Guesswork?
Municipal Electoral Behaviour in a Federal Context: Vancouver 2003

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Municipal elections are the poor cousins in the study of elections and voting behaviour. In Canada there has been no municipal election study analogous to the Canadian Election Study or the much less frequent provincial studies. The reason is likely institutional: most municipalities in Canada use a ward system and parties have not formed. This makes an election survey impractical, since voters face many low-profile candidates with little to tie them together across wards. Voting for mayor might have been the subject of a survey, but mayoral races are thought to be idiosyncratic affairs driven mostly by personalities, not by issues or ideology. Not surprisingly, voters are less informed about municipal issues and the positions of the candidates, so an election study has perhaps seemed less worthwhile at this level. The result is that very little is known about the character or quality of municipal electoral behaviour.

Yet three considerations recommend more assiduous study of municipal elections. First, there is an obvious theoretical payoff in extending our assessment of voting behaviour beyond the usual national contests. Are partisanship, ideology, issues, economic judgments, and evaluations of candidates equally influential in electoral choices under different institutional conditions, particularly a context with lower levels of information? Second, the decisions might be objectively more important than in the past: municipal governments' responsibilities have expanded with the continued offloading from more senior governments in times of fiscal restraint (Graham and Phillips 1998). Citizens may be realizing this, as some major cities' recent municipal elections have witnessed modest increases in turnout, pushing them past 50%. Doubters may point out that municipal governments have no constitutional status and exist at the whim of provincial governments, but they continue to occupy more than 15% of the field of public revenue and expenditure. Third, and relatedly, the complexity of intergovernmental arrangements may reduce the accountability of all governments if voters cannot pin responsibility on them (Smiley 1987, Richards 1997, MacKinnon and Nechyba 1998, Downs 1999; Cutler 2001, 2002). Municipal elections are a piece of this puzzle. They provide additional institutional variation that can help us understand what conditions contribute to the success or failure of electoral accountability.

The current paper reports on the first academic municipal election study in Canada (in the City of Vancouver, 2002) and in so doing speaks to the first and last of these considerations. To begin, we simply take the accumulated wisdom of studies of national elections and apply it to the local case. We explain the vote in Vancouver on the basis of socio-demographic characteristics, (provincial) partisanship, ideological location, economic judgments, and issues. The first four look much like they do at the national level, but issue opinions have little independent effect on the vote. The second half of the paper therefore asks whether attributions of responsibility to the municipal level of government are a necessary condition for issue voting in cities. Do citizens believe that cities have certain areas of competence, and do they hold municipal mayors and councillors accountable for performance in these areas and these areas alone? Rather than providing theory and background for these two sections up front, we treat them serially, laying the foundation with an analysis of Vancouver voting before moving on to the question of how the municipal level fits into questions of accountability in multi-level governance.

The Vote in the 2002 Vancouver Civic Election: A Miller-Shanks Interpretation

Why did Vancouverites vote the way they did in the last civic election? A number of candidate explanations suggest themselves. Perhaps the election was a verdict on the performance of the incumbent mayor, Phillip Owen, and his nine years in office. Maybe voters were sending a signal

about their preferences for future action on a range of policy concerns, from 'cleaning up' the Downtown Eastside to the state of public transit. The election of the left-minded Larry Campbell as mayor also could have been meant as a message to that other Campbell of some political note in British Columbia—right-minded BC Premier Gordon Campbell. It could also be that current concerns were mostly irrelevant to vote choice—voters instead could simply have been enacting long-standing commitments to political parties or social groupings. Finally, and most distressingly for the student of voting behaviour, voters' choices could have been bereft of any such systematic features—Vancouverites may have simply cast their votes at random.

A look at the asymmetrical distribution of voter preferences as reflected in the election day results should allow us to rule-out the last of these explanations with some confidence. A strictly random process should have resulted in a distribution of votes that was roughly equal across candidates, but voters chose Larry Campbell by nearly two to one over his nearest rival, Jennifer Clarke.

We canvass the other explanations using the Vancouver Election Survey, an exceedingly modest attempt to replicate national election study methodology at the municipal level. The framework for the analysis of individual voting decisions is based in Miller and Shanks' (1996) understanding of American national elections. The Miller-Shanks model seems to have become *de rigueur* in the analysis of particular electoral contests, at least as a first analytical step.[1] Use of the approach here allows us to 'get our bearings' regarding the determinants of vote choice for Vancouverites in 2002, and permits us to speak to the broader question highlighted above: do extant models of voting speak to the dynamics of municipal elections?

Miller and Shanks (1996) present what might be termed a unified empirical model of vote choice. The model builds quite explicitly on the general perspective developed in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), which emphasizes a distinction between long- and short-term determinants of voting behaviour. Long-term determinants include the most stable of sociological traits—religion, ethnicity, class, and gender, for instance. Short-term determinants are more variable—specific attitudes on issues, governmental performance, and the personal qualities of candidates, among others. In between are a couple of determinants the stability of which is occasionally disputed: general policy dispositions and party identification (see Blais et al 2002 for a concise exposition). The model is multi-stage and recursive: blocs of variables are entered successively in accordance with their presumed location in the causal ordering.

