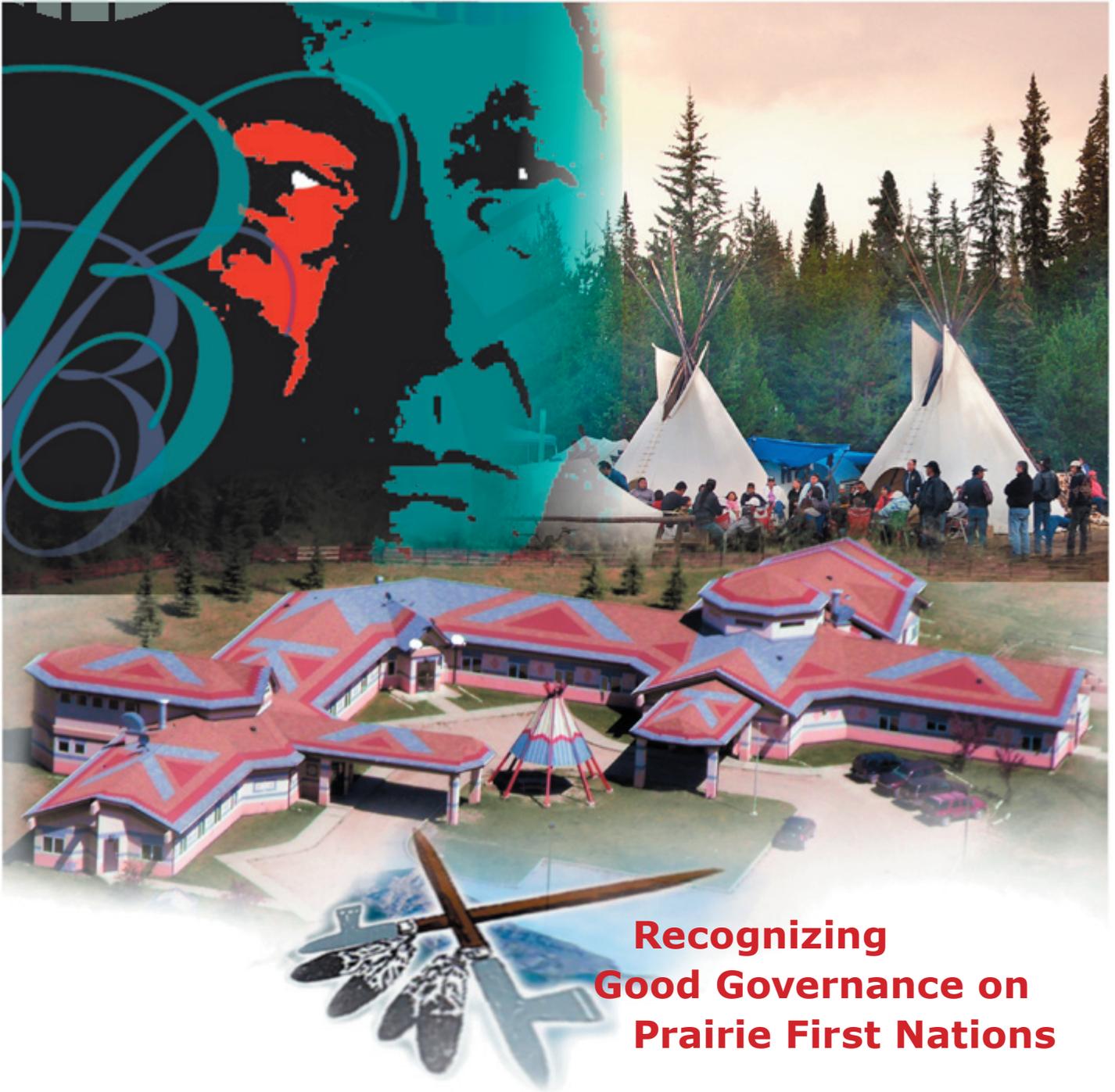


# POLICY SERIES

## THE FOURTH ANNUAL ABORIGINAL GOVERNANCE INDEX



**Recognizing  
Good Governance on  
Prairie First Nations**

**By Joseph Quesnel**



O'Chiese First Nation travelled to Winnipeg to accept a \$50,000 good governance award by the Frontier Centre in June of last year. Members of O'Chiese, and many other First Nations, were randomly interviewed asking how they rated their government. The O'Chiese First Nation won the award out of 98 First Nation within the Prairie Region.

The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is an independent, non-profit organization that undertakes research and education in support of economic growth and social outcomes that will enhance the quality of life in our communities. Through a variety of publications and public forums, the Centre explores policy innovations required to make the prairies region a winner in the open economy. It also provides new insights into solving important issues facing our cities, towns and provinces. These include improving the performance of public expenditures in important areas like local government, education, health and social policy. The authors of this study has worked independently and the opinions expressed are therefore his own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the board of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

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# The Fourth Annual Aboriginal Governance Index

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## Foreword

The heart of the Aboriginal Governance Index (AGI) is the desire to participate in the development of high-performance governments in First Nation communities that provide transparency, accountability and economic opportunity to all Aboriginal Canadians.

The AGI uses questionnaires to gather opinions from Aboriginal Canadians about the governance structures under which they live. In our work, we always seek to document policies that are improving the lives of First Nation members and those that are not. Ours is the most ambitious effort to gather opinions about band governance from First Nation citizens of which we are aware. This year, we surveyed 78 First Nations and gathered responses from more than 4,000 people.

As we conduct our surveying, the debate rages within policy institutes and academia about the best ways to improve Native communities.

This past year, the Frontier Centre for Public Policy noticed several interesting studies and policy ideas. Another think-tank released a study several weeks ago that pointed out the obvious income discrepancies between Aboriginal peoples and mainstream society. In its paper, policy ideas such as community-based economic development and education were offered as remedies.

The Frontier Centre supports some of these ideas, but it holds to the proven notion that First Nations must engage in the mainstream economy in order to get ahead.

Of course, governance reform is central to First Nation improvement.

The Aboriginal Governance Index has proven over the years the clear connection between governance and other important indicators of socio-economic success.

The AGI project began in 2006, when we started surveying First Nations in Manitoba. In 2007, we added Saskatchewan and in 2008, Alberta. Over the years, we have established relationships with First Nation communities, and the communities look forward to our surveying. We are receiving inquiries now about how to improve individual scores.

Each year, we review the AGI approach and methodology and make improvements. This year, we introduced an electronic version of the survey, which uses touch screen technology. Judging from the comments of our respondents and survey workers, this has greatly improved ease of use.

As always, we wish to acknowledge the generous support of the Lotte and John Hecht Memorial Foundation, the W. Garfield Weston Foundation and others.

In closing, I would also like to thank the First Nation leaders who are interested in seeing their communities succeed and who have granted us approval to visit and survey their communities. Without their support, we could not continue.



Peter Holle,  
President,  
Frontier Centre for Public Policy

## The most unique project in Canada's aboriginal policy space

The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is an independent think-tank based in Winnipeg. It has been engaged in research on a project we call the "Aboriginal Governance Index" since 2005, which involves opinion survey work. This project is positive, since the information collected is designed to provide First Nations on the Prairies with a convenient benchmark through which individual bands can evaluate their progress on various measures of good governance. We will be conducting our next round of surveys on bands throughout Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta starting this September.

The Aboriginal Governance Index project studies the various elements of positive governance on First Nations, so that best practices can be shared and discussed across all First Nation communities. We hope that this information is used to improve the lives and fortunes of all bands and their residents, who will be able to see how their band is doing relative to other bands within their own province and across all three provinces.

On June 10, 2009, The FCPP's Big Bear Award for Good Governance dinner was held at the Marlborough Hotel in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in honour of the First Nations that scored well on the project's measures of good governance. Five reserves from each of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta received a plaque recognizing their achievements. The O'Chiese First Nation from Alberta, which scored the highest, received a cash award of \$50,000 to be used for scholarships and infrastructure upgrades in its community. Grand Chief Morris Swan Shinacappo of Manitoba's Southern Chiefs Organization delivered a

powerful speech in favour of the index and better reserve governance. Elijah Harper, along with native author and lawyer Calvin Helin, attended the event as part of this project's honorary panel. The evening also featured speeches by David McLeod, general manager of Native Communications Incorporated (NCI), and Gerry the "Big Bear" Barret as emcee. NCI was also a donor to this event. I have included a DVD of the Chief Big Bear Award and Traditional Feast, which describes this project more fully.

On June 18, 2010, we will once again have the honour of awarding those First Nations that reflect good governance. Our team members will be heading to your respective First Nations soon to complete our survey work that ultimately determines next year's winners. As such, we respectfully request permission for our research assistants to survey residents on your reserve(s). We thank you in advance for your co-operation and assistance. You will be contacted with a date as to when we expect our research crew to be on site.



Don Sandberg

Director,  
Aboriginal Frontiers Project

If you have any questions about the survey content, please contact 204-957-1567 at the office, by cell at 204-620-2126, or by email at [donsandberg@shaw.ca](mailto:donsandberg@shaw.ca).

## Executive Summary

The Aboriginal Governance Index is intended to provide Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta First Nations with a convenient benchmark with which individual bands can measure their progress in developing high-performance governance institutions. The performance of each First Nation is evaluated by a survey that our research assistants conduct with local residents. We hope individual band members can benefit from the information. Knowing where their band government places can be a source of empowerment for individuals. They can use this information to encourage their communities to adopt better institutions of governance. (The survey questions are included in this report.)

Each band's overall ranking is based on a weighted composite of scores that evaluate five broad areas of good governance. The dimensions of good governance that are evaluated in this report are:

- Elections - How fair and impartial are votes for leaders?
- Administration - How effectively is the band's business conducted?
- Human Rights - How much regard is assigned to basic rights?
- Transparency - How well informed are citizens about government?
- Economy - How well is the community providing economic development?

While several of the bands that earned top scores last year once again landed near the top of this year's index, there were also some surprises, with several new bands performing very well. In Manitoba, we had Sapotaweyak Cree Nation, Mosakahiken Cree Nation and Cross

Lake First Nation in the top three spots. For Saskatchewan, the top three were Ochapowace First Nation, Muscowpetung Saulteaux First Nation and Saulteaux First Nation. Alberta's top three bands were O'Chiese First Nation, Paul First Nation and Siksika Nation.

The results confirmed several statistical connections that we have observed in previous AGI studies. Category scores tend to be correlated with each other. In other words, high performance in one category tends to predict good results in other categories.

While confidence in election systems continues to improve, there are still problems associated with administration, as many members still think that politics is interfering with administration and good policy-making. A lack of transparency also remains a problem in many communities.

This year's report includes a new section on proven best practices. In it, we provide helpful tips on how to separate band politics from administration, business, and service delivery as well as help First Nation governments be as transparent as they can be. Some of the ideas include:

- Promoting the development of independent media within the community;
- Posting all essential financial and electoral information on band web sites;
- Implementing policies that ensure most band council meetings are held on-reserve;
- Establishing an independent official to resolve disputes;
- Implementing policies that separate business or program managers from the chief and council.

## What is the Aboriginal Governance Index?

The AGI is a convenient way to measure the governance of the participating bands on the Prairies. Each band is rated in several areas: administration, human rights, elections, transparency and economy. Ranking in each area is based on the responses to the survey questions that our research assistants ask a sample number of band members. The rankings are tabulated from these responses. Each band receives a score between 20 and 100 on five dimensions of good governance. Higher scores mean that respondents generally described high-quality governance in their responses. Each of the category scores is averaged out to provide the total AGI score for each band.

The AGI is part of the Aboriginal Frontiers Project at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy. It was developed as a means to provide an on-the-ground account of First Nation governance. To our knowledge, it is the only survey project that asks these questions of grassroots Aboriginal people. The project began in Manitoba in 2006 under the direction of Don Sandberg, the head of the Aboriginal Frontiers Project. In 2007, the project expanded to Saskatchewan, and in 2008, Alberta was included. Since then, we have been building on the project, including improving its methodology and questions, based on input from the respondents and professional polling firms.

## The meaning and content of good governance

The AGI seeks to evaluate the quality of governance institutions in Aboriginal communities in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. To develop a methodology for the AGI, we were forced to grapple with the question “what is good governance?” and to reflect on the dimensions of good governance that are the most important for evaluation and analysis.

Although cultural and historical forces shape different perceptions of what constitutes good governance, our project is animated by the belief that there are certain core characteristics of good government that are universal. These include respect for basic human rights and adherence to democratic processes.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified a more detailed and specific list of characteristics that define good governance. Some of these are:

- **Participatory** - Directly or through legitimate representatives, informed, organized men and women engage in decision-making that considers the concerns of the entire community.
- **Transparent** - Decisions and their enforcement follow rules and regulations; information and access are freely available in understandable forms.
- **Effective and Efficient** - Processes and institutions make the best use of available resources to meet the needs of society in a sustainable, environmentally protective manner.
- **Responsive** - Processes and institutions try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time.

- **Accountable** - Government, the private sector and civil institutions are held to rules of responsibility for the effect of their actions on stakeholders.

In addition to focusing on these universal characteristics of good governance, our selection of criteria, questions and survey methodology was informed by the substantial body of literature that has grown around the identification of the characteristics that lead to successful tribal governance in the North American Aboriginal context.

In 2003, the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development identified the elements that characterize successful tribal governance. While this project focused on Aboriginal communities in the United States, its conclusions are applicable to Canada.

Among the characteristics it identified as defining good government are a clear separation between politics and day-to-day administration and service delivery, a competent and ethical bureaucracy, fair dispute-resolution mechanisms and stable institutions and policies.

