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# Designing good urban governance indicators: The importance of citizen participation and its evaluation in Greater Vancouver

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**Those developing good urban governance indicators face at least four major challenges: concept definition, measure choice, sample choice and indicator evaluation. While data collection and manipulation are often of primary concern, normative considerations are at least equally important insofar as they establish which indicators best represent ‘good’ urban governance and the standards by which selected indicators should be judged. After arguing that citizen participation is inextricably linked to good urban governance, a process by which to build and evaluate relevant indicators is developed, using election data from Greater Vancouver. ‘Persistent losing’ is presented as the normative rule by which these data should be evaluated, which asserts that community members can reject electoral rules which impose on them, more than others, higher participation costs. Results from Greater Vancouver municipal elections demonstrate that there is a good chance that some community members residing in Greater Vancouver can be considered persistent losers and suggestions are made as to how this situation might be remedied.**

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*Keywords:* Good governance, indicators, Vancouver, elections, voter participation, persistent losing

## Introduction

This article proposes solutions to four challenges associated with developing good urban governance indicators including concept definition, measure choice, sample choice and indicator evaluation. After establishing that citizen participation is central to any assessment of good urban governance, this paper uses local election results from Greater Vancouver to demonstrate how citizen participation in elections can be measured and, most importantly, evaluated. Relying on the theory of ‘persistent losing’, this paper suggests that some residents living in municipalities with consistently low turnout rates might be reasonable in rejecting

the rules by which local elections are contested, as they may be permanently or almost permanently excluded from participating in their own local governance because of discriminatory election rules. Suggestions as to which election rules might also be imposing higher costs on non-participants are also offered.

## Developing good governance indicators: four challenges

Having been a part of the private sector since perhaps the rise of the Ford motor company, in the 1980s most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries moved to entrench what have come to be known as New Public Management (NPM) principles into the daily business of government (Hood, 1995). Described as ‘accountingization’ of government,

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**Table 1 UN habitat urban governance indicators project categories and measures of ‘Good’ urban governance**

Effectiveness	Equity	Participation	Accountability	Security
1. Major sources of income	6. Citizens’ charter	10. Elected council	15. Contract, tenders, budget and account publication	22. Crime prevention policy
2. Predictability of local budget transfers	7. Percentage of women councillors	11. Elected mayor	16. Protection from higher levels of government	23. Police services per 100,000
3. Published performance delivery standards	8. Pro-poor pricing policies for water	12. Voter turnout	17. Codes of conduct for officials	24. Conflict resolution
4. Consumer satisfaction surveys	9. Incentives for informal businesses	13. Public forums	18. Facility for citizen complaints	25. Violence against women policies
5. Vision statement		14. Civic associations per 10,000	19. Anti-corruption commission	26. HIV/AIDS policy
			20. Disclosure of income and assets	
			21. Independent audit	

the NPM doctrine requires explicit standards and measures of performance, such as those embodied in agencies such as the UK’s National Audit Office, established by former British Prime Minister and NPM champion Margaret Thatcher. Often associated with one-off value-for-money assessments of government departmental budgets, NPM ‘bureaucratic’ evaluations have grown to include more long-term assessments of public services, using indicator-based evaluations to produce, for example, publicly-available rankings of grade school classroom-sizes, hospitals bed wait-times or university teaching and research quality (Carter, 1991; Hood, 1991).

Accelerated by the NPM revolution, indicators of good governance are now commonly used for international comparisons of state performance.<sup>1</sup> Since 1996, the World Bank has published good governance ratings for 209 countries, using several hundred indicators addressing six key aspects connected with good governance, voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and, control of corruption (World Bank, 2006). However, few efforts have been made to address good governance

at the local level, perhaps mostly because of data collection difficulties. To date, a minor spin-off of the World Bank national indicators project by Kaufmann et al. (2004) and the fledging UN Habitat Governance Indicators projects have been perhaps the most ambitious.

UN Habitat groups 26 indicators into five categories to assess “the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city” (Table 1; United Nations, 2005). Attempting to assess “the processes that steer and take into account the various links between stakeholders, local authorities and citizens” in a large number of cities, World Bank researchers generate 12 measures of urban governance from a worldwide survey of businesses. These include the level, or prevalence of, bribery; state capture; informal money laundering; street crime; red tape cost of imports; diversion of public funds; illegal party financing; soundness of banks; and, trust in politicians (Kaufmann et al., 2004).