Data, Variables, Hypotheses

The analysis is based on the Vancouver Election Study, 2002.[2] Our dependent variable is a binary indicator of vote choice in the mayoral race, where 1 indicates a vote cast for Larry Campbell of the Committee of Progressive Electors (COPE). Thus, a vote for any other candidate—principally

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[1] For a start, take recent work on Canadian national elections (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002) and US Presidential elections (Johnston, Hagen and Jamieson 2001).

[2] The Vancouver Election Study was executed by the Institute for Social Research at York University at a cost of $8,000. The survey was in the field immediately following the Vancouver vote—from mid-November, 2002 to the end of January, 2003. Only voters were interviewed, so no account of turnout is possible. The total number of valid respondents in the survey is 342. To retain the largest possible number of cases for analysis, imputations are made for missing values. Mean values are imputed on the socio-demographics, non-partisanship is imputed on party identification, and middle values are imputed on ideology, policy and performance scales. The data also are weighted for household sampling bias.

Jennifer Clarke of the Non-Partisan Association (NPA)—is recorded as 0. There were other candidates from other parties, but these two emerged as the viable candidates of the left (COPE) and right (NPA) respectively. The dichotomous simplification is an analytic convenience that should not do any injustice to the data: roughly 90 percent of our respondents voted for one of these two candidates.[3]

As for independent variables, the most long-term suite of variables in the Miller-Shanks model are the socio-demographics. In our analysis, the socio-demographic picture is sketched in by indicators of gender, age, education, ethnicity, religious affiliation and income.

- Structural and ideational links between being female and supporting policies and parties to the left of those backed by men (Gidengil et al. 2001) lead us to expect being a woman to increase the probability of voting for the broadly social democratic Campbell.

- A range of perspectives would suggest a generational gradient in a variety of political beliefs (Miller and Shanks' 1996; Inglehart 1997). Those over 55, then, might be less likely to back Campbell.

- There are any number of reasons to expect a link between education and vote choice. We leave these complexities aside and assume that university education imprints an unequivocal social liberalism that would lead to support for Campbell.

- At the federal level in Canada, ethnicity has been shown to have a significant impact on vote choice (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002). In these analyses, Northern Europeans have tended to back the Reform/Alliance Party and non-Europeans have tended to put their lot with the Liberals. We enter a dummy variable for non-European ethnicity in our estimations.[4]

- Income should measure materially rational incentives to choose alternatives promising different levels of taxation and expenditure. Thus, increasing increments of income should go with decreasing increments of support for the left-wing Campbell.[5]

- Religion is operationalized in our analyses as a set of two dummy variables, one for Catholic/Orthodox identifiers and one for those who claim no religious affiliation. Results at the federal level in Canada suggest that Catholics tend to put their support behind the Federal Liberal Party, while the non-religious tend disproportionately to support the NDP (e.g. Blais et al 2002). We might expect both groups to back Campbell in greater numbers than his principal opponent, the right-leaning Jennifer Clarke.

The next layer of independent variables is constituted by what we might term long-term political identifications.

- The first of these is party identification (PID). The traditional understanding of PID is as a stable affective attachment to a political party—a 'social identity' of sorts (Green, Palmquist and

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[3] The survey also measured voting for councillor so will be possible to do a related analysis of that election. The mayoral race is preferred as the dependent variable here for simplicity; notably, however, British Columbia voters, uniquely in Canada, have the cue of municipal parties to guide their mayoral choice.

[4] There were too few Northern Europeans in the analysis to make an estimation here worthwhile.

[5] Although our measure is in fact ordinal, we treat it as interval in the analysis. The bottommost level contains those earning less than $20,000/yr., the topmost level contains those earning in excess of $100,000/yr. In between are eight levels bounded at increments of $10,000.

Schickler 2002). The Vancouver Election Study contains no municipal analog, and for good reason. It seems unlikely that such identifications exist among any more than a fraction of the electorate. The formation of party identifications requires, at the least, a stable and highly visible suite of political parties with salient social images and durable links to the broader community.[6] Few, if any, of these conditions seem to obtain in Vancouver politics. Voters may, instead, be affected by stable party identifications at other levels of government (Blake 1982; Stewart and Clarke 1998), so we include provincial party identification in the analysis.[7] In view of the links, formal and informal, between these two parties and the two leading civic parties, the NPA and COPE, we expect to find NDP identifiers disproportionately in the Campbell camp, and Liberal supporters elsewhere.

- The second long-term political identification to enter the analysis is ideological identification, operationalized here as voters' self-placement on the left-right continuum. Johnston, Hagen and Jamieson (2001) term such ideological self-placements the "capstone of the hierarchy" in ideology (7). The expected link between ideological identification and vote choice should be clear enough: 'leftism' should induce support for Campbell.

Most proximate to vote choice in our model are a set of variables tapping performance and policy. With regard to performance, two variables enter the analysis.

