



Do Actions Speak Louder Than Words? Voter Behaviour in the CRD

Agency Research Consultants' Local Issues Survey on Municipal Election Voting Behaviour

Voter Intentions

Overall, 91% of survey participants in the Capital Regional District (CRD) indicated in the weeks leading up to the municipal election on November 15, 2008 that they intended to vote. Another 5% were uncertain whether they would vote or not. The remainder, only 4%, stated that they did not intend to vote. However, what people say and what they do might be an entirely different story: in 2005, for example, voter turnout in Victoria was 26%¹ and similar results were reported throughout the CRD. It may be that people who are willing to respond to a survey about voting habits are more likely to be active voters, given that 73% of participants indicated that they had voted in the 2005 election.

Men reported intending to vote at a higher rate than women (96% compared to 90%), while those under 35 years of age were less likely to report intending to vote (86% compared to 92% and 97% for those aged 35-54 and 55+, respectively). Participants from Victoria, Esquimalt and Oak Bay more frequently reported intending to vote than did those from Saanich and the peninsula (95% compared to 89%), with those in the Western Communities falling in between the two other areas at 91% (see Table 1).

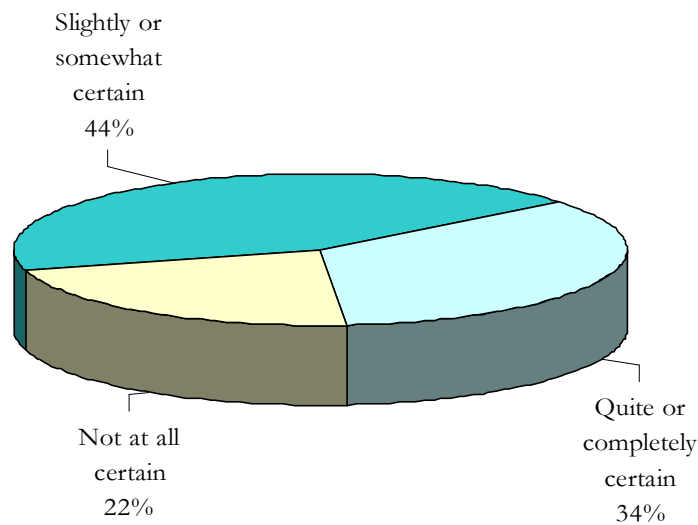
Table 1: Intentions to Vote by Participant Group

Participant Group	% Intending to Vote
Men	96%
Women	90%
Under 35	86%
35 - 54	92%
55 and over	97%
Saanich and peninsula	89%
Central (Victoria, Oak Bay, Esquimalt)	95%
Western communities	91%

One issue may be that voting in municipal elections may be more complicated than provincial or federal elections, where there are fewer positions to elect and where nearly all candidates are affiliated with a party, which makes it easier to distinguish, on general terms, candidates' positions on key issues such as the economy, social issues, and the environment. Indeed, survey participants were divided with regard to how certain they were about who they would vote for: 22% were not at all certain, 44% were slightly or somewhat certain, and only 34% were very certain (see Figure 1).

¹ http://www.victoria.ca/common/pdfs/election_results2005.pdf

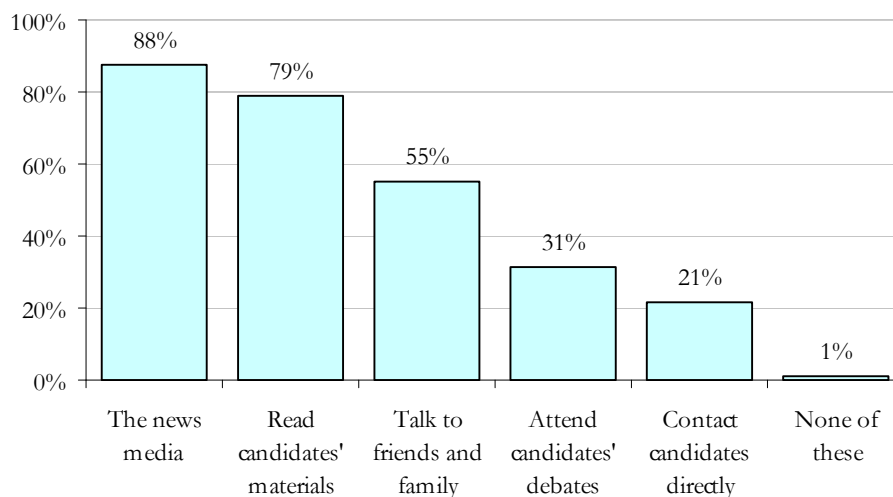
Figure 1: Voter Certainty in Upcoming Election