The questions contained in the AGI attempt to evaluate whether these important elements are being realized in governance.

In particular, the Harvard Project identified two models: (1) The standard approach, which emphasizes high dependence on federal dollars, is a system based on short-term political and economic gain, in effect where everything is about “spoils” and (2) The nation-building approach, which focuses on asserting decision-making powers, creating effective governing institutions and a strategic vision for the future, rather than short-term gain.

The Harvard Project also put to rest the idea that location or resource endowments alone create successful indigenous economies. Institutional arrangements and governance institutions play an important part. In particular, the following elements are crucial:

- Governing institutions are stable. That is, the rules do not change suddenly or arbitrarily.
- Governing institutions protect day-to-day business and program management from political interference. This usually involves an independent board of directors that separates leaders from program directors or business managers.
- Governing institutions take the politics out of court decisions and other dispute-resolution systems.
- Governing institutions provide administration that is effective.

The Harvard Project helps clarify the characteristics of effective governance in the context of Canadian First Nations. Our study's design and the dimensions of government we chose to evaluate have been informed by universal principles of good governance such as those set out by the OECD, with a special focus on the characteristics that have been identified in the research literature as especially important in this context. The purpose of the AGI is to evaluate through surveys and analysis the extent to which these types of good governance practices characterize Aboriginal governance in Canada.

## This year's results

This year, we modified the survey methodology by including a short form and a long form. The short form features six questions that directly correspond to the five areas identified above as categories of good governance. One notable change is the move toward touch screen computers for our surveys. This made the data collection much easier for all involved.

The sample size this year is 4,871 completed surveys. Of these, 4,354 are short surveys and 517 are long form. Seventy-eight bands were surveyed in the three provinces.

In conducting the surveys, we attempted to include band members from all walks of life and to ensure that the sample was representative.

The analysis of the AGI, based on data gathered from direct surveys of people living in First Nations, ranked the following communities as having superior systems of governance. Each of the top bands' overall score—the average of the results in the five dimensions of good governance that we evaluated—is also provided.

- Ochapowace First Nation (SK) 77.2%
- Muscowpetung First Nation (SK) 77%
- O'Chiese First Nation (AB) 76%

- Saulteaux First Nation (SK) 72.6%
- Wahpeton Dakota Nation (SK) 72.2%
- Little Pine First Nation (SK) 71.4%
- Yellow Quill First Nation (SK) 71.2%
- Carry the Kettle First Nation (SK) 71.2%
- Paul First Nation (AB) 71.2%
- Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, Lean Man First Nations (SK) 70.8%
- Witchehan Lake First Nation (AB) 70.8%
- Muskeg Lake Cree Nation (SK) 70.2%
- Siksika Nation (AB) 70.2%

The scores for the remainder of the 78 First Nations we surveyed are included in this report. A map of their locations is also included.

Unfortunately, many First Nations chose not to participate in the survey, and some simply did not respond within a reasonable amount of time to our requests to speak with band members. These First Nations were not included in the rankings. Moreover, after careful consideration, we decided to exclude any First Nation community with an adult population of fewer than 100 people.

The following tables show the overall scores for the highest ranked bands in each of the Prairie provinces:

Band ID	Band Name	Index Score
<b>Manitoba</b>		
<b>314</b>	<b>Sapolaweyak Cree Nation</b>	<b>69.6</b>
<b>312</b>	<b>Mosakahiken Cree First Nation</b>	<b>65.6</b>
<b>276</b>	<b>Cross Lake First Nation</b>	<b>64.2</b>
<b>287</b>	<b>Long Plain First Nation</b>	<b>64.0</b>
<b>306</b>	<b>Tataskweyak Cree Nation</b>	<b>63.4</b>

Band ID	Band Name	Index Score
<b>Saskatchewan</b>		
<b>363</b>	<b>Ochapowace First Nation</b>	<b>77.2</b>
<b>381</b>	<b>Muscowpetung Saulteaux First Nation</b>	<b>77.0</b>
<b>347</b>	<b>Saulteaux First Nation</b>	<b>72.6</b>
<b>358</b>	<b>Wahpeton Dakota Nation</b>	<b>72.2</b>
<b>340</b>	<b>Little Pine First Nation</b>	<b>71.4</b>
<b>Alberta</b>		
<b>431</b>	<b>O’Chiese First Nation</b>	<b>76.0</b>
<b>430</b>	<b>Paul First Nation</b>	<b>71.2</b>
<b>475</b>	<b>Siksika Nation</b>	<b>70.2</b>
<b>461</b>	<b>Sucker Creek Cree First Nation</b>	<b>69.2</b>
<b>473</b>	<b>Alexander First Nation</b>	<b>68.0</b>

We decided that securing an adequate sample in these communities would be too much for our research assistants as it would involve obtaining too high a population sample for such a small community. Therefore, these rankings feature only communities with an adult population of over 100 people.

**It should also be stressed that bands that scored near the bottom of our list in terms of overall ranking are not necessarily the lowest-performing bands in the Prairies. It is quite likely the lowest-performing governance institutions are found amongst the communities that refused to grant us permission to speak with their citizens. We strongly advise readers not to judge the lowest-ranking bands too harshly—their willingness to be surveyed indicates a certain degree of openness and commitment to improvement that was unfortunately not evident in the communities that barred us from entry.**

**Furthermore, we would like to caution readers against attributing undue importance to small differences between the overall scores earned by different bands. Bands that are separated by just one or two points in overall scores or in a particular category likely have governance institutions that operate at a similar level of performance. In other words, it would be a mistake to conclude definitively that Band A has a superior government to Band B based upon a one-point gap between the communities in the overall rankings.**

The following tables present the complete results of the 2010 Aboriginal Governance Index by province:

## Summary of all Saskatchewan surveys

Rank	Band Name	Band #	Elections	Administration	Human Rights	Transparency	Economy	Total
1	Ochapowace First Nation	363	88	85	72	72	69	77.2
2	Muscowpetung Saulteaux First Nation	381	80	71	81	68	85	77.0
3	Saulteaux First Nation	347	87	65	77	64	70	72.6
4	Wahpeton Dakota Nation	358	95	63	57	73	73	72.2
5	Little Pine First Nation	340	78	68	71	69	71	71.4
6	Yellow Quill First Nation	376	82	71	75	62	66	71.2
7	Carry The Kettle First Nation	378	77	72	77	72	58	71.2
8	Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, Lean Man First Nations	343	77	67	80	61	69	70.8
9	Witcheakan Lake first Nation	407	87	60	81	54	72	70.8
10	Muskeg Lake Cree Nation	375	82	59	81	68	61	70.2
11	Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation	355	89	64	74	56	66	69.8
12	Okanese First Nation	382	93	55	82	70	47	69.4
13	Cumberland House Cree Nation	350	86	60	75	61	58	68.0
14	Flying Dust First Nation	395	85	62	68	65	59	67.8
15	English River First Nation	400	84	60	67	70	58	67.8
16	Shoal Lake Cree Nation	357	80	76	66	59	57	67.6
17	Gordon First Nation	391	87	65	66	58	62	67.6
18	Poundmaker Cree Nation	345	87	60	70	63	56	67.2
19	Waterhen Lake First Nation	402	80	69	65	57	65	67.2
20	Kahkewistahaw First Nation	362	81	61	77	63	53	67.0
21	James Smith Cree Nation	370	86	59	68	50	71	66.8
22	Muskoday First Nation	371	87	61	61	78	47	66.8
23	Cowessess First Nation	361	78	67	65	71	51	66.4
24	Red Earth First Nation	356	90	55	64	64	58	66.2
25	Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation	369	81	60	62	65	61	65.8
26	Kinistin Saulteaux Nation	377	77	58	64	65	65	65.8
27	Canoe Lake Cree First Nation	394	78	66	69	53	62	65.6
28	Peepeekisis First Nation	384	78	51	67	65	63	64.8
29	Muskowekwan First Nation	392	79	68	62	46	67	64.4
30	Moosomin First Nation	342	74	60	68	54	65	64.2
31	Island Lake First Nation	397	76	64	75	43	62	64.0
32	Buffalo River Dene Nation	398	70	73	65	60	52	64.0
33	Thunderchild First Nation	349	73	59	62	59	66	63.8
34	Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation	396	85	62	67	53	52	63.8
35	Onion Lake	344	76	56	66	68	52	63.6
36	Lac La Ronge First Nation	353	85	59	67	54	51	63.2
37	Piapot First Nation	385	78	60	66	60	46	62.0
38	Kawacatoose First Nation	393	70	64	56	54	66	62.0
39	Little Black Bear First Nation	379	86	57	45	53	64	61.0
40	Pasqua First Nation	383	82	55	45	64	59	61.0
41	Montreal Lake Cree Nation	354	87	52	59	53	49	60.0
42	Cote First Nation 366	366	83	47	70	51	42	58.6

## Summary of all Manitoba surveys

Rank	Band Name	Band #	Elections	Administration	Human Rights	Transparency	Economy	Total
1	Sapotaweyak Cree Nation	314	90	68	58	59	73	69.6
2	Mosakahiken Cree Nation	312	81	62	53	46	86	65.6
3	Cross Lake First Nation	276	86	59	59	57	60	64.2
4	Long Plain First Nation	287	75	57	70	65	53	64.0
5	Tataskweyak Cree Nation	306	76	60	63	58	60	63.4
6	Norway House Cree Nation	278	83	61	52	67	53	63.2
7	Brokenhead Ojibway Nation	261	86	61	59	58	51	63.0
8	Opaskwayak Cree Nation	315	87	61	49	63	54	62.8
9	Pinaymootang First Nation	272	89	65	56	57	46	62.6
10	Peguis First Nation	269	83	61	59	58	51	62.4
11	Rolling River First Nation	291	76	57	66	67	46	62.4
12	Sandy Bay First Nation	283	74	53	57	53	72	61.8
13	Swan Lake First Nation	293	86	62	61	57	43	61.8
14	Ebb and Flow First Nation	280	76	60	68	56	46	61.2
15	Dakota Plains First Nation	288	83	62	54	61	45	61.0
16	O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation	318	79	52	58	50	59	59.6
17	Dakota Tipi First Nation	295	71	58	60	49	57	59.0
18	Little Saskatchewan First Nation	274	75	42	63	55	59	58.8
19	Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation	313	60	58	55	60	57	58.0
20	Tootinaowaziibeeng Treaty Reserve	292	63	51	55	44	60	54.6
21	Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation	324	59	54	58	48	48	53.4

## Summary of all Alberta surveys

Rank	Band Name	Band #	Elections	Administration	Human Rights	Transparency	Economy	Total
1	O'Chiese First Nation	431	92	73	84	72	59	76.0
2	Paul First Nation	441	81	61	83	48	83	71.2
3	Siksika Nation	430	82	71	63	66	69	70.2
4	Sucker Creek Cree First Nation	456	68	69	72	69	68	69.2
5	Alexander First Nation	438	81	57	65	54	83	68.0
6	Bigstone Cree Nation	458	82	64	70	65	59	68.0
7	Tsuu T'Ina Nation	432	84	64	53	60	65	65.2
8	Beaver First Nation	445	69	55	80	52	70	65.2
9	Little Red River Cree Nation	447	77	62	69	51	66	65.0
10	Loon River Cree Nation	476	81	47	77	58	60	64.6
11	Driftpile First Nation	450	71	68	59	56	58	62.4
12	Horse Lake First Nation	449	71	46	70	55	69	62.2
13	Wesley First Nation	475	80	55	62	49	64	62.0
14	Sunchild First Nation	434	72	57	62	49	69	61.8
15	Enoch Cree Nation #440	440	75	56	39	52	63	57.0

## Notes from the survey work

Simply providing numbers and rankings does not always do justice to all the communities we include in our survey. Thus, we attempt to provide more detail about the First Nations in each province

as well as the specific circumstances and challenges they face. This is to give more nuances to our index as well as some colour by describing some of our experiences from our travels.

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## Notes from the Saskatchewan survey work

The third year of surveying in Saskatchewan is complete for 2010. The majority of First Nation communities in Saskatchewan were surveyed, and the few reserves that chose not to participate were all aware of the AGI and asked to participate. We hope they will take part next year and that the survey teams may visit those reserves.

Our AGI supervisor visited the majority of the First Nation reserves throughout Saskatchewan. We always request permission from the chief and council and/or band managers before we enter First Nations to do surveys. Most First Nations communities were happy to participate in the AGI, but there were some leaders who appeared reluctant to allow us to interview their residents. I think these leaders do not understand the purpose of the survey. So rather than accept, many chiefs decline to participate out of misunderstanding.

In Saulteaux First Nation, the chief was

particularly helpful, and the participation of the Saulteaux First Nation was excellent, as the chief also helped gather his people to do surveys. Surveys go very well when the leadership encourages the members to take part. I hope this will become a trend.

The Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation also took part this year. The councillor gave the AGI team a list of First Nation communities and permission to do surveys. These communities are located in the North, and getting to them requires much travel on gravel roads.

The AGI supervisor hopes to gain access to the communities that did not take part in the survey, and we hope that the leaders will give their permission for the 2011 project. To all the Saskatchewan First Nations who participated in this very important survey and who welcomed us into their communities, thank you for your time, openness and transparency.

## Notes from the Manitoba survey work

First Nations communities in Manitoba are resilient. Over this past year, many communities in the province faced unspeakable losses, as the H1N1 virus raged through communities and claimed many lives. In addition, some isolated reserves are facing fuel and food shortages due to the rapid, early spring thaw that affected the length of the winter-road season.