- First, we assess the impact of retrospective economic evaluations with a variable measuring individuals' assessments of Vancouver's economy 'over the past five years.' An extensive literature on economic voting (see, *inter alia*: Kramer 1971; Fiorina 1981; Lewis-Beck 1988) leads us to expect voters to reward incumbents during good times and punish them during bad times. In Vancouver in 2002, such a dynamic would lead us to expect those with a favourable assessment of the economy to back the party and candidate of the incumbent—the NPA and Clarke.

- The link between the second performance variable and the vote is less direct. The variable taps voters' views on 'how good a job' the provincial Liberal government is doing. But why should voters punish (or reward) municipal politicians for the peccadilloes of provincial incumbents? From a strictly rational point of view, they probably should not, that is unless they are sophisticated enough to induce centrist policy by balancing the rightist provincial government with a leftist mayor and council (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995; Johnston and Cutler 2003). Indeed, popular commentary surrounding the election suggested that the municipal election was a referendum of sorts on the performance of the provincial Liberals.

Two policy or issue variables round out the basic vote model.

- The first variable actually seems to tap both performance and policy considerations, insofar as it asks voters to express their level of 'satisfaction' with Vancouver's public transit system. All other things being equal, dissatisfied voters should back the challenger, Campbell.

- The second variable asks voters to indicate their preferred level of 'taxes and spending on services.' The core difference between the municipal parties is on this general dimension.

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[6] A proper social-psychological theory of the emergence of party identifications is hard to find, yet these several propositions seem to be widely held in the literature. See Campbell et al. (1960), Miller and Shanks (1996), Bartels (2000), Jackman and Sniderman (2000) and, especially, Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002).

[7] The reference group for this variable includes provincial Green Party identifiers, provincial non-partisans, and those responding 'don't know' or 'refused' on the party identification item.

♦ We do not include our variable asking about responsibility for "problems on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside". We leave that for the following section. Resource constraints meant that a proper inventory of attitudes on the means to improving the Downtown Eastside was beyond the scope of this survey.

Results

We estimate the model with probit. Results appear in Table 1. Main cell entries are marginal effects estimates—they describe the shift in the probability of a Campbell vote associated with marginal changes in each independent variable with other variables fixed at their means. Interpretation of these marginal effects estimates can proceed analogously to interpretation of the linear probability model estimated by OLS regression, bearing in mind that significant non-linearities may be obscured by this technique. And in our case note that the effects are slightly conservative because they are evaluated at a baseline probability near 0.75.

Model I includes socio-demographics only. Two variables reach significance here: age and non-European ethnicity. Effects are both negatively signed and of comparable magnitudes—each variable is associated with a roughly 20 point difference in the probability of a Campbell vote. The age effect is as expected, and suggests that Campbell may have been the beneficiary of a 'youth rally' of sorts. With regard to non-European ethnicity, the estimated effect here seems to comport with popular images of Vancouver's Asian community—by far the majority of the non-Europeans in our sample—as a broadly individualistic and conservative voting bloc. Group identification may be a significant story here too, insofar as links between this community and the federal and provincial Liberal parties have made their way into the "social imagery" (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002) of the NPA. The 'low information' context of civic politics, furthermore, leads us to expect such 'shortcuts' as ethnic group membership to carry more weight for voters than they otherwise might—say, in the saturated informational context of a national election. In any case, it seems clear that ethnicity made a difference to Vancouver voters in 2002. Not so for the remainder of the socio-demographics—gender, education, income and religion—none of which reach significance here.

Model II incorporates provincial party identification dummies, more than quadrupling the explanatory power of the model. Liberal and NDP PID are both highly significant and correctly signed in this model. The estimated effect on Liberal PID seems especially large: Liberal partisanship is associated with a roughly 40 point drop in the probability of Campbell support. Conversely, NDP identification increases one's probability of backing Campbell by almost 20 points.[8] Keep in mind that unlike national or provincial contests, where the use of PID is sometimes thought to be 'too close' to the vote, this variable is at two removes from the mayoral choice. First, it is party identification at another level, with parties of very different names and lacking obvious organizational integration. Second, the choice is for a mayor who is affiliated with the civic party but does not form a government in the parliamentary sense, so the vote is not for a governing party.

The inclusion of PID variables also clarifies some of the links between the socio-demographics and the vote observed in Model I. The effects of both non-European ethnicity and age shrink in size in

[8] Note the asymmetry in this relationship: the ratio of Liberal to NDP coefficients is better than 2:1. It would seem that Liberal partisanship effects a greater pull than does NDP partisanship. A note of caution on this interpretation, however: the reference group for the PID variables includes a handful of respondents who self-identified as provincial Green Party partisans.

this model, though both remain significant. This implies that part of the relationship between socio-demographics and the vote traffics through party identifications. Note also that education and income effects increase in this model, though both remain insignificant at conventional levels. The jump in education effects seems most important and may imply the existence of two offsetting routes between education and the vote: a direct, negative route and an indirect, positive route through NDP partisanship. We return to this puzzle below.

