

THE DYNAMICS OF CATHOLIC VOTING BEHAVIOUR  
SURROUNDING DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM  
IN NEWFOUNDLAND

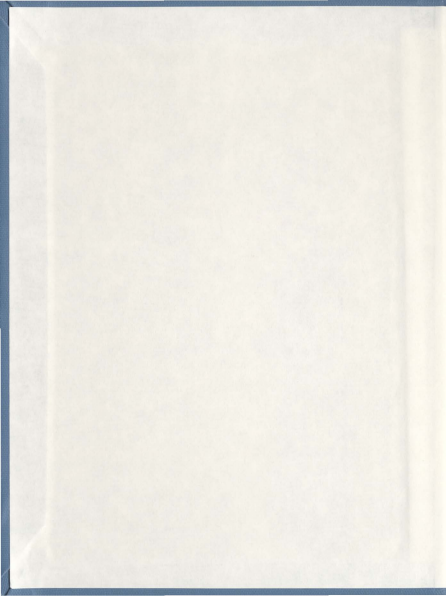
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The Dynamics of Catholic Voting Behaviour  
Surrounding Denominational Education Reform  
in Newfoundland

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to reveal factors which accounted for the variance in vote among the Catholic electorate of St. John's during the 1995 and 1997 Newfoundland referenda on education reform. It is based primarily on two surveys conducted in St. John's after each referendum. Previous research on this topic has demonstrated that religious affiliation was an important factor in predicting voting behaviour surrounding the question of education reform. In particular, Catholic voters tended to vote against the reforms more than did non-Catholics. Preliminary multivariate analysis of the survey data has identified key factors which strongly influence Catholic voters. Voting patterns exhibited differed substantially when issues of the degree of religiosity and fear of loss of denominational rights are considered. Religiosity was considered both in terms of objective and subjective measures. Fear of loss of rights was manifest among these voters as a perceived attack on Catholics and the church by the government. The attempt to uncover the motivations of the Catholic voters during the two referenda requires a careful investigation of past and recent trends in social behaviour. Further validation of the observed trends can be accomplished if an historical basis for the Irish-Catholic identity demonstrated by the local Catholic population can be shown. This research is premised on the theory that Catholic voters who still possessed a strong sense of "Catholic identity," feelings of belonging to a "Catholic population," and believed that the reforms were a threat to "Catholic rights," were most likely to oppose the reforms to the education system.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 Statement of Topic**

The two referenda on denominational education reform in Newfoundland in 1995 and 1997 represent two of the more interesting and controversial events in Canadian and, in particular, Newfoundland politics in recent memory. The issue embodies perhaps one of the most important provincial responsibilities, the education of children.

The 1995 referendum was characterized by a set of complex relationships between the electorate and the government, between major interest groups (churches) and the public, as well as within the electorate itself. An unpopular Premier, Clyde Wells, presented an unclear referendum question to an arguably disillusioned public, a certain proportion of which was greatly influenced by the Catholic church and its leaders. Within this situation, the public was faced with a great number of avenues through which it could, and did, display its displeasure. The result was a minuscule majority voting in favour of the proposed amendment to Term17, which would have had the effect of stripping the churches of their control of the provincial education system.

In the 1997 referendum, however, the landscape had radically changed. The newly elected Premier, Brian Tobin, was riding an immense wave of popularity. He presented a clear and straightforward referendum question to the public and unlike 1995, the Catholic church played a visibly modest role in its attempt to mobilize its congregation against the proposed reforms. All this provided the public with little opportunity to maneuver on the

issue. The result was an overwhelming show of support for the elimination of Newfoundland's traditional denominational education system.

Consequently, we are presented with circumstances in each referendum which are quite different. This offers a unique and valuable opportunity to compare and hopefully to understand the process of how and why the people of Newfoundland, especially a portion of the Catholic population, have opened this new chapter in the province's history.

The primary focus of this study is on factors explaining the vote among the St. John's electorate in each referendum, and in particular the behaviour and motives of Catholic voters. It was a marked shift in the Catholic vote which accounted for the much larger "Yes" vote in 1997 than in 1995. As necessary background, this thesis will also include elements of both the history and theory concerning the question of denominational education in Newfoundland until 1997. In trying to grasp the forces at work during the two referenda it is necessary to fully appreciate the position of denominational education in the province since its inception in the nineteenth century. Attempts to modify the structure of denominational education in Newfoundland have been widespread throughout history. Various governments and provincial bodies have long opposed the system, professing unnecessary financial burdens and illogical organization and administration of the schools. A complete historical background is provided in Chapter 2. A central goal of this is to illustrate how the issue of denominational education has evolved, especially since the beginning of this decade, as a contest primarily between the Roman Catholic, and later the Pentecostal, churches on one

side and Government on the other.

There has been a great deal of speculation concerning voting patterns in the two referendums. It is the goal of this work to attempt to provide, through scientific means, what seem to be the most likely explanations for the rift that formed among the Catholic voters over the issue of denominational education

## **1.2 Research Question**

What factors led to the polarization within the Catholic electorate during the 1995 and 1997 referenda on education reform in Newfoundland? Why did some Catholics oppose the reforms, while others favoured the changes? Why is it that some Catholics so adamantly professed their right to control the education of their own children? This polarization may be observed in a number of ways. For a portion of the Catholic electorate, it seemed that the proposal for non-denominational schools was defined in terms of a personal attack by the government. Others framed the debate in a more holistic fashion which encompassed a concern for "the church." It is the goal of this study to determine which of these conceptualizations is the most relevant in understanding Catholic voting behaviour. Also, the question of where these beliefs and attitudes come from and why they are so resistant to attenuation over time will be explored.

## **1.3 Scope of Research**

The previous section prompts the question of why the research is focused primarily on Catholic voters. A practical reason for this focus is that most of the survey data available for analysis are limited to St. John's. The population of the city is such that

there are few Pentecostals represented and there is a very strong Catholic tradition present. Comparison of both survey and population distributions illustrates this point. Although the 1997 survey overrepresents the Pentecostal population slightly, the percentage remains insufficient to warrant a detailed study similar to that undertaken with the Catholic population of St. John's.<sup>1</sup> See Table 1-1.

**Table 1-1—Comparison Of Survey and Population Distributions, 1995, 1997**

Religion	1995		1997	
	Survey	Population	Survey	Population
Roman Catholic	49.7%	52.4%	59.2%	53.6%
Anglican	21.1	18.8	15.8	18.4
United Church, Presb.	15.1	17.1	11.4	16.3
Salvation Army	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.2
Pentecostal	1.9	2.0	2.2	1.8
Other	3.5	3.0	3.8	3.1
None	5.7	3.3	4.3	3.6

Source: *St. John's Political Attitude Survey (1995, 1997)*. Directed by Professors Mark Graesser and Jeff Jackson, Department of Political Science, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

In addition, it has been observed that religion was one of the main causes of the division among voters over the question of education reform. As seen in Table 1-2, analysis of the data collected for the City of St. John's demonstrates that Catholics divided evenly while most non-Catholics overwhelmingly tended to vote Yes in the 1995

<sup>1</sup>Source for St. John's population distributions: *1991 Census*, data aggregated by provincial electoral districts. (Districts of Kilbride, St. John's Center, St. John's East, St. John's West, St. John's North, St. John's South, and Virginia Waters) Distribution for population aged 18 and older.

referendum.

**Table 1-2--Vote by Religion, 1995, 1997**

"What is your Religion?"				
Vote	All Respondents			
	1995		1997	
	Catholic	Other	Catholic	Other
Yes	48.1%	77.4%	68.1%	83.3%
No	51.9	22.6	31.9	16.7
(N=100%)	(81)	(84)	(69)	(48)

Evidently, a deep rift had formed among the Catholic electorate between the two referenda. During the 1995 referendum a slight majority of Catholics voted against the proposed reforms. In the 1997 referendum, the trend reversed but 32 percent of the Catholic electorate continued to oppose the reforms. Meanwhile, non-Catholic proportions changed relatively little. Why did education reform prove to be such a divisive initiative for Catholic voters?

Another reason for the focus on the Catholic voters relates to the seemingly natural tendency for people to associate the denominational education issue with the Catholic church. The Catholic church appeared to be the main opponent of the proposed reforms. The Pentecostal church was also strongly opposed to the reforms but it seems as though they were unable to capture the focus afforded the issue by the media. In addition, the large proportion of the population represented by the Catholic church in contrast to that of the Pentecostal church warrants the exclusion of the latter from this study.

Also, given the attempts to determine the genesis of attitudes and belief systems

among these voters, it would not be advisable to combine these two denominations in the analysis. The Pentecostal faith and its particular history of development in Newfoundland, is considerably different from that of the Catholic faith which makes it quite possible that a sense of "Pentecostal society" is not present among these voters. If this is the case, including them in the analysis would not contribute to a greater understanding of the deep-seated motivations that likely played a major role in the determination of the vote. In the end, education reform appeared to be shaped mainly as a battle between the Catholic church and the government.

#### **1.4 Methodology and Sources of Data**

Most of the evidence used in the examination of the above questions was drawn from two data sets derived from the 1995 and 1997 St. John's Political Attitude Surveys. These were completed and made available by Memorial University of Newfoundland's Department of Political Science, and are well designed tools with which to probe the motivations of voters in each referendum.

The St. John's 1995 Political Attitude Survey, directed by Professors Mark Graesser and Jeff Jackson, was completed in November 1995. It focused most notably on attitudes towards the education referendum and the provincial government. Also included are measures of social background and characteristics which provide for much of the analysis involved in this research project. The interviews were conducted with two sub-samples, one group interviewed in the homes of the respondents, and the other by telephone. The in-home sub-sample was designed to represent all eligible voters within

the City of St. John's. A two-stage cluster design was used to obtain a random sample from the Provincial List of Electors compiled in December 1994. The result was a randomly selected sample of 345 interviews of which 232 were completed. The telephone interviews included a total sample of 110 St. John's residents selected by directory assisted random digit dialing of which 96 were completed. A total of 328(72.7%) interviews were completed producing a margin of error of approximately  $\pm 5.5\%$  nineteen times out of twenty. Comparison of the survey and actual population distributions shows that the survey was, in most cases, quite representative of the population, according to figures taken from Census information.

The St. John's 1997 Political Attitude Survey, directed by Professor Mark Graesser, was completed in November 1997 and includes measures on issues resembling those surveyed in the 1995 survey. The 1997 interviews were selected and administered in the same manner as done in 1995, specifically randomly selected in-home and telephone interviews. However, the total sample size is smaller. The total number of in-home interviews assigned were 210 of which 141 were completed. The telephone sub-sample consisted of 80 interviews of which 50 were completed. In all, 191 interviews(65.8%) of the assigned 290 were completed. This produces a margin of error of approximately  $\pm 7\%$  nineteen times out of twenty. Again, comparison of the survey and population distributions shows that the survey was reasonably representative of the population of St. John's.



### **1.5 Plan of the Study**

This study is divided into three central components. While serving as a review of the evolution and institutionalization of Newfoundland's education system, Chapter 2 traces the historical development of schooling from the time of its inception as an informal, church sponsored establishment to the emergence of a formal, institutional arrangement between government and the Church. Also included is an examination of the reports of both the Warren and Williams Royal Commissions. The reasons for their presence is two-fold. While these reports represent the two most significant attempts to alter the existing denominational system, and are therefore historically significant, they also illustrate how the development of a modern education system in Newfoundland was characterized by a great deal of tension between government and the churches. This sets the stage for the furious debate which developed over denominational education reform in the 1990s.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth examination of the 1995 and 1997 referendums. In particular, it presents the central issues which emerged on both sides of the debate during both campaigns such as minority/denominational rights and claims that the education system was highly inefficient. In addition to this is an attempt to understand why some Catholics were adamant about preserving the denominational system. This section paints a picture of the typical Irish Newfoundland Catholic as one who possesses a strong sense of belonging and community; a sense of culture which was propagated by the Catholic

church in Newfoundland.<sup>3</sup> This is quite significant in allowing the reader to fully understand and follow the data analysis which follows in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 represents the attempt to determine which factors were most important in influencing the voting patterns of Catholic voters during the two latest education referendums. It is an attempt to lend a certain degree of credibility, through quantitative means, to what seem to be the most likely explanations for the division that formed among the Catholic electorate of St. John's over the issue of denominational education reform. A multivariate analysis of the available survey data for the City of St. John's completed after each referendum, with a particular focus on the central issues which emerged during the campaigns, will reveal the answers to these questions.

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<sup>3</sup>The use of the phrase "Irish Newfoundland Catholics" does not represent a conscious attempt to focus on this particular ethnic group as opposed to Scottish or English Catholics, for example. Virtually all of the Catholic population of Newfoundland, and especially St. John's, is of early (pre-famine) Irish origin.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE EVOLUTION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF DENOMINATIONAL EDUCATION IN NEWFOUNDLAND

The events which unfolded in the early 1990s leading up to the latest attempt by government to alter Newfoundland's system of denominational education were undeniably dramatic. Throughout the history of the denominational system in this province, many have mused, but only a few have endeavoured to alter the arrangement between the churches and the government concerning the education of children. Until 1997 and the efforts of Premier Brian Tobin, these rare ventures have been largely unsuccessful. The result has been more than 150 years of church domination of the education system. This chapter describes the process through which the denominational system emerged, changed, and eventually arrived at this point in history which marks the end of Newfoundland's denominational education system.

#### **2.1 History to 1964**

Newfoundland's education system, as it existed to 1997, evolved from an informal assortment of separate church funded schools, through non-denominational charity and church society schools, into a secular, state-supported system and eventually to a fully denominational and distinctly institutionalized system protected under the Constitution.<sup>3</sup> Newfoundland's first schools were established by churches and various

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<sup>3</sup>Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. *Our Children, Our Future: Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary*.

church societies.<sup>4</sup> These schools taught the basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic but religious education was the primary focus. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), and other church societies such as the Benevolent Irish Society, played a pivotal role in bringing education to Newfoundland children. The SPG opened a school in St. John's in 1744 and by the early 1800s it had established schools in all of the major Newfoundland communities.<sup>5</sup> These schools were denominational in nature but seemed to have been open to students of all denominations. Other schools were soon established by similar organizations such as the Newfoundland School Society which began to operate non-denominational schools in 1823, and the Benevolent Irish Society which opened a school in St. John's in 1827. Although these societies were originally non-denominational, the Newfoundland School Society eventually became associated with the Church of England, and the Benevolent Irish Society, which educated mainly Roman Catholic children, became associated with the Roman Catholic church.<sup>6</sup> It is at this point that the notion of denominational schools first emerged. This reality was further strengthened in the early 1830s and 1840s with the arrival in Newfoundland of other religious orders, primarily the Presentation Sisters and the Mercy Sisters, who would

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*Elementary, Secondary Education*. Dr. Len Williams, Chairman. March, 1992, 49.