Because of the added costs of transporting goods to these isolated communities, they face a great hurdle in meeting basic needs. Our research assistants began their survey work in Manitoba in October 2009. As they started, the media was reporting on the high infection rate of H1N1 that was sweeping through First Nations communities. This brought an element of health

and safety awareness that we had to consider as we sent our assistants to rural and isolated communities.

The good news is many chiefs and councils took a proactive stance by obtaining vaccinations and by educating their people about the H1N1 virus. Our research assistants reported that despite the losses that some communities had endured, the people they encountered were helpful and pleasant. Many First Nations participated in the survey despite these losses, which is commendable. The shorter winter-road season has brought hardship to some already disadvantaged communities.

As leaders search for solutions and plan for future winters, they are facing challenges in terms of providing services and dealing with increased population pressures. A limited land base also presents challenges for some communities.

Manitoba First Nations also face governance challenges. Some First Nations are facing deficit struggles that place them in danger of being co-managed or placed into third-party management. If this happens, they lose control over their own governance. The hope is that improving governance will help these First Nations avoid co-management or worse, third-party management. Co-managed or third-party management also presents problems for our survey work, as some communities are under-

standably reluctant to discuss governance and services under these conditions.

Leadership and electoral challenges present problems for some Manitoba First Nations. For example, the conflict between the elected chief and council and the custom council in Roseau River First Nation (a custom council is an institution created by the First Nation itself as balance against the elected chief and council) has created significant division and strife within that First Nation. Moreover, confusion over political roles has created a situation where two elected chiefs claim legitimacy within the community. As a result, both parties have been to the Federal Court of Canada to resolve these issues. Communities where there are leadership issues present difficulties for our survey workers, as people are reluctant to discuss governance issues amid such turmoil. To all the Manitoba First Nations who participated this year, thank you. Our survey workers noticed progress on several First Nations as well as a greater degree of openness to our workers. Of particular note were Sapotaweyak, Rolling River, Dakota Tipi, Wuskwi Sipiik and Opaskwayak Cree Nation. In all these communities, we were well received. We look forward to seeing you again next year, and to those who have yet to participate, consider this your invitation. We hope you accept.

## Notes from the Alberta survey work

This is the second year we visited Alberta First Nations. Like last year, we visited band councils, health and education offices and people in their homes. Our challenge is to gain credibility in the eyes of the First Nations we visit. As this is only our second year conducting research for the AGI in Alberta, the project is therefore less well

known here. Judging from our conversations with leaders and community members, most people in Alberta First Nations have not heard of the AGI, so we have important work to do to demonstrate what our project is and how it can benefit their communities.

Unfortunately, due to the small populations of some First Nations in the north-east part of Alberta, we had to drop some of these communities from our survey. As mentioned before, this was because of the impossibility of obtaining an adequate survey sample. Sadly, this meant that some communities that participated last year such as Mikisew Cree Nation and Chipewyan Prairie First Nation were not included. Last year, Chipewyan Prairie in particular was flagged for the forward-thinking character of the community leaders and their openness to our survey.

Not being able to include communities north of Fort McMurray kept us from meeting with them and learning about their ongoing issues. For the communities along the Athabasca River, we are aware of issues relating to the environment, as these First Nations are concerned about development of their traditional territories by the oil and gas industry. We want to make mention of these communities and their issues.

There are also governance issues in some communities. In particular, a leadership dispute in Lubicon Lake Cree Nation as well as a recent third-party takeover prevented us from obtaining a survey sample from that community. There are also other First Nations that are dealing with co-management and third-party issues. Therefore, we were not able to obtain a sample from them. Out of respect, we agreed to monitor the situation in these communities and return upon improvement.

Sharing in oil and gas revenue is an important issue for many Alberta First Nations. In one band office, a land manager explained how their reserve lands are filled with oil and gas companies that are extracting resources. However, the revenue the community receives from this activity, he demonstrated, is not very substantial.

The desire on the part of many First Nations is to find better ways to share in these resources and to become players. When it comes to forestry in the North, several First Nations are engaging in logging operations that generate revenue and jobs for their communities.

We were able to get access to a good number of First Nations in northwest Alberta. Leaders were open to hearing us and often could see the benefit of allowing us to survey their members, as this allowed them to see how they are performing in the eyes of their community members.

In the central part of Alberta (Treaty 6 territory), we received good feedback. Our research assistant supervisor reported a positive response from Sunchild First Nation and O'Chiese First Nation. O'Chiese scored the highest last year, and we hope they can use their experience to encourage other communities to participate. We were able to obtain approval from Wesley First Nation but not from Chiniki and Bearspaw, the other communities that comprise Stoney Tribe. We hope our continual surveying in this area will encourage these First Nations to see the benefits of participation.

Unfortunately, we were unable to get to the First Nations within the Hobbema area, although we did visit the band office of Samson Cree Nation, where we found the staff very helpful.

In the Treaty 7 territory (southern Alberta), we were able to discuss the survey with all the chiefs. We received warm approval from Siksika Nation Chief Leroy Good Eagle as well as leaders from Tsuu T'ina. This is the first time we conducted the survey on Tsuu T'ina. Chief Good Eagle was particularly positive about the survey and discussed the many initiatives the community is embarking upon.

The leaders of the Blackfoot communities also expressed a desire to engage in regional political co-operation. In the past, these tribes were allied together. Of particular pride to the communities this year is the successful repatriation of sa-

cred ceremonial objects. Unfortunately, we were not able to secure ultimate approval from the Piikani First Nation (Peigan) or the Blood Tribe. After lengthy discussions, it was agreed that we would return in the fall.

## First Nations requiring some mention

**O'Chiese:** This reserve, located close to Rocky Mountain House, scored well again this year. The band government continues to post important information on its web site and in prominent places in the community.

**Siksika Nation:** At the chiefs' assembly in Calgary, Chief Leroy Good Eagle stated that he was very interested in working toward effective and accountable governance for the Siksika community. Some of the Chief's plans are outlined in our Best Practices section, which is included later.

**Blood Tribe:** With the able help of our research assistant Ivan Tallow, we received a tentative go-ahead from Chief Charles Weasel Head. The Chief raised some reasonable issues about the survey questions and methodology. We plan to review his input carefully as we review our methodological approach in preparation for next year's project. Ivan is originally a Blood Tribe member, so he was able to discuss community issues with the Chief as well as provide helpful solutions on how they can move forward. Unfortunately, we did not receive the full consent of council to proceed, and we ran out of time. Chief Weasel Head is a prominent leader among Alberta First Nations, so we are very interested in discussing any issues he may have. We look forward to surveying Blood next year.

**Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee Band):** This was the first time we surveyed this community. Southwest of the Calgary city limits, this band is strategically located. The band office is top notch, and the band owns several business ventures including a renowned, picturesque golf course and a gravel company.

**Little Red River Cree Nation:** We found this small community very welcoming. It consists of John D'Or Prairie, Garden River and Fox Lake (which is accessible by winter road). The staff was very helpful in providing information about the community. In John D'Or, we were able to speak to the Chief and council, who allowed us to address a band council meeting about our project. Chief Gus Loonskin approved the project, because it would allow the membership to gauge governance in the community. He thought the survey was a way to provide feedback for the leadership on how they are doing, which we think is a very constructive attitude. Some councillors were unsure, and one in particular was very reluctant at first. Through long discussions, he came around. We were asked some tough, legitimate questions about our survey and about the challenges band governments face over funding levels from Indian and Northern Affairs.

## Notes about First Nation funding and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

While we conducted our survey, many leaders raised the issue of funding for band governments from Indian and Northern Affairs. They felt that poor public services on many First Nations were not the fault of the First Nation governments or the people. After all, the federal government, through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), provides funds for on-reserve programs. The federal government has stated that what they send to band governments for services is supposed to be comparable to what non-Aboriginal Canadians receive from their federal, provincial and municipal governments for services. By the government's own admission, much of this funding is not meeting this target. The extent to which the federal government is actually underfunding is an open question that deserves further exploration. It should also be noted that for the short survey—which was the vast majority of the surveys distributed—none of the questions are tightly linked to funding levels.

In addition to arguing that current levels of federal government funding are insufficient, many leaders stated that existing laws—especially the *Indian Act*—limit their freedom to take action in ways that they determine would benefit their communities. First Nation governments under the *Indian Act* often face legal constraints that prevent them from freely deciding where to invest or how to govern the programs they are required to deliver. That responsibility still often rests with federal policy makers.

Despite the possibility of underfunding and the fact that the leaders operate under political constraints, there exists a consensus that they have an obligation to deliver the highest-performing government possible under the circumstances they face—even as they press for reform at the federal level.

There is also the reality that when the federal government began to devolve program delivery responsibilities to band governments in the 1980s, it did not provide the expertise or training of band workers that was necessary to effectively deliver those programs. Building policy capacity, especially in the area of financial management, among First Nation communities should be a priority, and it would help improve public management in several areas.

None of this excuses mismanagement where it occurs at the local level. First Nation governments have an obligation to their membership to spend available funds responsibly and transparently. Regardless of flaws in existing funding formulas or unhelpful constraints imposed by the *Indian Act* and other laws, there is still an obligation to ensure band funds are allocated to the proper programs and that they reach their intended targets. While pushing for comprehensive reform, it is important for public managers at the local level to be as accountable, transparent and effective as possible. We are convinced that this conviction is shared by the overwhelming majority of First Nation leaders.

## Best practices

There is no perfect template for every First Nation. Each community is unique and aspires to different things. However, as the Harvard Project and other initiatives tell us, there are basic government practices that have been clearly linked to superior economic performance, improved democracy and greater social cohesion.

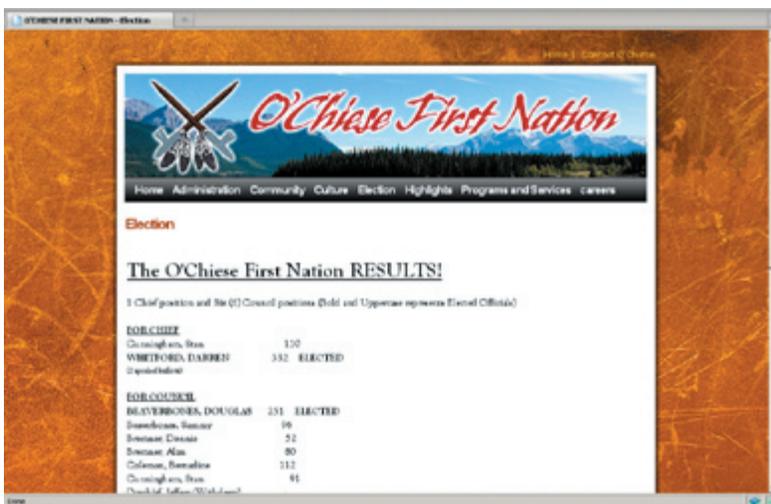
It makes sense that effective governance institutions are characterized by transparency wherever possible. The light of exposure helps keep people informed, and it keeps decision-makers accountable.

### *DEVELOP INDEPENDENT MEDIA*

Media is a big area where improvements can be made. Band newsletters are legitimate of course, but they cannot be the only means of reaching members. Often, they merely paint a limited picture. One good practice is the encouragement of independent media within the community. Some of the best reserves have media outlets that publicize activities on the reserve.

### *POLICIES THAT REQUIRE MOST MEETINGS BE HELD ON-RESERVE*

Policies should also be developed to ensure the chief and council are available to members who have questions. Oftentimes, we noticed the chief and council held meetings off-reserve, usually in larger urban centres. Sometimes this is legitimate, but many members think the leadership should have all essential meetings on the reserve, so members can attend. Specific policies for holding meetings on-reserve or for notification of band meetings should exist and should be enforced.



### *POST BAND DOCUMENTS ONLINE*

In this electronic age, there is no reason First Nations cannot place major documents and financial data on band web sites. Many of the high-performing First Nations in our survey already place this information online. Audited statements, salaries, expenses and band-election results are items that can be disclosed. Bands such as O'Chiese and Rolling River are good examples of First Nations that display this information prominently for all to see.

### *"FIREWALL" BETWEEN BUSINESS AND PROGRAM MANAGERS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS*

A significant area in need of reform is the level of separation between the elected officials and businesses and service deliverers. Too many members complain that band businesses and administration are not far enough removed from politics. In the Harvard Project, professor Stephen Cornell at the Native Nations Institute (University of Arizona) provided evidence that band enterprises that are separate from band politics through independent boards of directors are more profitable.

This is because these businesses can focus on the bottom line rather than on pleasing politicians. Often, politicians quickly use band enterprises as a way to reward voters or to hire friends and family. As a result, business performance suffers, as the eye is taken off merit and focused on politics.

Siksika Nation in Alberta is a First Nation that performed well in our survey (3<sup>rd</sup> in Alberta and 13<sup>th</sup> overall) and is adopting policies to remove politics from administration and services. It is working with the University of Lethbridge to have a third party act as an independent appeals tribunal to deal with complaints against program service providers. This is a type of “ombudsperson” who is separate from the community and can engage in dispute management.

Not surprisingly, First Nations that adopt a system of appointing independent officials to resolve disputes do better. This contributes to improved transparency and administration scores, and as the Harvard Project has shown, it leads to more-profitable businesses and better decision-making. A top priority for all First Nations is ensuring that committees that provide public services are kept separate from politics by competent and independent boards of directors who answer first to program and service managers who are thinking about the good provision of services and not politics. This means there is a “firewall” between these managers and committees and the chief and council.

## Construction of the Governance Survey

Our analysts wrote several drafts of possible questions and divided them into five categories, which reflect different aspects of good governance: elections, administration, human rights, transparency, services and the economy.