Model III adds long-term ideological commitments—represented here as left-right self-placement—to the picture. The variable is highly significant and correctly signed. Those to the right of the political spectrum are, as expected, less likely to back Campbell than those on the left. The variable also seems to explain part of the PID-vote link, as both Liberal and NDP PID effects drop in size in this model. The initial asymmetry in PID effects is mirrored in the asymmetry of these drops: the drop in NDP PID cuts the initial effect almost in half, while Liberal PID loses just an eighth of its power. This would seem to imply that the NDP PID-vote link largely turns on ideological affinity, whereas the Liberal PID-vote link would appear more psychological. Note again, however, possible bias introduced through the constitution of the reference group for the PID variables.

Model III also sheds more light on the link between socio-demographics and the vote. *Per* expectations, much of the link between age and the vote seems to hinge on ideology, as age effects drop from significance with left-right self-placement in the model. Results are not so clear for non-European ethnicity. Consonant with an ideological affinity interpretation of the ethnicity-vote connection, the non-European variable does drop in size in this model, but only marginally. Any simplistic account of a conservative bias in this group, thus, seems overwrought—long-term group identification may be closer to the truth. Still, it is possible that other aspects of ideological commitment not well captured by our left-right self-identification measure mediate the relationship. For instance, a lack of familiarity with the left-right idiom among non-European respondents may explain much of the observed pattern. And, indeed, we find that nearly half of the non-Europeans took the 'centre' option, while only 29 per cent of the others did so. The inclusion of more suitable ideological measures, thus, might clarify the nature of the ethnicity-vote link.

In Model IV, variables tapping performance evaluations enter at significant levels. Retrospective economic evaluations and assessments of the provincial Liberal government do not add much independent explanatory power to the model, but they do clarify several of the linkages between the vote and variables entered in previous stages. Both variables, as we would expect, are negatively related to Campbell support—rosy assessment of the Vancouver economy and the Liberal government tended to be to the benefit of the incumbent party. Part of this effect may simply involve partisan projection, as voters fit their evaluations of the economy and the provincial Liberals to their pre-existing party identifications.[9] And indeed, both PID variables shrink in size in this model, with NDP PID falling from statistical significance. Still, performance evaluations seem to carry some weight of their own too, especially as concerns the Liberal performance measure.[10] The

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[9] Of course, the reverse may also be true, as voters may adjust their partisan commitments to fit their evaluations of the economy and government performance (see, *inter alia,* Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983). We bracket such endogeneity issues in this paper and take the Miller-Shanks perspective for granted.

[10] Auxiliary regressions (unreported) of the vote on the performance measures alone show that the effects of economic evaluations remain quite stable even when PID is dropped from the model. With performance measures excluded from the model, however, PID effects are much larger, as noted. This suggests that economic evaluations are largely projections from

effects of economic evaluations are comparable in magnitude to those estimated for ideological self-placement, although differences in the scaling of these variables suggests that ideological effects may still be substantively more important. Attention to scaling is of special importance for evaluating Liberal performance effects, as the measure ranges from 0 to 100. The minute effect reported in the table, thus, should probably be multiplied by a factor of 10 or 20 for substantive interpretation.[11] Looked at this way, the effect is smaller than but still comparable to the ideology and economic evaluation effects.

Model IV also gives us occasion to return to education and income effects, noted above. Effects of both of these variables reach significant levels in this model and, furthermore, appear to be of substantive importance. The model suggests that the net effect of university education is a 10 point drop in the probability of Campbell support; for income, the model suggests (roughly) that a $10,000 increase in income implies a 2 point bump in the probability of a Campbell vote.[12] Both of these effects are perversely signed from the perspective of our theoretical expectations. Some (perhaps most) of this curious pattern no doubt turns on peculiarities of our small sample size and collinearity issues concerning our education, income and PID variables. As suggested above, education may also have offsetting effects with respect to vote choice—pushing voters left on certain issues (e.g. social liberalism and post-material values), to the benefit of NDP partisanship, and pushing them right on others (e.g. fiscal issues). That the education effect is undisturbed by the ideological self-placement and policy measures undercuts this interpretation somewhat; perhaps alternate indicators of policy orientations would clarify the links. A similar story might make sense of the income effects—high income might cut right on measured fiscal issues, left on unmeasured non-fiscal ones—but with the data at hand, it is impossible to be sure. All in all, then, such creative speculations are just that, and given our small sample size we prefer to remain non-committal about these findings.

Model V is the fully specified model, including, for the first time, the two policy variables. Both variables are insignificant and only the effect associated with spending attitudes is correctly signed. Neither variable seems to be an important mediator of prior traits or dispositions, much less an independent force on vote choice. Little changes elsewhere in the model and the pseudo *R*-squared is stable. The fate of the transit variable comes as something of a surprise, given that transit was a highly salient concern in Vancouver politics over the year or so preceding the election, owing to a protracted labour dispute during the summer of 2001. And the taxes/spending question may have been too close to the hard truth: voter may have been unwilling to make the taxes/spending trade-off and so it does not properly measure preferences for the size of government. The lack of retrospective performance voting and issue voting can always be ascribed to imperfect measurement of the issues that really matter to voters (Elkins 1995), but here we find no impact from two obvious candidates: public transit and the level of taxes and services.