<sup>4</sup>The first school in Newfoundland was opened in the mid 1720s in Bonavista by Rev. Henry Jones.

<sup>5</sup>*Our Children, Our Future*, 50.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

provide education on a denominational basis. The last non-denominational school society ended when the Christian Brothers assumed control of the Benevolent Irish Society schools in 1876, thereby firmly establishing denominational education in Newfoundland.

The first attempt to alter this arrangement followed the establishment of Representative Government in Newfoundland in 1832. The first Education Act (1836) set as its goal the establishment of a secular school system administered by nine local school boards. The Act provided grants for schools which were supposed to be non-denominational and established a public school system.<sup>7</sup> An 1838 amendment to the 1836 Education Act clearly expressed the government's intentions for a non-denominational system. It stipulated that clergy were not "to interfere in the proceedings or management of schools," and prohibited religious instruction - even the use of textbooks "having a tendency to teach particular denominational beliefs."<sup>8</sup> Although the Act clearly stipulated the terms under which the education system was to develop in Newfoundland, it did very little to alter the existing defacto denominational system. The government was moving in a direction opposite to the consensus of the population which assumed that education was the responsibility of the family and the church rather than the state. In effect, "the Legislature accepted a moral obligation to share some of the cost but little overall

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 51.

authority.”<sup>9</sup> However, in 1842 the public school boards were dissolved and public education was virtually abandoned largely due to friction between the Protestant and Roman Catholic school board members.<sup>10</sup> The following example speaks to the problems that developed within the single system. The original aim of the government was to provide for single schools for both Protestants and Catholics. However, district school boards, like the one in Harbour Grace for example, wanted one hour a day to be allotted when children (whose parents approved) would read from the scriptures. This was unacceptable to the government which promptly requested that an alternate rule, similar to that in other districts, be adopted. *Proper* regulations would provide for a minister of religion to visit the schools occasionally to give religious instruction to pupils of the congregation. No religion was to be taught in the school on a regular basis. After some debate, the Conception Bay Board adopted *both* rules. The governor would not approve the board’s new constitution, which led to Protestant parents refusing to send their children to a school where religion was not being taught. In addition, the rejection of the board’s constitution by the Governor resulted in the suspension of funding to the district. This prompted the Catholic and Protestant churches to petition for the division of the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>10</sup>The 1838 Amendment which banned the use of the Bible in schools was the chief source of controversy, especially among the Protestant board members. *Our Children, Our Future*, 51.

grant money for the district.<sup>11</sup> These same types of problems were also present in the districts of Trinity and Bonavista.

After much debate, the government, through the 1843 Education Act, finally consented to the provision of separate school boards. Under this latest legislation the Roman Catholic and Protestant populations (Church of England and Methodists) now had their own separate school boards and would receive proportional funding.<sup>12</sup> However, no sooner did the Protestant clergy realize their goal of a separate school system did they petition the government for further changes to the Education Act. Under the guidance of Bishop Feild, the Church of England lobbied for a further division of the Protestant grant. In order to strengthen the Church of England through the avoidance of doctrinal and organizational differences, Bishop Field advocated the establishment of a separate system for the Methodists. This caused further tension among the denominational groups as many believed that the further dilution of scarce funding was not the most suitable, nor logical solution for providing education to Newfoundland's scattered population. Despite this, the Education Act of 1874 further divided the education grant according to the number of adherents declared by the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, the

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<sup>11</sup>Dr. Llewellyn Parsons, "Political Involvement in Education in Newfoundland, 1832-1876". A paper given at the Newfoundland Historical Society Meeting, March 27, 1975, 8.

<sup>12</sup>*Our Children, Our Future*, 51.

Congregationalist Church, the Free Church of Scotland, and the Methodist Church.<sup>13</sup> For better or worse, Newfoundland's educational system was now further divided on the basis of religion.

The institutionalized system continued to expand in 1876 as new legislation provided for the appointment of three denominational Superintendents of Education, one each for the Roman Catholic, Church of England, and General Protestants.<sup>14</sup> These superintendents gained control over the general supervision of schools and the training of teachers. The passing of the 1927 Education Act strengthened the denominational nature of Newfoundland schooling as it officially endorsed the existing system of education as the approved system for Newfoundland. Also, it abolished the position of Minister of Education created in 1920 in favour of a Bureau of Education composed of the Prime Minister, the three Denominational Superintendents, and a secretary for education.<sup>15</sup> This act also identified four areas of denominational or church control in education which later came to be constitutionally entrenched and protected in Term 17 of Newfoundland's Terms of Union with Canada in 1949:

- the right to denominationally based school boards which could own and operate schools;

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>15</sup>Phillip McCann, "Denominational Education in the Twentieth Century in Newfoundland," in *The Vexed Question*, ed. William McKim (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1988), 60.



- the right of these boards to appoint and/or dismiss teachers;
- the right of these schools to receive public funding on a non-discriminatory basis;
- the right to establish denominational colleges.

From 1933 to 1949 Newfoundland was stripped of its democratic government and placed under the control of an appointed Commission which was responsible to the Dominions Office in Great Britain. The Commission, composed of three Newfoundland members and three British members, had as its task the rejuvenation of Newfoundland's political, social, and economic well-being. In order to achieve this goal, the Commission was convinced that the denominational education system needed to be completely dismantled. This sparked a fierce debate between the Commission and the church leaders who claimed that the undemocratic Commission was crushing religious rights. In the face of such controversy the Commission abandoned its primary goal and settled for an arrangement whereby formerly abolished denominational Superintendents were brought into the Department of Education's policy-making apparatus, the Council of Education, as executive officers. After Confederation in 1949, the churches gained constitutional protection for the rights they had been afforded by the Acts of 1843 and 1876, as well as the 1935 amendments to the 1927 Education Act. This resulted largely from the efforts of former Newfoundland Premier J. R. Smallwood who, in his own words was "implacably determined" to ensure constitutional protection of the churches' right to funding for their

own schools.<sup>16</sup> Smallwood had been unyielding in his desire to keep sectarian issues out of the Confederation campaign and attempted to strike a deal with Archbishop Roche with the hope of guaranteeing a peaceful vote. Although the Archbishop never officially accepted Smallwood's proposal, Term 17 was added to the Terms of Union.<sup>17</sup> Two central aspects would guide Newfoundland's education system for the next twenty years:

- all government funds for education were allocated on a non-discriminatory basis;
- the Department of Education was organized around denominational Superintendents who controlled all programmes within the schools of their particular denomination.<sup>18</sup>

## **2.2 The Warren Commission and its Effects on Denominational Education**

By 1964 a number of alarming statistics had been collected on the state of education in Canada's newest province. 1,266 schools were operated by 270 boards. Only 99 of these schools had ten classrooms or more. It seemed obvious to opponents of the denominational structure that the duplication inherent in the system rendered it unable to meet rising post-confederation demands for modernization. This led to the appointment in 1964 of the Royal Commission on Education and Youth, chaired by Dr. Phillip Warren.

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<sup>16</sup>Joseph R. Smallwood, *I Chose Canada: The Memoirs of the Honourable Joseph R. "Joey" Smallwood*. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973), 306.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 308-309. See Appendix A for the text of Term 17.

<sup>18</sup>Mark W. Graesser. "Church, State, and Public Policy in Newfoundland: The Question of Denominational Education." Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, May 27-29, 1990, 5.

Three years later the commission released its report which led to the most extensive changes in the history of the education system thus far. The report included more than 300 recommendations concerning curriculum and teacher qualifications as well as three key recommendations concerning the denominational structure of education:

- reorganizing the Department of Education on a functional rather than a denominational basis by removing the denominational Superintendents from their administrative duties;
- consolidation of school districts, including the creation of “interdenominational” boards in rural areas to achieve greater efficiencies; and
- consolidating smaller schools, especially at the high school level.<sup>19</sup>

These proposed reforms did little to calm the existing tensions between government and church leaders. Although denominational proponents viewed these as radical reforms, the churches would continue to exercise the exclusive right to operate schools. However, interdenominational cooperation would be required and in an attempt to limit church control to district and school levels, the Council of Education would be abolished in favour of church representation on advisory boards which would control religious education programmes and the distribution of any grants distributed along denominational lines.<sup>20</sup> Despite the concerns of the Catholic representatives that the

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<sup>19</sup>Mark W. Graesser. “Education Reform in Newfoundland, 1990-1995. The Impact of Constitutional Constraints and Referendum Politics.” Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, June 10, 1997, 4.

<sup>20</sup>Graesser. “Church, State, and Public Policy in Newfoundland...,” 7.

recommendations contravened rights entrenched by Term 17 of the Terms of Union, all the churches soon came to accept a compromise arrangement. The Protestant denominations (excluding the Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists) combined their systems into an "integrated" assembly. Also, Denominational Education Councils (DEC's) were established for the three major groups (Catholic, Integrated and Pentecostal). These bodies controlled the distribution of all educational capital funding from the government, designed religious curricula, and enjoyed considerable advisory roles as a link between government and the churches. This new understanding was formally legalized by the Department of Education Act of 1968 and the Schools Act of 1969.

A denominational system of education has different meanings in different jurisdictions. In Quebec it was a dual system of public education with separate schools for Catholics and Protestants. In Newfoundland it meant the right of several churches or groups of churches to establish and maintain their own schools with the support of government money. It has been said that the most important consideration of the first Committee on Education in 1871 was "devising the best means for the establishment of schools in Newfoundland, financed by the government."<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, religious animosity and jealousy efficiently silenced the effectiveness of the various Education

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<sup>31</sup>Dr. Llewellyn Parsons, "Our Educational Past: Some Unanticipated Consequences," Department of Educational Administration, Memorial University of Newfoundland (1969), 2.

Acts through which government attempted to meet its goal. By 1967, the five denominations (Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Church, Pentecostal, and Salvation Army) operated 1046 schools under 270 school boards. Sixty-seven (67) percent of these schools had fewer than four classrooms.<sup>22</sup>

The goal of the historical review to this point has been to demonstrate that the denominational system had been plagued by tension and controversy throughout its development. Religious conflict represented practically a constant challenge to attempts to provide quality in the Newfoundland education system. However, there had been relatively little open debate over denominational education. From Confederation to 1990, the only exception has been the Warren Commission which addressed the denominational aspect of education rather than merely structural and administrative concerns. Although the Warren Commission was successful in implementing substantial changes, the essential denominational character of the education system would remain until the release of the Williams Royal Commission Report (1992) and the subsequent church-state negotiations from 1992-1995. The key structural elements of the newly altered education system included the Department of Education, provincial Denominational Education Commissions, denominational districts and school boards, and the individual schools.

The Department of Education Act and the Schools Act were the documents that continued to maintain denominational education. The former did so in an administrative

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 13.

sense. At the provincial level, policy-making and administrative duties were centered in the Department of Education. The composition of the Department was similar to others in that it was headed by a Minister as well as other bureaucratic officials, but some powers were shared with the Denominational Education Councils (DECs), represented by their respective Executive Directors. These powers included establishing, abolishing or altering school districts, appointing school board members, receiving and allocating education grants from the government, and designing and administering religious education curriculum. The Minister, Deputy Minister, an Assistant Deputy Minister, and the three Executive Directors composed the Denominational Policy Commission which was responsible for advising the Cabinet.<sup>23</sup>

The Schools Act provided for the existence of districts and denominational school boards that would operate all schools in the province. Each of the 32 provincial districts were governed by a School Board whose members were two-thirds elected and one-third appointed based on the recommendations from the Denominational Education Committees. Superintendents and an administrative staff were placed in charge of the individual districts. The School Board owned and operated all schools in the district and was responsible for the hiring of teachers, who were represented by the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association (NLTA). The provincial Department of Education issued funding to each district on the basis of a formula predicated primarily on

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<sup>23</sup>Graesser. "Church, State, and Public Policy in Newfoundland...", 10.

enrollment, but other funding came from poll taxes and local donations.<sup>24</sup>

At the bottom of the system were the individual schools. These were classified primarily by religion and children were to attend a school on the basis of this categorization, even if this meant being bused past a closer school of a different denomination. However, according to the Department of Education, this practice was not strictly maintained in areas where a school of a child's denomination did not exist. In 1988-89, children of other faiths totaled seven percent of Catholic school enrollment, and eighteen percent of Integrated and Pentecostal schools.<sup>25</sup>

This represents a brief examination of the structure of the Newfoundland education system after the implementation of the Warren Commission reforms. What follows is an account of the latest attempt to alter this arrangement between the churches and the government - the Williams Royal Commission - including the major findings of the report and the failed attempt at negotiated reform between the churches and government which compelled Premiers Wells and Tobin to pursue constitutional amendments, and thus the need to conduct referendums.

### **2.3 The Williams Commission and the Failed Attempt at Negotiated Reform, 1990-1995**

Although the education system continued to evolve after the Warren Commission

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 10, quoting *Economic Statistics*, Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (March 1989), Table 8.

reforms, a certain degree of criticism continued to exist. A common argument was that the duplication of services which remained represented a central obstacle to a cost-effective and efficient system. As evidence of the need for further and substantial change within the education system, provincial statistics on enrollments indicated a sharp decline in the numbers of students.<sup>26</sup> It was argued that as the numbers of students fell, so too did the need for abundance of small, separate schools provided for by education legislation. In 1986, armed with "hard proof" of the need for further major steps in education reform, the Newfoundland Teacher's Association (NTA), now the Newfoundland and Labrador Teacher's Association (NLTA), called for the appointment of a Royal Commission to examine the administrative and economic disadvantages of the denominational system and provide recommendations for its improvement. Four years later, in 1990, the NLTA had its call answered. Newly elected Premier Clyde Wells was focused on initiating a new strategy that would release Newfoundland from the confines of a failing resource-based economy. He realized that education reform was the first step in generating a healthy future for the province. Quoting facts that showed Newfoundland was spending higher amounts of its GDP on education than other Canadian provinces, yet producing

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<sup>26</sup>Total enrollment had been on a constant increase since Confederation. However, in 1972-73 the total was 161,723; in 1986-87 it was 139,378, and at the point of education reform in 1996-97 it was 106,205. *Education Statistics-Elementary-Secondary 1997-98*. Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Table 7.



sub-standard results,<sup>27</sup> the Government appointed the Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education in August 1990. The Commission was chaired by Dr. Len Williams, a Memorial University education professor.