Sources of Information during an Election Campaign

The majority of participants decided who to vote for during the election campaign, with only 12% knowing beforehand. Interestingly, 7% waited until they were at the polling station to make their choice. Thus, information distributed during an election period is of the utmost importance. The top choices for sources of information were news media (88%), brochures and fliers from candidates (79%), and talking with friends and family (55%). Nearly one-third (31%) attended candidates' debates, while 21% contacted candidates directly (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Sources of Information about Voting Choices



Younger participants (under 35 years of age) were less likely to consult news media for information about candidates (81% of participants, compared to 85% of those aged 35-54 and 94% of those aged 55+); they were more likely to talk with family and friends (68%

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compared to 61% and 42%) and to read information provided by candidates, including visiting candidates' websites (89% compared to 72% and 79%).

Several participants (22% of those that provided additional comments) indicated that they were lacking in information about candidates or their platforms. They expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that they had not received brochures or fliers from candidates that would assist them in making a decision about who to vote for. Some mentioned the fact that they were having trouble finding out who was even running.

"I would probably start voting municipally if I knew something about the candidates. A primetime local debate on Chek 6 or A-channel would be helpful, and a lot more advertising."

"I have not yet heard from any of the candidates. I don't even know their names!"

"I voted in the advance poll on Wednesday. It was extremely difficult to find out information on the candidates in my riding and nearly impossible to find out information regarding the incumbent trustees who were running. As a result I did not vote for any incumbent trustees."

Key Issues for the CRD

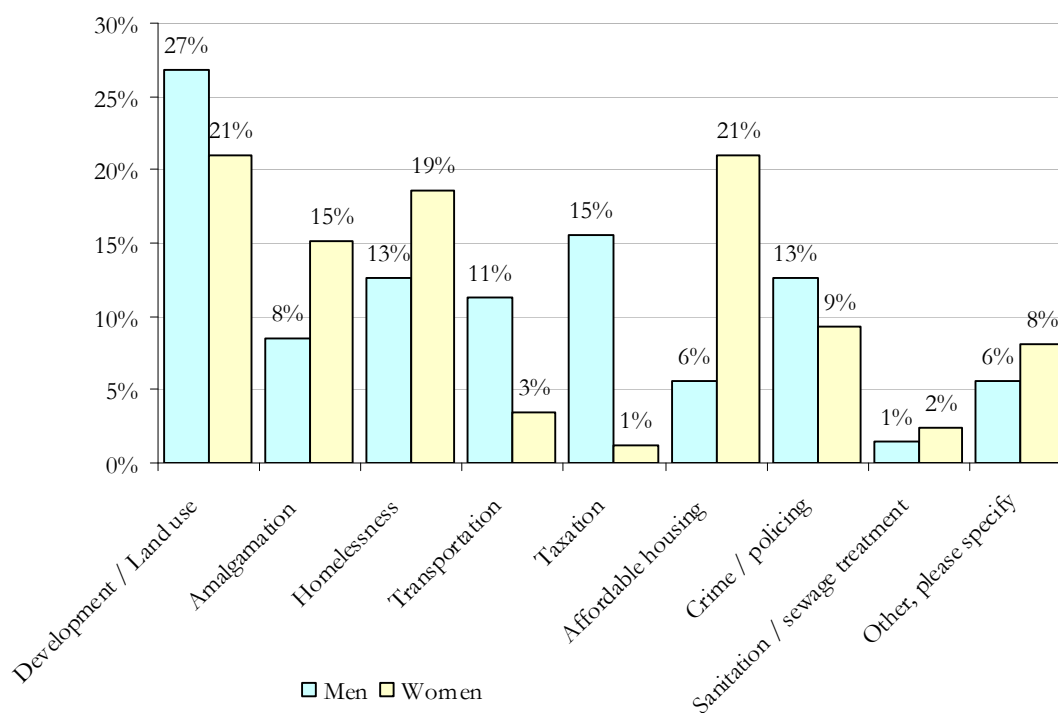
Building awareness of who the candidates actually are is important; issues-based information is equally necessary to capturing voter interest. Participants in the survey were asked to indicate which issue they considered to be the most important issue for the November 15th election. Development and land use; homelessness; and affordable housing topped the list at 23%, 17%, and 14%, respectively. Amalgamation (13%) and crime and policing (11%) were also significant issues of interest to survey participants (see Table 2).