The major determinants of the vote in Vancouver in 2002 were largely long-term in nature. The most notable socio-demographic effect emanates from non-European ethnicity, although age effects also played a part. The status of income and education is unclear, but, taken at face value, our final

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partisanship, carrying little independent weight of their own. The Liberal performance measure, by contrast, is roughly two and a half times as large with PID excluded, suggesting that it carries some independent weight in the voting calculus.

[11] Such crude transformations of marginal effects, however, would be crude indeed, as response probabilities are non-linear functions of the independent variables in probit models.

[12] Recall that, although treated as interval for analytical purposes, this measure is in fact ordinal. See fn. 5 for variable construction details.

model implies that they were of some substantive importance. Quite clear are the effects of provincial party identifications, as NDP and especially Liberal partisans voted in highly distinctive ways in the civic contest. Ideology and performance evaluations also moved voters somewhat. But neither general issues like taxes-and-spending, nor more particular ones involving a retrospective evaluation of the incumbent mayor-council party, were relevant to vote choice.

Municipal Elections and Federalism

Municipal governments in Canada are objectively less important than the two senior levels of government in the federation. Yet they are deemed important enough to have independent delegated powers (including the power of taxation) and important enough for decision-makers to be invested with power through independent democratic elections. These are clearly "second-order elections" but not "third-order elections" in the terminology of Reif and Schmitt (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Reif 1997): but it does not appear that they are so meaningless that voters are behaving randomly or that voters understand them merely as opportunities to pass judgment on, and send a message, to senior governments. We interpret our results as a strong confirmation that voters take the same approach to municipal elections as federal and provincial ones.

Nevertheless, voters find themselves in a tremendously challenging situation as they try to ensure municipal accountability. Many voters (the current authors included) must have a sketchy understanding of what powers their municipal governments have, and how independent are those powers from the provincial government. Federal powers, too, are relevant, especially when provincial and federal governments engage in buck-passing in policy areas that are ultimately delivered or implemented at the municipal level. When voters do seek out political information they lack the longstanding partisan and ideological cues that facilitate decision-making at provincial and federal levels. Even in British Columbia, where an at-large system of civic elections has led to the development of parties, their longevity is nowhere near that of provincial or federal parties, they do not share names or organization with those parties, nor do their names or public images have ideological associations to the same degree. Municipal elections in Canada are elections of persons rather than parties, and therefore present informational challenges more like those facing American voters than Canadian voters in other elections.

A real-world example all-too-familiar to residents of Vancouver makes the complexity apparent. If voters are unhappy about public transportation in their city—perhaps after the four-month strike that shut down the system entirely in the spring of 2002—who do they hold responsible? Voters may wonder which government is in charge when the website of the local transit authority states: "It is a separate organization, and is not part of the provincial government or the Greater Vancouver Regional District." The municipal government may try to deflect any blame that does come its way by blaming the provincial government for cutting subsidies to public transportation. The provincial government may defend itself by saying first, that they had to devote money they would have liked to spend on public transportation to more pressing concerns due to the fact that the federal government has cut transfers; and second, that if municipal residents want better service, they are free to elect a local government that will raise taxes to bolster the subsidy for public transit. Finally, the federal government may retort that cuts to provincial governments have not in fact occurred, and, besides which, if the provincial government had not cut its own tax rates, it would have had ample funds to support all of its programs. These intergovernmental linkages are difficult to sort

through for policy experts, let alone the average voter. Yet sort through them they must, and their ability to do so affects public policy.

Were Vancouver voters hamstrung by these complexities? Or did they employ blunt but effective tools to clear the intergovernmental thicket? We focus on two questions in what follows. One: Was awareness of the links between civic and provincial parties a necessary condition for voters to be guided by their provincial partisanship, liberal performance judgments, and even local economic judgments (conditional on provincial responsibility)? If so, it will be further evidence that only voters with substantial background information can take advantage of "shortcuts to judgment". Two: Was issue-voting mediated by attributions of responsibility to the local government such that only those who saw the local government as responsible for a given situation were willing to blame or credit the NPA? If so, the inevitable consequences is that accountability is more difficult in a system of multi-level governance than in a unitary system.

The first step is to report on awareness of municipal parties. Vancouver voters (recall that the survey is limited to voters) do take advantage of the fact that municipal parties are some guide to policy positions in civic politics. Only one in five voters could not spontaneously name any of the municipal parties. Of the 80 per cent that could, nearly 3 in 4 (72%) came up with COPE and the NPA. Roughly two-thirds mentioned COPE as the main party on the left and the NPA on the right; only 7 per cent put them on the wrong ends of the spectrum. And 75 per cent knew that the incumbent mayor was Philip Owen and that he was from the NPA.

