Report Back on Random Order Ballot Model Used in the 2018 Vancouver Election

January 19, 2021









- The City of Vancouver has primarily used an alphabetical ballot in its elections
- A random order ballot was used both in the 1993 Vancouver election, and most recently, in the 2018 election as directed by Council
- At the Standing Committee of Council on City Finance and Services on July 24, 2019, Council directed staff to engage specific advisory committees for their feedback on the use of an alphabetical versus random order ballot



Three methods were undertaken:

- 1. Joint Advisory Committee meeting
- 2. Online survey
- 3. Academic study conducted by SFU researchers

The findings from all three methods were analyzed and triangulated to arrive at the recommendations presented in the Council report.

• It is important to note that due to the pandemic and other unforeseen challenges in 2020, staff encountered limitations in engagement efforts.



Your City Hall is a framework that takes a systems change and equity-focused approach to:

- 1. Increasing civic literacy
- 2. Deepening local democracy
- 3. Reducing barriers to participation in civic life within and beyond City Hall

https://vancouver.ca/your-government/your-city-hall.aspx



1. Joint Advisory Committee meeting

Joint Advisory Committee meeting



- The meeting was held on February 3, 2020.
- Members from the following Advisory Committees attended: Racial and Ethno-Cultural Equity Advisory Committee, Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee, and Seniors' Advisory Committee.
- In addition, feedback was received from the Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee on January 30, 2020.



When asked whether attendees prefer a random order ballot model or alphabetical model, there was no clear consensus. Benefits and drawbacks to each model were identified. Recommendations from attendees included:

- Improving ballot design
- Improving accessibility
- Increasing patterns on the ballot
- Reducing the length of the ballot
- Increasing eligibility requirements for potential candidates
- Reducing systemic barriers through engagement and outreach to increase voter turnout and candidate diversity, particularly among IBPOC residents.

2. Online survey



- The survey was distributed via the City of Vancouver's Social Policy & Projects Community Service Grants email list.
- Translated into four languages: Punjabi, Tagalog, Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese.
- Open from January 21 to March 12, 2020, and again from September 3 to 28, 2020.
- Total number of responses = 162 (153 complete and nine partial).



The survey asked three questions:

- 1. What impact do you think listing candidates in random order has on the fairness of voting?
- 2. Whether you voted or not in the 2018 municipal election, what is your preference for the way candidates are listed on the ballot in the future?
- 3. If you voted in the City of Vancouver's 2018 municipal election, how would you rate the clarity of the random order ballot?

Plus two open-ended questions for additional comments



- Almost half of survey respondents (45.9%) indicate that the random order ballot model increases fairness.
- 42.4% indicate a preference for an alphabetical ballot, with 37.3% indicating a preference for the random order ballot.
- In rating the clarity of the random order ballot, responses are mixed. The top three responses range from "very clear" (33.3%), to "not clear but not confusing" (24.4%), to "somewhat confusing" (19.2%).

3. Academic Study

Election Ballot Order Effects in Vancouver Municipal Elections

Dr. Eline de Rooij & Corinne Henderson



- Ballot order model:
 - A procedure for determining the order in which candidate names appear on a ballot
- Ballot order effect:
 - The impact of a candidate's position (rank) on the ballot on the share of the vote the candidate receives
- Presentation overview:
 - 1. Existing ballot order models
 - 2. Ballot order effects:
 - a. Findings from academic literature
 - b. Findings from an analysis of Vancouver municipal election data

Report Section 2

Existing ballot order models



- There are at least 7 different procedures that have been used in North America to determine the order in which candidate names appear on a ballot (ballot order model)
- The most used procedure in Canada is to list candidate names in alphabetical order using candidates' last names
- In choosing which model to use, there are trade-offs in terms of:
 - Fairness to candidates
 - Transparency of the procedure
 - Ease and cost of implementation
 - Voter experience

Existing ballot order models in Canada



Figure 2.A. Map of provincial/territorial ballot order models

Figure 2.B. Map of municipal ballot order models by province/territory



Report Section 3

Ballot order effects

Findings from academic literature

Key findings Section 3



- Most published academic studies show that the order in which candidates' names appear on the ballot impacts their vote shares (ballot order effect)
 - But care should be taken when using insights from studies conducted in one particular context to motivate changes to election laws in a very different context
- Ballot order effects tend to be worse when voters lack sufficient information about candidates and/or they do not have a strong preference for one candidate over another



Factors that potentially amplify ballot order effect	Factors that potentially reduce ballot order effect
Large number of candidates on the ballot	Party labels / partisan context
Lower position of race on ballot (if turnout is similar across the races)	Lower position of race on ballot (if turnout is substantially lower for lower-positioned races)
At-large electoral system (versus ward-system)	
Municipal election (versus provincial or federal)	
Lower visibility office: park commissioner, school trustee	Higher visibility office: mayor, city councillor

Report Section 4

Ballot order effects

Findings from an analysis of Vancouver municipal election data



- Data: Candidates' vote shares and ballot position in 13 Vancouver City municipal elections (1988-2018, including 2 by-elections)
- Methodology: Statistical analysis estimating the effect of candidates' ballot position on their vote shares
 - Independent of (perceived) gender, predicted ethnic/racial background, incumbency, and party affiliation
 - Taking account of the fact that ballot rank likely matters more for candidates positioned higher on the ballot
 - Separate models for elections for mayor, councillor, park commissioner and school trustee (all election years combined and separate)



- Candidates lower on ballots for city council, park and school board elections receive, on average, a statistically significantly <u>lower share of the vote</u> than those ranked higher on the ballot
 - The ballot order effect is largest in park board elections, then school board elections, then city council elections
- In general, <u>no evidence</u> of a ballot order effect in elections for mayor
- <u>No evidence</u> that the random ballots in 1993 and 2018 reduced the ballot order effect



- The estimated difference between a candidate ranked 1st and ranked 10th on the ballot in each race is:
 - Park board: 0.43 percentage-points
 - School board: 0.31 percentage-points
 - City council: 0.26 percentage-points
- The average difference in elections between 1988 and 2018 between the vote share of the losing candidate with the most votes and the winning candidate with the fewest votes suggest that ballot rank can potentially change election outcomes



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RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations



A. THAT Council direct staff to continue with the random order ballot model that was approved by Council and implemented for the 2018 general municipal election in the 2022 general municipal election;

FURTHER THAT Council direct staff to include the addition of numbers in front of candidate names on the ballot in the 2022 general municipal election.

- B. THAT Council direct staff to implement Recommendation A in any by-elections prior to the 2022 general municipal election.
- C. THAT the City of Vancouver request that the Province amend the Vancouver Charter to extend the candidate nomination period and move it to earlier in the election year (87 days);

FURTHER THAT Council submit to the next Lower Mainland Local Government Association (LMLGA) and subsequent Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) conventions a resolution for consideration that requests an extension of the candidate nomination period.

D. THAT the City of Vancouver request that the Province amend the Vancouver Charter to require a minimum of 75 qualified nominators for Councillor candidates and 100 qualified nominators for Mayoral candidates.

QUESTIONS?