Throughout the process, survey constructors relied on our Aboriginal Frontiers research and on grassroots reporting to inform our choice of categories and the wording of the questions. We also had considerable on-the-ground input from our policy analysts and field workers about our questions. This input will be taken into consideration as we develop and improve our questionnaires.

## The surveying work

The AGI questionnaires for Manitoba were distributed first. Saskatchewan questionnaires were handled next and then Alberta. We recruited band members on many First Nations to assist with the survey work. Through the good work of some of our fieldworkers, we were able to secure access to many reserves and to obtain a sufficient number of surveys. Some band councils even assisted with the recruiting of on-reserve workers.

We assigned points for each question depending on the answer given. Answers that suggested better governance earned more points, whereas answers that suggested worse governance earned fewer. For each question, the “best” answer was assigned 100 points and the “worst” answer was assigned 20. Each band’s survey scores were averaged to produce a band score for each category and an overall score. For each category and overall, the best score a band could receive was 100

per cent if every respondent gave the “best” possible answer to each question. The worst score would be 20 per cent if each respondent gave the least favourable answer.

## Weightings

In this year’s report, we weighted all five categories of governance equally. This means that to obtain the final band score, we added up the category scores and divided the total by five, the number of categories examined.

The category results were generally positively correlated with one another. In other words, strong performance in one area generally predicts strong performance in the others. Therefore, the results of our survey are quite robust to different approaches to weighting the category scores. Small changes in the weighting system do not produce very different survey results.

## Statistical breakdown of results

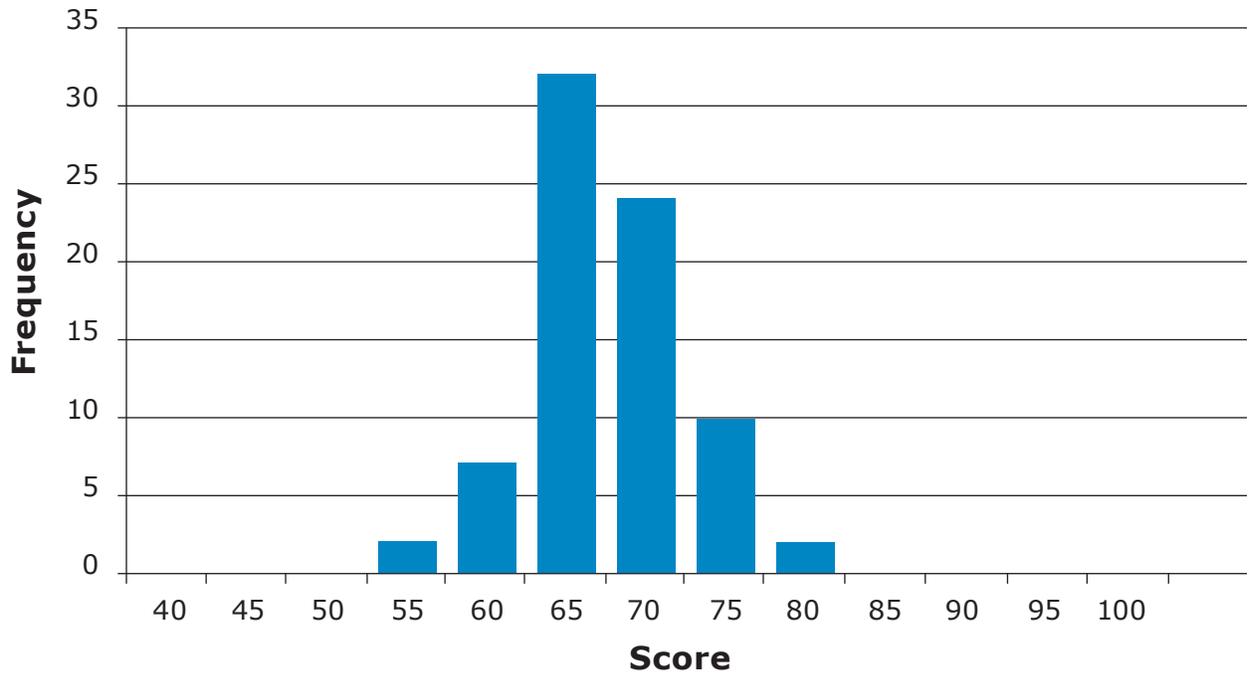
This section of the AGI provides histograms that show the distribution of overall band scores as well as the scores for the five areas of good governance that are evaluated in this report.

Overall and in each area, the results show a strong central tendency—scores tend to be grouped together in the middle of the distribution with fewer bands earning scores well below or well above average. It may be particularly important to examine the bands found at the two ends of the distribution to identify the factors that lead bands to be particularly successful or unsuccessful in specific areas.

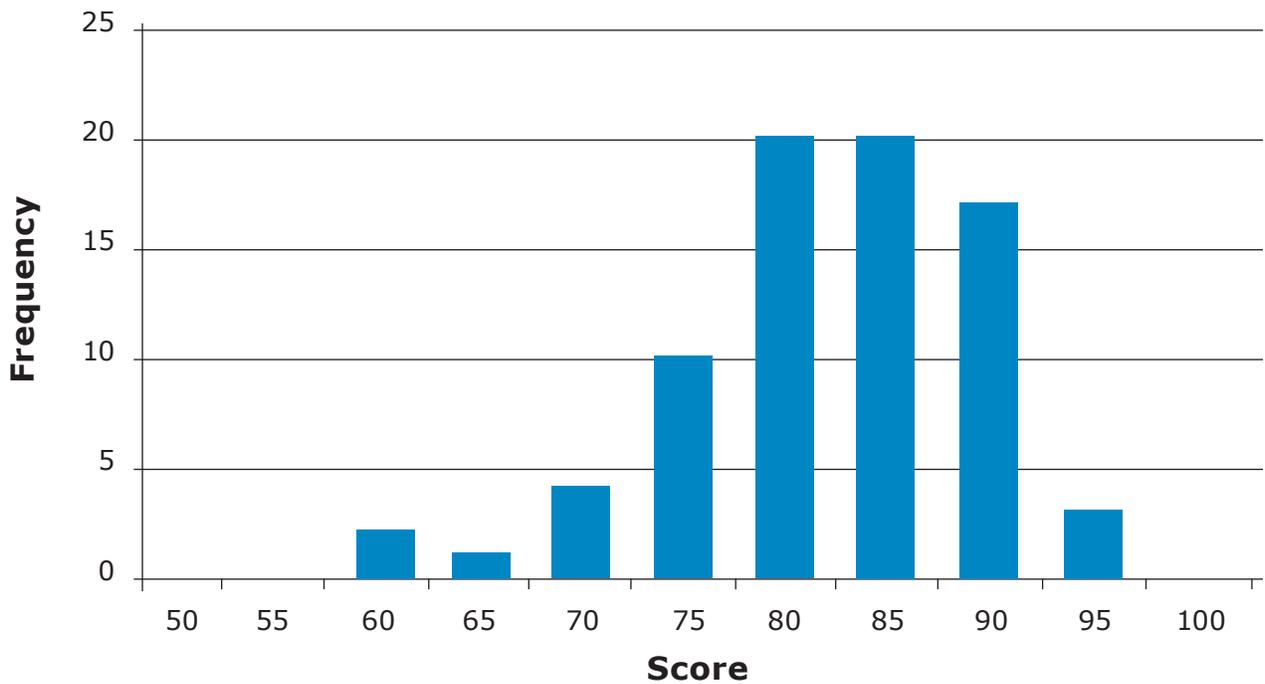
The trend toward a clustering in the middle of the scoring distribution is particularly strong when overall scores are examined. Of the 78 bands that provided sufficient responses for the AGI team to develop a band score, 56 (72 per cent) scored between 60 and 70 points. Only 13 bands (17 per cent) earned more than 70 points, and only eight bands (10 per cent) scored fewer than 60 points.

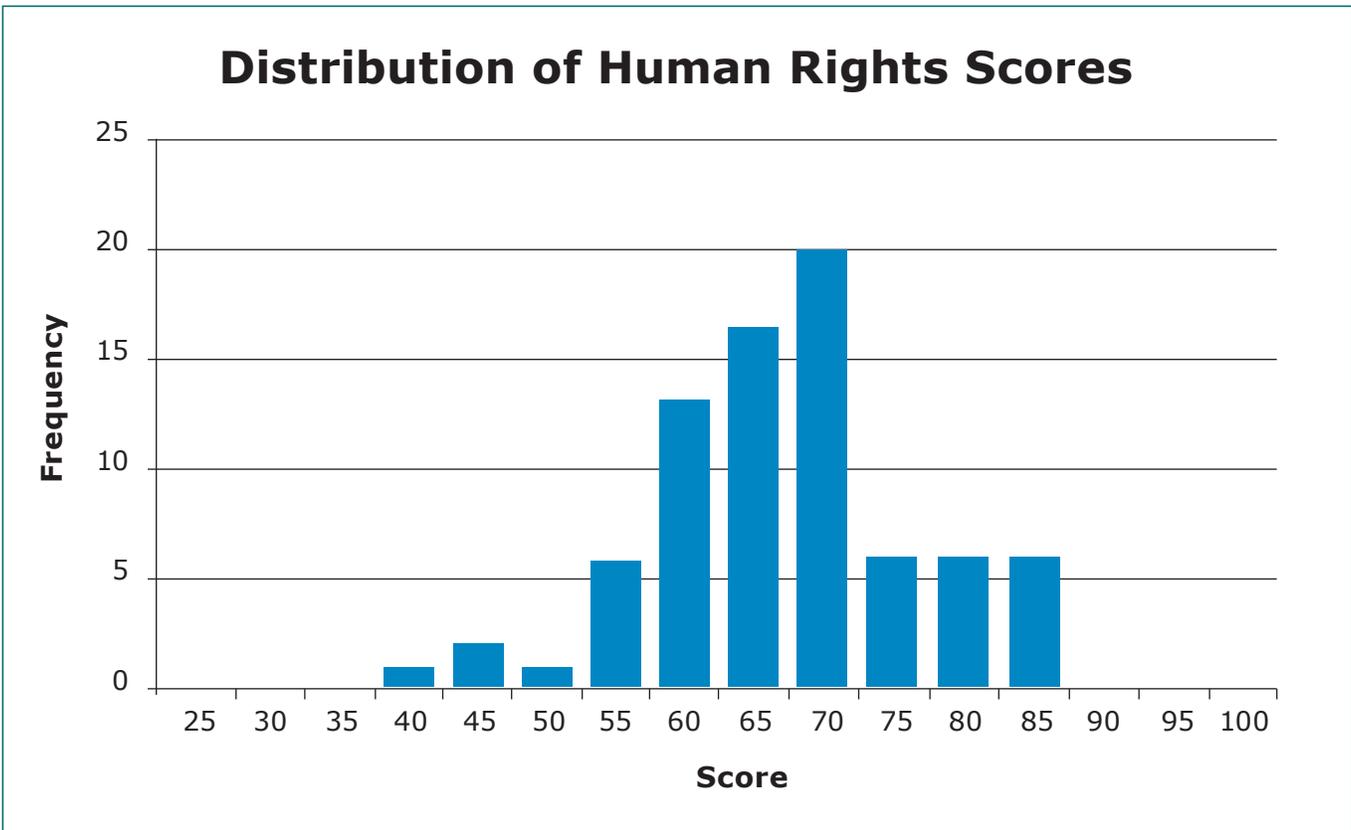
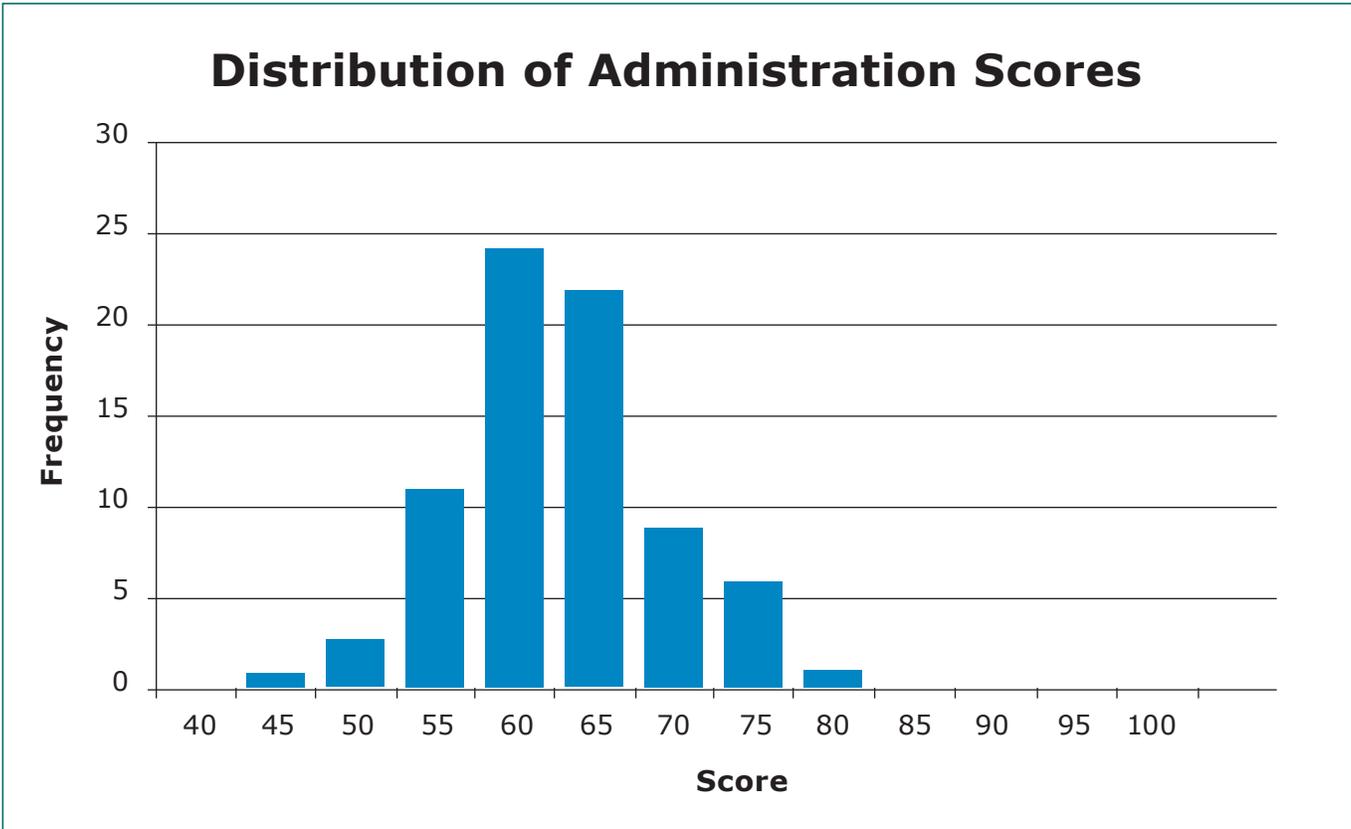
Overall  
Transparency  
Administration  
Services/  
Economy  
Human Rights  
Elections