Without reviewing specific outputs, the two projects noted above should give the reader a general idea of what is being attempted with indicator-based assessments of local governance quality. After providing a definition of the subject of interest and outlining core concepts, measures of these concepts are proposed, taken and assessed. In other words, after gathering what are defended as appropriate data, indicator results are evaluated in terms of whether they are more or less good. Explained more fully below, this process suggests four distinct challenges to overcome when using this approach to assess urban governance quality: concept definition; measure choice; sample choice and indicator evaluation.

#### Challenge 1: concept definition

A starting point for any indicator project is to provide the reader with an initial definition and

<sup>1</sup>The United Nations Development Programme (2006) *Governance Indicators: A User’s Guide* lists over 33 indices of what may be broadly considered national good governance indicators projects. Listed producers of these indices include: Afrobarometer; Center for Global Development; Center for Public Integrity; Committee to Protect Journalists; Journalists Killed Statistics; The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; European Commission; Freedom House; International IDEA and Stockholm University; International Labour Organization; Inter-parliamentary Union; Reporters without Borders; Transparency International; United Nations Development Programme; United Nations University; University of Maryland, Centre for International Development and Conflict Management; University of Michigan, World Values Survey (WVS); University of Purdue, International Programs, Political Terror Scale; University of Strathclyde, Global Barometer Survey Network; World Bank Institute.

explanation of related concepts, explored in this section by deconstructing ‘good urban governance’. Here ‘urban’ is taken to delineate a particular community of interest, usually referring to those living in a densely populated area. This part of the term is discussed more fully below in the section concerning sampling. As shown above, the World Bank and UN Habitat use ‘governance’ to describe the process by which collective decisions are made. ‘Good’ provides the evaluative portion of this term and does so in two ways: by describing the standards by which governance indicators are assessed and establishing the components crucial for any complete assessment of governance. In other words, for governance of an urban area to be considered ‘good’, concept ‘x’ must be included AND meet ‘good’ standard ‘y’. While discussions of assessment standards are left for the indicator evaluation section, the rest of this section discusses what components might be essential to any assessment of good urban governance.

To better explain what components are crucial when determining whether the governance of an urban area is or is not ‘good’, it may be helpful to imagine how collective decisions are made in large communities. Here we can imagine two scenarios: a single or small group of leaders making policy that affects the larger community, or a process in which all community members have a say in their own governance. Thinking about decision-making in this practical way turns our minds to whether collective decisions *should* be made by one, by the few or by many. When faced with this normative choice, we are eventually forced to decide whether we accept or reject the Lockean assertion that no person is naturally entitled to subject another to his or her will or authority. Those who reject this idea of *intrinsic equality* often rely on claims of racial, gender, ancestral or religious superiority/inferiority to justify why some community members are naturally more worthy than others to rule. Those who accept the idea that none are naturally superior will incorporate intrinsic equality in their definition of how a community should be governed.

A strong proponent of intrinsic equality, Robert Dahl’s writing connects this idea to the process by which decisions are made. In *Democracy and Its Critics*, for example, he states “when binding decisions are made no citizen’s [adult community member’s] claims as to the laws, rules, and policies to be adopted are to be counted as superior to the claims of any other citizen” (Dahl, 1989, p. 015). This expanded concept of intrinsic equality as it pertains to the definition of governance not only suggests that members of a community should have their claims or preferences counted when decisions which affect them are made, but that their claims should be *considered equally*. This article argues that while indicators of other

qualities may be important, measures of *citizen participation* are essential to any complete assessment of good urban governance, as they provide some idea of the extent to which interests are considered within an urban community and whether this consideration may or may not be equal. If not equal, good urban governance requires at a minimum that there are limits to the systemic impediments on the achievement of this ideal. Returning to our above examples, in failing to include measures of whether or not citizens are included in their own governance, World Bank researchers run the risk of lumping dictatorships with democracies.<sup>2</sup> In including participation indicators, UN Habitat researchers have at least taken a step away from making what would seem, to most, a counterintuitive error.

