



Enhancing Electoral Research in Canada:
Feedback from Electoral Management Bodies and Researchers
on Key Issues for Canadian Electoral Research

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Report 2023-04-10

This report was commissioned by C-Dem.

The data used were recruited through email communication and gathered using a Qualtrics survey. The first email communication was sent out on January 27, 2023 to eight electoral management bodies (EMBs) and 36 researchers affiliated with C-Dem. Reminder requests were sent out on March 13, 2023. Responses were recorded from six EMBs and 14 researchers. The last EMB response was recorded on March 24, 2023 and the final researcher response on March 20, 2023.

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1.0 Executive Summary

To facilitate a stronger relationship between Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and researchers, C-Dem has collected feedback between January and March, 2023. To enhance their work, EMBs require reliable research on various aspects of the electoral process. In many cases, researchers also benefit from data that is gathered by EMBs. This report focuses on the results of surveys conducted with Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and researchers in Canada to identify key areas of interest for electoral research and to facilitate stronger relationships between the two groups. Between January and March, 2023 representatives from six EMBs and 14 C-Dem researchers filled out a six-question survey to identify key areas of interest to support the development of Canadian electoral research.

This report highlights several key issues that the EMBs would like to see as the topic of further research, including barriers to voting, electoral trust and perceptions of electoral integrity, participation trends, technology and modernization of voting services, administrative challenges, accessibility and social media analysis. The EMBs also identified the types of research they find valuable, such as reports, raw data, academic studies, and conferences. Additionally, EMBs provided feedback on the data they would like to see researchers use in their work, such as resources available on their websites and public opinion research data available upon request.

The researchers identified several key areas of research interest, such as citizen competence, civic engagement and political participation, and the impact of misinformation on the electoral process. They also identified the types of research and data that are of value to them, including survey data, public opinion research, and academic studies.

Finally, this report discusses ways that both EMBs and researchers indicated C-Dem could facilitate stronger relationships between them, such as organizing conferences and establishing open forums to maintain a running list of interests of EMBs. Overall, this report highlights the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing between EMBs and researchers to improve the electoral process in Canada.

2.0 Electoral Management Bodies

C-Dem received feedback from six electoral management bodies that include Elections Canada, Elections BC, Elections PEI, Elections Saskatchewan, Elections Ontario and Elections New Brunswick. This report summarizes the key issues identified by EMBs for further research, the types of research that are of value to them, the research products they seek access to, and how C-Dem can facilitate stronger relationships between EMBs and researchers.

2.1 Key issues identified by EMBs for further research

- 1) **Barriers to Voting (4):** EMBs have identified barriers to voting that include barriers for specific target groups such as indigenous electors, youth, administrative barriers to voting, and general barriers to voting. Research in this area can help EMBs develop strategies to reduce these barriers.

- 2) **Electoral Trust and Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (3):** EMBs have highlighted the need to better understand electoral trust and perceptions of electoral integrity, specifically pertaining to various target groups such as Indigenous electors and immigrants. Trust in the electoral process is critical for promoting democratic participation. Research can help identify areas where trust may be lacking and suggest strategies for improving it.
- 3) **Participation Trends (5):** EMBs have identified key issues regarding electoral participation which include demographic trends, voting trends and reasons for voting, voting by mail, voter participation, and turnout (elector engagement). Understanding these trends can help EMBs develop effective strategies to increase voter turnout and engagement.
- 4) **Technology and Modernization of Voting Services (3):** EMBs have identified the need for research on the modernization of voting services and the use of technology to improve the electoral process. This includes research on:
 - a. electronic voting systems,
 - b. online voter registration, and
 - c. other technological solutions that can make voting more accessible and efficient.
- 5) **Administrative Challenges:** EMBs have identified administrative challenges that require further research: staffing challenges, division of work between the main office and field offices, and how best to support them.
- 6) **Accessibility:** EMBs have identified the need for research on accessibility of voting services, including awareness of services and how to vote. This research can help EMBs develop strategies to improve the accessibility of information to ensure that all Canadians can participate in the electoral process.
- 7) **Social Media Analysis:** EMBs recognize that social media platforms have become a crucial tool for political communication and can be used to disseminate information, engage with voters, and monitor election-related activities. Research in this area can help EMBs to effectively monitor and respond to social media activities during elections.

