Indigenous Experiences with Online Voting

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Canada

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71ed89gqMCU

Report Scope & Background

- Examine the opportunities and challenges online voting presents for participation and governance in First Nations in Canada
- Draws on the experiences of three First Nations: Tsuut'ina Nation, Wasauksing First Nation, and Nipissing First Nation

Argument

Online voting is a key tool for:

1. Modernizing community institutions and governance;
2. Improving community connectedness;
3. Enhancing self-determination as part of an iterative path to self-government

Indigenous Governance & Technology

- Indigenous communities face a number of interrelated challenges
  - i.e. local governance and community engagement: colonization, the residential school system, the Indian Act, etc.

- Lack of insight into the strategies and innovations being Indigenous communities are taking to increase governance capacity.

- Small but growing literature that explores ICT use in Indigenous communities.

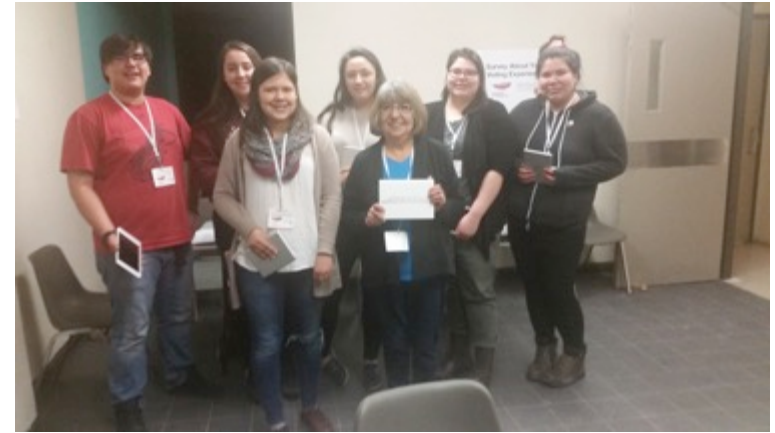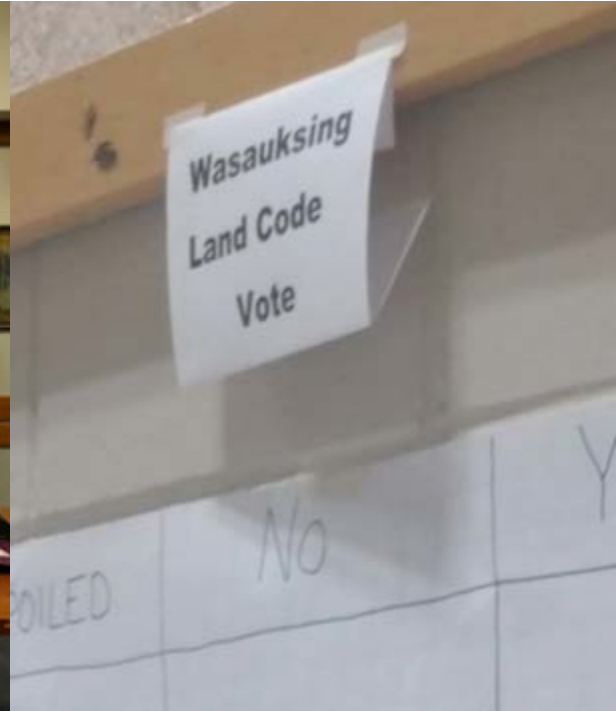| PROVINCE	COMMUNITY	YEAR	TYPE OF VOTE	TOPIC
ON	Whitefish River First Nation	2015	Referendum	MRP Law
ON	Nipissing First Nation	2014	Referendum	Constitution
ON	Shawanaga First Nation	2015	Agreement Vote	Land Code
ON	Mississauga First Nation	2014 & 2015	Election/Referendum	FNEA/Constitution
ON	Batchewana First Nation	2015	Referendum	MRP Law
BC	Talthan First Nation	2011, 2014, 2015	Agreement Vote (x2)/Election/Referendum	Transmission Line IBA/Council Election/ Management Agreement
BC	Huu-ay-aht First Nation	2012	General Assembly	General Assembly
BC	Squamish First Nation	2013	Referendum	Membership Agreement