### Challenge 2: measure choice

Measure choice can be viewed as a more technical, but nonetheless important component of indicator development. It is here that the chosen concept is operationalized, with numbers substituted for words. Sticking with the core theme of citizen participation, although there are many ways for citizens to participate in their own governance, there are only two broad categories into which all participation can be broadly classified: electoral and extra-electoral. Where both categories of participation would seem central to include in any complete assessment of good urban governance, this exploratory article explores only electoral participation, as elections are the key mechanisms through which policy decisions in modern mass society are made (Lijphart, 1997). A full assessment of electoral participation should, perhaps, also include indicators of other conditions—such as contest competitiveness, seat-to-vote proportionality, and whether those elected to local legislatures reflected demographic characteristics of the general population.

As shown in *Table 2*, those wishing to explore voter participation face a number of distinct choices when developing indicators. For example, while ‘ballots cast’ is the most commonly used numerator, there is much debate over which denominator generates the most appropriate voter turnout measure (Vanhanen, 1997). For example, 139,761 Vancouver voters cast ballots in 2002 whereas only 132,072 participated in the 2005 Vancouver civic election: a difference of 7000. Using ‘total population’ accurately reflects this small difference between the two elec-

<sup>2</sup> In their national level assessments of good governance the World Bank team does include a measure of ‘political participation’ based on qualitative information provided in the Bertelsmann Transformation Index and ‘political rights’ also derived from qualitative assessments by Freedom House. They do not however include quantitative indicators of this important governance characteristic.

**Table 2** Voter participation in the City of Vancouver (1984–2005)

Year	Ballots cast	Total population	Eligible population <sup>a</sup>	Registered voters	Turnout (population)	Turnout (eligible)	Turnout (registered)
2005	132,072	583,267	408,287	407,040	23%	32%	32%
2002	139,761	552,004	386,403	280,055	25%	36%	50%
1999	94,271	533,006	373,104	256,361	18%	25%	37%
1996	97,803	514,008	359,806	304,243	19%	27%	32%
1993	95,357	488,710	342,097	275,138	20%	28%	35%
1990	133,107	463,952	324,767	257,352	29%	41%	52%
1988	126,843	448,169	313,718	174,120	28%	40%	73%
1986	142,858	432,385	302,670	290,168	33%	47%	49%
1984	141,788	425,143	297,600	289,066	33%	48%	49%
Average					25%	36%	44%

Source: City of Vancouver.

1990 First year provincial voters list used.

1988 List of electors gathered by mail.

1986 Final year door-to-door enumeration conducted.

<sup>a</sup>Eligible population estimated as 70% of total population.

tions, but artificially lowers both scores by including non-eligible residents (i.e. people under the age of 18 and non-citizen residents). Using ‘eligible population’ also accurately reflects the small difference, but distorts accuracy because they are often based on estimates (here taking 70% of the population to account for ineligible residents such as those under the age of 18). However votes cast divided by ‘registered voters’ produces an 18% difference (50–32%) in turnout rates between the two years while the raw figure indicate a much smaller.

These examples show how even this single simple indicator of voter participation can be complicated on a technical level. Beyond the technical considerations, if one chooses to use anything but total population to calculate turnout, one enters into normative debate about eligibility restrictions. For example, where the City of Vancouver rules more-or-less reflect the Canadian status quo, they are more restrictive than, for example, those in the UK and elsewhere, where under some conditions non-citizens can vote in local elections; or Brazil, where the legal voting age is 16. Based on these considerations, the safest choice is to divide ballots cast by total population, as there is less to explain, followed by eligible population and registered voters, with the first and third most often used (IDEA, 2005).

### Challenge 3: sample choice

Once definitions, concepts and measures have been selected, the next challenge facing those developing indicators is to exactly establish community boundaries. This is where the urban idea re-enters consideration of ‘good urban governance’ and provides researchers with a variety of choices. Political boundaries can often artificially subdivide regionally-based communities raising *horizontal* sampling challenges; additionally, more than one governmental body can be responsible for critical policy deci-

sions in a single geographic area, raising *vertical* sampling challenges.