Table 2: Key Issues for the Upcoming Election

Key Issue	Number	Percent
Development / land use	37	23%
Homelessness	27	17%
Affordable housing	22	14%
Amalgamation	20	13%
Crime / policing	17	11%
Taxation	12	8%
Transportation	11	7%
Sanitation / sewage treatment	3	2%
Other	11	7%
Total	160	100%

Key issues varied according to participant demographics. For instance, more men than women reported development and land use (27%); taxation (15%); crime and policing (13%); and transportation (11%) as key issues in the upcoming election. Women, on the other hand, more often reported that affordable housing (21%); homelessness (19%); and amalgamation (15%) were key issues (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Key Issues for the Upcoming Election by Gender



Similarly, key issues varied by region. Respondents in the Saanich and Peninsula and Western Communities regions were more likely to report land use and development (32% and 35% compared to 18%); taxation (18% and 13% compared to 2%); and transportation (11% and 13% compared to 5%) as key issues; while respondents in the central region (Victoria, Esquimalt and Oak Bay) reported that homelessness (21%) and affordable housing (19%) were the most important concerns (See Table 3).

Table 3: Key Issues for the Upcoming Election by Region

Key Issue	Saanich and Peninsula	Central (Victoria, Oak Bay, Esquimalt)	Western Communities
Development / Land use	32%	18%	35%
Amalgamation	18%	13%	4%
Homelessness	7%	21%	4%
Transportation	11%	5%	13%
Taxation	18%	2%	13%
Affordable housing	4%	19%	13%
Crime / policing	7%	12%	13%
Sanitation / sewage treatment	0%	3%	0%
Other, please specify	4%	6%	4%
Total	28	94	23

Those who responded to the survey clearly had passionate opinions about municipal politics; several participants (26% of those who provided comments) spoke to issues of primary

concern to them, including the importance of safety in neighbourhoods, financial responsibility, and cooperating with other municipalities.

“I think it is very hard to separate the crime/policing issue from the homelessness issue. Many of the homeless are involved in drugs and/or alcohol, therefore in criminal activity to support their habits. Doing something about one of those issues should hopefully do something about the other.”

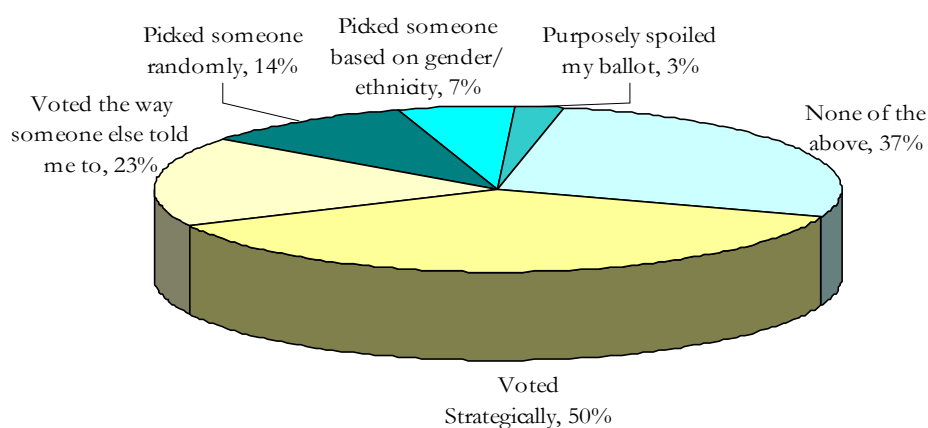
“When voting I try to vote for candidates whom I think will best serve our community, I also take into consideration if a candidate is willing to work alongside our neighbouring municipalities... because I want my council to be able to work together and not waste time butting heads.”

