**Proposal Lead:** Michael McGregor, TMU

**Participating Researchers**

Scott Pruysers, Dalhousie; Aleks Essex, Western; Helen Hayes, McGill; Nicole Goodman, Brock; Rebecca Wallace, St. FX

**Submission Date:** June 7, 2024

**Proposal #:** 001

**Pillar(s)**: Elections and Voting

**Core Research Question(s) Addressed**: *Which of the partnership's core research questions, if any, does this proposal address? Please select all that apply. Proposals do not have to address one of the core research questions to be funded, but we are especially keen to support research and data collection related to our core questions.*

2. How do local government institutions strengthen or weaken turnout, engagement, and representation in Canada? What major or minor reforms might improve local democracy?
3. How does local engagement and representation vary across places in Canada? What accounts for this variation, and what can we learn from it to improve local democracy?

**Data Collection**: *What kind of data collection does your proposal involve? Please select all that apply.*

- Survey data: Municipal Politicians Survey
- Survey data: General Public Survey
- Qualitative Data Collection
- Other

**Project Description**: *Please describe your proposal in 1-3 paragraphs.*

I am proposing that we run elector and candidate surveys in Nova Scotia this fall (election day is October 19). Some colleagues and I are interested in conducting research on remote voting (internet, telephone, mail), but the surveys can obviously include questions which will be of interest to other CMB members.

Along with a series of collaborators from different disciplines, as well as representatives from two EMBs - Elections Nova Scotia, and the Regional Municipality of Halifax - my plan is to conduct research that will answer the following questions: (1) Are the remote voting methods employed in Nova Scotia's municipalities trustworthy? (2) Do electors and other relevant political actors view these methods as trustworthy and does that influence their willingness to use them? (3) What roles do political actors play in shaping electors' evaluations of trustworthiness? (4) How does trust (or the lack thereof) affect electors' attitudes towards democracy and electoral institutions?

This project includes the study of six types of actors: vendors (private companies that administer remote elections at the behest of municipalities), electoral management bodies (municipal administrators responsible for holding elections), candidates for mayor, city council, and school boards, the media (both traditional and social), non-governmental organizations (with a special interest in elections and democracy) and electors. Each of these actors will be the focus on one scholar on the research team, based upon researcher expertise. Data collected during the course of the study will include surveys of voters and non-voters, candidates, and representatives of electoral management bodies, interviews with a variety of stakeholders, technical analyses of remote voting systems, and data from traditional and non-traditional media outlets.

**Contribution**: *Please describe the contribution or novelty of this proposal (one paragraph).*

In 2024, 100% of Nova Scotia's municipalities will employ internet voting, and almost all will include some other form of remote voting. However, there has yet to be an examination of remote voting in this province. At the same time, remote voting is widely used (and growing) elsewhere in Canada – it is used by a majority of Ontario Municipalities, for subsets of the population in some territorial elections, and Indigenous governments have extensively adopted it. There is a clear and pressing need to consider how Canadians view remote voting methods, and to determine why they hold the views they do.

**Audience**: *Please describe the principal audience(s) for this proposal.*

I expect that the principal audiences will be academics (through from a wide variety of fields, including political science, psychology, and computer science) and EMBs. However, I think that the public will find our work of interest.

**Outputs**: *Please describe the output(s) that this proposal will generate. If the outputs are academic, please describe where you would plan to submit the work.*

We plan to write an academic book answering the project's major questions, as well as several articles. We are going to work with EMB partners to provide them with data and analysis that they will find of interest.

**Knowledge Mobilization Outputs**: *If the primary outputs from this proposal are academic, please describe at least one non-academic knowledge mobilization output (e.g. website post, op-ed, short report, etc.). If the principal outputs are non-academic in nature, you can skip this question.*

I think we can produce op-eds for newspapers in Nova Scotia, as well as potentially a descriptive report for the Regional Municipality of Halifax.

**Timeline**: *Please provide a timeline for your proposal from data collection through to submission (for academic outputs) and/or release/publication (for non-academic outputs).*

Data collection will take place in the summer and fall of 2024. Work outputs will begin immediately afterwards. I expect that we will have our book drafted by the end of 2025. Publication may be 2026 or 2027.

**Questions (Mun. Politicians Survey)**: *Please provide a draft of the questions that would need to be included in the politician survey to make this project successful.*

There are several themes that I would like the questions to touch upon. These include: 1) Attitudes towards/trust in various forms of voting, 2) Attitudes towards/trust in political institutions, and democracy as a whole, 3) Questions about interaction with various important sources of information, including candidates, EMBs, the media, NGOs, and potentially even vendors. 4) Questions about populism, and views towards conspiracy theories, 5) Standard questions on ideology, voting records at different levels, and various questions of knowledge (We can toy with the types of knowledge questions we ask, as I expect this will be an important correlate of trust in voting methods and democracy)

**Sample (Mun. Politicians Survey)**: *Please describe the sample size you require for this project and any details about the sample that we need to know (e.g. a specific province, a specific municipality type, etc.)*

I have already communicated with Samantha Rochon at Leger about this. She have stated that she can reliably obtain responses from 1,200 Nova Scotians, with 50-60% being in the Halifax CMA. She quoted me a cost of $4.75 for a 10 minute survey, $6.00 for 15 minutes, and $7.00 for 20 minutes (though I understand that the CMB may be able to negotiate better prices).