Its mandate included an inquiry into the organization and administration of education in Newfoundland. Through consultations with key groups, public hearings and research by Commission staff as well as external researchers, the Commission attempted to reveal the true nature of the provincial education system. Although many different issues were raised during this process, the denominational system was the source of greatest concern. Of the 1,041 written and oral submissions to the Commission, 86 percent voiced some concern about the denominational structure of education (three-quarters supported the existing system and only nine percent expressed opposition to denominational schooling). The Commission concluded that the education system must undergo significant changes to meet its responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

The arguments for retaining the denominational system were based on the parents' right to choose the system of education they feel is best for their children, the constitutional entitlement of churches to continue to enjoy a major role in provincial education (Term 17), the spiritual role of education which allows for the development of the "whole child," as well as the logistical value of a system which provided for a large

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<sup>27</sup>*The Express* (St. John's) "The Premier Lesson," feature interview with Premier Wells, 2 August, 1995.

number of small schools with the benefit of low pupil-teacher ratio which produced certain educational advantages.<sup>28</sup>

The arguments for abolishing the denominational system were based primarily on the high degree of cost and inefficiency inherent in the system due to the duplication of services, and assertions that the system violated the rights of those who are not members of the churches recognized for educational purposes. This was expressed in terms of hiring practices for teachers, the promotion of intolerance among students of different faiths, and that the system wastes millions of dollars instead of spending money to improve the quality of education for everyone.<sup>29</sup> Based on the results of a representative survey of 1,001 Newfoundland residents in which 60 percent of all respondents preferred a *non-denominational system* as opposed to the *present denominational system*, and a systematic analysis of the costs of duplication brought on by the system which concluded that a non-denominational system would cost \$21.4 million less to operate than the denominational system, the Commission concluded that the education system must undergo significant changes to meet its responsibilities effectively and efficiently. The end result was 211 recommendations focusing on changes in curriculum, teaching, the nature of the school, connections between the school and the community, and accountability for performance.

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<sup>28</sup>*Our Children, Our Future*, 14.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

The first recommendation was *"that, recognizing the reality of a pluralist democracy, declining enrollments and diminishing resources, the proposed model which is responsive to the needs of all constituent groups, yet recognizes the desire of the majority to retain a school system based on Judeo-Christian principles, be adopted and implemented."* The main elements of the proposed education system included the following:

- children would attend the school nearest to their home instead of the nearest school of their denomination. However, where numbers warrant, children would be provided with education in their own faith;
- the existing 27 denominational school boards would be replaced by 9 regional non-denominational boards. All members would be elected without regard to religion;
- school Councils, composed of parents, teachers, and church representatives would be established in an advisory role for matters concerning the schools and religious education;
- the Denominational Education Councils would be abolished. The role of the churches was now to include the provision of religious education programs and pastoral care for students. The Denominational Policy Commission would be retained in an advisory role and a School Planning and Construction Board would be responsible for the allocation of funds on a non-denominational basis.

The recommendations were generally endorsed by the provincial opposition parties, the Home and School Federation, and the NLTA. However, due to the fact that the proposed changes contravened the rights of the churches under Term 17 of the Constitution, there existed only two options to proceed with the implementation of the reforms: voluntary agreement on the part of the churches or a Constitutional amendment.

It was hoped that the latter could be avoided, so given that the three Denominational Education Councils strongly and immediately disavowed the recommendations, negotiations were launched with the churches in order to obtain their consent to the Commission's proposals.

Late in 1992, Minister of Education Chris Decker formalized negotiations with the DEC's in the hope of bringing the new education system into effect by September 1993. This would turn out to be an unrealistic goal as little progress was made amidst claims by the Roman Catholic church that the government was trying to force through reforms that would lead to "godless" schools. Premier Wells remained confident that efficiencies could be realized within a rationalized education system which still provided for some church involvement, so newly appointed Associate Deputy Minister of Education Robert Crocker, former Dean of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, was called upon to co-ordinate the process of negotiation.

In November 1993, after efforts by Crocker to solicit an alternate reform proposal, the DEC's presented the government with its own concept of how reform could proceed while at the same time keeping their constitutional rights intact. The main points included:

- establishment of 10 school districts which would be administered by Board of Education composed of denominationally elected members in proportion to the census breakdown. Within each Board there would be Denominational Authorities representing each denomination. These Authorities would retain jurisdiction over all areas of current denominational rights including the operation of schools, hiring/dismissal of teachers, and school construction;

- all schools would remain uni-denominational, with the exception of joint service agreements between the denominations;
- the district Boards of Education would provide financial and administrative support to the Denominational Authorities. Government would continue to allocate funding on a denominational basis under the direction of a joint government-DEC School Construction Committee;
- the DEC's would remain in their present capacity but would be supported by a new Denominational Education Commission.<sup>20</sup>

It was the government's opinion that this new proposal represented no identifiable modification of the current education system, so it was quick to respond with its own counter-proposal.<sup>21</sup> The government proposed an *inter-denominational* model as a compromise between the Williams Commissions' *non-denominational* proposal and the latest church proposal which protected the existing denominational system. The main points of the government's proposal included:

- 8 to 10 large districts composed of education boards of 15 members (10 elected, 5 appointed by the denominations);
- schools were characterized as "neighbourhood," "inter-denominational," or "common." They would be open to all children, but children had to attend the school nearest their home. If numbers warranted and sufficient parents requested, some schools could remain uni-denominational;
- each education board would be composed of denominationally appointed sub-committees which would oversee religious education and pastoral

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<sup>20</sup>Graesser. "Education Reform in Newfoundland, 1990-1995...", 14-15.

<sup>21</sup>Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Adjusting the Course: Restructuring the School System for Educational Excellence* (25 November, 1993).

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The publication of both these proposals clearly indicated the distance between the parties in their negotiations. The DEC's were demanding the retention of the constitutionally protected denominational character of education in the province, while the government wanted to limit church activity to advisory roles. Negotiations continued in vain for the next year until the government came forth with another attempt to secure the consent of the DEC's in their bid for reform. In modifications to their 1993 proposal,

*Adjusting the Course:*

- 10 education board members would be elected as denominational representatives, and 5 at large;
- denominational committees would be given control over the hiring/dismissal of teachers for "sound educational reasons;"
- the process of designation of uni-denominational schools was clarified: it would require consent from 90% of parents and strict studies to guarantee the viability these schools;
- legislation would be introduced declaring the system "denominational" which would insure continued protection under the constitution.<sup>33</sup>

However, these changes did nothing to appease the DEC's. As both the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal Councils continued to denounce government attempts at negotiated reform, as well as announcing plans to seek court injunctions to prevent the introduction of any legislation based on the government's proposals, the talk of a

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<sup>32</sup>Graesser. "Education Reform in Newfoundland, 1990-1995...", 15-16.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 17.

constitutional amendment to remove or alter Term 17 escalated. In January 1995, as another attempt at a negotiated settlement failed, the government released a new poll which indicated that 78 percent of the public supported constitutional change to allow the Williams Commission reforms, now three years old, to proceed.<sup>34</sup> The churches responded by lobbying Newfoundland MP's and Senators to reject any such request.

In April 1995, both parties met again with the government producing a further transformed version of its 1993 proposal. The most notable changes included affording the denominational sub-committees more power in terms of teacher allocations, and in reference to the designation process for uni-denominational schools, a simple majority of eligible voters would be required as opposed to the previously proposed 90 percent.<sup>35</sup> After the final meeting on 1 June, 1995 produced no change, Premier Wells announced that a referendum would be held to seek a mandate for a constitutional amendment.

The period from 1990 to 1995 represents a key episode in the process of education reform. The Williams Royal Commission Report and the subsequent church-government negotiations brought a previously quiescent issue to a head and forced the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal Councils into a strong defensive mode. Past policy makers were aware that denominational education was an extremely expensive, inefficient arrangement. However, they were also aware of the position of the churches in

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<sup>34</sup>*The Evening Telegram*, 25 January, 1995.

<sup>35</sup>Graesser. "Education Reform in Newfoundland, 1990-1995...", 19.

Newfoundland society and education and that any attempts to alter this arrangement could not be entered into half-heartedly. Thus, from the time of Confederation to 1990, denominational education sank into obscurity as Governments dealt with *safer*, *alternative* issues. It was not until the election of Clyde Wells and his desire to forge a healthier future for Newfoundland that education reform moved from being a “non-issue” to an all engaging issue. This is crucial because, as we will see, the salient issues for the Roman Catholic electorate during the 1995 and 1997 referendums were formed and reinforced during this period.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE 1995 AND 1997 REFERENDUMS: THE ISSUES

Although numerous attempts at negotiated reform with the churches proved futile, the government remained determined to follow through with the major restructuring of the province's education system as recommended by the Williams Commission. If the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal Councils saw Term 17 as their trump card, then the government reluctantly viewed a constitutional amendment to alter or eliminate Term 17 as theirs. The government was reasonably confident that Parliament would approve such a request. However, even though there was no legal requirement for such a process (amendments to the Constitution are the responsibility of Parliament and the provincial legislatures), Premier Wells felt that some expression of direct democracy would be necessary because of the enormity and magnitude of the issue in the life of the province. Thus, it was determined that on 5 September, 1995, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador would vote in a referendum on the future of denominational education in the province.

#### **3.1 The 1995 Referendum**

What was sought was approval for a modification of Term 17 to the extent outlined in its last compromise model, *Adjusting the Course*. Inter-denominational schools would be created, while at the same time protecting the rights of each denomination. The government argued that these rights would actually be extended as a

result of the reforms. The new system would provide protection for the students who, under the existing system, had no right to their own form of religious education if they did not belong to the religious denomination in control of the school. The government immediately began preparations on the all important wording of the referendum question. After experimenting with several different options, it was decided that the exact wording of the proposed new Term 17 (see Appendix B) would be presented for consideration, with the question being:

“Do you support revising Term 17 in the manner proposed by government, to enable reform of the denominational education system?”

This decision led to quite a degree of controversy during the campaign as the precise wording of the new Term 17, and the referendum question itself, proved to be excessively ambiguous to the general public. The problem was that during the whole course of negotiations between the churches and government, the public was essentially deprived of any meaningful explanation of what both sides were bringing to the negotiating table. This, in combination with the lack of a government campaign, meant that most people had no clear idea of what they were voting for or against on referendum day. In the government's defense, Premier Wells said he did not want to spend public money on a campaign to influence the vote in what was to be a fair, uninhibited expression of public opinion. He limited government's activity to the circulation of a pamphlet that briefly tried to explain the old Term 17 and rationalize the revised version. Government also ran several newspaper advertisements aimed at correcting errors in the

"No" campaign's propaganda, as well as to encourage people to vote when it appeared that a low turnout rate was to be expected.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, two related issues comprised the government's rationale for education reform. First, the government argued that extensive economic savings would arise from the establishment of a single school system. The Williams Royal Commission found that approximately \$21 million in operation costs could be saved annually. In addition, the Department of Education estimated that an additional \$8 to \$10 million could be saved in busing expenditures.<sup>36</sup> It was suggested by government that the necessary savings could not be achieved as long as the current system continued to operate unchanged. Therefore, the need for a greater degree of consolidation through reform of the system was justified. Second, the government contended that Newfoundland students were not achieving at levels comparable to students in other provinces, even though the people of Newfoundland were spending more for education, relative to their incomes, than the people in wealthier provinces in Canada. In a time of rapidly declining enrollment in provincial schools, largely due to out-migration, and increasingly scarce economic resources, it was difficult to justify the continuation of a system in which separate denominational systems competed for government funding.<sup>37</sup> As

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<sup>36</sup>Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Questions and Answers about the Restructured School System." Press Release. 25 July, 1995, 10-11.

<sup>37</sup>Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "The Education Referendum: A Decision On The Future Of Education In Newfoundland and Labrador." An information pamphlet released by the provincial government during the 1995 referendum campaign.

well, the structure of education in Newfoundland was highly inefficient and was characterized as fostering considerable duplication of school boards, administration, schools, and transportation because of the existence of four separate school systems. Government argued that in order to improve the achievement levels of Newfoundland children relative to other Canadian children, more attention had to be devoted to improving the quality of education, not the quantity of facilities. A major concern among religious groups was that specific rights guaranteed under the constitution would be seriously compromised in the event of any reforms. However, the government claimed that the central features of the denominational system could be preserved without direct church control over the day-to-day operations of the system.<sup>28</sup>

The understated government "Yes" campaign in the 1995 referendum appeared in stark contrast to the highly organized "No" campaign. The principal members of the "No" side, the Catholic and Pentecostal Denominational Education Councils, joined in a fierce battle against the government. In a manner akin to a regular election campaign, they coalesced under the Referendum Co-ordinating Committee. A campaign manager and staff were hired, hundreds of volunteers were secured, a number of polls were commissioned, and a grass-roots congregational network that provided face-to-face contact with the voters was initiated.

Perhaps the most effective issue raised by the "No" side was that the amendment

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<sup>28</sup>Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Questions and Answers," 8.

would arbitrarily remove constitutionally protected "minority rights" from certain groups. The Catholic and Pentecostal Councils appealed to the protection of basic religious rights and ideals of the church as opposed to the abandonment of such values "merely for the sake of administrative reform." Another point of contention for the "No" side was that the government was unnecessarily proceeding with reforms that would eliminate any trace of religion from the school system. It was argued that the amendment would clear the way for constitutional challenges similar to those in Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia which disputed the constitutionality of certain Christian observances and practices.<sup>39</sup>

The "No" side also challenged the "efficiency" argument advanced by the government. According to the Referendum Co-ordinating Committee, Newfoundland spent \$1500 per capita less than the Canadian average on education each year but the quality of education steadily improved. Their statistics showed that in 1994, the reading and writing skills of Newfoundland students compare to those for all Canadian students.<sup>40</sup> The Committee also called the government's estimation of the savings to be gained from education reform into question. It claimed that the government was confusing the issue of cost effectiveness with the denominational character of the education system. According to the "No" side, the churches agreed to save most, if not all, of the amount estimated by

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<sup>39</sup>The Referendum Co-ordinating Committee, "Keep the Faith in Education: The Right Way to Education Reform." An information pamphlet released during the 1995 referendum campaign.