“I would support the concept of amalgamation in the West Shore and would love to hear some brave councilor suggest it. Perhaps then land development and transportation would have a master plan and some real weight behind making changes.”

Behaviour at the Polls

Given the history of low voter turnout in the CRD, it is interesting to speculate about whether residents are actively engaged in the democratic process or whether voting has turned into, essentially, one more chore. Survey participants were asked whether they had ever engaged in voting behaviours that went counter to the philosophy that voting was the individual citizens' voice in politics. Half (50%) indicated that they had voted strategically, picking a candidate who was most likely to win over another candidate that they did not support. Several indicated they had at one time picked a candidate randomly (14%), voted for someone because of their gender or ethnicity (7%), voted for whichever candidate their friends or family members told them to select (23%), or purposely spoiled their ballot (3%). Only 37% indicated that they had never engaged in such voting behaviour (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Voting Behaviour (Percentages based on participants)



Women were generally more likely than men to have engaged in such behaviours (33% of women reporting having done 'none of the above' compared to 44% of men), as were those of moderate household income (30% of those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$99,999

reported having done 'none of the above' compared to 39% of those with lower incomes and 50% of those with higher incomes) and those living in Saanich and the peninsula (32% compared to 38% in the Central Region and 43% in the Western Communities).

Methods and Technical Notes

The CRD Municipal Election Survey was Agency Research Consultants' fourth local issues survey; it ran online from October 25 to November 10, 2008. Participants were invited to respond to the survey through a variety of means, including direct (email and forum) invitations, media releases, and online advertising.

A total of 172 participants answered the survey. A slight majority (55%) were women. Participants most frequently (41%) reported an annual household income of between \$50,000 and \$99,999 and there was a broad distribution of ages. Respondents were asked to provide the first three digits of their postal code as a method of identifying geographic location; 63% were from Victoria, Oak Bay and Esquimalt; 18% were from Saanich and the peninsula; and an additional 15% were from the Western Communities (see Table 3).

Table 4: Demographic Information for Survey Participants

Category	Count	Percent	Region of Residence	Count	Percent
Gender			Saanich and Peninsula	28	18%
Man	71	44%	Central (Victoria, Oak Bay, Esquimalt)	97	63%
Woman	89	55%	Western Communities	23	15%
Rather not say	2	1%	Other	5	3%
Age			Annual Household Income		
Under 24	4	2%	Under \$25,000	18	11%
25-34	33	20%	\$25,000 - \$49,999	28	18%
35-44	31	19%	\$50,000 - \$99,999	64	41%
45-54	30	19%	\$100,000 - \$149,999	21	13%
55-64	39	24%	\$150,000 - \$199,999	6	4%
65 or over	23	14%	\$200,000 or above	1	1%
Rather not say	2	1%	Rather not say	20	13%

For More Information

Agency Research Consultants regularly undertakes surveys within the CRD to provide local information about issues that affect our region. If you would like to participate in future surveys, or for more information about our Municipal Election Survey, please contact Kim Nuernberger at 250-885-0289 or email us at info@agencyresearch.ca. Don't forget to visit our website for regular updates at www.agencyresearch.ca. Our second annual Christmas Survey is up and running and we'd love to hear from you! Have you had your say?

Go Ahead, Be a Statistic!