



Editorial: Municipal Elections in Canada: Qualitative Insights

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Municipal Elections in Canada: Qualitative Insights

In Canada, more than a decade ago, research on municipal elections had two main characteristics. One is that there are far fewer studies conducted on this political arena than on the other levels of government—albeit this was not, at the time, unique to Canada (Breux and Bherer, 2011). This phenomenon was marked by strong differences between the provinces, although a comprehensive province-by-province comparison has not been conducted. The other characteristic is that the existing research was mostly qualitative, consisting primarily of monographs on a few large cities (e.g., Belley et al., 2011; Sancton, 2015).

Although working across all Canadian provinces and territories is always a challenge, analyses of municipal representative democracy abound today. This effervescence is linked to the creation of vast quantitative surveys of voters and elected officials. In particular, interprovincial research teams have been created offering comparative perspectives on often similar realities. It is now possible to say that the incursion of quantitative researchers has given visibility to the research taking place at this level of government and has created a network of researchers on these issues.

This quantitative research has generally adopted three angles of analysis: electoral behavior; the profile of elected officials; and the analysis of more specific elections. Surveys on electoral behavior, and more specifically on voting, have made it possible to grasp the importance of certain socio-demographic variables (Couture et al., 2014; McGregor and Spicer, 2016) and some contextual variables (Doering et al., 2020) on voter turnout. Others have focused their attention more on the choice voters make at the ballot box (Lucas, 2020; Couture and Breux). On the side of the electoral offer, the time that the municipal councilor devotes to their various functions (Koop, 2016), the way in which they exercise and conceive this function and the performance of women (Lucas et al., 2021) are all themes that have been analyzed. Other studies have focused on the analysis of certain elections (Lucas and McGregor, 2021).

While this brief portrait cannot be exhaustive, it shows the importance which quantitative studies have taken on in this field. During the same period, qualitative analyses also emerged around topics such as the profile of certain voters (Breux and Vallette, 2020); apoliticism, power of mayors (Graham, 2018) or the professionalization of elected officials (Sancton, 2015; Mévellec and Tremblay, 2016); as well as the different rules surrounding electoral campaigns (Taylor and Vanhooren, 2021). Analyses on specific elections and cities have also been carried out (Chiasson and Mevellec, 2014).

While this, too, is not an exhaustive portrait, we note that qualitative and mixed analyses remain less numerous than their quantitative counterparts and that they seem less oriented toward an interprovincial dialogue. Similarly, to our knowledge, there are few dialogues between these two types of analysis, even though many gray areas still remain to be explored to perfect our understanding of the municipal political scene in Canada.

This Research Topic thus aims to initiate a project and a network of qualitative or mixed research on municipal democracy in Canada. Two of the articles dealing with this Research Topic focus on the electorate, while the other two explore the electoral offer. Matthews et al. draw inspiration from work carried out nationally and in the United States to understand how Canadian voters

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conceptualize the municipal electoral offer in the absence of clear ideological benchmarks. They thus show that even without an ideological label, a non-negligible part of the voters see the candidates for mayor in ideological terms. While the authors observe that much less is known about the way voters reason and act politically at the municipal level, Vallette, in a detailed analysis of how senior citizens see the municipal scene in a city in the province of Quebec, highlights that understanding this political scene requires a certain experience and a certain level of knowledge. In addition, the closeness felt with the elected official seems to constitute an important element of the relationship of these voters with this political scene.

This personalized connection with elected officials is also analyzed by Mévellec in the context of her analysis of an electoral campaign conducted under the aegis of a municipal political party. The author emphasizes the importance of door-to-door contact to develop the candidate platform and to compensate for the lack of information highlighted by Matthews et al. While Mévellec clearly shows what political parties do during election campaigns and the way in which certain candidates distance themselves from party guidelines, Breux and Van Neste are interested in the evolution of the profile of the elected representatives of one particular Montreal political party over the past three last elections. This party, although refusing to position itself clearly on a left-right axis, has an identity that is more pronounced than those of its counterparts. Compared to the latter, the elected representatives of this party have, on average, more training in the field of mobility, the environment, development and urban planning as well as, increasingly,

experience in the field of administration—a profile that raises questions about their capacity to attract a certain part of the electorate.

This Research Topic embodies a first attempt to link and network qualitative and mixed research studies at the municipal level in Canada. These studies still need to be developed, in particular to allow exchanges and comparisons between the different provinces. Three of the four articles on this topic are from the province of Quebec. Might this be a coincidence? (insofar as many researchers' agendas have become disrupted in the midst of the pandemic); Is it specific to Quebec? It is hard to say, although a significant body of qualitative research on the municipal scene in Quebec had already been produced by a number of authors more than 10 years ago (Albeit this was the case for Ontario, as well). Moreover, the authors of this issue are mostly female authors. Again, a coincidence? It is hard to say. One thing is certain: all the pan-Canadian research projects that have emerged in recent years invite us to continue research by developing new approaches and innovative methodologies.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SB and JC contributed to conception of the text. SB wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Both authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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