<sup>40</sup>*The Evening Telegram*. (St. John's) 16 August, 1995.

government through the reduction of administrative salaries and school consolidation. The referendum was called, not because the Catholic and Pentecostal Councils did not want reform (from the beginning they agreed that the status quo must change), but rather because an agreement could not be reached on the terms of reform.

On September 5, a slim majority of 55 percent voted “Yes,” (with a turnout of 52 percent). This was a surprising result since it had been estimated by both sides that public support for the government’s proposal at the beginning of the campaign was approximately 70 percent. As we will see, this result can be largely attributed to the determined campaign of the “No” side, in particular the ability to invoke concerns of loss of “minority rights” among the Catholic and Pentecostal electorate.<sup>41</sup> Seventeen of the 52 districts produced “No” majorities and voting occurred along religious lines with the predominantly Catholic and Pentecostal districts voting “No” and the predominantly Protestant districts voting “Yes.”(See Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the vote.)

### **3.2 The 1997 Referendum**

The 1995 vote did little to advance the government’s reforms as the confusion among the public, as well as those directly involved in the reform process, only intensified after the vote. Much of the public was only aware that the government received its mandate and could proceed with education reform, not with specific details of

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<sup>41</sup>Eight weeks following the referendum the “No” side publicized the costs incurred in its battle to stop education reform. The total expenditure for the four Roman Catholic dioceses involved was \$384, 798. More than half (53 percent) of this total was spent on their media campaign. *The Evening Telegram*. (St. John’s) 3 November, 1995.

how reform would take place. The House of Assembly debate on the Term 17 amending resolution was plagued with the same problems. Nevertheless, the resolution was passed on 31 October, 1995 which cleared the way for its introduction to the House of Commons. The vote was 31-20 with six Liberal backbenchers voting against the resolution and the two Opposition Leaders, Lynn Verge (P.C.) and Jack Harris (NDP), voting in favour. Throughout the campaign, Premier Wells remained confident that the resolution would easily pass through Parliament. However, two issues would hinder this progress. First, the federal government was concerned about the ramifications of recognizing the slim 55 percent majority vote in the referendum and its implications with the separatist movement in Quebec. There was fear of setting a precedent which could be used against the federalists in the event of another Quebec referendum on separation. Second, Catholic rights advocates initiated a substantial national lobby arguing that recognizing the Newfoundland vote would allow for the enervation of minority rights throughout Canada. The constitutional clause would eventually pass through Parliament in November 1996, but the detailed legislation on education reform remained to be drafted. Demonstrating sound confidence in Parliamentary approval of the resolution, the Wells government drafted new Schools and Education Acts in the Fall of 1995. However, Premier Wells resigned before the introduction of the bills to the legislature. Brian Tobin was elected as the new party leader and won a landslide election victory in February 1996.

Continuing on from his predecessor, Premier Tobin was determined to proceed

with education reform. However, reform could not proceed until the new Term 17 was approved by Parliament in Ottawa. The government, apparently concerned with the amount of time and financial resources being lost during this lengthy process, attempted to move the reform process along by striking a secret deal with the churches. According to one Anglican Bishop, the churches were approached by government because of difficulty in getting the Term 17 amendment through the Senate.<sup>42</sup> The "Framework Agreement for School Board Consolidation" resulted from these discussions and immediately sparked a sense of confusion and betrayal among the supporters of education reform, who formed a "Yes means Yes" organization to lobby government. The framework agreement seemed to stand in stark contrast to the reforms awaiting approval in the Senate. Many uni-denominational, not inter-denominational, schools would be established and denominational education committees would direct and determine student admission policy for such schools, removal and hiring of teachers, as well as the content of religious curriculum. This agreement seemed to maintain the power of the churches in education. It represented a serious regression in the move towards the creation of a single school system. After enduring a number of months of vociferous opposition to the agreement, the government backed down and proceeded with other interim reform measures that more accurately reflected what had been voted for by reform supporters.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>*The Evening Telegram* (St. John's) 7 May, 1996.

<sup>43</sup>*The Evening Telegram* (St. John's) 22 June, 1996.



However, delays in the passage of the Term 17 amendments in Parliament prevented passage of the new education legislation until early 1997. Then, in June 1997 Premier Tobin was faced with court injunctions petitioned by the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal committees to halt implementation of the new law, claiming it violated constitutional protections under the *amended* Term 17. Admitting his extreme frustration at the churches and the Newfoundland Supreme Court, Premier Tobin announced on July 31 that he was leaning towards calling a new referendum. In a province-wide address Tobin said that a new vote may be necessary to,

end the confusion and chaos that has gripped our education system over the past five years...I believe its time to recognize that we cannot maintain our commitment to achieving the education reform necessary to shape our future, if we continue to tie that reform to the denominational system of education that shaped our past...<sup>44</sup>

In the Premier's view, a new mandate from the people was crucial to ending the situation in which the decisions of all school boards were subject to the approval of two denominational representatives. Thus, on September 2, 1997, just two years from the date when Newfoundland voted in the first referendum on education reform, a second referendum question was to be put to the people for their consideration (see Appendix C for the wording of the new amendment).

Do you support a single school system where all children, regardless of their religious affiliation, attend the same schools where opportunities for religious education and observances are provided?

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<sup>44</sup>Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Executive Council. 31, July, 1997 Press Release.

Premier Tobin was quite clear about the goal of government in this latest referendum. He said,

Let there be no doubt about what government is proposing. It means nothing less than the removal of the churches from the governing of the schools. It would mean the existing Term 17 would be completely replaced....making the legislature completely responsible for the administration of schools...<sup>49</sup>

There were to be no constitutional rights for the churches in the new school system, and parents —not churches— would have the ultimate right and responsibility to direct their children's education. However, Premier Tobin quickly reassured the churches that religious education and special observances would be enshrined in the new constitutional amendment.

Premier Tobin was also quite clear that this round of debate would not resemble the last. In trying not to be publicly critical of former Premier Wells' attempt to solve the problem of education reform, Premier Tobin sought to distance himself from the previous campaign. Tobin commended Wells on his honourable attempt to negotiating education reform with the churches, but unlike the Wells non-campaign posture in 1995, the government mounted a vigorous campaign and went to great lengths in lobbying different interest groups for their support. These included the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association and the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Association, both of which would be considered "strategically important" to the drive towards

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

education reform.<sup>46</sup> These associations assumed mostly neutral positions in the previous campaign. The government believed that if these groups could be convinced of the legitimacy of reform, especially concerning the minority rights issue, then the Premier could look to them for validation of his actions. The ability to bring these groups on side would be a large victory for the government in being able to silence concerns over possible loss of rights through education reform. During the 1995 referendum Premier Wells had not campaigned because he did not want to “bully” the public. Premier Tobin, wanting to guarantee a favourable outcome, launched a province-wide campaign and would be rewarded for his efforts.

The reasons for reform emphasized by Premier Tobin in 1997 differed quite significantly from those offered by Premier Wells just two years prior. Some have speculated that the shifting of focus from purely economic concerns to the greater welfare and consideration of the children was a key determinant in the increased support for education reform in 1997. The central aspects of the government’s “principled” campaign in 1997 included the correction of a “moral wrong” inherent in the denominational system, in addition to a seemingly greater concern for all those who had suffered discrimination because of the denominational system. There was less emphasis given to economics or fiscal necessity; rather, ethical necessity was the focus. The government sought a vote to end the separation of children, to eliminate the existing Term 17, and to

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<sup>46</sup>*The Evening Telegram*. (St. John’s) 30 July, 1997.

create a single school system where children would attend schools together.<sup>47</sup>

According to Premier Tobin, who was himself a practicing Roman Catholic, the denominational system fostered ill will and undue sectarian competition among students. Premier Tobin stated, "the time has come to protect the rights of the most important group in education- our children. I believe it's our children who must be given the full opportunity to live together and learn together."<sup>48</sup> He also expressed concern over the necessity to hire teachers because they were competent and committed to education, not because they were of the proper religion; also, the need for school boards to represent everyone, not just those of a particular religion.

Those in opposition to the government's proposal played a much more subdued role in 1997. The particular groups in opposition remained largely unchanged from 1995, but they were nearly non-existent as organized forces during the second campaign. Taking the role of primary opponent again were the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches along with their respective committees.

The main thrust of the "No" side's argument again was that the government was unnecessarily proceeding with a constitutional amendment in the place of "effective" negotiations. One of the few publications distributed by the "No" side was a pamphlet produced by the Pentecostal Parent's Action Committee. Its focus was towards issues of

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<sup>47</sup>Executive Council. 31 July, 1997 Press Release.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

parental choice in the education of their own children, a quality education, and family values. According to the Committee, a “Yes” vote on September 2 would only serve to extend the chaos of the reform process, not halt it. There was a concern that a long delay in the implementation of the new system would result while waiting for Parliament to pass the new amendment. In addition, the committee foresaw numerous court challenges that would further delay the beginning of the new system. Thus, they argued that the quickest, most painless route to education reform was through renewed negotiations between the government and the churches.<sup>49</sup>

Another point raised by the Committee concerned the province’s guarantee that religious observances would be protected by the new Term 17. In their view, it was not possible for the government to guarantee the protection of these rights in light of similar circumstances in Ontario and British Columbia where certain religious practices and observances were deemed unconstitutional by the courts. The Committee felt that the wording of the new Term 17 was not strong enough to prevent future court challenges.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly frustrated with the government’s tactics, Bonaventure Fagan of the Catholic Education Council (CEC) was concerned that the second referendum would only lead to further division among the public and religious groups. Reluctantly, the churches pursued the debate once again with the apparently scant resources they had available.

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<sup>49</sup>Pentecostal Parents’ Action Committee. An information pamphlet released by the Committee during the 1997 referendum campaign.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

Requests were made to the government by the CEC (as well as by a pro-“Yes” group called “Quality First”) to provide campaign funding, but the Premier refused stating that it would be “unfair” and “fiscally irresponsible” for the government to undertake such action because any number of groups might make similar requests.<sup>51</sup>

To reiterate, the main points raised by the “No” side in 1997 included a demand for government to fund the opposition to its own proposal for education reform, claims that government could not be trusted, the suggestion that regardless of the content of the amendment, it would not work, and arguing that majorities cannot take rights away from minorities. All in all, it was a very weak campaign compared to its previous effort. The first campaign saw a focused and well conceived plan, making full use of their Co-ordinating Committee, polls, and publicists. None of these were evident in the second campaign. The “No” side was reduced to simple “name calling” and bickering over unimportant aspects of the reform proposal.

The atmosphere preceding the 1997 referendum over education reform was quite unlike that of the previous campaign. There seemed to be three central forces which, in combination, led to the overwhelming show of support for the new constitutional amendment. First, there was an effervescent confidence flowing from Confederation Hill. There was a wave of support from within the government, from across the floor of the Legislature, as well as from such political heavyweights as John Crosbie, former

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<sup>51</sup>Executive Council. 13 August, 1997 Press Release.

Conservative provincial and federal cabinet minister, who was quoted as saying, "the only decisive way of cleaning it up is another referendum. I believe the action will be endorsed."<sup>32</sup> Jack Harris, provincial leader of the NDP, said that, "the current education system is the worst one we've had."<sup>33</sup> All in all, there was a wide spectrum of support for the government's latest reform initiative.

Second, there was the relative lack of effort by the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal councils in 1997. Much speculation occurred to explain their absence, but the most probable reasons included either the lack of economic resources to mount a large campaign a second time, or simply the realization that the government was heading for an impressive victory. Whatever the reasons, the absence of an effective "No" campaign represented a substantial advantage for the government. If the effectiveness of the attempt by the Catholic church to mobilize voters around fears of loss of denominational rights and Catholic identity was a key factor in the closeness of the 1995 vote then the absence of an energetic and effective church campaign in 1997 probably contributed to the large "Yes" majority.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, there were the voters themselves. Most people find it difficult to maintain

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<sup>32</sup>*The Evening Telegram*. 25 July, 1997.

<sup>33</sup>*The Evening Telegram*. 27 July, 1997.

<sup>34</sup>Following the 1997 referendum, the Catholic church challenged the constitutionality of the referendum and the amendment. It was recently revealed during the case that the Catholic church did spend a great deal of money on polling in the final days before the vote—which only revealed how badly they were losing.

focus during a single election campaign. By the time of the 1997 vote, the issue of education reform had been on the public agenda for nearly five years. Thus, the public was undoubtedly tired of dealing with the issue and wished to end the debate once and for all. Moreover, the attempted removal of church control of education in Newfoundland came on the heels of the Mount Cashel scandal which largely crushed people's faith and trust in the veracity of religious leaders. The vote for reform may have been a chance at retribution for some.

Being acutely aware of this combination of factors, Premier Tobin's confidence in a successful outcome was not misplaced. The government's proposal was approved with a resounding 73 percent majority while the Amending resolution passed unanimously in the House of Assembly. (See Table 3-1) The bill was then introduced in Parliament and after a lengthy process of hearings by a joint House of Commons - Senate committee which saw numerous presentations from those on both sides of the debate, the resolution allowing for the creation of a single public school system in Newfoundland was passed in December 1997. A new Education Act became law on April 21, 1998.

**Table 3-1—1995 and 1997 Referendum Results**

Percentage voting *Yes*

Referendum	Vote	Voter Turnout	Number of Districts Producing "Yes" Majorities
1995	54.9%	52.4%	35/52
1997	73%	53.1%	46/48

In both cases, the "No" vote equals 100 minus the "Yes" vote. As a point of interest, the voter turnout for the 1996 General Election was 74.4% and 69.5% in the 1999 General Election. The



reduced number of districts in 1997 resulted from changes to the provincial electoral district boundaries.

Source: Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

### **3.3 The Historical Basis for the Catholic Vote: A Catholic Identity**

Two objectives have been sought to this point. First, Chapter 2 represents an attempt to explain the evolution of the denominational education system in Newfoundland. In addition to this historical account, the key elements of the debate over education reform before the 1995 and 1997 referendums were examined. Chapter 3 has thus far provided a descriptive account of the two referendum campaigns. This lays the foundation for the second objective and addresses the issue at the heart of this thesis: a quantitative analysis and explanation of Catholic voting behaviour during the latest round of education reform. However, before this can proceed it is necessary to explore the historical or thematic basis for the statistical analysis of voter behaviour during the two referendums.

