an election call, is fairly straightforward. Currently jurisdictions that use permanent registers have continued to incorporate a revision period within their election calendar and also permit voter registration at advance and regular polls.

* 1. **Voters should have the right not to be included on the register.**

Permitting voters to have their names kept off of a permanent register is accomplished through legislative authority and administrative procedure. Voters wishing to be excluded from the register would simply need to inform election administrators of this preference, verify their identity, and they can then be deleted from future register updates. This would not affect their entitlement to vote as they would simply need to register at their voting station when they go to vote. Privacy and security protection legislation which currently exists in several jurisdictions could be adapted to become applicable to a permanent register.

* 1. **Voters should be able to have their names removed from the register at any time.**

Permitting voters to have their names removed from the register would require a similar application procedure. This could take place at any time prior to the printing and distribution of the voters lists for an election.

* 1. **Voters should be able to have register information about themselves corrected at any time.**

Permitting voters to have information about themselves corrected would follow a similar administrative procedure as for exclusion and deletion from the register.

* 1. **A permanent register must be designed so as to prevent voter fraud, i.e. by minimizing the inclusion of people that are not eligible voters.**

Designing a permanent register to minimize the inclusion of ineligible voters has certain advantages over enumeration. When an enumerator goes door-to door to register voters, the veracity of the information provided is not challenged. Identification and citizenship verification are not required for an enumeration record to be created. Ultimately, it depends on the ability and willingness of the voter to provide accurate information. The system checks to prevent this type of voter fraud include challenges of a voter’s eligibility during revision and at the polls by scrutineers and election officials, as well as the requirement to produce identification before being issued a ballot. These same system checks are in place for a permanent register. Additionally, a permanent register benefits from the verification procedures that are in place when an official record is created.

* 1. **A permanent register should be designed to minimize the risk of errors by the registrant or election administrators.**

Minimization of information error by the registrant and election administrators is, for the most part, a moot point. Following the initial creation of a permanent register through enumeration records, the register is kept up-to-date largely from other official sources. The selection of updating sources and the rigor with which these sources verify personal information when creating records, will determine the risk of error within the voter register. The sources used to keep voter registers current are within the authority of legislation and the control of election administrators. Records kept for purposes of driver licensing and vehicle registration and used to keep registers current receive close scrutiny when they are initially created, as are vital statistics.

* 1. **Information on the register must be managed according to the strictest criteria for preserving privacy and safeguarding confidentiality.**

Separate provisions for the protection of privacy and confidentiality of voter information can be included along with legislation authorizing the establishment of a register of voters for Saskatchewan or the register could be subject to Saskatchewan’s *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

* 1. **A permanent register must be widely accepted by the public as an authoritative and legitimate means of listing the electoral population.**

Voter registers have already become widely accepted in Canada as an authoritative and legitimate means of listing the electoral population at federal, provincial and territorial levels. There is no reason to expect this would not occur in Saskatchewan. Furthermore, quality studies can be conducted and published to demonstrate the currency, coverage and accuracy of the register information.

# 12.0 Conclusion

It is difficult to quantify the advantages and disadvantages of each approach to voter registration. To some extent, the weight that is given to the characteristics of each depends on what one is looking for in a registration system. Considering the quality of the information produced by each approach, currency of voter information would appear to be a distinct strength of enumeration. A permanent register, on the other hand can yield greater coverage. Due to the lack of available statistics regarding information accuracy, it is hard to say which approach comes out on top. It can be argued, however, that voter information within a permanent register has the potential to be more accurate because it is produced over time and from multiple sources and is not being recollected every 4 years under tight time frames.

Considering the initial investment required to develop a register of voters for Saskatchewan and the ongoing cost of a register as compared to door-to-door enumeration, there is a strong business case for establishing a register of voters for Saskatchewan. The savings in moving to a register would very quickly pay for the initial investment in register development and the ongoing maintenance costs. In light of the capacity of Elections Saskatchewan’s election management system (ESPREE) to incorporate a “register module” and the availability of reliable data sources for updating a register, it is also feasible to move toward the development of a permanent register of voters at this time.