### Distribution of Overall Scores

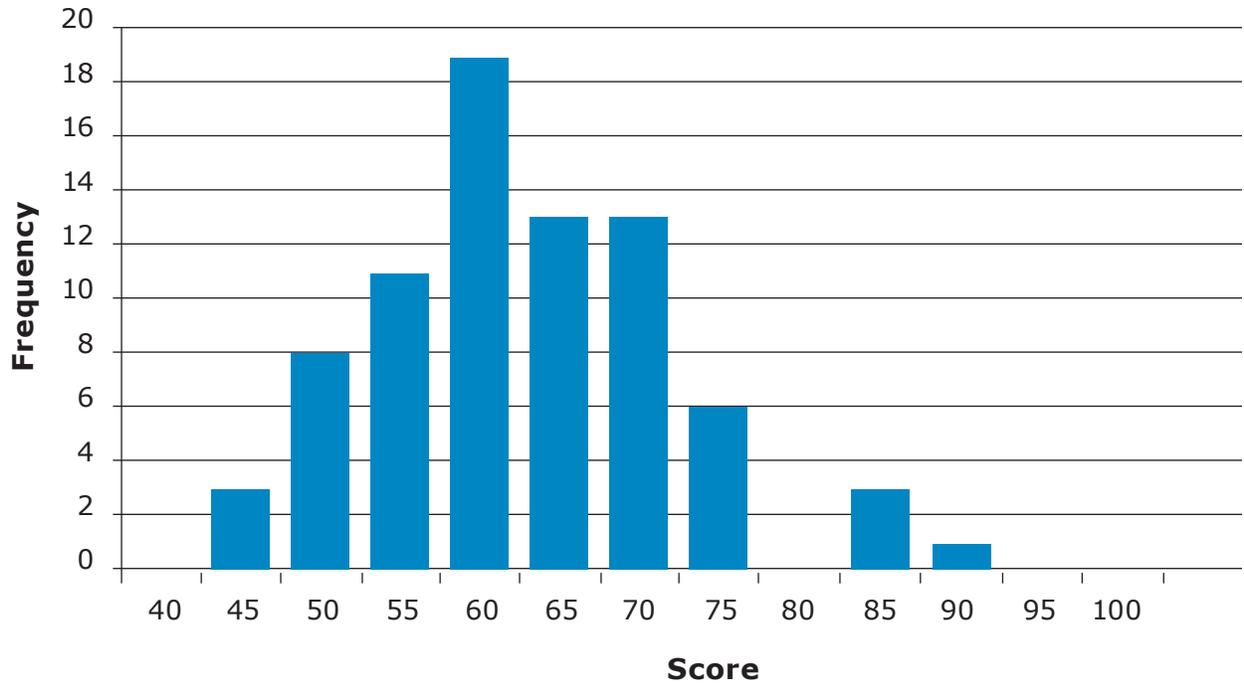


### Distribution of Elections Scores

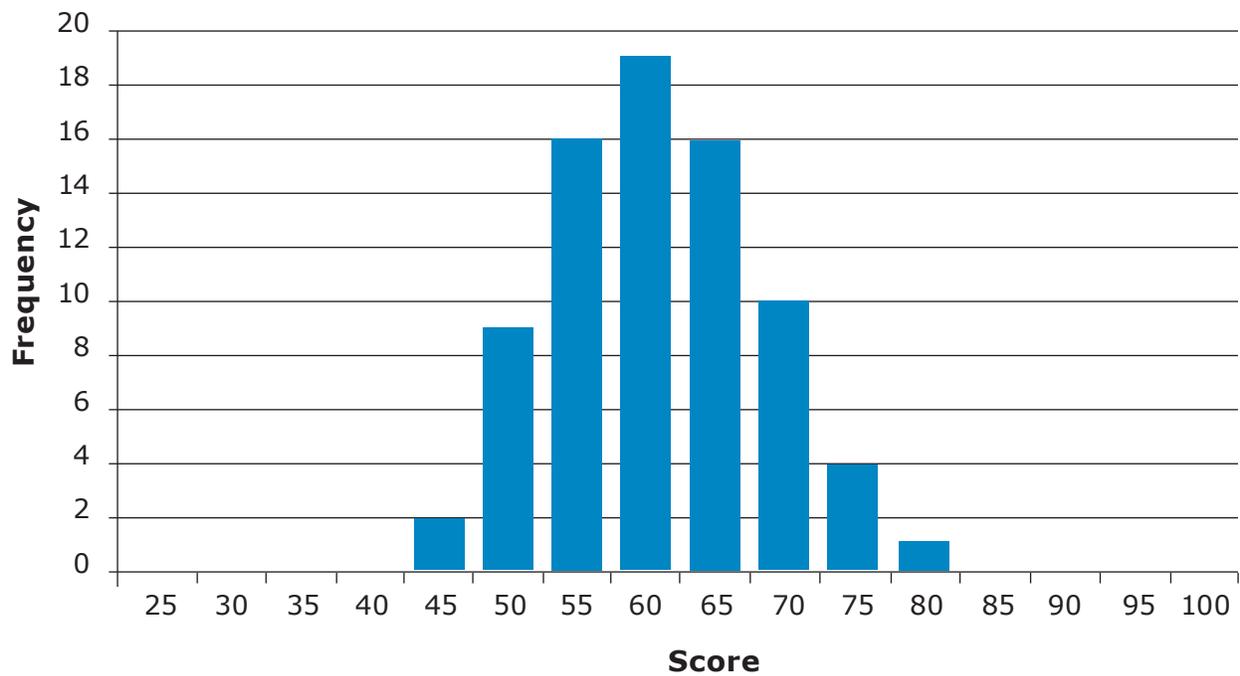




### Distribution of Economy Scores



### Distribution of Transparency Scores

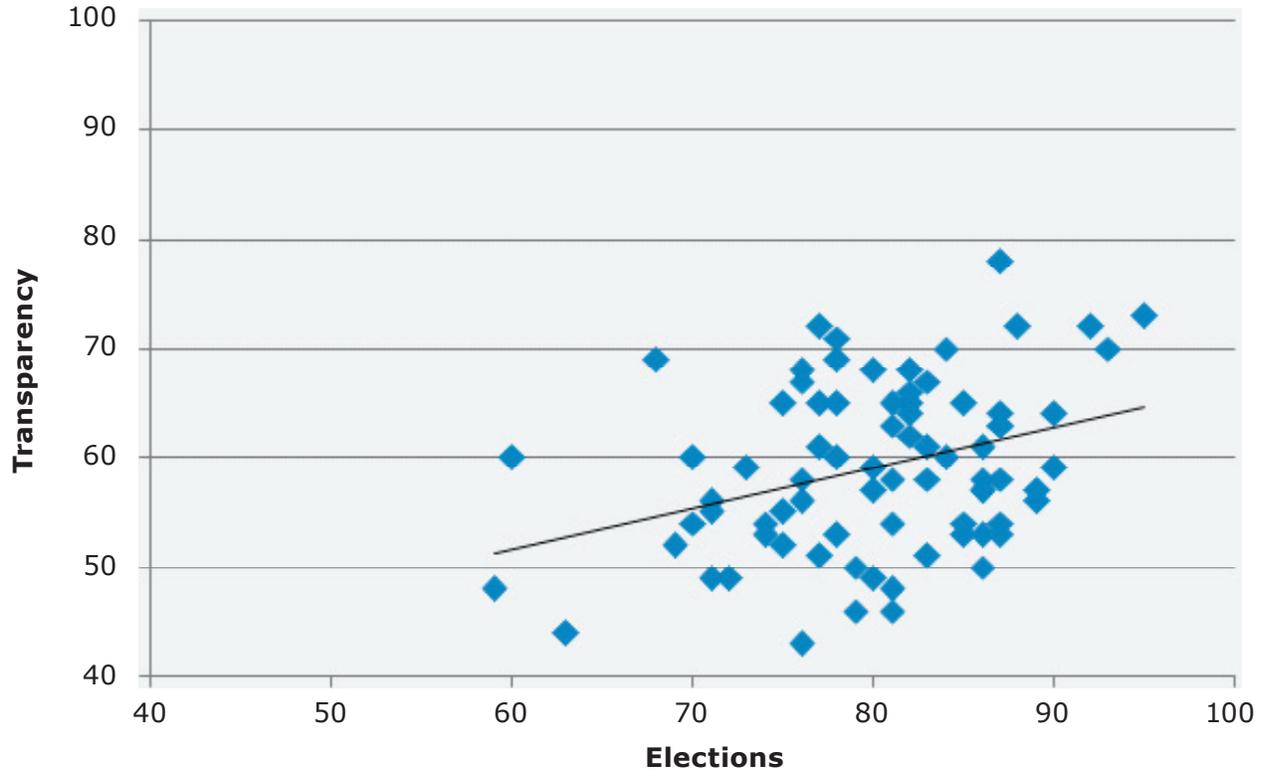


## Relationships between scores in different categories

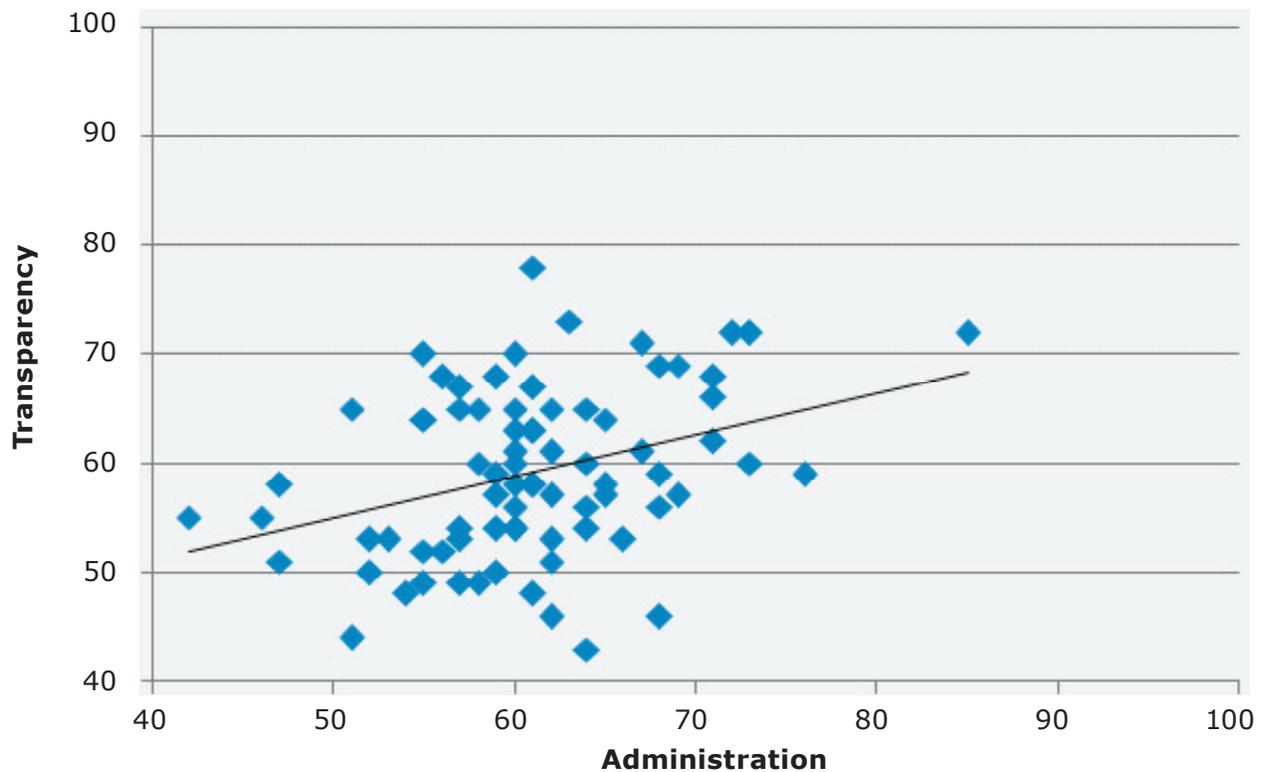
### Summary

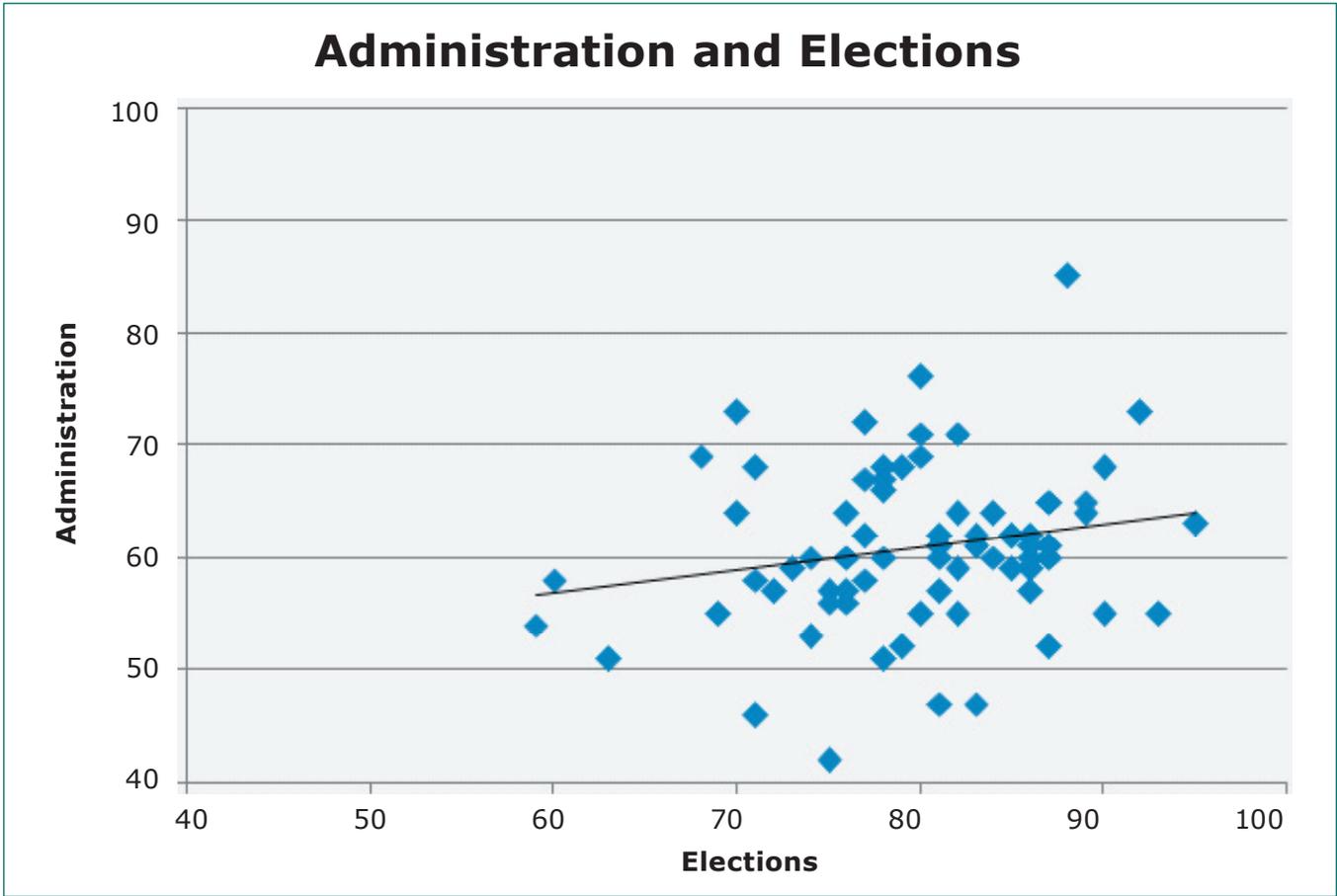
- Generally speaking, there exist positive correlations between the different areas of good governance that were analyzed in this report. In other words, strong performance in one area tends to go with strong performance in all the others. It is rare for a band to earn exceptionally strong scores in some areas and to score terribly poorly in the others.
- For the most part, regression analysis (a technique for analyzing the relationship between different variables) of the relationship between performances in each of the five areas showed relationships that were not statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence interval. This does not mean that the relationships are unimportant—with only 78 bands examined, a very high degree of correlation is required for the relationship to be statistically significant. Running a simple bivariate regression (a regression analysis that involves two variables) between the scores in the five areas shows a positive relationship (though not always statistically significant) in eight instances and a negative relationship in only two—neither of which is large or statistically significant.
- There were some examples of statistically significant positive correlations between the scores in different areas of governance. For example, the relationship between transparency and administration was significant at the 95 per cent confidence level as was the relationship between transparency and elections. The relationship between administration and elections was also statistically significant at the 90 per cent confidence level. These relationships are illustrated graphically below with a scatter plot that provides a trend-line showing the results of an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.
- Of the five categories analyzed, administration is the best predictor of overall performance.

### Transparency and Elections



### Transparency and Administration





## Strengths and weaknesses of aboriginal governance on the prairies

In the research for the AGI, our team distributed two different surveys—a short survey with six questions and a much longer survey with more than 50 questions. The advantage of this approach is that the short survey enabled us to get a large number of responses, as the time required to complete one is relatively small, while the long form allowed us to analyze many additional dimensions of Aboriginal governance.

Since its inception, the AGI has shown that it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about Aboriginal governance, because the quality of governance structures differs significantly from one community to another.

We are aware of this diversity between Aboriginal communities and recognize there are exceptions to most general comments we could make. Nonetheless, due to the size of the sample and the detail of our questionnaires, the responses to our survey provide a great deal of information that can help us to understand—generally speaking—what the areas of strength and weakness are in Aboriginal governance structures in the three provinces we studied. The following notes identify some of the most significant findings of our survey, which shed light on the important issue of where Aboriginal governance structures are currently succeeding and where they are most in need of reform.

## Elections

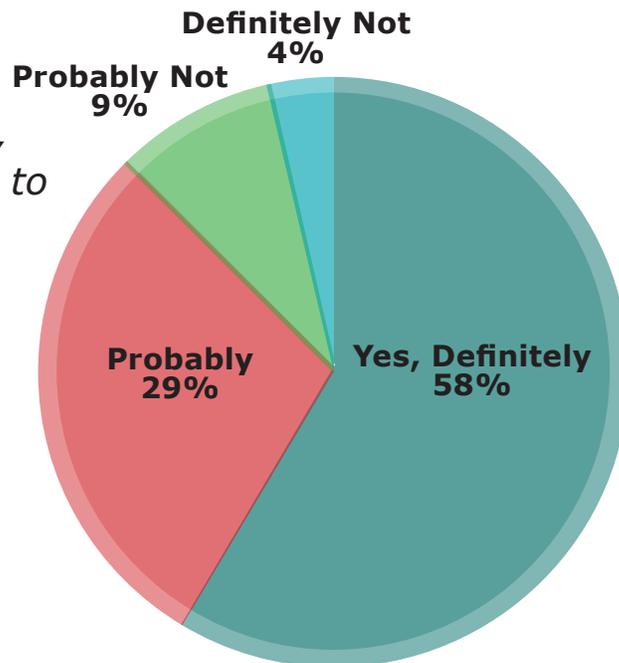
Our questions concerning elections elicited more positive responses than any other set of questions in our survey. When asked to describe their level of confidence that votes in the most recent band election were counted fairly, well above half (58 per cent) of the respondents gave the most positive possible answer, "Yes, definitely." An additional 29 per cent of respondents said they believed votes were "probably" counted fairly in the last election. Only 4 per cent said that the votes were "definitely" not counted fairly and another 9 per cent thought the votes were "probably not" counted correctly. In total, 87 per cent of respondents gave a generally positive response to this question compared to just 13 per cent who gave a negative response.

To be sure, some respondents did express some concern about the legitimacy and quality of the electoral processes. A sizeable minority of our respondents (36 per cent) said they believe "favours and payments have been exchanged for votes." A slightly larger minority, (43 per cent) expressed a general sense of dissatisfaction with the candidates for political office in the community, saying they are generally "dissatisfied" with the quality of the candidates.