What had begun to develop after the release of the Royal Commission's report in 1992, and came to a head in 1995 and 1997, was a religious cleavage. Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches heavily opposed any plan to restructure "their" education system beyond a certain limit, while Protestant churches fundamentally applauded the attempt to improve the education of Newfoundland children. This is not, however, the major finding. It came as no surprise, least of all to Premiers Wells and Tobin, that such a division developed over the issue of school reform. Religion and pressure from religious leaders are, and will likely continue to be, constants in Newfoundland politics.

The most interesting aspect, from the point of view of this analysis, is the distinctive behaviour of a certain segment of Catholic voters in the province during the two referendums on education reform. In 1995, the Catholic church<sup>53</sup> assumed a vigorous role in opposition to the government's proposal to reform the education system. Large sums of money were spent on a well planned media campaign which was to assure the Catholic population, and anyone else who would listen, that the real agenda of Premier Wells was the creation of "godless schools" and eliminating the rights of parents to dictate the kind of education their children would receive. The Catholic church went to great lengths to instill the belief that the public should fear government's initiative because it represented the stripping away of minority rights by the majority. Chapter 41 examines survey data showing that this was perhaps the most effective determinant of Catholic voting patterns in the 1995 referendum. An increased fear of loss of denominational rights led to increased opposition to the proposed education reforms. As previously mentioned, it has been estimated by those close to the reform process that the churches were so effective in their campaign that they were able to reduce support for the proposals by approximately twenty percent.

1997 saw the announcement of a second referendum and another attempt to alter the churches' role in the province's education system. Many had expected a repetition of

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<sup>53</sup>Perhaps here it should be elaborated that the "Catholic church" in the context of this analysis, does not simply refer to the institutional and papal establishment for the purposes of worship. Rather, more accurate is a reference to a greater "Catholic community" composed of a combination of R.C adherents, priests, and parishioners.

the 1995 debate; however, much had changed. Conspicuous by their absence, it soon became clear that those in opposition to the reforms were unable or unwilling to mount such a powerful second effort in this latest round of debate. The Catholic and Pentecostal churches limited their role largely to protesting against the referendum process, stating their displeasure with being put through such a divisive and unnecessary ordeal once again. There was very little from the "No" side in the way of substantial debate on the issue. A significant proportion of the Catholic electorate, though, continued to vote against the reforms. The central question at hand is why this was so. During the 1995 referendum, the Catholic voters were under tremendous pressure from church leaders to strike down the government's proposal. As a result, more than half of the Catholics voted "No." In 1997, Catholic voters were left more to their own devices on referendum day. Although the Bishops had officially urged a "No" vote, the church represented no substantial catalyst for opposition. Yet, one third of Catholic voters continued to vote "No" on referendum day. What was it about a sizeable proportion of Catholic voters that led to this result? What forces were they conceding to? What impelled 32 percent of the Catholic electorate in St. John's to vote to save the denominational education system in Newfoundland?

The answer to these questions will be demonstrated in the analysis of survey data. First, it is necessary to realize that the foundation for the continued Catholic opposition to education reform in the absence of overt church mobilization has its roots in developments which occurred beginning more than two centuries ago. These

developments concern the construction of a Catholic society; a sense of identity and pride analogous to the feelings of dignity and belonging that accompany membership in something greater than oneself. Being a Canadian citizen, for example, holds a great deal of importance for many people and it is not uncommon for this shared sentiment to inspire action among the population in times of dispute. The masses of federalists who marched throughout the streets of Montreal on the eve of the latest referendum on Quebec sovereignty stands testament to the will of the public to attempt to save and protect something it believes in. The establishment of such a lasting sense of presence is what the Roman Catholic Church attempted to inspire among the Irish Catholic immigrants in Newfoundland.

After the demise of Lord Baltimore's settlement at Ferryland in 1629, it became official English policy throughout the remainder of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries to regard Newfoundland as strictly a seasonal fishing ground and a school for sailors.<sup>56</sup> However, the French sought to erect permanent settlement in Newfoundland, including a Roman Catholic parish; a goal briefly realized in the settlement of Placentia until the treaty of Utrecht forced the French and institutionalized Roman Catholicism out of Newfoundland in 1714.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Margaret Conrad et al., *History of the Canadian Peoples: Beginnings to 1867* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1993), 281.

<sup>57</sup>Hans Rollman, *A History of Newfoundland Catholicism and the Archdiocese of St. John's: From Lord Baltimore to Vatican II*.  
<http://www.mun.ca/rels/rc/texts/rchistory.htm>

Despite the unfavourable attitudes of the colonial authorities towards settlement in Newfoundland, immigration, in particular Irish immigration, increased during the eighteenth century. By the late 1700s, half the population of Newfoundland was Irish and by 1836 they surpassed the English in numbers. The vast majority of Irish coming to Newfoundland were Roman Catholic and most settled in St. John's which had developed into the commercial center for the new colony, or nearby on the Avalon Peninsula.<sup>58</sup>

The movement of large numbers of Irish Catholics to Newfoundland was not so much a desire for a new and better existence as it was an escape from unfavourable conditions in Ireland. In their homeland, Catholics were banned from teaching school unless they took prescribed oaths. They could not act as guardians to Protestant children. A flag was to be used to signal the beginning of masses as bells were not permitted on Catholic chapels. Catholics could not sit in Parliament, nor vote in elections.<sup>59</sup> Essentially, Roman Catholics had few or no rights under English law. Penal laws prohibited the establishment of an ecclesiastical presence in Newfoundland which led to similar, if not harsher treatment of the Irish Catholic population.

However, in 1784 an event occurred which signaled the beginning of a permanent Roman Catholic presence in Newfoundland. The King of England ordered "...full liberty of conscience, and the free exercise of all such modes of religious worship as are not

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<sup>58</sup>John E. Fitzgerald, "Conflict and Culture in Irish Newfoundland Roman Catholicism, 1829-1850." (Ph.D. diss., University of Ottawa, 1997), 35.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

prohibited by law....<sup>60</sup> Leaders of the Roman Catholic faith in Newfoundland could now legally follow through with their plans for the institutional development of their faith, and from this point on Catholicism in Newfoundland developed in stages, from a classical church determined to meet the spiritual needs of the Irish population, to a political church preoccupied with securing civil rights for Catholics.<sup>61</sup> This evolution of Catholicism largely centered around the activity of a number of high profile bishops, most notably James Louis O'Donel and Michael Fleming. It has been argued that the first three bishops in Newfoundland "pursued a policy of appeasement towards the British colonial authorities and the pacification of their Irish parishioners...." while later church leaders were attempting to create a society along the "lines of an Irish nationalism politically."<sup>62</sup>

In 1784 Rev. O'Donel arrived in St. John's. During his time in Newfoundland the Irish population had grown and diversified. In 1806 Newfoundland saw the creation of the Benevolent Irish Society, a middle class men's fraternal organization, the purpose of which was to celebrate Irish heritage and culture. It was a charitable organization with the goal of helping the growing numbers of poor in St. John's. Most of the original members of the organization were Protestant. However, in later years, Catholics joined in

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<sup>60</sup>Hans Rollman, "Religious Enfranchisement and Roman Catholics in Eighteenth Century Newfoundland," in Terrence Murphy and Cyril J. Byrne, eds. *Religion and Identity: The Experience of Irish and Scottish Catholics in Atlantic Canada* (St. John's: Jespersen Press, 1987), 34-52.

<sup>61</sup>Rollman, *A History of Newfoundland Catholicism*, 2.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

increasing numbers.<sup>63</sup> Bishop O'Donel's accomplishments in providing a means of social support for Newfoundland Catholics laid the foundation for the more advanced process of institutionalization, as well as a more resilient Catholic identity established under the leadership of Bishop Fleming.

Bishop Fleming was seen as an incendiary priest. Between 1834 and 1841 the British government appealed four times to Rome to have him removed from Newfoundland due to the strong methods he used to defend Catholicism.<sup>64</sup> St. John's, upon creation of Representative Government, was administered as a Protestant state. However, in the 1830s fifty-two percent of its population was Irish Roman Catholic. Social cleavages along religious, ethnic, and economic lines were persistent as Catholics were viewed as merely an unruly mob by their Protestant rulers. Fleming's position was to promote the integrity of the Catholic religion both socially and religiously. He felt that it was necessary to give Catholicism in Newfoundland a "position in public estimation that it had not had before."<sup>65</sup> This was partly accomplished through education. Between 1833 and 1843 Bishop Fleming was responsible for bringing two orders of nuns from Ireland to open schools and supported Newfoundland's Irish-type non-denominational public school system.<sup>66</sup> Because of his interests he became actively involved in politics

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<sup>63</sup>Fitzgerald, "Conflict and Culture," 46.

<sup>64</sup>Terrence Murphy, Cyril Byrne, eds. *"Religion and Identity,"* chapter 6.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, chapter 6.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, chapter 6.

and encouraged his priests to do the same. He helped create a Catholic population that was not a passive group; rather, they were quick to defend their honour and status and displayed a great deal of unity and cohesion.

During the nineteenth century Catholicism underwent a major process of institutionalization which legitimized the place of Irish Catholic culture in Newfoundland. Perhaps the most significant event leading to the realization of Catholic identity was the completion of the Roman Catholic Cathedral which stands as a monument to the efforts of the Catholic Church to provide for its congregations. Other endeavours such as the commitment to the education of Catholic children would represent an extraordinary contribution to the formation of a Catholic identity and sense of belonging. Fitzgerald states, "If the colonial office saw no legitimacy in Irish Catholic culture, the Newfoundland Catholic clergy were constantly trying to kindle it...and propagate the faith among the population."<sup>67</sup> In the later half of the nineteenth century, Newfoundland Catholicism had a new, determined and more vigorous priesthood. The Irish agitated for constitutional change and recognition and fought for equal rights as well as established educational institutions. Backed by the church, the more they achieved the more they pressured for advancement so that by 1846, the independent place of their church and their culture in Newfoundland was secure.<sup>68</sup> Historian Donald Akenson noted

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<sup>67</sup>Fitzgerald, "Conflict and Culture," 342.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 403.



that "an integral and absolutely necessary aspect of the development of a sense of identity in British North America was the creation of a British culture in the new homeland."<sup>69</sup> The same was true for the Irish Catholic community of Newfoundland in St. John's.

Archbishop Roche was also a notable Catholic church official who left a lasting impression on the Catholic population of St. John's and Newfoundland. His entry into the public scene and the development of a Catholic identity coincided late in his term with Newfoundland's decision to surrender another attempt at self-determination in favour of Confederation with Canada. In 1947-48 Roche was cast as a prominent defender of Newfoundland's independence.<sup>70</sup> He was of the opinion that much had been accomplished for Catholicism in Newfoundland and the goal should be to further protect and promote the evolution of a Catholic community. Confederation, and the consequent "intermingling" with mainland Catholics, would erode Newfoundland's unique Catholicism.<sup>71</sup> Archbishop Roche was an ardent proponent of self-rule and did not hesitate to use the considerable institutional powers of the church to serve his desires.

The Catholic sense of identity was largely maintained and promulgated in Newfoundland through the denominational education system. Thus, when the government

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<sup>69</sup>Donald H. Akenson, "The Historiography of English-Speaking Canada and the Concept of Diaspora: A Skeptical Appreciation," Canadian Historical Review, vol 76, no. 3 (Sept. 1995): 396.

<sup>70</sup>Rollman, A History of Newfoundland Catholicism, 3.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

proposed to weaken the denominational character of the school system in 1995, many Catholics were understandably concerned and voted in opposition to the proposed reforms. Furthermore, the following data analysis will demonstrate that as the Catholic church mobilized voters around fears of lost denominational rights and central elements of Catholic identity, opposition to the reforms strengthened dramatically.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE 1995 AND 1997 EDUCATION REFERENDUMS: THE BASIS OF CATHOLIC OPPOSITION TO REFORM

Politics and religion have often converged in Newfoundland. The previous chapters attest to this. Consequently, it came as no surprise, and was probably even expected, when religious affiliation emerged as the leading divisive element among the public during the more than five years of recent debate over education reform in the province. There has been a great deal of speculation concerning this issue. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to attempt to lend a certain degree of support, through quantitative means, to what seem to be the most likely explanations for the rift that formed among the Catholic electorate of St. John's over the issue of denominational education reform. Specifically, what factors determined the split in the Catholic vote during the two latest referenda? Why did some Catholics oppose the reforms while others favoured the changes? Many have speculated, and the research indirectly indicates, that the influence of the Catholic Church led to strong opposition among many Catholic voters during the 1995 referendum. If this is accurate, what accounted for the continued Catholic opposition to education reform in 1997 in the absence of any effective campaign by the Catholic Church?

As the government positioned itself to rewrite Newfoundland's Terms of Union with Canada to alter the denominational system, the issue of education reform became a

battle between the government on one side and the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches on the other.<sup>72</sup> A partial analysis of the St. John's survey data is presented in Table 4-1 illustrating the degree of division among voters over the question of education reform. The data reveal that in 1995 52 percent of St. John's Catholics voted No to the proposed reforms, while a majority of non-Catholics tended to vote Yes to the reforms. In the 1997 referendum, a 68 percent majority of St. John's Catholics voted in favour of ending the denominational system, but still at a lower rate than non-Catholics. This illustrates a dynamic different from the results in 1995 and represents a key element to be explored within this analysis.

**Table 4-1—Denominational Opposition to Education Reform,  
1995, 1997**

"How did you vote in the referendum?"

Percentage voting *No*

Referendum	Total	Religion	
		Catholic	Other
1995	35.8%	51.9%(81)	22.6%(84)
1997	24.4%	31.9%(69)	16.7%(48)

In all cases, the Yes percentage is 100 minus the No percentage. Non-responses are excluded. "Other" denominations include Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Pentecostal and Other. The frequencies in parentheses represent total numbers in the category, not those voting No.

<sup>72</sup>Affiliates of the remaining denominations tended overwhelmingly to favour creating a single school system. See Table 4-1.

Among the Catholic voters, twenty percent fewer voted against the reforms in 1997 than they did in 1995, whereas non-Catholic voters were only six percent less likely to vote "No" to the reforms in 1997. The most interesting element illustrated here is that whereas support for reform approached consensus among non-Catholics, the Catholic electorate was divided. During the 1995 referendum a bare majority of Catholics voted against the proposed reforms. In the 1997 referendum two-thirds of Catholics voted "Yes" to the reforms. The question of what caused this division now arises. Did it result from the uneven mobilization efforts of the Catholic church during both campaigns? In other words, did the spirited church campaign in 1995 lead to a strong "No" majority among Catholic voters, while the virtual absence of a church campaign in 1997 led to a majority of Catholics voting "Yes?" Were Catholic voters simply accepting the obvious will of the broader majority in 1997 by voting "Yes?" What effect did the newly elected Premier Brian Tobin have on the Catholic electorate? These represent some of the possible motivations and explanations of Catholic voting behaviour surrounding the debate over education reform.