On the horizontal challenge, when assessing urban governance, one must provide territorial delineation. This can, of course, be done by using existing political boundaries of, say, municipalities. However, these boundaries are sometimes too restrictive to address a particular issue. For example, Anne Golden, Chair of the Greater Toronto Area Task Force, recommended that the Greater Toronto Area be treated as a single region, complete with a region-wide body, to deal with issues of the economy, planning and infrastructure, because the then-assemblage of local and regional governments was too fractured to adequately address these issues (Ontario, 1996). On the other hand, political boundaries can be so large as to mask sub-community distributions that may be of interest. For example, while median household total income is \$35,583 in the City of Vancouver, median income in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood is \$11,029 (City of Vancouver, 2000) rendering many city-wide generalizations imprecise. An illustration of this need for more fine-grained research to investigate challenges in access to housing appears in the article by Fiedler et al. in this issue (Fiedler et al., 2006).

The vertical challenge of assessing urban governance lies in the fact that policy decisions affecting local citizens are not often made by a single level of government, and often not by governments at all. In Vancouver, urban policy decisions are made by Federal, First Nations, Provincial, Regional, and Municipal governments, private sector or non-governmental bodies or some combination of these actors. So, assessing good governance often requires a ‘whole of government’ analysis—that is, looking at how governments and organizations interact to provide solutions to urban problems (Bakvis and Juillet, 2004; Hopkins et al., 2001). Here again, the Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside proves illustrative. In an attempt to alleviate poverty in one of the country’s

**Table 3** Voter turnout in 2005 Greater Vancouver Region municipal elections

Municipality	Population	Eligible voters	Ballots cast	% Population	% Eligible voters
Lions Bay	1421	995	591	42%	59%
Anmore	1673	1171	598	36%	51%
Bowen Island	3424	2397	1180	34%	49%
White Rock	19,577	13,704	6,091	31%	44%
West Vancouver	44,149	30,904	11,874	27%	38%
Delta	102,655	71,859	23,918	23%	33%
Vancouver	583,267	408,287	132,072	23%	32%
Surrey	393,137	275,196	83,173	21%	30%
Maple Ridge	73,280	51,296	14,432	20%	28%
New Westminster	57,480	40,236	10,566	18%	26%
North Vancouver District	87,083	60,958	15,600	18%	26%
Richmond	173,430	121,401	30,051	17%	25%
Pitt Meadows	16,673	11,671	2,864	17%	25%
Burnaby	204,324	143,027	33,668	16%	24%
Coquitlam	121,973	85,381	18,061	15%	21%
North Vancouver City	46,759	32,731	6,784	15%	21%
Langley Township	97,125	67,988	12,507	13%	18%
Langley City	25,716	18,001	3,294	13%	18%
Port Coquitlam	57,563	40,294	6,903	12%	17%
Port Moody	28,458	19,921	3,154	11%	16%
GVRD totals and averages	2,139,167	1,497,417	417,381	20%	28%

*Source:* As there is currently no compilation of these results, figures were gathered from various city clerks' departments. Totals do not include Belcarra, where as all council positions were acclaimed and no election was conducted, unincorporated areas, or First Nations council elections.

poorest areas, Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments signed the Vancouver Agreement in order to coordinate their policy response (Vancouver Agreement, 2005). To assess good urban governance in this area could require inclusion of at least all three signatories, if not also their community partners.

Turning back to our key issue of electoral participation, it is necessary to choose an appropriate sample with which to assess this concept. Using the Greater Vancouver Region as an example, horizontal considerations include whether to examine single municipalities, groups of municipalities, all 21 municipalities within the official Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), or some or all of those municipalities that are close, but not included, within the GVRD. Vertical considerations include whether to examine municipal elections or extend this examination to Provincial or Federal elections within the chosen municipality or municipalities. Or moving in the micro-direction, one might even look at participation in these elections on a neighbourhood or individual basis.

Table 3 presents 2005 civic election turnout data collected from all GVRD member municipalities to illustrate measure choices discussed in the previous section choices and to set up the discussions of how to evaluate turnout in the GRVD the next section. Turnout of registered voters ranges from a low of 11% in Port Moody to a high of 42% in Lions Bay, averaging 20%. Eligible turnout rates (here calculated as 70% of the total population) average 28% and range from 16% in Port Moody to 59% in Lions Bay. As with Table 2, these figures not only indicate

the variation between elections, but also the importance of indicator choice. How we might begin to interpret these results is discussed in the next section.