2.2 Types of research of value to Electoral Management Bodies

1. **Reports (4):** EMBs identified reports as a relevant source of research, specifically with non-academic language.
2. **Raw Data:** Raw data, particularly survey data, is another valuable resource for EMBs.
3. **Articles/Academic Studies (4):** Academic studies are another valuable resource for EMBs. Academic studies provide in-depth analysis of specific aspects of the electoral process, such as voter turnout, electoral trust, and barriers to voting.
4. **Conferences** are also a valuable resource for EMBs.

Given the key issues identified, EMBs would like access to research products such as reports and summaries/key findings. Specific issues identified of importance include cross Canada comparisons of voting trends, demographic data on voting behaviour, along with data on confidence and trust in elections, specifically related to EMBs.

2.3 What EMBs want researchers to use in their work

EMBs want researchers to utilize resources available on their websites, such as in Open Data sections, where there is voter turnout data, financing data, as well as survey and poll data. Additionally, EMBs also have data available upon request, specifically public opinion research.

By utilizing these resources, researchers can gain valuable insights into various aspects of elections and improve their research outcomes.

2.4 Facilitating Relationships

To further facilitate strong relationships between researchers and EMBs, the respondents indicated that they thought C-Dem could take several steps.

- Conduct event surveys,
- Liaise on special projects,
- Share information and research within their network to help produce a more comprehensive understanding of election-related issues,
- Organize conferences to promote the development of subcommittees,
- Provide a platform for EMBs to call out for data requests,
- Establish an open forum to maintain a running list of interests of EMBs,
- Focus on Canadian-based data to provide relevant insights, and
- Promote collaboration among Canadian EMBs.

3.0 Researchers

C-Dem received feedback from 14 researchers that are a part of the research network from across Canada and the US. This section summarizes the key research topics and types of data that researchers within the C-Dem network would find useful to achieve their research goals. Additionally, this section outlines the ways researchers think C-Dem can help continue to foster strong relationships between EMBs and researchers.

3.1 Researchers have identified a number of key issues that require further research

1. **Citizen Competence:** One key issue identified by researchers is citizen competence. This refers to the quality of political attitudes and political information processing. Understanding citizen competence is critical for ensuring that citizens have the knowledge and skills necessary to engage effectively in the political process. Further research is needed to explore how citizen competence can be improved in Canada.
2. **Political Participation:** Topics such as voter information/misinformation, systematic biases in participation, and declining voter participation have been identified as key issues. Additionally, minority voting is an area of concern that requires further exploration.
3. **Political Culture:** Researchers have identified several areas of concern related to political culture, including the representation of Canada's diverse population, democratic accountability, trust in electoral democracy, and integrity of the electoral system. Mistrust in the conduct of elections is also an important issue that requires further research.
4. **Citizen Engagement and Trust:** Citizen engagement is a critical area of focus for researchers, as understanding public trust in the political and electoral system, as well as citizen engagement, is essential for ensuring a strong democracy. Further research is needed to explore how citizen engagement can be improved in Canada.

5. **Immigration:** Immigration is another key issue identified by researchers. Topics such as immigration, immigrants' voting patterns and attitudes, and ethnic relations in Canada require further exploration to better understand their impact on Canadian society.
6. **Misinformation:** Misinformation in general, as well as misinformation and disinformation, are areas of concern that have a significant impact on politics and democracy.
7. **Polarization and Division:** Topics such as polarization/division and social cohesion, partisanship and polarization, populism, loser's consent polarization, and polarization and violence have all been identified as areas of concern.
8. **Party Politics:** Researchers have identified several areas of concern related to party politics, including regulation of political parties, electoral behaviour, parliamentary politics, party politics, party systems, and party dynamics and public opinion in between campaigns.
9. **Indigenous Issues and Electoral Systems:** Researchers identified Indigenous electoral systems and issues as a topic of interest which includes demographic information, Indigeneity and political candidates, Indigenous participation and voting behavior.
10. **The Future of Journalism and News:** Understanding how journalism and news can be improved is critical for ensuring a well-informed public and a strong democracy.