Despite these concerns, the residents with whom we spoke expressed more confidence about their electoral processes than they did about other aspects of on-reserve governance. While there is room for improvement in some communities, our survey data clearly show that most band residents in the Prairies seem to think that, generally speaking, their local elections are free and fair.

## Elections

*In the last Band election, were rightful voters able to trust that their votes, and only their votes, would be counted?*



## Administration

Unfortunately, the responses to our questions surrounding the quality of government administration suggest that nepotism exists within many reserve communities. Furthermore, many respondents suggested that political power is sometimes exercised arbitrarily in some communities and that there is inadequate consultation of local residents by the chief and council.

Our surveys suggest that some communities might benefit from more consultation with residents by the chief and council during the decision-making process. For example, 34 per cent of respondents said their chief and council do not consult band members at all when making decisions. A majority of respondents (66 per cent) did say the chief and council do consult residents—however, it is troubling that a sizeable minority of one-third said such consultations do not take place in their communities.

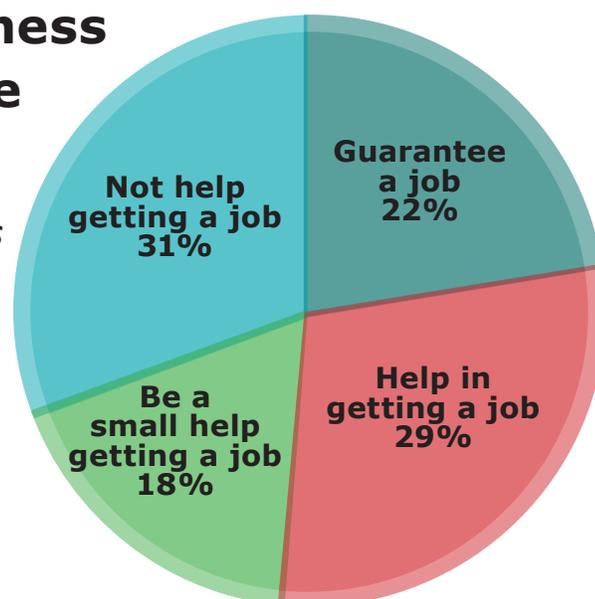
Our surveys also show that some residents think band councils use their power to make decisions that benefit its members and not necessarily most residents. One of the clearest ways this problem seems to manifest itself is in hiring for government jobs on the reserves.

As the graphic below illustrates, a large majority (69 per cent) of our respondents told us that being related to the a band council member would be at least a “small help” in getting a job on the reserve. Furthermore, more than one in five respondents (22 per cent) told us that being related to a band council member would “guarantee” a person in their community a job.

A reasonably large minority (31 per cent) suggested that being related to a band council member would not help in getting a job, but the responses to this important question seem to suggest that nepotism and preferential hiring continue to distort the job market in some Aboriginal communities.

## Perceptions of fairness in hiring on-reserve

*If you were a member of a band council member's family would this:*



## Human Rights

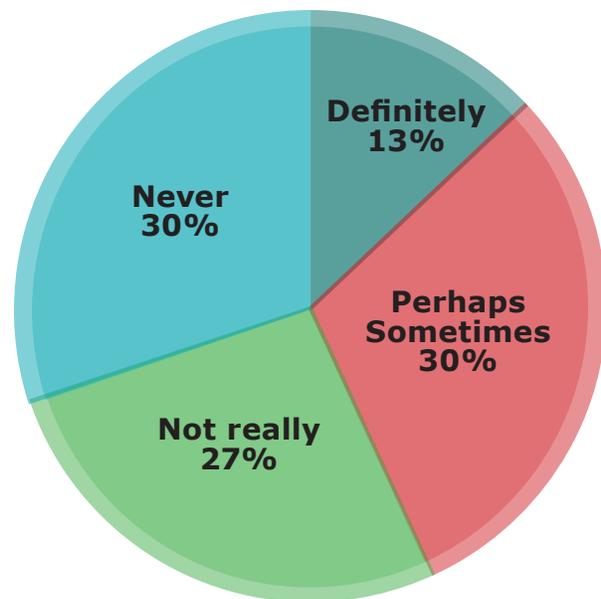
A prerequisite for a successful community is that individuals feel physically safe and secure in the possession of their property. Our survey suggests that some reserves are not meeting these conditions.

The first function of government is to protect the person and property of citizens from violent attacks. Our survey results suggest that in many communities the residents think that their governments are not adequately providing this protection. When asked to rate the "personal security" of band residents as either "good" or "not good," almost half of the respondents (46 per cent) said "not good." Although a majority of people said they think the personal security of band residents is "good," it is troubling that such a large minority of residents does not feel safe from physical violence. Although there remains substantial room for improvement, it is encouraging that the percentage of respondents who said that the personal security of residents is "not good" has fallen dramatically since last year's survey. In the 2009 AGI, 59 per cent rated the physical security of their band's residents as "not good." This number has dropped by 13 percentage points in the past year, a sign that some communities may be making progress toward ensuring the physical protection of residents and their property.

Our survey respondents suggested that in some communities the chief and council abuse their political power by using Band Council Resolutions (BCRs) to remove residents from the community. Expelling residents deprives individuals or families of their membership in the band. Many people think BCRs are used for political reasons.

## Human rights on reserve

*Does the Council force people off the reserve (with Band Council Resolution - BCR)?*



When we asked about the use of BCRs, a significant minority of our respondents told us that they are sometimes used to remove people with whom the chief and council are unhappy. Thirteen per cent said this practice "definitely" occurs in their community. An additional 30 per cent said that BCRs are "perhaps sometimes" used to remove individuals from the community.