#### Challenge 4: indicator evaluation and 'persistent losing'

Assessments of good urban governance not only require appropriate indicators, but also standards which these indicators are assessed. This second process of attaching judgment to generated measures again requires normative consideration. For example, where many would agree that it is better to have higher than lower voter turnout, there are those who believe that low voter turnout is desirable (Schumpeter, 1950; Bollen, 1980; Bollen, 1993) or at least that it is not a serious problem (Rosenstone and Wolfinger, 1978). Whether one thinks of high or low turnout in urban areas as good, bad or unimportant, once again rests on how one defines 'good' urban governance. While there is not enough room in this short article to fully debate all normative possibilities as to how levels of voter participation might be interpreted, there is space to try to offer compelling normative reasons why low voter participation might be viewed as problematic as it pertains to good governance.

Starting with the idea that no adult community member's policy preferences are superior to the claims of those of any other citizen, it was previously argued that the preferences of all community members should to be *equally considered* during collective decision-making processes. It is for this reason

that participation is considered a critical good governance indicator. To many, 'equal consideration' is linked to one form or another of utilitarianism, in which governance is 'good' as long as the decision-making process produces outcomes that maximize aggregate welfare. That is, preferences do not have to be voiced, just realized. But scholars such as Charles Beitz (1989) and Robert Dahl (1989) argue that these strictly outcome-based, consequentialist evaluations are inadequate. In fact, as summarized by William Kymlicka, this idea has become so widely challenged that 'the goal of most contemporary political philosophers is to find a systematic alternative to utilitarianism' (1990, 50).

Perhaps the most developed alternative to utilitarianism has been produced by Thomas Scanlon (1982, 1998). Building on what may be deemed the first systematic alternative to utilitarianism as proposed by John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Scanlon proposes an evaluatory rule by which acts, as they are produced through decision-making processes such as elections, can be judged:

An act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any rules for the general regulation of behaviour which no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement (1982, 110).

A powerful notion, Scanlon's idea has been adopted by a number of authors seeking to develop a universal rule by which to evaluate decision-making processes, including electoral systems. In Brian Barry's heralded *Justice as Impartiality* (1995), he explains that it is possible to imagine decision-making processes where rules could be reasonably rejected, such as when 'under some proposed rule people would suffer burdens that under an alternative feasible rule nobody need bear' (1995, 69–70). In this circumstance, this first rule could be rejected because of the availability of the second—especially if those suffering under the first rule do so because of their social identity (ie gender, class, ancestry, etc). As Barry explains:

... if there is one thing that is straightforwardly contradicted by justice as impartiality, it is the creation of first- and second-class citizens according to ethnic identity. *For it is manifestly unreasonable to expect those who are systematically disadvantaged in this way to accept their inferior status.* (1995, 114, emphasis added)

This vital passage offers an important clarification as to how Scanlon's ideas can be used to evaluate political institutions, including the processes by which community members participate in elections. Here it is argued that rules by which decisions are made can be reasonably rejected if a community member's input into the decision-making process is unfairly curtailed and would be less so under alternative institutional arrangements, with this disad-

vantage being especially unjust if offending rules inflict *recurring* bias on community members.

While it is important to acknowledge that no collective decision process can be entirely cost-free, it would seem entirely reasonable for community members to reject a decision-making process if their voices are systematically subject to prohibitive or nearly prohibitive participation costs, when less burdensome alternatives are available. As one example of this situation, later in this issue Cardinal argues that this is the case for Aboriginal peoples in Vancouver (Cardinal, 2006). Following on this logic, community members subject to unfair costs over time are for the purposes of this article deemed *persistent losers*. The *theory of persistent losing* is proposed as follows:

Community members committed to collective decision-making are reasonable in rejecting the rules by which collective decisions are made if it can be shown that they are permanently or almost permanently disadvantaged during the decision-making process because of institutionalised discrimination.

Moving to operationalization, *Figure 1* illustrates a generic process by which to identify persistent losers. Step 1 asks if there is any possibility of persistent absence? That is, is there evidence that a large proportion of the community is absent from the decision-making process over the long term? This step is necessary because if very few community members are absent, then there is almost no chance that persistent absence will be concentrated among a particular group. If a large proportion of the community is found to be absent, Step 2 seeks to identify whether persistent absence is randomly distributed or concentrated within a particular community group. If persistent absence is found to be concentrated, Step 3 asks if higher participation costs are imposed on the persistently absent group. If so, superior institutional arrangements have to be identified in Step 4 before rejection of these discriminatory rules can be deemed reasonable.