I would expect that we are running pre- and post-election waves. Based upon the cost estimates above, for a 15 minute pre-election survey, and a 10-minute post survey, the costs would be $11,400 + tax.

**Pew Points (Mun. Politicians Survey)**: *Please provide an estimate of the "Pew Points" required for this survey. Do not include "core" questions in your calculation (that is, questions that will be included in every survey such as ideological self-placement and basic demographics).*

This is hard to say at this point. I would love it if a good chunk (maybe 50% of the survey) were devoted to questions related to this study, but I'm flexible.

**Questions (Gen. Public Survey)**: *Please provide a draft of the questions that would need to be included in the public survey to make this project successful.*

I would like to ask questions along several themes, including: 1) Trust in various forms of voting, as well as democracy in general 2) Trust in various institutions, including the supreme court, the police, Parliament, etc. 3) Measures of contact with relevant actors, including candidates, EMBs, NGOs, the media, and potentially vendors, 4) Measures about perceptions of the messages received from the actors above, re: the trustworthiness of internet voting 5) Measures of populism and attitudes towards conspiracy theories, covid, fluoride, etc. 6) Standard questions about ideology, partisanship, and knowledge (it would be fun to play with some interesting knowledge measures here, as I expect this will be particularly important to this research)

**Sample (Gen. Public Survey)**: *Please describe the sample size you require for this project and any details about the sample that we need to know (e.g. a specific province, a specific municipality type, etc.)*

I've been in touch with Leger (Samantha) about this and they have said that they are able to obtain a sample of 1,200 in NS. They also provided some pricing options: $4.75 for a 10 minute survey, $6.00 for 15 minutes, and $7.00 for 20 minutes. If we run a 15 minute pre-election survey, and a 10 minute post election survey, with 1,200 in the pre, and 700 in the post, this would cost $11,400 + tax. That said, I understand that you may have negotiated better rates than this.

**Pew Points (Gen. Public Survey)**: *Please provide an estimate of the "Pew Points" required for this survey. Do not include "core" questions in your calculation (that is, questions that will be included in every survey such as ideological self-placement and basic demographics).*

This is difficult to say at this point, but I'm flexible and recognize that there is a need to include a variety of other questions, not directly related to the study I am proposing.

**Qualitative Data Collection**: *Please describe the qualitative data collection that you plan to undertake.*

The qualitative data collection will include interviews with EMBs (conducted by Goodman), vendors (Essex), and NGOs (Wallace). Helen Hayes will also be collecting and analyzing twitter data, EMB websites, and outputs from major newspapers (note: she has tools available to her to do this work, via her position of Research Manager at the Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy, at McGill).

**Qualitative Budget**: *Please provide an estimated budget for qualitative data collection. For assistance with your budget estimate, please consult this document: LINK HERE.*

I don't expect there to be many costs associated with this research. Interviews will be conducted by team members. If possible, it would be nice to have some RA time devoted to helping take notes during interviews, but this is not a necessity if cost is a consideration. One exception is if the REB requires that we provide transcripts of interviews to interviewees. If that is the case, then some RA funding will be required.

Sorry I don't have a better answer here. The bottom line is that I am flexible on this.

Note the Jack: The "LINK HERE" text does not actually include a link.

**Travel for Qualitative Research**: *If your qualitative data collection involves travel, please describe which team members would participate in the travel. Note that we encourage opportunities for students and junior members to participate in research travel whenever possible.*

n/a

**Other Data**: *Please describe the "other" data collection that you have in mind.*

Aleks Essex is going to communicate with major vendors (those private companies that run remote voting elections) in an attempt to assess the trustworthiness of their systems, on a technical basis. He is a software engineer, and has existing relationships with them.

**Budget Estimate (other data)**: *Please provide a budget estimate for the cost of this data collection. If your proposal involves CMB RAs, you can instead provide an estimate of the number of RA hours that would be required.*

This is one area where an RA might be helpful. It would be helpful to have a social science student work with Aleks to (a) help him take notes during interviews, but (b) aid him in asking non-technical questions. For instance, such a student would be well positioned to ask questions about the types of messaging that vendors do to convince EMBs, and members of the public of the trustworthiness of their systems.

This RA could work for 50 hours, at $25/hr (+benefits). I estimate the cost would be roughly $1500.

Of course, I'm happy to put this up for discussion.

**Ethics**: *The participants in this proposal will secure ethics approval from the appropriate institutions and will send ethics approval documentation to the partnership coordinator before beginning data collection.*Yes

**Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**: *The proposal lead has considered equity, diversity, and inclusion in relation to this proposal and, where appropriate, has offered opportunities for collaboration to ensure that project outputs reflect the partnership's EDI commitments.*Yes