Knowing the partisan landscape at the civic level is doubtless an advantage for Vancouver voters. Awareness of links between these parties and the better-known provincial parties would be a further boon. When asked: "Do you think the local parties in the municipal election are associated with the political parties in provincial politics?" 57 per cent said yes. Of these, seven in ten (36% total) made the accurate COPE-NDP and NPA-Liberal links. Yet despite media commentary that suggested straight-ticket voting for COPE on the coattails of Larry Campbell led to a COPE-Green[13] sweep of council, only one third voted a straight ticket, and only half of those chose COPE. The *prima facie* evidence is that many voters are aware enough to take advantage of the partisan cues, but in general do not follow those cues slavishly.

Voters who do not have this information must be at a significant disadvantage, unable to use various shortcuts to judgment (Kinder 1998; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Johnston et al. 1996). Table 2a presents mixed evidence for this proposition by comparing the effects of independent variables for the 64% who did not know the party links with the effects for the 36% that did.

Even Liberals who are not aware of the party links are 14% more likely to choose the NPA candidate, but for those who know about the links the increment is 50%. There is a hint that NDP partisans who know the links are more likely to chose Campbell than fellow partisans who do not, but the effect is nowhere near as powerful as on the Liberal side. As for ideology, the mapping to mayoral choice is doubly powerful and much more precise among those who place the parties correctly in left-right space. The effect among those who cannot do so must arise from ideological or policy information about the candidates themselves, independent of their parties. All told, these results

[13] COPE and the Green Party made a deal whereby the Greens did not run a mayoral candidate and in return COPE only ran eight councillors and the Greens ran two to compete for the 10 council spots.

intimate that in a challenging, low-information electoral situation, only those voters with relevant contextual information can use partisanship and ideology as shortcuts to judgment.

The other results in table 2a are ambiguous and puzzling. Satisfaction with the provincial Liberals promotes NPA voting only among those unaware of the Liberal-NPA link. The only explanation must be that the better-informed who know of the linkage are unwilling to use the municipal election as a referendum on provincial Liberal performance. Their partisanship and ideology guide their choice, so they need not fall back on the Liberal government's performance as a guide to the NPA's likely policy agenda under Jennifer Clarke. Voters without the background information on the links between political arenas fall back on a simple referendum-style, time-for-a-change strategy—but it is applied at a level other than that where the real judgment is directed. In the current situation the sentiment is not all that misplaced, but it would be if the local incumbent party were the one opposite from the one in power in the province.

The rest of the results show that awareness of party links does not facilitate issue voting—municipal issue voting continues to elude us. Those who thought the provincial government responsible for bad transit and a worsened economy *and* were aware of party links were no different in their voting behaviour, all else equal. Voters' use of information from the other levels of government therefore appears to be general rather than specific. Any other-level referendum voting is not issue-based. An optimistic interpretation is that we do not see a well-informed sub-population who exert issue-based accountability while the bulk of the electorate uses general ideological and partisan cues.

Table 3 – Attributions of Responsibility in Vancouver

Government Responsible	*Downtown Eastside*	*Vancouver Economy*[14]	*Public Transit*
Provincial	16.4%	59.1%	30.7%
Federal	9.9%	8.5%	4.4%
Local	22.8%	5.5%	39.8%
Not Gov't	18.7%	7.6%	0.6%
Depends on Problem	4.4%		
Don't Know	26.9%	18.7%	24.0%
N	339	340	340

We tackle the question of local government responsibility and issue-voting in table 2b. But first, to set the stage, table 3 reports voters' attributions of responsibility to the three levels of government. Note the high level of uncertainty: across the three issues, one fifth to one quarter of voters could not say which government was "mostly responsible" in these policy domains. On these three salient issues, that portion of the voting public is very likely unable to do what it takes to hold governments accountable. Only half (54%) of voters found the local government 'mostly responsible' on *any of the three most important issues in the campaign*, and it is hard to think of other issues that could have

[14] These were not significantly different across the divergent assessments of the economy, in contrast to previous surveys in Alberta and British Columbia (see Cutler 2002).

been important to more than a small fraction of voters. As an afterthought, it is sensible that few finger the federal government as responsible in any of these areas.

The most important numbers in the table are the relative proportions of the public pinning responsibility on the provincial and local governments. The two governments are blamed by roughly equal numbers for the *Downtown Eastside* and *Public Transit*, while most voters put the fate of the *Local Economy* in the hands of the provincial government. Amazingly, this runs directly against the grain of the findings in the voting analysis, where only economic evaluations were found to influence voting! Only one in twenty voters think the local government is responsible for the state of the local economy, yet on average, net of all other factors, voters with positive rather than negative assessments of the local economy are 17 per cent more likely to support the candidate from the incumbent's party. We ask whether only the tiny minority who blame the local government are behind the influence of local economic retrospections, though this seems implausible. Alternatively, it may be that our measure of economic evaluations hooks into a broader set of non-economic performance retrospections, at least for some non-trivial minority of respondents.