When applied to voter participation, all that needs to be shown in Step 1 of the persistent loser process is that a large proportion of the voting age population is absent from the polling booth over time. Such results suggest that some, more than others, might be absent from most or, in the worst-case scenario, every election. Where the single-year snapshot of turnout in *Table 2* offers only the first hint that some groups may be absent from municipal elections, when the information presented in *Table 1* is illustrated (as in *Figure 2*), it becomes most valuable as turnout over time, and the possibility of systematic disadvantage can be more thoroughly evaluated.

As shown in *Figure 2*, both total population-based and eligible population-based turnout trends show that not only is there a good chance of persistent absence in all recent Vancouver elections, but this chance has increased in recent years. Keeping

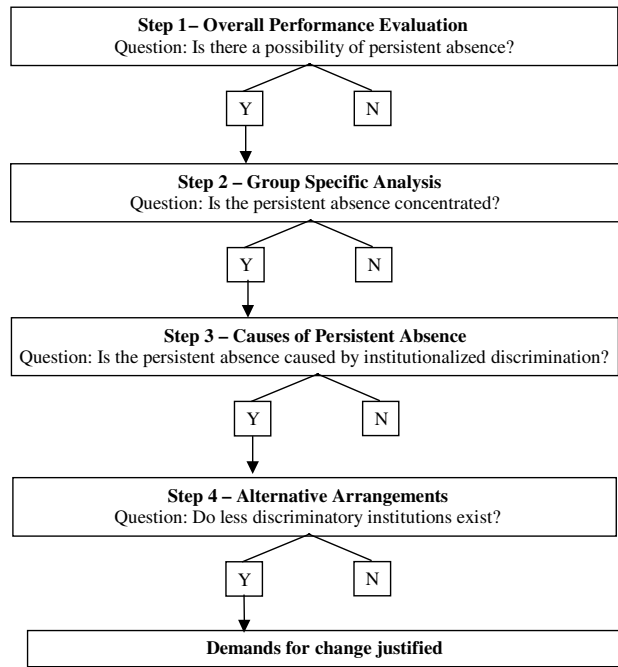


Figure 1 Identifying persistent losers.