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Our Approach

Community-Based Participatory Research Approach:

- Collaboration

- Community Participation

- Building Capacity

Community Profiles

Wasauksing Case Study
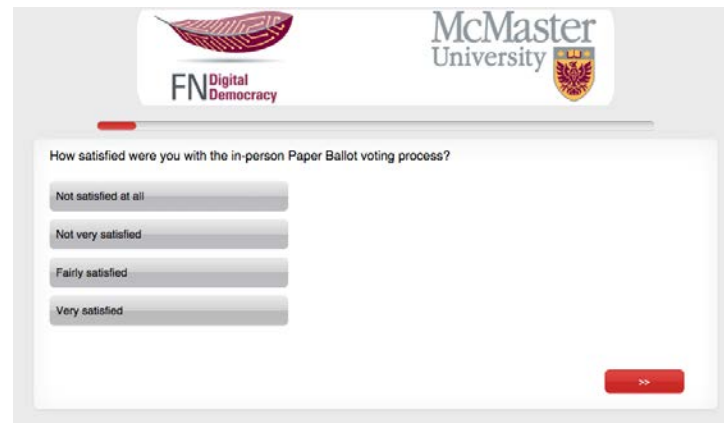
Total Counts in WFN Land Code Ratification Vote

Votes Received	Yes	No	Totals
Internet	69	6	75
Paper (76 Received by Mail)	122	54	176
Totals	191	60	251

Research Methods

- Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) methodology that included:

    - Surveys via AskingCanadians platform
        - Paper voters, N=66
        - Internet voters, N=15
    - Semi-structured interviews
    - On site participant observation

Findings: Innovation & Community Modernization

- Online voting part of broader approach to modernize governance through the deployment of digital technology

- Online voting cheap and effective avenue to engage community members

- Can modernize governance, but not replacements for traditional structures

"So currently, every First Nation that is in the development process will be doing e-voting. There are none that are opting out of it. Every one of them is going that route. The way I see it going is that it will replace mail in ballots, we won't have that cost anymore. So it will just become that."

Findings: Community Connectedness

- Online voters more likely to live off-reserve, paper voters on reserve

- Remote voting methods clearly desired by the community
  - 2/3 of votes cast remotely

- Paper voters support the change
  - 28% "in all circumstances"
  - 35% "in special circumstances"

Vote method	Totals
Internet	75
Paper	100
Mail	76
Total	251

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Findings: Community Connectedness

- Online voting and social media tools to improve connectedness
- Created participatory opportunities
    - With local government;
    - Between members
- Networks & information exchange
  essential to vote success

> I think digital technology is a really good communications tool. It used to be when communities were smaller, word of mouth was the way to get everything out, and we still rely on that quite a bit but because we're a little bit more spread out, we have a set number of community members that live here on reserve and then off reservers are fairly spread out. It gives us that opportunity to be able to connect with them and make them feel like they're part of the reserve and they're still part of the voting processes and they're still part of the governance of the reserve and the community and their people.

Findings: Self-Determination & Self-Government

- Community consultation significant challenge

- Online voting helped consult with community members
  - Enabled quorum

- Enactment of self-government in its own right

"The UN Declaration guarantees our inherent rights. We're taking back jurisdiction on many fronts and developing laws, and asserting our rights but we'll need digital tools to do this."

Conclusion and Implications

- Advancement of self-determination and community well-being

- Part of iterative approach to self-government

- May not be successful in all Indigenous communities
  - Introduction must be directed by the community
  - Consistent with broader political goals

For more information: www.digitalimpactfn.com

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Governance Structures of First Nations Elections in Canada

Legislative framework	Number of nations
Indian Act election system	166
First Nations Elections Act	57
Custom election codes	355
Self-government agreements	40

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