Table 4-1 represents direct, statistical evidence of the divisive tendency of denominational education reform on the Catholic population in St. John's, and likely the rest of the province. With this fact in mind, the task is to uncover the more specific motivations of the Catholic electorate during the referendums. What were the most relevant factors that affected their voting behaviour between 1995 and 1997? Perhaps the best place to begin is with the arguments made by the respective governments as to why

the system should be discarded in favour of a single school system, as well as the counter arguments made by opponents of education reform.

Edelman has argued that the public's picture of the world is constantly being manipulated by many different forces, including those actors involved. The version of a problem that the public is faced with may not always represent the true essence of a social issue, and there is a strong diversity of meanings present in every social problem which develops from the range of concerns involved.<sup>73</sup> This insight can be applied to denominational education reform in Newfoundland. Primarily through the use of the language chosen by the Premiers during their respective reform campaigns, denominational education represented two different "problems" for the public. The first round of debate presented the education system as an inefficient and extremely costly arrangement which the government and the people could no longer justify in light of present fiscal reality. Premier Clyde Wells argued that the current structure of education "encourages inefficiency and duplication the province can no longer afford."<sup>74</sup> The Premier's main concern was fiscal responsibility and a more streamlined government. The second round of debate saw the government justifying education reform on the grounds that it was an outright societal evil that separated Newfoundland children on the basis of religion and fostered ill will and undue competition. Not unlike his predecessor,

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<sup>73</sup>Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 15.

<sup>74</sup>*The Evening Telegram* (St. John's) 5 July, 1995.

Premier Brian Tobin seemed adamant about ending the denominational school system. Unlike Premier Wells, Premier Tobin attempted to convince the public that the real issue at hand was the correction of a "moral wrong" inherent in the school system of Newfoundland and Labrador, not simply saving money. Tobin argued that,

We must begin to focus on educational opportunities for our children. We have focused for far too long on the issue of governance, power, and control. It is time to concentrate our energy, our imagination, and our commitment on our children, on their education; a quality education and to give them our very best.<sup>19</sup>

The emotional campaign against education reform focused on two main areas. First, and perhaps the most influential argument was that the amendment would eliminate certain "minority rights." The second argument focused on the claim that education reform would lead to the elimination of all religious practices in schools, including the observance of Christmas and Easter. The data will demonstrate that the "No" campaign was very successful, more so in 1995, in portraying the government proposals as an attempt by the government to create "godless schools."

These are issues which may have had significant impact on the voting behaviour of the Catholic population of St. John's. Were the voters swayed more by arguments of money and economic inefficiency, by a desire to correct a moral wrongdoing, or did Catholic voters have completely different motivations during the two referenda?

#### **4.1 Economic Inefficiency**

Consider the issue of the denominational system wasting money through

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<sup>19</sup>*The Northern Pen*. Vol.18, #36. 9 September, 1997.

duplication of services. One of the key tenets of the 1995 referendum campaign was the claim that the people could no longer afford to run the denominational system as it had existed for more than a century. It was the government's contention that given the bleak economic environment in the province, it was unable to continue funding each denominational education board separately. Measures had to be taken to better utilize the available resources. Analysis of the survey data shows that there is a high degree of correlation between the vote in the 1995 referendum and the voter's position on this issue. The results are seen in Table 4-2.

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**Table 4-2--1995 Vote by Denominational System Wastes Money**

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"The denominational system wastes a lot of money in unnecessary duplication."

Vote	All Respondents		Total
	Agree	Disagree	
Yes	73.8%	17.6%	68.1%
No	26.2	82.4	31.9
(N=100%)	(145)	(17)	(162)

*Missing Values: (165) includes non-voters and "no opinion" responses. Respondents who did not vote in the referendum (46.3% of the sample) were not asked this question.*

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The data show that Premier Wells' argument was accepted by a large percentage of those included in this poll.<sup>35</sup> Overall, 68 percent of those who voted agreed that the system was wasteful, and of these 74 percent voted Yes. This result was apparently anticipated by the Premier who could have framed the issue of education reform in a

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<sup>35</sup>Given this, it is important to keep in mind that any conclusions drawn from this analysis are restricted by the fact that the missing values for the vote indicator total 152(46.3%) of the sample. This reflects low voter turnout in the referendum.



number of different ways, including those same arguments advanced by Premier Tobin two years later.

The joint effect of the issue of a wasteful education system on voting behaviour and religion is shown in Table 4-3.

**Table 4-3<sup>77</sup>—1995 Vote by Religion by Denominational System Wastes Money**

System wastes money	Percentage voting <i>No</i>	
	Religion Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>22.6</b>
Agree	39.3(61)	18.4(76)
Disagree	90.0(10)	71.4 (7)
(N=100%)		
<i>Missing Values:(173)</i>		

Overall, 51.9 percent of the Catholic respondents voted against the proposed reforms in 1995. Controlling for opinion on the wastefulness of the education system produces an interesting result. Among those Catholics who agreed that the system was wasteful, a lesser percentage voted No; 39 percent, whereas among those Catholics who did *not* agree that the system wasted money through duplication of services, 90 percent voted against the education reforms. Simply, among Catholic voters, opposition to the reforms increased among those who believed the education system was efficient and cost-effective (i.e. favoured the status quo). However, while it is clear that one's position on

<sup>77</sup>For this and all subsequent three way tables each percentage is based on the total number of voting respondents in the indicated subgroup. E.g., of all Catholic voters who agreed that "the denominational system wastes money," 39.3 % voted No (and 60.7% voted Yes).

the economic inefficiency argument was a significant determinant of overall voting behaviour during the 1995 referendum (Table 4-2), Catholic voters were not significantly more likely than non-Catholics to vote No on the basis of this argument.

#### 4.2 Loss of Denominational/Religious Rights

Previous research has shown, and this analysis confirms, that many Catholics were concerned that the reforms to the education system would strip them of certain rights that were considered to be guaranteed under the constitution, specifically Newfoundland's Terms of Union with Canada. Some Catholics saw the reforms as a personal attack by the government, while for others the issue seemed to be defined in a more holistic fashion encompassing a concern for "the church". Determining which of these characterizations is more accurate in understanding Catholic voting behaviour would be difficult with the available data. However, the survey data show that a great deal of the Catholic population felt threatened by the proposed education reforms.

**Table 4-4--1995 Vote by Fear Of Loss Of Denominational Rights**

"The proposed changes in Term 17 endanger rights of people of my religion."

Vote	All Respondents		
	Agree	Disagree	Total
Yes	17.8%	86.1%	66.9%
No	82.2	13.9	33.1
(N=100%)	(45)	(115)	(160)
<i>Missing Values: (168)</i>			

Table 4-4 illustrates that those who were concerned about the changes to Term 17 and the possibility of a subsequent loss of denominational or religious rights were most

likely to vote against education reform. In 1995, 82.2 percent of those respondents who agreed that their rights were being threatened by the government's reforms voted against the proposal. Likewise, those who did not perceive the reforms as a threat to their denominational rights voted 86.1 percent in favour of ending the denominational school system. Table 4-5 illustrates the effect on Catholic voting behaviour.

**Table 4-5—1995 Vote by Religion by Fear Of Loss Of Denominational Rights**

Percentage voting No		
Changes endanger Rights	Religion	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>22.6</b>
Agree	87.5(32)	63.6(11)
Disagree	17.1(41)	13.4(67)
(N=100%)		
Missing Values: (177)		

Overall, a total of 51.9 percent of Catholics voted against the reforms in 1995. However, among those Catholics who agreed that the new changes to Term 17 threatened their denominational rights, the percentage voting "No" increased by more than thirty points to 87.5 percent. Likewise, among those Catholics who did not feel threatened by the proposed reforms, the percentage voting "No" falls by more than thirty points to 17.1 percent. Those Catholics who feared a loss of denominational or religious rights through education reform were far more likely to vote against the proposal than Catholics who did not fear a loss of rights. This pattern reflects one of the strongest effects on Catholic voting behaviour in the analysis thus far.

**Table 4-6--1997 Vote by Fear Of Loss Of Denominational Rights**

"The new changes to Term 17 go too far in eliminating denominational school rights."

All Respondents			
Vote	Agree	Disagree	Total
Yes	42.1%	94.5%	75.0%
No	57.9	5.5	25.0
(N=100%)	(38)	(73)	(120)
<i>Missing Values:(78)</i>			

Table 4-6 reports the relationship between vote and fear of loss of denominational rights in the 1997 referendum. The pattern exhibits similarity to that shown in the previous referendum data, but, for reasons to be explored, not to the same degree. A majority of voters who felt that their denominational rights were being threatened by the reforms voted "No" in the referendum, but now 58 percent as opposed to the 82 percent of the comparable group in 1995. Among the general population, there was still concern over the consequences of education reform even though "minority rights" was a much less contested issue during the 1997 campaign. Overall, 75 percent of those who voted believed the reforms went too far in eliminating denominational rights.

**Table 4-7--1997 Vote by Religion by Fear Of Loss Of Denominational Rights**

Changes Go Too Far	Percentage voting No	
	Religion	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>16.7</b>
Agree	66.7(27)	30.0(10)
Disagree	8.3(36)	3.0(33)
(N=100%)		
<i>Missing Values:(78)</i>		

Overall, in 1997, 32 percent of the Catholic electorate voted No. Among those Catholics

who feared a loss of denominational rights upon changes to the education system, the percentage voting “No” increased to 66.7 percent, while falling to 8.3 percent among those Catholics who did not fear a loss of denominational rights. A segment of the Catholic population, as well as a substantial proportion of the general population was still considerably preoccupied with the issue of minority rights violations through education reform. However, the results indicate that, in general, the “rights” argument was less salient during the 1997 No campaign; a likely consequence of the broad consensus toward reform.

#### **4.3 “Catholic Identity”**

During both referendums the Yes/No vote was substantially correlated with attitudes on the issue of “rights.” However, this was only publicly emphasized by the “No” campaign in the 1995 referendum. In 1997 it would be accurate to argue that the “No” campaign was virtually absent from the scene.

The fact remains that although the Church had a less prominent role in the 1997 campaign, a significant proportion of the Catholic electorate continued to vote against the establishment of a single school system in Newfoundland, especially on the basis of the “minority rights” issue. It is necessary here to qualify this statement. This analysis does not provide any direct evidence of the *impact* of the Church during the referendum. It has only been shown that the Church campaign *effort* was less. Regardless, I believe that a strong relationship between the Church campaign and significant opposition to education reform can be inferred from the survey data, thereby establishing indirect evidence of the

impact of the Church during the referendum.

In table 4-5 it is observed that of those 1995 Catholic respondents who agreed that education reform would lead to a loss of denominational rights, the percentage voting against the reforms increased by 35 percentage points. Alternately, disagreement with the argument of loss of denominational rights through education reform led to a marked increase in the percentage of Catholics voting in favour of the reforms. Given the strong effort of the Church during the campaign, it is a distinct possibility that the Church's ability, or inability, to mobilize Catholics based on this fear of loss of rights led to a significant division among Catholic voters. Thus, it can be argued that the focused effort of the Church in 1995 produced a strong impact on the outcome of the referendum and likewise, the weaker effort of the Church in 1997 produced a weaker impact on the outcome of the referendum. Given this, two possibilities remain: either a sizeable portion of Catholic voters were still significantly affected by the arguments espoused by the church in 1995, or the opposition to the reforms was the result of a deeper, more latent motivation.

One of the indicators which may represent these latent motivations is religiosity, or sense of religious identity. It is hypothesized, and supported by the survey data, that the extent to which a person considered him/herself a religious person exhibited considerable influence on voting patterns. Analysis of data from both referendums reveals that those Catholics who considered themselves to be very religious were noticeably more likely than equivalent non-Catholics to vote "No," while the variation between the not very

religious Catholics and non-Catholics who voted "No" was *not* as pronounced. The strongest argument able to explain this seems to identify a "Catholic sense of identity," shared by only some Catholics, which is arguably somewhat similar to the concept of nationalism. This is a form of nationalism which is very much different from the traditional, violent forms of ethnic nationalism that has consumed various regions of the globe. What is being described is most accurately characterized as a strong sense of pride and a feeling of belonging to a group. Essentially, the purpose of this section is to measure "sense of Catholic identity." Since this concept had no direct measure in the survey data, the relationship between religiosity, religion, and the vote is examined. The respondent's age and length of residence in St. John's are also utilized as alternative indicators of the same concept. Table 4-8 reports this relationship among the sample population of St. John's.

**Table 4-8--1995 Vote by Religiosity**

"Would you say you are a very religious person, somewhat religious, or not very religious?"

All Respondents				
Vote	Religiosity		Total	
	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	
Yes	33.3%	63.4%	80.0%	64.1%
No	66.7	36.6	20.0	35.9
(N=100%) (18)		(112)	(40)	(170)
<i>Missing Values: (158)</i>				

Table 4-8 reports the relationship between vote in the 1995 referendum and the degree to which a person considered him/herself to be religious. The trend that emerges is

strong and clear to the extent that those respondents who considered themselves to be very religious were twice as likely to vote against the reforms to the education system, while the ‘not very religious’ respondents were four times as likely to vote in favour of the reforms. This is not entirely surprising as one would expect those with a closer attachment to the church and its capacity within the education system to be more open to the strong arguments advanced by the “No” campaign during the 1995 referendum. Table 4-9 details the effects of religiosity on the Catholic population of St. John’s, compared with non-Catholics.

**Table 4-9—1995 Vote by Religion by Religiosity**

How Religious Are you?	Percentage voting <i>No</i>	
	Religion	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>22.6</b>
Very	90.0(10)	37.5(8)
Somewhat	50.9(53)	22.4(58)
Not Very	29.4(17)	16.7(18)
(N=100%)		
<i>Missing Values: (164)</i>		

A significant pattern can be inferred from the data. Among those Catholics who considered themselves to be very religious, the percentage voting “No” in the 1995 referendum climbs from 52 percent to 90 percent among the very religious, while falling to 29 percent for those Catholics who consider themselves to be not very religious. The similar trend for non-Catholics is much weaker, a difference of about 21 percent between “very” and “not very” religious respondents. This relationship demonstrates a sharp



distinction between Catholics and non-Catholics. A higher sense of religious identity among Catholics leads to a greater proportion voting against the government's proposal of education reform.