3.2 Types of research of value to researchers

1. **Electoral Statistics:** One of the primary areas of interest for researchers is electoral statistics. EMBs produce data on various aspects of the electoral process, including election results, voter turnout rates and candidate backgrounds. Researchers require a series of well-formatted and easily accessible electoral results with identifiers attached to each electoral district to enable merging with Statistics Canada socio-demographic information to the greatest extent possible. They also require official electoral results (both current and historical) at the polling division and district levels. It would be ideal for EMBs to make these data available in a user-friendly format that allows researchers to analyze and interpret the results easily. Ideally this should also include political contributions/financial data.
2. **Regulations:** Researchers are also interested in political contributions and party regulations. EMBs should provide information on party regulations and party donations to enable researchers to analyze the influence of money in politics. Political contributions data are crucial for researchers interested in understanding the sources of campaign financing and the role of money in elections.
3. **Voter Registration and Turnout:** Voter registration and turnout data are essential for researchers interested in understanding the factors that influence voter behaviour. EMBs should provide information on voter registration and turnout, including data on the accessibility of voting locations and methods. These data should be available at the polling division and district levels to enable researchers to analyze the data by population group and geographic location.
4. **Public Opinion Data:** Researchers also require public opinion data in between elections. EMBs should conduct surveys to gather data on political attitudes and opinions, which researchers can use to understand how public opinion influences

election outcomes. Researchers also require data on the use of social media and online platforms in political campaigns and their influence on voters. Analysis of the impact of media coverage on public opinion during elections is also critical.

3.3 Facilitating Relationships

1. **Networking Opportunities:** Networking opportunities are crucial for strengthening relationships between EMBs and researchers. C-Dem already provides networking opportunities through its annual conferences. EMBs should be invited to these conferences to see the range of work being conducted between EMBs and researchers across the country. C-Dem should continue hosting forums that bring together researchers and EMB staff. These forums can discuss current issues in election administration and encourage the exchange of ideas between researchers and EMBs. To facilitate connections between researchers and EMB experts, C-Dem could arrange events, such as research4impact, to create opportunities for academics and EMB experts to discuss issues in-depth in 20-30 minute calls.
2. **Improved Access to Data:** EMBs can facilitate the work of researchers by improving the accessibility and standardization of their data. To accomplish this, EMBs should improve their websites and databases to make it easier for researchers to search for and acquire data. For example, EMBs could create a separate "DATA" main section on their website where they deposit all their publicly available data. Additionally, EMBs in different regions should standardize the ways they recode, name, and store data.
3. **Support for Indigenous Governments:** Greater support should be given to Indigenous governments undertaking the design and delivery of their elections. Indigenous governments may not always want this support, but sharing knowledge and adapting best practices from EMBs could benefit them.

4.0 Summary

This report summarizes the results of a survey conducted by C-Dem to receive feedback from Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and researchers. Six EMBs identified key issues for further research, including barriers to voting, electoral trust and perceptions of electoral integrity, participation trends, technology and modernization of voting services, administrative challenges, and accessibility. EMBs prefer reports, raw data, academic studies, and conferences as research products, and they want researchers to use the resources available on their websites. Researchers identified citizen competence, political participation, and electoral systems as key issues for further research. They prefer open access to data, collaboration with EMBs, and a standardized survey method. C-Dem can facilitate stronger relationships between EMBs and researchers by promoting collaboration through the facilitation of increased access to data, organizing conferences/networking events and establishing an open forum.