If it is decided that a permanent register is justified for Saskatchewan, legislative amendments to *The Election Act, 1996* will be required on a timely basis to give Elections Saskatchewan adequate lead time to acquire the necessary resources and make the extensive changes that will be required to prepare for the implementation of a permanent register. It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline the additional provisions that would be necessary and those that would need to be repealed within Saskatchewan’s *Election Act, 1996* in order to give effect to this initiative. It is also outside the scope of this paper to provide advice as to the most appropriate administrative data sources to be used for updating a voter register.

Considering the recent security/privacy breaches across the country involving voter register data, it would be prudent to develop a rigorous privacy protection protocol for Saskatchewan’s voter register. This should involve the Office of the Saskatchewan Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The development of a permanent register takes time. It would be ideal for a permanent register to be built in the years between an electoral event. In order for a permanent register to be in place for the 2019 election, it would be desirable to have legislative amendments in place as soon as practicable so that the required staff could be hired, work could begin on establishing agreements with various data sources, and system modification could be made. It would also be desirable to test the voters lists extracted from a permanent register in a by-election before they are used for a general election. Quality research should also be conducted prior to its use in order to gauge the currency, coverage and accuracy of the register information. Methodologies for conducting this type of research have been developed and tested by Elections British Columbia, Elections Manitoba, Elections Alberta and Elections Canada.

# Appendix 1 - Acknowledgements

The individuals listed below provided invaluable contributions to this discussion paper. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

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 Systems

# Appendix 2 – List of Publications and Documents

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# Appendix 3 – About the Author

Lorne Gibson is an election administration professional currently employed as an electoral management consultant.

He was formerly the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta and prior to that he was the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer in Manitoba. In total, he has 11 years of executive level electoral management experience and 5 years experience as an independent election consultant. Lorne has also worked at the provincial level of government within Manitoba for 17 years - as a senior manager, policy advisor, research analyst and communications coordinator.

Lorne Gibson has considerable experience with voter registration systems in Canada. He planned and oversaw the conduct of province-wide enumerations in Manitoba and developed a permanent register of electors in Alberta. He also developed a secure on-line voter registration system for Alberta and conducted an auditability assessment of Bolivia’s voter registration system for the Electoral Court of Bolivia.

In his post-graduate studies at the University of Alberta, Lorne specialized in research methods and statistics. He taught courses in these and other fields at the universities of Alberta, Manitoba and Winnipeg over an 18-year period.

1. It had been recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer that *The Election Act, 1996* be amended to permit enumeration outside the Writ period. The regulation that was drafted to accomplish this was passed by order-in-council. From the perspective of an independent election office, it would be preferable to see this change in legislation rather than in regulation for two important reasons. Firstly, this significant change to the way in which the voters list is compiled was created and approved by the Executive Branch of government not the Legislative Assembly. It is important that Elections Saskatchewan be seen to be taking its direction from the Legislative Assembly rather than from government. Secondly, regulations are much easier to change at the whim of government and this creates less certainty for election administrators in the timing of enumeration in the future. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Only 9 states in the U.S. do not require advance registration, instead allowing voters to register when they arrive at the polls. Five of these states rank highest in the nation in voter turnout. North Dakota does not require voter registration at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It should be noted that voting is also compulsory in Australia and an AU $20.00 fine is levied for not doing so. Compulsory registration and voting imply that voting is considered a privilege and a responsibility of Australian citizens. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Currently only Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Yukon continue to enumerate before elections. PEI follows the practice of confirming the names of eligible voters. Alberta, which has a permanent register of voters in place, also conducted a province-wide confirmation prior to their last general election in April 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In Alberta’s 2012 election, it was alleged by a candidate that he was verbally abused and assaulted by a resident while campaigning in his constituency. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Saskatchewan, for example, hires approximately 3,000 people to conduct its Province-wide enumeration. A similar number is hired in Manitoba. During its last enumeration, Alberta needed to hire approximately 6,500 enumerators. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The alternative to prescriptive procedural law would be for the election statute to be more permissive by declaring a broad set of values and principles and to entrust the interpretation and implementation to professional election administrators under the watchful scrutiny of the legislature. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. After several complaints of obstruction by candidates, Manitoba found it necessary to go the additional step of enacting laws prohibiting obstruction or interference with an election official’s or an enumerators right of entry to a community to perform their duties. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Until the law was amended in 2010, Alberta required returning officers to contact the executive of the registered constituency association of the political party forming the government and that of the party whose candidate received the highest or next highest number of votes in the preceding election by registered letter for written recommendations of persons to act as enumerators. It was only after first complying with this procedure that returning officers could use other sources to appoint the required number of enumerators. With the date of elections unknown in Alberta, returning officers could face considerable time pressure to find enumerators for either a general enumeration or a more limited targeted enumeration.