It should be stressed that a majority of respondents did not seem to view BCRs as a major threat in their communities.

Thirty per cent said that their council “never” removes people in this manner, and an additional 27 per cent responded “not really,” suggesting that the use of BCRs occurs very infrequently—if at all—on their reserves. Although the majority of our respondents suggested that BCRs are not a major problem in their communities, it is nonetheless troubling that a sizeable minority said this practice occurs at least “sometimes” in their band. This constitutes a perceived threat in the minds of too many Aboriginal Canadians, and it should be discontinued immediately wherever it persists.

Overall, the majority of respondents gave favourable responses to our major questions concerning human rights and physical security. This is certainly good news. However, the data from these questions show there is a significant minority that does not feel safe and/or fears the use of BCRs. The protection of people from physical harm and the guarantee of basic property rights are the essential building blocks of a harmonious and economically successful community. In those communities where residents do not feel secure and/or BCRs are used to remove people from the community, it is clear that governments need to act aggressively to improve this situation and to ensure that the basic human rights and safety of residents are protected.

## Transparency

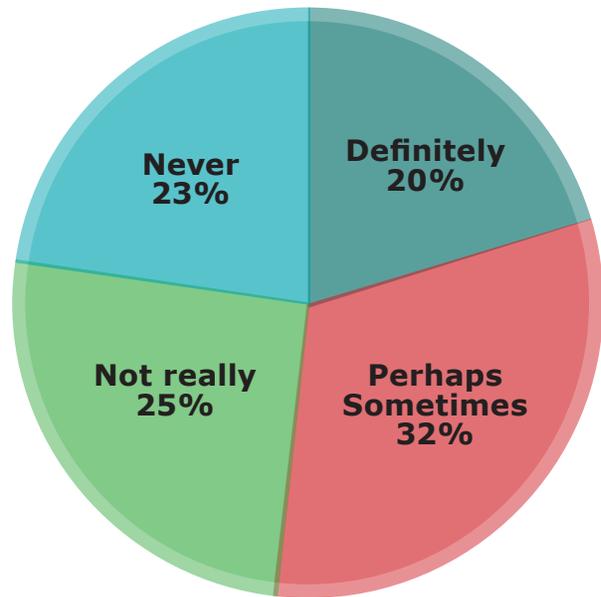
In order for residents to be informed and engaged in the decision-making process, it is crucially important for band councils to be transparent. Information concerning council meetings, major decisions and financial records should be easily available to all who are interested. The responses to our survey questions about transparency were generally mixed. Some respondents reported good access to information about their band council’s activities, while others reported very limited access.

For example, when asked whether band council minutes and decisions are readily available to band residents, 15 per cent of respondents reported that this information is “always” available, and another 20 per cent said the information is made available most of the time. This means approximately 35 per cent of respondents gave a generally positive answer to this question. An additional 26 per cent gave a neutral answer, saying this information is “sometimes” made available. A similar number of respondents gave a negative response to the question. Twenty per cent of respondents said that minutes and decisions are “never” made available, and an additional 20 per cent said that they are “rarely” available. In total, 40 per cent gave a negative response to this question. This mixed response suggests that some communities are much more transparent and forthcoming with official information than others are.

Our survey also produced a mixed response when we asked questions about transparency surrounding council activities that involve money. Transparency in this area is particularly important, as it helps to ensure that funds are used for legitimate purposes that serve the public good.

## Transparency in aboriginal government

*Does the band allow access for its members to its business plan and financial statements?*



When we asked whether residents have access to the band’s business plans or financial statements, approximately half of the respondents gave at least a somewhat positive response, and half gave a negative response. Fifty-two per cent said that members either “definitely” or “sometimes” have access to this information compared to 48 per cent who said residents either “do not really” or “never” have access to business plans and financial statements.

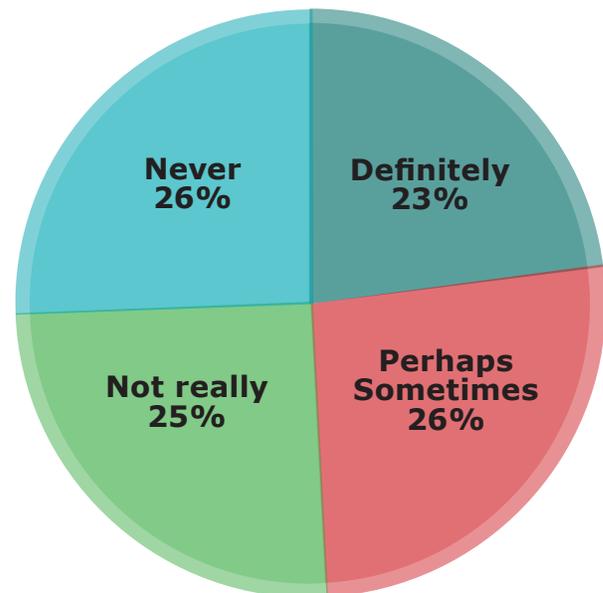
## Economy

The separation of business and politics is an important prerequisite for economic growth in First Nations communities. If the band council members and their families dominate the economy, it creates a major barrier to beneficial competition and economic development. Unfortunately, our survey results suggest that members of band councils and their families may occupy inappropriately powerful positions in the economies of some bands.

Approximately one-quarter (23 per cent) said that band council members “definitely” run the reserve’s independent service outlets, and an additional 26 per cent said “perhaps sometimes.” A very slim majority (51 per cent) said band council members and their families either “never” or “do not really” run the independent service outlets. For sustained economic development to occur in Aboriginal communities, it is important to ensure that those who control local politics do not also dominate economic activity. Our data suggest that there is at least the perception that the band council controls economic activity in some communities. Economic development and social cohesion are more likely to emerge if people think economic success is linked to merit—not control over local politics. It is therefore important to work to loosen the tight relationship between business and politics that exists on some reserves in order to promote the perception of fairness and ensure equality of opportunity and fair economic competition on reserves.

## Separation of business and politics on aboriginal reserves

*Do members of your band council, or their family members, run the Resrves’s independent service outlets?*



## Conclusions

With the fourth annual survey completed, we think we have provided a useful picture of First Nation governance that identifies high-performing bands, highlights best practices and points to general areas of strength and weakness in Aboriginal governance in Western Canada.

Of course, improvement is always possible in any study. Each year, we strive to improve our methodology. To that end, we welcome any input on the AGI and ways the project can be improved in future years.

One way we aim to improve the project each year is by striving to secure permission from a greater number of First Nations in order to increase the number of bands we survey. This year, we are pleased to have a much greater number from Saskatchewan, and we look forward to maintaining those numbers as well as improving the numbers in Alberta and Manitoba.

We have focused our efforts on presenting positive stories and using the AGI as a tool for encouragement and the identification of successful approaches to governance. This is the reason we included our best-practices section, which we hope First Nation governments will review. The best practices described in this report are strategies that have a proven track record of improving governance processes.

While we see progress on fronts such as electoral performance, our survey data show how much work there is still to be done in areas such as administration, transparency and human rights protection.

Many First Nations communities face daunting social and economic challenges. In our travels across the Prairies, we were inspired by the leaders—and other citizens outside of the political process—who are committed to confronting and overcoming those challenges. The development of effective and transparent governance institutions in all First Nations communities is an important step toward achieving this objective. By identifying areas of strength and weakness, highlighting top performers and disseminating best practices, the AGI and the Frontier Centre seek to contribute to the development of such institutions.

We look forward to returning to First Nations communities this autumn to begin research for next year's AGI and to continuing to work with Aboriginal Canadians to build high-performance local governments that deliver accountability, transparency and economic opportunity for their people.

See you all next year!

## Appendix

# A Note from the Projects Coordinator

The primary purpose of the Frontier Centre's Aboriginal Governance Index is to identify and share best practices from leading bands in the Prairie provinces, so as to improve the quality of governance and the delivery of government services to Aboriginal Canadians.

We are intent upon building a spirit of trust as we seek to engage First Nations members in the AGI. We are often asked who funds us. To keep our perspective independent and original, we neither ask for nor receive government funding. Private charitable foundations fund the majority of our policy work.

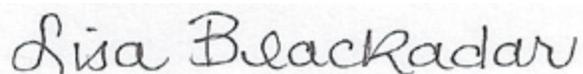
We recognize that each band administration has its own unique set of challenges and victories, and the objective of the AGI is to focus on the positive aspects of Aboriginal governance and to point out successful models and best practices. We have all heard the news reports of tragedies and corruption that have occurred on reserves. It is important for such stories to be brought into the open and for band leaders who fail their citizens to be held accountable. However, the primary objective of this report is to highlight forward-thinking band administrators who have implemented positive change that will improve the prosperity and lives of their band members.

The AGI process is not static. While we retain our core mission of evaluating the quality of governance institutions in First Nations communities and disseminating best practices, we seek to improve our survey methodology and approach to field research each year. For this reason, we made substantial improvements to our data-collection processes this year.

Through software engineered by Technos Inc., we now survey members of First Nations electronically. Netbooks that are programmed to operate on a platform with touch screen technology were introduced this year to reduce the possibility of data input error. This system helps us to conduct research with flexibility and high mobility.

Look for this engaging opportunity to have your opinions count when our research assistants visit your First Nation in the fall of 2010.

Part of my role as the Projects Coordinator is to plan and oversee the logistics of the AGI fieldwork. Our research assistants travelled thousands of kilometres and I thank them for what they have accomplished. They met with many interesting people and enjoyed beautiful scenery in their travels across our great West. As I begin to plan the fifth AGI, I invite your First Nation community to participate and to share your stories with us.



Lisa Blackadar  
Projects Coordinator

## A Note from the Research Assistant Supervisor

In our travels, we always strive to ensure that we fully explain what we are doing with our survey.

Unfortunately, the purpose of the AGI is misunderstood in many First Nations communities. When I travel to the communities and meet with chiefs and councillors, I find that most leaders are indeed working toward improving the transparency of their local governance institutions. However, further improvements are needed to ensure that citizens are aware of the administration's decision-making processes, financial information and the services that are available to them. Newly elected chiefs may well do their best, but because their people may dwell on a past chief's wrongdoings, there is a fear that participation in the AGI will reflect negatively on their job performance.

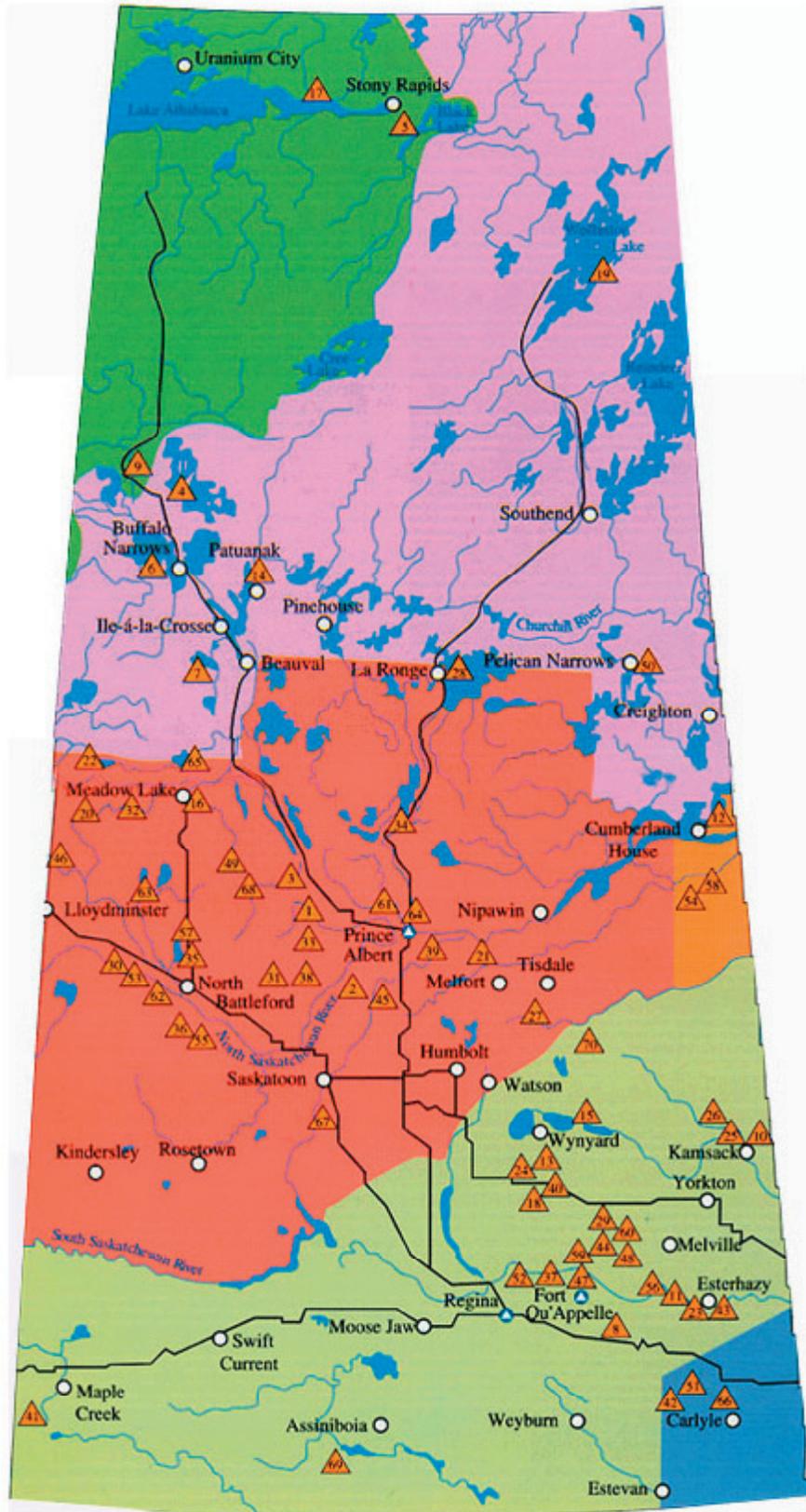
We wish to stress to all participating communities that the survey deals only with the present government, not past ones.