Table 3 suggests that we throw the "classical" "watertight compartments" view of federalism out the window, if it were not already splattered on the pavement below. Even here in the intraprovincial context where powers are delegated rather than constitutionally entrenched, voters do not make uniform judgments about responsibility. The implications are disturbing. When only a minority of voters hold a given government responsible in a given policy area, that government may feel insulated from the electoral mechanism of accountability and unwilling to tackle the policy problem for fear of a failure that concentrates attributions of responsibility on them (Richards 1997, MacKinnon and Nechyba 1998, Cutler 2001, 2002; Blais et al. 2002). Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is a shockingly vivid illustration of this situation: three levels of government continue to bicker and pass the buck, and this is reflected in the public's diffuse attributions of responsibility. No government suffers the full consequences of failure on the issue because the public cannot focus its judgment on any one level.

This concern would be mitigated somewhat if we were to find pointed issue-voting among those who attributed principal responsibility to the level of government in question. Table 2b presents our evidence on this question. It adds interactions to measure the impact of issue voting among those who saw the local government as responsible on *transit*, *downtown*, and the *economy*. The transit issue is the only one that hints at the mediation of issue voting by responsibility. Although the coefficients are not significant at traditional levels, the difference in the probability of a Campbell vote between a very satisfied and very unsatisfied respondent who sees the local government as responsible is predicted to be 26% (std. err. 18%).[15] In such a small sample, further subdivided by attributions of responsibility, this result is highly suggestive.

We did not have a fine-grained measure of how the problems of the Downtown Eastside should be addressed. We asked only the responsibility question because retrospective judgments can be presumed negative. Most popular commentary implied that those who saw the local government as responsible on the issue ought to have been more negative about the candidate of the incumbent party, especially because the incumbent mayor had been pushed out of his party because of his rejection of the status quo. These voters were not different from those who found other governments

[15] Simulated by CLARIFY (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2003).

or no government responsible. This is an issue where responsibility is diffuse, so that the conditions for the exercise of accountability, as commonly understood, do not obtain.

So few voters found the local government responsible for the local economy that it is difficult to say whether it was any more influential on their decisions. (If anything it was less so). The evidence indicates that perceptions of a worsened economy hurt the NPA candidate for mayor without mediation by an attribution of responsibility, and without knowledge of links with the provincial government.[16] It may be that the economic question measured a general, 'how things are going in Vancouver' sentiment, so the attributions of responsibility for the economy more particularly are not applicable to this sentiment. However, we found in studies of the Alberta and British Columbia elections of 2001 (Cutler 2002) that voters seem to have a reflexive approach to the economy that attaches economic perceptions to incumbent governments directly. Even governments who objectively have little to do with policy that affects the economy pay a price when voters think it has gone sour. Voters, operating in a confusing intergovernmental context with little incentive to seek clear and reliable information about responsibility, appear to hedge their bets, turning against whichever incumbent is available for punishment. This is a disturbing and potentially fatal flaw in multi-level governance. Presumably, to the extent that voters look to the state of the economy for guidance in their voting decisions they are overlooking policy areas for which the government in question is responsible. In previous work this has been termed an "issue bias" (Cutler 2001) that results from putting imperfectly informed voters in the context of entangled multi-level governance (see also Richards 1997).

Conclusion

The lack of retrospective issue-voting in this municipal election is troubling from the point of view of accountability for policy decisions. The contrast with retrospective economic voting when the government in question is not considered responsible—subjectively *or* objectively—makes the picture look even more bleak. Nor did we find prospective issue voting on the general measure of taxes and spending in areas of municipal competence. The Vancouver mayoral contest of 2002 did not, in fairness, have ideal conditions for issue-voting. Yet if voters were generally able to hold their municipal administration to account we would expect rejection of the incumbent mayor's party among those who wanted more services, those who blamed the local government for problems in the Downtown Eastside, and those who were dissatisfied with transit and saw the local government as responsible.

Considered alongside the lack of issue-voting, the findings on provincial party identification and government performance suggest that these are indeed "second-order elections" (Reif and Schmitt 1980). The question, then, is why? Voters are voters – we cannot ascribe them different motivations depending on context; the answer has to be institutional. The second-order elections literature would respond that there is simply "less at stake" (Norris 1997). But this is too facile: Voters might objectively have *more* at stake in the level and quality of municipal services and the general quality of the place they spend most of their time. A major strand of literature on federalism that emphasizes subsidiarity and getting government 'closer to the people' argues that voters ought to be *more* engaged and see *more* at stake in the local context than in the distant arena of national politics.

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[16] This may be because the provincial government changed in the midst of the 5-year period identified in the question, and it was the previous provincial government that was widely associated with the economic decline.

The subsidiarity and local democracy literature overlooks the rational informational constraints on democratic citizens and the interaction of these constraints with institutions such as parties and the media. Voters in municipal elections may not be motivated to get relevant information, the information may not be available, or they may not be competent at organizing and applying the information. If any of these obtain, second-order elections may not only be pointless, they may be an inefficient and possibly perverse mechanism of social choice. When so-called second-order elections exist against the backdrop of a jungle of confusing, conflictual intergovernmental relationships, voters may be unable play the role they are expected to play if the promise of multi-level governance is to be fulfilled.