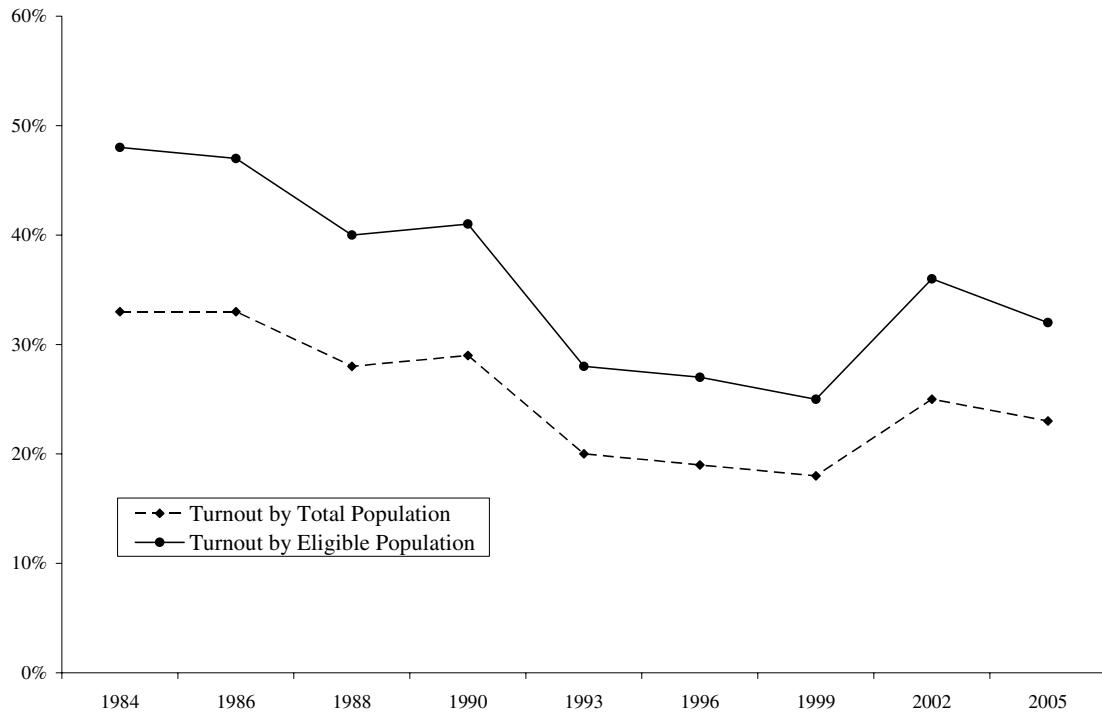


Figure 2 Voter turnout in the City of Vancouver (1984–2005).

community population constant (with an average of 28% of those eligible participating in Vancouver local elections), if an entirely different set of residents participated in each election cycle it would take four elections (or 16 years) to guarantee all community members cast one vote. However, the most likely

scenario is that certain members of the community always, or almost always, vote, where other members never, or almost never, cast ballots. As such, low voter-turnout figures alone do not provide enough evidence to declare reasonable rejection due to persistent losing. Instead, this designation re-

quires low turnout be concentrated within one community *and* caused by discriminatory rules. However, the figures from Vancouver provide enough evidence to move to Step 2 of the process by which persistent losing is assessed.

To move to investigating which institutions might be causing some residents to participate less than others, Step 2 demands proof that persistent absence is concentrated among a particular group of community members. This type of evidence is often more difficult to collect than overall participation statistics. However, exit poll information collected by the author from the 2005 Vancouver Civic election suggests that the voting population does not well reflect the overall composition of the city. For example, where 27% of Vancouver residents have Chinese ancestry, polling information suggests a mere 14% of the 2005 voting population was Chinese. It also suggests younger and less wealthy or educated voters are turning out at rates lower than their proportion of the population (Cernetig, 2005). While these polling results are for a single election, the socio-demographic composition of the voting population is confirmed by other studies (Stewart, 1997; Cutler and Matthews, 2005). Thus, this best available evidence from the City of Vancouver suggests that not only is absence persistent and non-random, it is concentrated within specific groups.

Steps 3 and 4 require first identifying institutional features that may be creating unequal participation rates. Where such evidence requires much more investigation than current space allows, favorite historical culprits are straightforward disenfranchisement laws, poll-taxes, wealth requirements and literacy tests (Grofman and Davidson, 1992). However, more subtle laws can serve to make participation costs higher for some than others, most often related to information about candidates and election processes (Stewart, 2003a). For example, those who do not understand English as a first language are forced to fill-in ballots written in a non-comprehensible tongue. Others live in areas that are simply targeted less by political parties. There is evidence of all these conditions in the City of Vancouver, and throughout other cities in British Columbia (Stewart, 1997; Smith and Stewart, 1998; Stewart, 2003b). This indicates that indeed, some Vancouver residents can consider themselves persistent losers and hence reasonably reject the election rules that render their participation costs higher than those of their neighbours.

Once identified, these discriminatory conditions often have straightforward remedies. Multilingual ballots, ward or proportional representation systems, and election finance rules have all been used to ease the burden on persistent losers. In many cases these remedies have been court-ordered instead of legislated, as municipal and state level governments failed to take action, even when presented with overwhelming evidence of disadvantage (Grof-

man and Davidson, 1992). While more investigation is needed in Greater Vancouver, even these initial results indicate that some carry heavier participation burdens than others.

## Conclusion

This article has tackled the general problem of designing and utilizing good urban governance indicators, using citizen participation in local elections to illustrate the proposed approach. It is hoped that the theory of persistent losing is not only convincing but also shows why defining and assessing a desired concept is perhaps more difficult than might first be considered. This speaks to the challenge within indicators research of reconciling values with objective measures, identified earlier in this issue (Holden, 2006). Although normative justifications are always subject to criticism, failure to include reasons why a particular measure is chosen and what empirical results signify greatly weakens any indicator project. World Bank and UN Habitat researchers highlighted in this paper fail to include an adequate assessment of citizen participation in their good urban governance indicator sets, nor do they to provide much guidance as to why their indicators are essential and, most importantly, how these indicators should be assessed. This paper has explained why it is important to include turnout rates in any assessment of urban governance and why low rates are often problematic, while high rates are always good.

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