Similar to the previous indicators, the trend continues in 1997 but not to the same extent.

**Table 4-10—1997 Vote by Religiosity**

"Would you say you are a very religious person, somewhat religious, or not very religious?"

All Respondents				
Religiosity				
Vote	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	Total
Yes	54.2%	78.0%	88.9%	75.0%
No	45.8	22.0	11.1	25.0
(N=100%)	(24)	(82)	(18)	(124)
<i>Missing Values: (67)</i>				

Unlike 1995, an overall majority even of "very religious" voters in 1997 voted "Yes" to the proposed reforms to the education system. Not unlike 1995, those voters who were considered to be not very religious were more in favour of the reforms. This result reflects the central concern of this analysis. In the second referendum something had changed in the minds of the average voter making him more prone to support the proposed amendments to Term 17. After nearly five years of constant debate on the issue, and perhaps sensing the inevitability of reform, did voters simply concede the government's position and resolve to end the dispute once and for all, or are there other explanations for the significant shift in attitudes?

**Table 4-11—1997 Vote by Religion by Religiosity**

How religious are you?	Percentage voting <i>No</i>	
	Religion	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>16.7</b>
Very	58.3(12)	33.3(12)
Somewhat	31.8(44)	9.4(32)
Not Very	8.3(12)	25.0(4)
(N=100%)	<i>Missing Values: (75)</i>	

A significant effect on Catholic voting behaviour can be inferred from these results. The percentage voting against the proposed reforms varied from 58.3 percent among the very religious Catholics to only 8.3 percent among those who were not very religious. Table 4-10 showed that overall, a majority of very religious respondents voted Yes, a trend opposite from that demonstrated in 1995. Compared with the results from 1995 (Table 4-9), the degree of religious identity among the Catholic voters in particular is quite relevant again in 1997 (Table 4-11). There is a decrease in the percentage voting against education reform on the basis of religiosity; however, the relationship remains considerably strong. Again, as in 1995, this issue reveals a much weaker trend among non-Catholic voters, a difference of 8 percent between "very" and "not very" religious respondents. This gives a great deal of support for arguing that religious sense of identity, in the absence of church promotion of the idea of loss of denominational rights, was an alternate motivation for the continuing Catholic opposition to the proposed education reforms in the 1997 referendum. One aspect that may further validate the idea of a Catholic sense of identity is the respondent's length of residence in St. John's. The

rationale is that a sense of Catholic identity or belonging develops more fully in areas of high Catholic concentration. Given the large proportion of Catholics living in St. John's, it can be hypothesized that the tendency towards opposition to denominational education reform increased as length of residence in the area, thus exposure to a "Catholic community," increased.

**Table 4-12--1995 Vote by Length Of Residence In St. John's**

"We would like to know how long you have lived here in St. John's."

Vote	All Respondents					Total
	Length of Residence in St. John's					
	Always	20 yrs. or more	10-19 yrs.	Less than 10 yrs		
Yes	61.3%	72.5%	68.2%	53.6%	64.2%	
No	38.7	27.5	31.8	46.4	35.8	
(N=100%)	(75)	(51)	(22)	(28)	(176)	
<i>Missing Values: (152)</i>						

It is clear from the data in the above table that there is only a moderate relationship within the total sample population between vote and length of residence in the city. Respondents who have always lived in the city are somewhat more likely than those who have lived here for relatively shorter periods of time to vote in a particular way. However, the results differ significantly when religion is held constant. The results reported below in table 4-13 communicate the central idea in the above hypothesis concerning exposure to a "Catholic community" in relation to opposition to the proposed education reforms.

**Table 4-13—1995 Vote by Religion by Length Of Residence In St. John's**

Length of Residence	Percentage voting No	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>22.6</b>
Always	55.3(38)	21.9(32)
< 20 yrs	47.8(23)	8.0(25)
10-19 yrs	36.4(11)	30.0(10)
>10 yrs	66.7(9)	41.2(17)
(N=100%)		
<i>Missing Values: (163)</i>		

Among those Catholic voters who have been lifetime residents of St. John's, the degree of opposition to the reforms increased to slightly more than 55 percent. A progressive downward trend among those Catholics who have not been residents of St. John's since birth is quite evident. For example, among Catholics who have spent ten to nineteen years living in the city, the percentage voting in opposition to reforms of the education system falls by nearly twenty points to 36 percent. Curiously, the "less than 10 years" sub-group exhibits a reversal in the pattern and may be explained by the relatively small number of cases in this category. The non-Catholic voters exhibit a trend opposite to that of the Catholic voters as the percentage of those voting "No" increased as length of residence in the city decreased. Similarly, an anomalous result is present in one of the sub-groups. Only 8 percent of those in the "more than 20 years" group voted "No" and unlike the previous case, this cannot be explained by a small number of cases in the category. Given the high concentration of Catholics in this area of the province, along

with the trend of increased opposition to denominational education reform associated with longer terms of residence in St. John's, it is possible to cautiously infer a certain degree of correlation between these variables, at least in the 1995 referendum.

**Table 4-14--1997 Vote by Length Of Residence In St. John's**

"We would like to know how long you have lived here in St. John's."

Vote	All Respondents				Total
	Length of residence in St. John's				
	Always	20 yrs.	Less than		
		or more	10-19 yrs.	10 yrs.	
Yes	75.0	76.0	73.7	78.6	75.6%
No	25.0	24.0	26.3	21.4	24.4
(N=100%)	(44)	(50)	(19)	(14)	(127)
<i>Missing Values: (64)</i>					

In a similar, but weaker result to that shown in 1995, no significant relationship between length of residence and vote in the 1997 referendum can be inferred from the data in Table 4-14. Those who have lived in St. John's for longer periods of time were no more likely to oppose the education reforms. In fact, a sizeable majority in each category voted in favour of the reforms to the education system. Furthermore, in 1997, controlling for religion reveals no distinctive effect among Catholics.

**Table 4-15--1997 Vote by Religion by Length Of Residence In St. John's**

Length of Residence	Percentage voting No	
	Religion	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>16.7</b>
Always	31.0(29)	15.4(13)
<20 yrs.	33.3(24)	20.0(20)
10-19 yrs.	33.3(6)	18.2(11)
>10 yrs.	30.0(10)	0.0(4)
(N=100%)	<i>Missing Values:(74)</i>	

There is virtually no effect in 1997 of length of residence in St. John's and vote in the referendum among Catholic or non-Catholic voters. Long time residents of the city were just as likely as the newly arrived residents to vote in opposition to the education reforms. This is a surprising result given the pattern that emerged during the previous referendum in which the relationship is stronger among Catholic voters. While the amount of exposure to the "Catholic community" of St. John's (as measured by the above indicator) may not account for a significant amount of the increased proportion of "No" voters in 1997, I believe that it does emphasize an area worthy of further study. Regardless of the lack of a distinct relationship in this data, logic would seem to suggest the existence of a correlation between areas of high cultural concentrations and sense of cultural identity.

Additional evidence of a strong, effective sense of identity or belonging may be found in the relationship between vote in the referenda and the age of the voters. This is based on the supposition that older Catholics have had a longer period of time to become attached to the system of denominational education and the sense of belonging and community it provided. Therefore, they should have been more likely to oppose the education reforms.

**Table 4-16--1995 Vote by Age**

"How old are you?"					
All respondents					
	Age				
Vote	18-29 yrs.	30-44 yrs.	45-59 yrs.	<60 yrs.	Total
Yes	57.5%	70.6%	70.0%	53.1%	64.2%
No	42.5	29.4	30.0	46.9	35.8
(N=100%)	(40)	(51)	(50)	(32)	(173)
<i>Missing Values:(155)</i>					

Table 4-16 reports the relationship between age and vote in the 1995 referendum among the sample population. Younger and older respondents were equally likely to vote in favour of the education reforms. The largest majorities for reform are seen in the middle-aged categories which may possibly reflect the conservative nature of those voters who arguably had the most to gain (possibly due to their having greater concern for the quality of education) through a reduction in costs of education, a central issue of debate proposed by the Wells government during the 1995 referendum. The effect on the Catholic voters is shown in the following table:

**Table 4-17--1995 Vote by Religion by Age**

Percentage voting No		
Age	Religion	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>22.6</b>
18-29 yrs.	47.6(21)	43.8(16)
30-44 yrs.	41.4(29)	14.3(21)
45-59 yrs.	47.4(19)	15.4(26)
< 60 yrs.	100.0(10)	25.0(20)
(N=100%)		
<i>Missing Values:(166)</i>		

The data reveal no significant pattern between age of the voters and how they

voted. In the 18-29 category the original relationship nearly disappears. This suggests that for these voters, their religion was not an important factor in how they voted. The increase in the number of Catholics in this category who voted in favour of the reforms is likely a function of their short history of association with the denominational system. In other words, they might not have had time to become significantly attached to the system as some of the older respondents have. Therefore, they may have been more likely to embrace the government's argument of cost-effectiveness and efficiency. However, among the older Catholics, the original relationship is considerably strengthened. All of the Catholics in this category voted "No" in the referendum.<sup>78</sup> This may have resulted from the fact that these respondents may have been more easily mobilized by church leaders during their zealous campaign in 1995 because of their traditional beliefs and attachments to the church and its perceived capacity in helping society to shape and develop.

**Table 4-18--1997 Vote by Age**

"How old are you?"

Vote	All Respondents				Total
	Age				
	18-29 yrs.	30-44 yrs.	45-59 yrs.	<60 yrs.	
Yes	76.0%	72.0%	82.9%	68.8%	75.4%
No	24.0	28.0	17.1	31.2	24.6
(N=100%)	(25)	(50)	(35)	(16)	(126)
<i>Missing Values: (65)</i>					

<sup>78</sup>The overall result here is interesting but caution must be exercised given the small number of cases.



The pattern that emerges here is similar to that exhibited in the 1995 referendum. A majority of respondents in each age category voted in favour of the education reforms. In other words, age was not an important factor in determining the voting behaviour of the sample population during the 1997 referendum. Table 4-19 reports the relationship with respect to the Catholic voters.

**Table 4-19-1997 Vote by Religion by Age**

Age	Percentage voting <i>No</i>	
	Religion	
	Catholic	Other
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>16.7</b>
18-29 yrs.	30.8(13)	20.0(10)
30-44 yrs.	35.5(31)	18.8(16)
45-59 yrs.	22.2(18)	14.3(14)
< 60 yrs.	50.0(6)	12.5(8)

(N=100%)

*Missing Values: (75)*

Again, similar to 1995, the age of the respondents had no consistent role as a determinant of Catholic voting behaviour during the 1997 referendum. Younger Catholics were not significantly more likely than non-Catholics to vote against the proposed education reforms. The greatest effect is seen with respect to the sixty years or older Catholic respondents. The percentage voting in opposition to the proposed reforms increased by nearly twenty points for those in this category. As mentioned earlier, this may be evidence of the existence of a strong degree of attachment to denominational education which would have developed from a longer period of exposure to the system.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The goal of the analysis in this chapter has been to determine which factors were most important in influencing the voting patterns of Catholic voters during the two recent education referendums. To reiterate, it was not possible to directly measure the concept of “sense of Catholic identity” using the available survey data. However, the indicators of religiosity, age, and length of residence in St. John’s in relationship to the vote were treated as alternate indicators of the concept of Catholic identity.

Although the intent of such an exercise is to study aggregate sample trends which are then extrapolated to include the general public, individual profiles are usually possible to illustrate. In this case, a clear portrait of the average “No” voter has emerged. Recognizing that religion was perhaps the most powerful source of division for the voters, the majority of those in opposition to education reform in St. John’s were Catholic. Catholic voters who were more fearful of a loss of denominational rights through education reform were more likely to vote “No” in both referendums. Catholic voters who were more religious, or who possessed a greater sense of religious identity, were more likely to vote “No.” Although age did not emerge as a significant determinant of voting behaviour, Catholic voters over the age of 60 were most likely to oppose education reform.

These characteristics must be considered in combination with other outside factors in order to obtain a true picture of the events in question. It has been shown that during the 1995 referendum campaign the Referendum Co-ordinating Committee, led by the

Catholic and Pentecostal churches, organized a highly charged campaign. Every level of this religious hierarchy from the outport church ministers to the Bishops assumed an active role in mobilizing the public against reform. A significant and effective element in their strategy was the idea that education reform was the government's method for removing any and all traces of religion from the education system. A small majority of Catholics rejected the reform proposal on referendum day in 1995. I believe this analysis has produced sufficient evidence of a relationship between the enthusiastic efforts of the "No" campaign in 1995 and the large proportion of opposition to education reform.

However, the circumstances surrounding the 1997 campaign were substantially different. The Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches were either unable or unwilling to organize a defense of denominational education equivalent to that witnessed in the previous campaign. Yet, one-third of Catholic voters continued to vote "No" and express their disapproval of the proposed reforms. If the effectiveness of the church-led campaign in producing strong reform opposition in 1995 is accurate, then other factors must account for the observed opposition in 1997. It is at this point when the previously mentioned characteristics assert their most significant influence, specifically, the degree of religious identity among Catholic voters which had developed over a long history of church involvement in the basic societal, cultural, and political foundations of Newfoundland. Although the referendum produced a majority in favour of reform in the absence of church pressure to oppose, some Catholic voters turned to more personal motivations as a basis for opposition and offered compelling insight into the significance

and capacity of the church in Newfoundland society.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The central goal of this analysis has been to reveal the motivations of a portion of the Catholic electorate of St. John's during the 1995 and 1997 referendums on education reform. It is based upon the hypothesis that the efforts of the Roman Catholic church in 1995 to mobilize opposition to education reform around fears of threatened minority rights led a majority of Catholics to vote against education reform. In the absence of a strong church-led campaign in 1997, in which a majority of Catholics voted in favour of education reform, a significant proportion of Catholic voters still turned to deeper personal or cultural reasons to oppose education reform. It represents a study of political process, public opinion, as well as the effects of societal, cultural, and political pressure on public opinion.