We find that other-level partisanship, very general ideology, other-level performance evaluations, and misplaced economic judgments guided voters' choices in the Vancouver election of 2002. While we are somewhat optimistic that these choices are not mere guesswork and what looks like a leftward turn in the electorate produced a left-leaning mayor, we are not sanguine about the prospect of municipal accountability more generally. Further study of municipal elections should be directed to answering this question. Are municipal elections worth the trouble if the limitations of voters and the broader political institutions mean that mayor and councillors are insulated from accountability in areas of genuine municipal competence?

Apart from the normative implications, the results in this paper suggest that there is a very real payoff to be realized through more sustained attention to voting behaviour at the municipal level. Indeed, the low information context of city politics may be a burden for the municipal voter, but it constitutes a potential boon to the student of voting, who has typically enjoyed far more individual-level than system-level variation in his/her inquiries. One can imagine an accumulation of municipal election studies including variation on several important dimensions of context—informational, institutional, social-structural, economic, and so forth. As theory tends toward accounts of political cognition and choice that place emphasis on the structure of the political environment (Jackman and Sniderman 2002; Lupia and McCubbins 1998), the benefits of incorporating system-level variation of this sort into our analyses are clear.

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Table 1: A Miller-Shanks Model of Vancouver Voters (Probit)

Variable	I	II	III	IV	V
Woman	0.067	0.015	0.018	0.006	0.004
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.057)
55 years and over	**-0.196**	**-0.111**	-0.063	-0.066	-0.066
	(0.064)	(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.064)
University Education	-0.015	-0.095	-0.096	**-0.105**	**-0.106**
	(0.060)	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.060)	(0.060)
Non-European	**-0.206**	**-0.155**	**-0.133**	**-0.152**	**-0.148**
	(0.081)	(0.083)	(0.078)	(0.075)	(0.075)
Income	-0.003	0.010	0.014	**0.020**	**0.019**
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Catholic/Orthodox	-0.091	0.042	0.074	0.058	0.061
	(0.090)	(0.093)	(0.083)	(0.085)	(0.084)
Non-religious	0.053	0.024	0.023	0.018	0.018
	(0.066)	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.065)
Liberal PID		**-0.419**	**-0.360**	**-0.310**	**-0.308**
		(0.043)	(0.055)	(0.061)	(0.059)
NDP PID		**0.185**	**0.101**	0.067	0.075
		(0.011)	(0.056)	(0.073)	(0.068)
Left-Right Self-ID			**-0.065**	**-0.053**	**-0.049**
			(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.021)
Economic Evaluations				**-0.085**	**-0.084**
				(0.040)	(0.040)
Liberal Performance				**-0.002**	-0.002
				(0.001)	(0.001)
Transit					0.043
					(0.050)
Taxes and Services					-0.019
					(0.035)
N	310	310	310	310	310
LL	-176.90	-138.46	-129.94	-126.28	-125.69
Pseudo-R2	0.06	0.27	0.31	0.33	0.33

Note: Coefficients in bold significant at .10 or better. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Tables 2a & 2b
Probit Models of Voting For Larry Campbell (COPE)

Main Cell Entries are Marginal Effects, Standard Errors Below, Coefficients Significant at p<.10 in bold
(models also include socio-demographics, results not significantly different from Table 1)

2a - Awareness of Party Links & Ideology		2b - Issue Voting by Local Responsibility	
Prov Lib PID	-0.140	Prov Lib PID	**-0.257**
	(0.087)		(0.076)
X Knows Links	**-0.370**	Prov NDP PID	0.062
	(0.192)		(0.074)
Prov NDP PID	-0.007	Left-Right (0 to 10)	**-0.051**
	(0.090)		(0.016)
X Knows Links	0.142	Satisfaction with Prov Liberals	**-0.002**
	(0.096)		(0.001)
Left-Right (0 to 10)	**-0.030**	Taxes & Spending (-1 to 1)	0.016
	(0.018)		(0.048)
X Locates Parties	**-0.031**	Transit Satisfaction (0 to 4)	-0.009
	(0.010)		(0.035)
Satisfaction with Prov Liberals	**-0.003**	X Local Responsibility	-0.046
	(0.001)		(0.031)
X Knows Links	0.003	Vancouver Economy (-1 to 1)	**-0.092**
	(0.002)		(0.039)
Transit Satisfaction (0 to 4)	-0.030	X Local Responsibility	0.188
	(0.036)		(0.164)
Transit Bad & Prov Responsible	-0.044	Downtown Eastside Local Responsibility	-0.001
	(0.129)		(0.064)
X Knows Links	-0.012	N	310
	(0.183)		
Vancouver Economy (-1 to 1)	-0.075		
	(0.048)		
Economy Bad & Prov Responsible	0.041		
	(0.088)		
X Knows Links	-0.171		
	(0.178)		
Taxes & Spending (-1 to 1)	0.045		
	(0.050)		
N	310		