

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RANKED BALLOTS

The Municipal Elections Modernization Act gave every municipality in Ontario the option to choose ranked choice voting, but London was the only city to make the switch.

BY ALEX WEBER

MUNICIPALITIES FROM ACROSS Canada will be watching London closely next month.

The city is the first in the country to ditch the traditional first-past-the-post voting system in favour of ranked choice ballots. And the upcoming October 22 municipal election will be the first time a ranked choice voting system has been used anywhere in Canada since 1955 – making London a trailblazer in election reform.

City council gave the greenlight to switching to ranked choice voting in May 2017, voting nine to five in favour of the shift.

So what's changing this election?

Under the traditional first-past-the-post model, voters select one candidate and the candidate with the most votes is elected.

With a ranked choice voting system, voters can select up to three candidates and rank them in order of preference, and the candidate who receives 50 per cent plus one vote is elected. Under this model, all of the first-choice votes are counted first. If a candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes, they're the winner. If nobody receives more than 50 per cent during the first round, then the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated.

The votes earned by the remaining candidates are carried forward into the next round of counting. The eliminated candidates' ballots are redistributed to the remaining candidates, but this time using the next choice on those ballots. All of the votes are counted again. If any of the remaining candidates receives 50 per cent, plus one of the votes, they are elected. If not, the process is repeated until a winner is declared. When only two candidates remain, the candidate with the most votes wins.

Proponents of ranked choice ballots argue that it prevents vote splitting and costly run-off elections, while also creating more civil campaigns since candidates have to court their competitors supports in order to pick up second and third place votes.

The downside? Election results take longer to come in.

London's city clerk, Cathy Saunders, is in charge of the civic election and predicts Londoners will have to wait until morning before the results are official.

"It's our first time doing it this way and we want to ensure total accuracy so I'm going to be incredibly thorough," she says.

While city staffers originally advised against adopting a ranked ballot model, estimating it would cost London taxpayers over \$300,000 to update voting technology, hire staff and educate the public, Saunders says the actual cost to the city is closer to \$45,000.

Most of that money is being used to update the algorithm in the voting tabulators and to create a communication strategy to educate the public about the new voting system.

The city is also hiring more election staff this year, Saunders says, but that decision has more to do with London's growing population and feedback from the last civic election than the shift in voting systems.

"Most of the election prep work we would be doing in any event regardless of the type of election. We are still using tabulators for counting the votes, we still have to hire workers, we still have to create polling stations," she says. "The biggest difference this year for voters is going to be the way the ballot looks."

~BL

HOW A RANKED VOTING SYSTEM WORKS



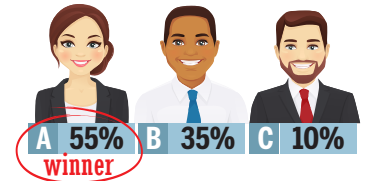
Voters fill out the ballot according to who their first pick for the position is, as well as their second pick and third pick.

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice
CANDIDATE A	●	○	○
CANDIDATE B	○	○	●
CANDIDATE C	○	●	○

First choice votes are counted on all ballots

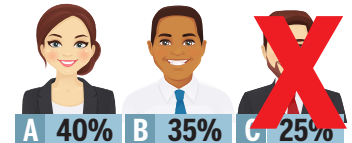
IS THERE A WINNER?

If a candidate has more than 50% of the votes, he/she is declared the winner.



IF NOT...

If no candidate has more than 50% of the votes in the first round, the candidate with the least amount of votes is eliminated.



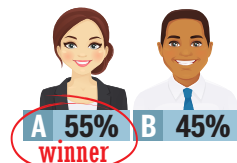
VOTES ARE COUNTED AGAIN

Voters that chose the eliminated candidate will then have their second choice counted.

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice
CANDIDATE A	○	●	○
CANDIDATE B	○	○	●
CANDIDATE C	○	○	○

SECOND CHOICE VOTE

After Candidate C is eliminated, the vote on this ballot will go to Candidate A (second choice). All votes are counted again.



The process is repeated until a winner is declared.

GRAPHIC: SUSAN BATSFORD