Chapter 2 traced the evolution of Newfoundland's denominational education system from its informal inception in the form of separate church-funded schools through to the establishment of a completely institutionalized and denominational school system. Beyond the examination of the various legislative acts which created, altered, and entrenched church rights to and control over education, it is imperative to realize that the arrangement between government and the churches was primarily characterized by constant tension, usually latent. Policy makers were keenly aware that the denominational system was an extremely inefficient and expensive venture. However, there was an

unwillingness to challenge the powerful influence of the church in Newfoundland society. Consequently, by the time of Confederation, the denominational essence of education in Newfoundland had been securely established. With the exception of the moderately successful Warren Commission reforms of 1968-69 which failed to alter the essential denominational character of the school system, forty years would pass before church control over education would be substantially contested. Bringing years of idle tension to the surface, the Williams Royal Commission report of 1992 recommended the dismantling of the denominational system, forced the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal councils into an ardent defensive posture, created numerous cleavages among the population, and culminated in two referendums that would eventually decide the fate of the education system.

Chapter 3 outlined and clarified the key issues that emerged during the subsequent referendum campaigns. During the 1995 campaign, the government charged that the denominational system was an unnecessary expense that could not continue to exist given the difficult fiscal realities in which the province found itself. Also, it was argued that Newfoundland students were not achieving at national levels because of the maintenance of a denominational system that sacrificed improvement and expansion of educational curriculum through unnecessary and wasteful funding of a highly inefficient administrative arrangement. The Roman Catholic and Pentecostal councils successfully countered by claiming that the reforms would remove constitutionally protected minority rights and that the primary goal of government was to remove all traces of religion from

the school system. The 1997 campaign saw the government shift its emphasis from a purely economic focus to a “principled” argument. Premier Tobin pursued education reform to correct a “moral wrong” which forced children to be separated on the basis of religion. The considerably subdued effort of the Catholic and Pentecostal churches was characterized primarily by a lack of organization and counterproductive criticism of the government’s decision to call a second referendum. These two sections were essential because they provide a foundation for the framing of the most salient issues that emerged during the referendum campaigns. These issues were explored in Chapter 4.

Religious affiliation did not represent the only cleavage to develop during the most recent debate over education reform. It was the most obvious and, at the same time, the most powerful. In the end, Catholic voters were divided evenly over the proposed reforms in 1995, while they represented a majority for reform in 1997. Most non-Catholics voted overwhelmingly in favour of reform in both referendums. However, this came as no surprise and does not represent a major finding of this analysis. Rather, what is more interesting and relevant is the fact that a significant division had developed among Catholic voters over this issue. During the 1995 referendum, a Catholic electorate represented a slight majority in opposition to education reform. Two years later the result was a majority in favour of the reforms; yet, approximately thirty-two percent of Catholics continued to vote “No.”

This attempt to more fully understand the events that transpired during the two referenda has accentuated a number of elements that may explain this behaviour. It was

the government's contention in 1995 that the denominational system wasted valuable financial resources through the duplication of services. Analysis of the survey data demonstrated a significant correlation between attitudes on this issue and voting choice. Those who agreed with the government's argument were much more likely to vote in favour of eliminating the denominational system than those who saw the system as efficient and well administered. Even when controlling for religious denomination, a similar pattern emerged. The proportion of Catholics voting against education reform increased among those who disagreed with the government's argument. However, the overall strength of the relationship decreased as a similar result was present among the non-Catholic voters. In the end, Catholic voters were not significantly more likely than non-Catholics to vote "No" based on this argument. Thus, while interesting, the contribution of this variable in a distinctive explanation of Catholic voting behaviour is minimal.

One of the most salient and sensitive issues for voters during the referendum campaigns was minority rights. Those in opposition to the reforms, primarily the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches, went to great lengths in 1995 to advance the idea that education reform entailed removing religion from the school system and thereby represented an infringement on the rights of Catholic and Pentecostal students and parents to receive the education of their choice. While the government insisted that the school system would retain some of its denominational character, thereby preserving certain minority rights, the Catholic and Pentecostal councils, represented by the Referendum



Co-ordinating Committee, effectively utilized the core principles of the existing Term 17 to their advantage. Survey results indicated a very strong relationship between the vote and attitude on this issue. Overall, 67 percent of those who voted in 1995 agreed that minority rights were threatened and of these 82 percent voted against education reform. Most significant are the results on the Catholic voters in 1995. Among those Catholic voters who agreed that education reform would possibly strip away denominational or minority rights, the percentage voting "No" increased to nearly ninety percent; more than 30 percentage points over and above the 52 percent of all Catholics who voted against the reforms. In 1997, a greater overall proportion of voters agreed that the reforms proposed a threat to minority rights: 75 percent. However, a smaller proportion of these voters voted "No": 58 percent. Among the Catholic voters, a similar but slightly weaker relationship than that observed in 1995 emerged. Although Catholic voters were less distinct from non-Catholic voters in their voting behaviour, a significant segment of the Catholic voters, as well as the general electorate remained considerably preoccupied with the issue.

The other significant aspect that emerges from the analysis is that a sense of religious identity on the part of some Catholic voters served as a latent motivation for continued opposition to the proposed reforms when the absence of a church-led defence was recognized. A clear trend developed from 1995 to 1997. In the first referendum, the church led the opposition to the government proposal and provided Catholic voters with specific reasons why they should reject the government's attack on their rights. The result was a Catholic majority voting in opposition to the proposed amendment that would

change the denominational system. In 1997, the church, claiming the high expense of carrying out a similar campaign a second time, failed to live up to the expectations that it had set for itself two years prior. At the same time, a smaller but still significant proportion of the Catholic population continued to oppose education reform. It is strongly reflected in the results of this analysis that these voters, who may have felt abandoned by their societal and cultural leaders, turned to deeper, "Catholic" reasons to oppose education reform. For example, in 1995 those respondents who considered themselves to be very religious were three times more likely to vote "No" than those who were not very religious (67 percent versus 20 percent). When religion was held constant a sharp distinction between the Catholic and non-Catholic voters was demonstrated: a higher sense of religious identity among Catholics led to a greater proportion voting against education reform. In 1997, 54 percent of the very religious respondents voted "Yes" to education reform as did an overwhelming majority of not very religious respondents. Holding religion constant illustrated that the degree of religious identity among Catholic voters, as opposed to non-Catholic voters, was particularly relevant again in the second referendum. It can be inferred from the data that of all the arguments for and against changing the denominational education system, the most significant in being able to understand the Catholic vote was the issue of "minority rights". Essentially, those Catholics who felt that their rights were being threatened were more likely to vote against the reforms, while a majority of those who did not foresee a loss of denominational rights voted in favour of the proposal to end denominational education. It would seem that if

most Catholics could have envisioned a restructured education system that did not jeopardize their denominational rights (as guaranteed by the Constitution) that the result would have been a greater percentage in favour of reform, especially in 1995.

To this day the reason behind this remains open to debate. However, the most plausible explanation for the observed pattern is the role of the church in mobilizing these concerns among its congregations. During the 1995 referendum campaign, the Catholic church assumed a very strong and very public position on the education reforms. The degree of contempt for the government's proposal was transferred to many Catholic voters through well calculated press releases from high ranking church officials, weekly sermons, as well as church sponsored social events. As mentioned, during the 1997 referendum the relationship between a person's fear of loss of rights and the vote is not as strong as during the previous referendum. This pattern reflects the fact that the church played a much smaller, less overt role throughout the 1997 campaign. This presents a strong argument for the claim that the activity of the church may have had a direct impact on the behaviour of some Catholic voters. The Catholic church's ability, or inability, to mobilize members of its congregation based on the fear of losing denominational rights through education reform likely led to the significant division among the Catholic voters.

It can be argued that during both campaigns Catholic voters gravitated towards two dominant poles. One represented traditional Catholics who valued the role of the church in all aspects of daily life, especially the education of children. These voters were likely those who were concerned about a loss of denominational rights, who had deeper

attachments to the church, and were adamant about the Catholic right to the education of their children. This group represents the mobilization attempts by the church. The other seemed to be shaped mainly by more liberal Catholics who, while still favouring a role for the church in provincial education, were more concerned with the issues of inefficiency and the division of children along denominational lines, arguably two unfortunate products of Newfoundland's historical denominational school system. It was this group which represented those who, in the end, resisted mobilization attempts by the church. The result was a vote by a minority of Catholics to preserve a sense of identity that had developed among Newfoundland Irish Catholics which was undoubtedly advanced by the preservation of the denominational school system in the province, offset by a majority whose primary concern reflected the reformist attitudes held by the great majority of Newfoundland citizens.

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## Appendix A

### TERM 17 - The Terms of Union of Newfoundland with Canada

Memorandum of Agreement entered into December 11, 1948,  
between Canada and Newfoundland  
Enacted as the *British North America Act 1949*, by the United Kingdom  
Title changed to the *Newfoundland Act* in the *Constitution Act, 1982*  
Section 1 numbered and Section 2 added by  
the *Constitution Amendment, 1987 (Newfoundland Act)*

- 17.(1) In lieu of Section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867 [originally the British North America Act, 1867], the following Term shall apply in respect to the Province of Newfoundland:

In and for the Province of Newfoundland the Legislature shall have the exclusive authority to make laws in relation to education, but the Legislature will not have the authority to make laws prejudicially affecting any rights or privilege with respect to denominational schools, common (amalgamated) schools, or denominational colleges, that any class or classes or persons have by law in Newfoundland at the date of Union and out of the public funds of the Province of Newfoundland provided for education,

- 1.146 all such schools shall receive their share of such funds in accordance with scales determined on a non-discriminatory basis from time to time by the Legislature for all schools then being conducted under authority of the Legislature; and
- 1.147 all such colleges shall receive their share of any grant from time to time voted for all colleges then being conducted under authority of the Legislature, such grant being distributed on a non-discriminatory basis.

- (B) For the purposes of paragraph one of this Term, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland have in Newfoundland all the same rights and privileges with respect to denominational schools and denominational colleges as any other classes or classes of persons had by law in Newfoundland at the date of Union, and the words "all such schools" in paragraph (a) of paragraph one of this Term and the words "all such colleges" in paragraph (b) of paragraph 1 of this Term include, respectively, the schools and the colleges of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland.

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#### Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

- s.29 **Rights respecting certain schools preserved.**—Nothing in this Charter abrogates or derogates from any rights or privileges guaranteed by or under the Constitution of Canada in respect of denominational, separate or dissentient schools.

Source: Bernard W. Funtston and Eugene Meehan, *Canadian Constitutional Documents Consolidated* (Scarborough, Ontario: Carswell, 1994), pp. 351-352 and 440.

## Appendix B

### AMENDED TERM 17, 1995

Proposed wording released by the Government of Newfoundland  
for approval by the voters in the referendum on September 5, 1995.

Existing language of Term 17 to be replaced by the following :

"17. In lieu of section ninety-three of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, the following shall apply in respect of the Province of Newfoundland:

In and for the Province of Newfoundland the Legislature shall have the exclusive authority to make laws in relation to education but,

- 1.3 except as provided in paragraphs (b) and (c), schools established, maintained and operated with public funds shall be denominational schools, and any class of persons having rights under this term as of January 1, 1995 shall have the right to provide for religious education, activities and observances for the children of that class in such schools, and the group of classes that formed one integrated school system by agreement in 1969 may exercise the same rights under this term as a single class of persons; and
- 1.4 subject to provincial legislation that is uniformly applicable to all schools specifying conditions for the establishment or continued operation of schools,
  - (A) any class of persons referred to in paragraph (a) shall have the right to publicly funded denominational school established, maintained and especially for that class; and
  - (B) the legislature may approve the establishment, maintenance and operation of a publicly funded school, whether denominational or non-denominational; and
- (3) where a school is established, maintained and operated pursuant to paragraph (b)(i) that class shall have the right to provide for religious education, activities and observances and to direct the teaching of aspects of curriculum affecting religious beliefs, student admission policy and the assignment and dismissal of teachers in that school; and
- (4) all schools under paragraphs (a) and (b) shall receive their share of public funds in accordance with scales determined on a non-discriminatory basis from time to time by the legislature; and
- (5) if the classes of persons having rights under this term so desire they shall have the right to elect collectively not less than two-thirds of the members of a school board, and any class so desiring shall have the right to elect that portion of the two-thirds that is proportionate to the population of that class in the area under the board's jurisdiction."

## Appendix C

### AMENDED TERM 17, 1997

Proposed wording released by the Government of Newfoundland  
for approval by the voters in the referendum on September 2, 1997

Existing language of Term 17 to be replaced by the following :

- "17. (1) In lieu of section ninety-three of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, this section shall apply in respect of the Province of Newfoundland.
- (2) In and for the Province of Newfoundland, the Legislature shall have exclusive authority to make laws in relation to education, but shall provide for courses in religion that are not specific to a religious denomination.
- (3) Religious observances shall be permitted in a school where requested by parents."

## **Appendix D**

### **Primary Indicators Included in the Analysis**

#### **1995 St. John's Political Attitude Survey**

Q1: To begin with, we would like to know how long you have lived here in St. John's.

- 1 Always, since childhood
- 2 20 years or longer
- 3 10-19 years
- 4 5-9 years
- 5 1-4 years
- 6 less than one year

Q13: Would you mind telling me whether you voted "YES" or "NO?"

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Q17: The proposed changes in Term 17 endanger the right of people of my religion.

- 1 Agree
- 2 Disagree

Q25: The denominational system wastes a lot of money in unnecessary duplication.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

Q54: What is your age?

Q56: What is your religion?

- 1 Roman Catholic
- 2 Anglican
- 3 United Church, Presbyterian
- 4 Salvation Army
- 5 Pentecostal
- 6 Other
- 7 None

Q57: Would you say you are a very religious person, somewhat religious, or not very religious?

- 1 Very religious
- 2 Somewhat religious
- 3 Not very religious

**1997 St. John's Political Attitude Survey**

Q1: To begin with, we would like to know how long you have lived in St. John's?

- 1 Always, since childhood
- 2 20 years or longer
- 3 10-19 years
- 4 5-9 years
- 5 1-4 years
- 6 less than one year

Q22: Would you mind telling me how you voted?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Q31: The new changes to Term 17 go too far in eliminating denominational school rights?

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

Q45: What is your age?

Q46: What is your religion?

- 1 Roman Catholic
- 2 Anglican
- 3 United Church, Presbyterian
- 4 Salvation Army
- 5 Pentecostal
- 6 Other
- 7 None

Q47: Would you say you are a very religious person, somewhat religious, or not very religious?

- 1 Very religious
- 2 Somewhat religious
- 3 Not very religious