Technically speaking, Elections Canada no longer enumerates since moving to a permanent list. However, when appointing revising agents, a federal returning officer must first solicit names of suitable persons from the registered parties whose candidates finished first and second in the last election. The timeliness of party designation of individuals can be problematic. To the extent possible, the returning officer must also appoint an equal number of revising agents from the names supplied from each party and where revising agents are working in pairs, each must represent a different political interest. Again, the returning officer is only permitted to use other sources if a sufficient number of names is not provided by the parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John Courtney offers a different perspective on the value of politically appointed enumerators. He suggests that door-to-door enumeration contributes to the health of local party organizations by providing a small financial reward to local party volunteers who serve as enumerators. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A more thorough discussion of the components of quality, including currency, coverage and accuracy, can be found later in this paper in section 7.0 Advantages and Disadvantages of Enumeration. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Elections Canada’s Register of Voters Project determined that nation-wide approximately 20% of the information on the voters list changes every year – 16% due to moves, 2% because of residents turning 18, 1% for new citizens and 1% due to death. The Office of the Auditor General in it’s 2005 report on Administering the Federal Election Process found that about 17% of voter information changes each year. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Several jurisdictions, such as Alberta and BC, have also permitted election administrators to collect and store within their registers information regarding provisional or prospective voters – those below the age of 18 years – for inclusion on voters lists when they reach the age of majority. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In Great Britain the government seeks out every eligible voter through an annual nationwide canvass, during which local officials mail or hand deliver a form for voter registration to each household. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. More recent estimates have pegged the actual cost avoidance to be closer to $30 million each election cycle. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It should be noted that the National Register of Voters can not supplant a provincial voters list. One of the major reasons for this is that Saskatchewan, and many other provinces for that matter, have different voter qualifications. One example is the 6-month residency requirement to be an eligible voter in Saskatchewan which does not exist at the federal level. Saskatchewan also allows British subjects who were qualified to vote in 1971 to continue to vote in provincial elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The Uniform Law Conference of Canada noted in 2011 that there is no uniformity in voter residency requirements across Canada. All jurisdictions require that an elector be domiciled, resident, or ordinarily resident in the jurisdiction to vote, however, the time of residence required before being eligible to vote and the rules for determining if or where one is resident are not uniform. For example, an individual is eligible to vote in an Ontario provincial election if they are resident in the electoral district on “general polling day”; there is no minimum period of residency in the Province of Ontario. New Brunswick requires residency for only 40 days, but most others require between 6 and 12 months of residency in the province or territory before a person is eligible to vote. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. It is sometimes assumed that enumeration will capture nearly 100% of the eligible voter population. In fact, when calculating voter turnout it has become common practice for election administrators to base the calculation on the number of names on their voters list rather than the population of eligible voters. Later in the paper there is a more thorough discussion of enumeration and permanent register coverage with statistics provided from voters list quality research. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The information collected door-to-door during Alberta’s 2011 enumeration/ confirmation needed to be supplemented with voter information from the National Register of Voters for Alberta before their 2012 election. After adding this voter information, coverage increased to approximately 93%. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For instance, Elections Alberta has partnered with driver and vehicle licensing authorities in the province to include inserts on the availability of on-line voter registration options and address change reminders along with driver licence renewal notifications. A similar initiative was undertaken with Canada Post to inform residents who had recently changed their address of the availability of on-line registration. In Saskatchewan, a service such as “expressaddress.com” could be used to help keep track of address changes and keep the voter register current. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Recognizing the importance of quality of information in the National Register of Voters, Elections Canada has set a target of 77.0% for currency. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Elizabeth Gidengil notes that younger Canadians, the poor and those with less formal schooling, in addition to being less likely to vote, are the most likely to be disadvantaged by a switch to a permanent voter register. This is the case because they are more likely to be tenants, and frequent moves means that tenants are less likely to be registered correctly in the constituency where they live. Consequently, they are less likely to receive a voter information card telling them where to vote and may also find it harder to deal with the challenges of getting on the register. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Recognizing the importance of quality of information in the National Register of Voters, Elections Canada has set a target of 92.0% for coverage. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. To ensure event readiness in case of system damage or catastrophic loss of data due to flooding, fire, power failure, malicious attack, etc., Elections Saskatchewan would be required to prepare a contingency plan for disaster recovery and business resumption. Such a plan would need to provide for routine back-up of register information and software, off-site storage of back-up information and plans to access redundant computer equipment. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Voters lists, whether produced through enumeration or from a permanent register, are provided to returning officers and election officials in order to facilitate voting and will also be shared with political participants for purposes of campaigning. Voters lists produced from a permanent register are, for the most part, updated centrally and are not accessible to scores of data entry operators and enumerators. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Some jurisdictions, like Saskatchewan, collect date of birth information during enumeration, but they do not collect driver license numbers. The amount and nature of the information collected and stored within a register of voters depends on the uses to which the register is put and the types of administrative data sources that are used for updating. For instance, in addition to the standard eligibility information collected for voting in provincial and municipal elections, Elections Quebec also collects “religious denomination” for use in school board elections. They have discontinued collecting “occupation” because of the difficulty keeping this type of information up-to-date and because there was no real purpose for it. Legislation authorizing the creation of an elector register can place restrictions on the type of information that can be collected and retained. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. There is room for debate over how long campaigns must last in order to produce an informed and engaged electorate. There are many more channels of communication today, which might suggest that a shorter campaign period is preferable. On the other hand, many voters are turned off by politics and are not paying attention. More time may be necessary to raise their level of awareness and involvement. Also, shorter campaigns may tend to favour the re-election of incumbents over newcomers who struggle to be known and heard. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For, example, Elections Alberta developed a secure on-line voter registration application called Voterlink for a cost of $60,000 using the same external developer who built Election Saskatchewan’s election management system. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. On June 14, 2012, Manitoba passed legislation requiring the Chief Electoral Officer to examine and report on the establishment of a permanent voters list for Manitoba elections. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Due to the change to enumeration outside the Writ period in Saskatchewan’s 2011 election, the decision was made to enumerate certain facilities with less stable populations, such as personal care homes, within the revision period. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This estimate of the size of Saskatchewan’s electoral population was provided by Elections Canada and derived from Statistics Canada data sources. This estimate is somewhat higher than the voter population eligible for provincial elections since it has not been adjusted for the 6-month residency rule that applies to provincial elections within Saskatchewan. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This estimate of the size of Manitoba’s electoral population was provided by Elections Manitoba and derived from Manitoba Bureau of Statistics data sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. As noted in the text of this paper, Alberta has a register of voters. For their 2011 enumeration/confirmation, they pre-populated their enumeration forms with elector information and only needed to add new voters or correct inaccurate records. Therefore, a large percentage of these registered voters would have already been on the register prior to enumeration. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. This estimate of the size of Alberta’s electoral population was provided by Elections Canada and derived from Statistics Canada data sources. The estimate is somewhat higher than the voter population eligible for provincial elections since it has not been adjusted for the 6-month residency rule that applies to provincial elections within Alberta. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This estimate of the size of Yukon’s electoral population was provided by Elections Yukon. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. These estimates of the size of provincial electoral populations were derived from Statistics Canada data sources. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. These numbers have been adjusted to exclude the estimated number of deceased, duplicates and non-Canadian citizens. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. At the national level, the coverage and currency estimates may vary by +/-0.2 and +/-0.7. More detailed estimates will have higher levels of variation. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Elections Canada notes that maintaining a register in the North is challenging due to unique characteristics of the area. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The benefit side of the ledger is particularly difficult to quantify. Also, both costs and benefits may not be evenly distributed among the various institutions, organizations and individuals who have a stake in deciding which method of voter registration is adopted. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. In 1993 when Elections Quebec was preparing for the implementation of a permanent register, they estimated their development costs to be over $14 million. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. For purposes of comparison, Manitoba’s cost of enumeration in 2011 was $2,799,046. However, Manitoba’s enumeration was conducted over a 33-day period whereas Saskatchewan’s occurred over 19 days. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Notwithstanding the name of the election management software, Elections Saskatchewan does not have a permanent register of voters. The software was named because of its capability and in anticipation of a register being developed. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. There is a paucity of information regarding the initial start up plans and costs for register development within the provinces and territories in Canada. Typically development costs were not tracked separately from other IT and program costs. One exception is Quebec which developed detailed implementation plans prior to the introduction of their register in 1997. It may, however, be helpful to note that New Brunswick, which has had a permanent register of voters since 2006, is currently entering into a contract for the complete redevelopment of their register system. The estimated value of the contract which has been awarded to an external provider is between $250,000 - $300,000. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. There are currently no administrative or clerical positions within the IT department of Elections Saskatchewan and no other available staff positions to fulfil this role. Although the process of keeping a register of voters up-to-date can be largely automated, there is still a need for manual matching and processing of some data. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The number of voters on Nova Scotia’s register was 716,660 as of May 20, 2012. This register would, therefore, be quite comparable in size to a register developed for Saskatchewan. Annual maintenance costs include fees for an external consultant and an in-house GIS Analyst. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The number of voters on New Brunswick’s register was 552,000 following municipal elections held on May 14, 2012. Annual maintenance costs include a portion of the salary costs for the Manager of Voter Information Systems and a portion of the salary cost for another staff person. In earlier stages of the development of New Brunswick’s register, there were additional maintenance costs with an external provider. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. For purposes of comparison, in a recent study conducted by Elections Manitoba examining whether or not a permanent voters list should be established for the province, it was estimated that there would be a requirement for 4-5 full time equivalent staff to manage and maintain a register in Manitoba. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The “Permanent Voters List Study” recently released by Elections Manitoba estimated that the ongoing maintenance costs for a voter register over a 4-year election cycle would be $1,530,000. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The costs are presented in current rates and no attempt has been made to forecast inflationary increases for the major cost contributors, such as fees and salaries, to either registration option. Increases in the salaries of positions devoted to register maintenance will increase over time as a result of salary adjustments that are arrived at via collective bargaining between the SGEU and the Saskatchewan government. On the other hand, the fees paid to enumerators and other election officials are set by regulation through periodic adjustments to the tariff of fees for election workers recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer. Currently the fee paid to enumerators in Saskatchewan is low compared with other jurisdictions. For example the amount paid per name collected in Manitoba is $.75 and in Alberta it is $1.00. In Saskatchewan, the fee per name collected is $.50 in urban areas and $.65 in rural areas. These fees would likely need to increase before the next general election in order to attract a sufficient number of enumerators. The amounts paid for lease of returning office space in major cities such as Regina, Saskatoon and Lloydminster will also undoubtedly increase as the commercial rental market supply tightens in Saskatchewan’s surging economy. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)