In addition, some First Nation leaders are apprehensive about the loss or decrease of funding. They are under the mistaken belief that our survey is connected to their band funding, which it is not. Therefore, out of this mistaken fear, they choose not to participate in the AGI.

The AGI was never intended to seek out the negative aspects of First Nations or to undermine band governments. The AGI was started as a way of assisting First Nations in moving forward on band governance issues. We know there are many challenges and barriers encountered by First Nations, and this is why the AGI was created. In travelling to First Nation communities and talking with their people and hearing their concerns and ideas, we are able to help promote a better future for all First Nations.

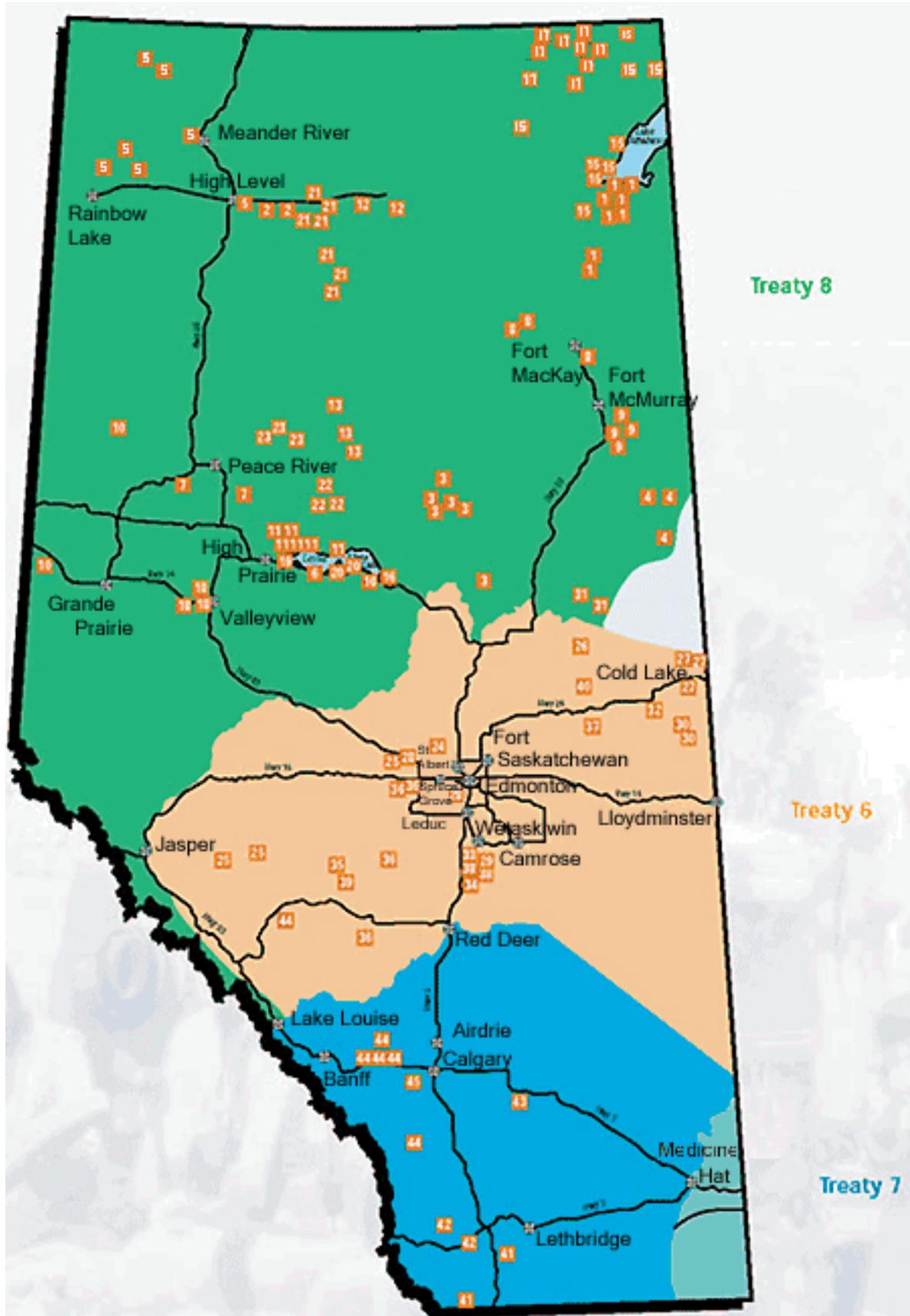
Barb McLeod  
Research Assistant Supervisor

# LOCATIONS OF FIRST NATIONS IN SASKATCHEWAN





# LOCATIONS OF FIRST NATIONS IN ALBERTA



# ABORIGINAL GOVERNANCE INDEX SURVEY

GENDER OF RESPONDENT:  Male  Female

AGE OF RESPONDENT:  16-21  22-29  30-39  40-49  50+

1. In the last Band Council election, were rightful voters able to trust that their votes, and only their votes, would be counted?

- Yes, definitely
- Probably
- Don't know/not sure
- Probably not
- Definitely not

2. If you were a member of the Chief's family, would this

- Guarantee a job
- Help get a job
- Be a small help getting a job
- Not help
- Make it more difficult
- Don't know/not sure

3. Are Council minutes and decisions easily available to anyone on the reserve?

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know/not sure

4. Does the Council force people off the Reserve whom it doesn't like (with a Band Council Resolution - BCR)?

- Definitely
- Perhaps sometimes
- Not really
- Never
- Don't know/not sure

5. Does the band allow access for its members to its business plan and financial statements?

- Definitely
- Perhaps sometimes
- Not really
- Never
- Don't know/not sure

6. Do members of your band council or their family members run the Reserve's independent service outlets (for example retail outlets or restaurants)?

- Definitely
- Perhaps sometimes
- Not really
- Never
- Don't know/not sure

For Office Use Only:

NAME OF FIRST NATION: \_\_\_\_\_

BAND NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ SURVEY CONTROL NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_



Dear Sir or Madam:

The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is engaged in research on a project we call the "Aboriginal Governance Index." The purpose of the project is to provide First Nations in the Prairies with a convenient benchmark with which individual bands can measure their progress in achieving responsible self-government.

As you are no doubt well aware, the movement towards full autonomy for First Nations and away from the bureaucratic paternalism of Canada's Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has had successes and failures. We are trying to identify the elements of governance that have characterized successful transitions in order to provide all First Nations with information about best practices. We hope that this information may then be employed in a positive fashion to improve the lives and fortunes of all bands and their individual residents.

We request your co-operation in filling out the attached discussion guide, and thank you for taking the time to do that. If you have any questions about the contents, or are unsure about the nature of the information we need, please contact me. I can be reached at the office at 204-957-1567, by cellular phone at 204-620-2126 or by e-mail at [donsandberg@shaw.ca](mailto:donsandberg@shaw.ca).

Yours sincerely,

Don Sandberg

Aboriginal Policy Fellow

THE NAME OF YOUR FIRST NATION: \_\_\_\_\_

BAND NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

GENDER OF RESPONDENT:  Male  Female

AGE OF RESPONDENT:  16-21  22-29  30-39  40-49  50+

## I. ELECTIONS

1. Are elections held every two years or is the frequency established by custom?  
Every 2 years  Other
2. Are you satisfied with the quality of the candidates? Yes  No
3. Have favours or payments ever been exchanged for votes? Yes  No
4. Have election results ever been disputed? Yes  No
5. Is the person who resolves such disputes independent from band officials?  
Yes  No
6. Does your band decide leadership by hereditary custom? Yes  No

## II. ADMINISTRATION

1. Do the Chief and band council make all decisions? Yes  No
2. Are other band members consulted? Yes  No
3. Do band officials ever benefit personally from their own decisions? Yes  No
4. Does the council tend to hire family? Yes  No
5. Does band employment depend on family or political relations with existing leaders?  
Yes  No
6. Are open positions of employment with the band posted on bulletin boards?  
Yes  No
7. Has your band ever had a third-party administrator appointed under the Indian Act?  
Yes  No
8. Do you think the band is overstaffed? Yes  No
9. Does the band use too many outsiders to do its work? Yes  No
10. Have you ever seen a copy of the band's financial statements? Yes  No
11. Overall, how would you rate your band's administration? Good  Bad

## III. HUMAN RIGHTS

1. Does the Chief or council use band council resolutions (BCRs) to force residents to leave the reservation? Yes  No
2. Have residents been removed with BCRs within the last five years? Yes  No
3. Do band members removed from the reservation have the right to an appeal?  
Yes  No
4. Does an independent agency hear such appeals? Yes  No
5. Who appoints that agency? Chief/Council  Other

CONTINUED

6. Do band members have security in the possession of their homes and enterprises?  
Yes  No
7. Have band members ever been evicted from their homes?  
Yes  No
8. Does the band provide its own police services? Yes  No
9. Is the band policed by an outside force, such as the R.C.M.P.? Yes  No
10. How would you rate the personal security of band residents?  
Good  Bad
11. How would you describe the percentage of band members incarcerated in jails or prisons over the last five years?  
High  Low

#### IV. TRANSPARENCY

1. Do you think the band council meets often enough?  
Yes  No
2. Are band council meetings open to band members on a regular basis?  
Yes  No
3. Are band council minutes and decisions made available to band members?  
Yes  No
4. Is there in place a formal process for consulting residents? Yes  No
5. Does the band publish a newsletter, information bulletins or other communications to inform members of band activities?  
Yes  No
6. Does the band allow access for its members to its business plan and financial statements?  
Yes  No
7. How would you rate the financial information given band members?  
Adequate  Inadequate
8. Are band members provided with information on the performance of band enterprises?  
Yes  No
9. To your knowledge, has the band council ever defaulted on its financial responsibilities?  
Yes  No
10. Do you think your band carries too much debt?  
Yes  No
11. Do you think your band's management of records is adequate?  
Yes  No
12. Is there a formal process in place for handling complaints from band members?  
Yes  No

CONTINUED

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## V. SERVICES

1. Do you think your band's schools are performing well? Yes  No
2. Is your school drop-out rate good or bad? Good  Bad
3. Do you think your band provides enough support for those who want to go on to college or university?  
Yes  No
4. Overall, how would you rate your band's performance with regard to education?  
Yes  No
5. Do people in your community wait too long for medical attention? Yes  No
6. Overall, how would you rate your band's performance with regard to health services?  
Yes  No
7. How would you rate the access of your band members to welfare?  
Adequate  Inadequate
8. Does your band suffer from a shortage of housing? Yes  No
9. Do you think housing is assigned fairly? Yes  No
10. How would you rate the quality of water provided to your community?  
Good  Bad
11. Overall, are you happy with the services your band's leaders are providing?  
Yes  No

## VI. THE ECONOMY

1. Do the members of your band council also run the band's businesses?  
Yes  No
2. Do you think the hiring of people to work for band businesses is fair?  
Yes  No
3. Does the band provide equal and fair access to credit or loan capital?  
Yes  No
4. How would you rate the availability of jobs in your community?  
Adequate  Inadequate
5. How would you rate the number of band members who have left the reservation?  
High  Low
6. Is or has the band ever been under third party management? Yes  No
7. Do you think your community's economy is growing? Yes  No
8. Do you think that your children would do better for themselves if they stayed in your community or left?  
Stay  Leave

END - THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

## About the Authors

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**Joseph Quesnel** is a policy analyst at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who focuses on aboriginal issues among other topics. He is from the Sudbury region of Northern Ontario, and has Metis ancestry from Quebec. He graduated from McGill University in 2001, majoring in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and American politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. In 2004, he completed a master of journalism degree at Carleton University in Ottawa, where he specialized in political reporting. For two years, he covered House standing committees, as well as Senate committees. His career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including Sudbury and Espanola and an editor/reporter with the *Drum/First Perspective*, a nationally-distributed Aboriginal newspaper. He also completed internships at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa and the Cable Public Affairs Channel. He is on the editorial board of the online journal C2C and writes a column in the *Winnipeg Sun* and other publications.

## Notable Contributions

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**Don Sandberg**

Aboriginal Policy Fellow



**Ben Eisen**

Statistical Analysis



**Barb McLeod**

Research Assistant Supervisor



**Lisa Blackadar**

AGI Projects Coordinator

## FURTHER READING

June 2009

### **Third Annual Aboriginal Governance Index**

#### **Rewarding good governance on Canada's reserves**

[http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication\\_detail.php?PubID=2807](http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=2807)

February 2008

### **Second Annual Aboriginal Governance Index**

[http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication\\_detail.php?PubID=2057](http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=2057)

June 2006

### **First Annual Aboriginal Governance Index**

<http://www.fcpp.org/publication.php/1402>

April 2010

### **Beyond the Indian Act:**

#### **Restoring Aboriginal Property Rights**

With Dr. Tom Flanagan,

Professor of Political Science,

University of Calgary

<http://www.fcpp.org/publication.php/3257>

For these and more see  
[www.fcpp.org](http://www.fcpp.org)

