

ONTARIO 2021

# Municipal Democracy Index

armstrong  
strategy group



# “Things you measure tend to improve”

We count our calories, watch our pounds and measure our blood pressure. But who’s measuring our democratic health? Is our political heart pumping smoothly or are we heading for the ICU?

The inaugural Municipal Democracy Index measures the political health of Ontario’s 32 largest municipalities.

The results are sobering and reveal a democratic deficiency, particularly in the areas of public participation and diverse representation.

Data allows us to assess and improve - and also allows us to rank. Maclean’s magazine ranks the best schools and the CAA tells us who has the worst roads. Now we have a ranking of democratic health, from best to worst.

Ontario’s Municipal Democracy Index provides a disheartening

diagnosis. But when you get a bad diagnosis from a doctor, it’s no time to shrug and retreat. It’s time for treatment and courage. The numbers are a wakeup call, an invitation for bold action and transformation.

We hope these charts and rankings encourage and enable all 32 municipalities to improve their democratic health!



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The 2021 Municipal Democracy Index is a ranking based on four data sets: Voter turnout, gender balance on council, racial diversity and our own original measure of User Design Experience. This fourth category looks at efforts made by each municipality to be more inclusive and inviting for ordinary citizens. While some of these details may seem insignificant, it's often these small, overlooked flaws that can collectively serve as a significant obstacle to participation.

The overall winner of this inaugural index is Peterborough! We want to congratulate Mayor Diane Therrion, all of City Council and City Clerk John Kennedy along with his colleagues.



Peterborough City Council



City Clerk John Kennedy

Congratulations to our runner-ups as well: the municipalities of Whitby and Clarington!

We want to thank the municipal staff from all 32 municipalities who generously offered their time to help us collect information and data. We dealt directly with more than fifty Clerks, Deputy Clerks, Election Managers, Administrators and Program Managers. It is because of their participation that we were able to put this together and that in and of itself is a recognition of their interest in improving democracy.

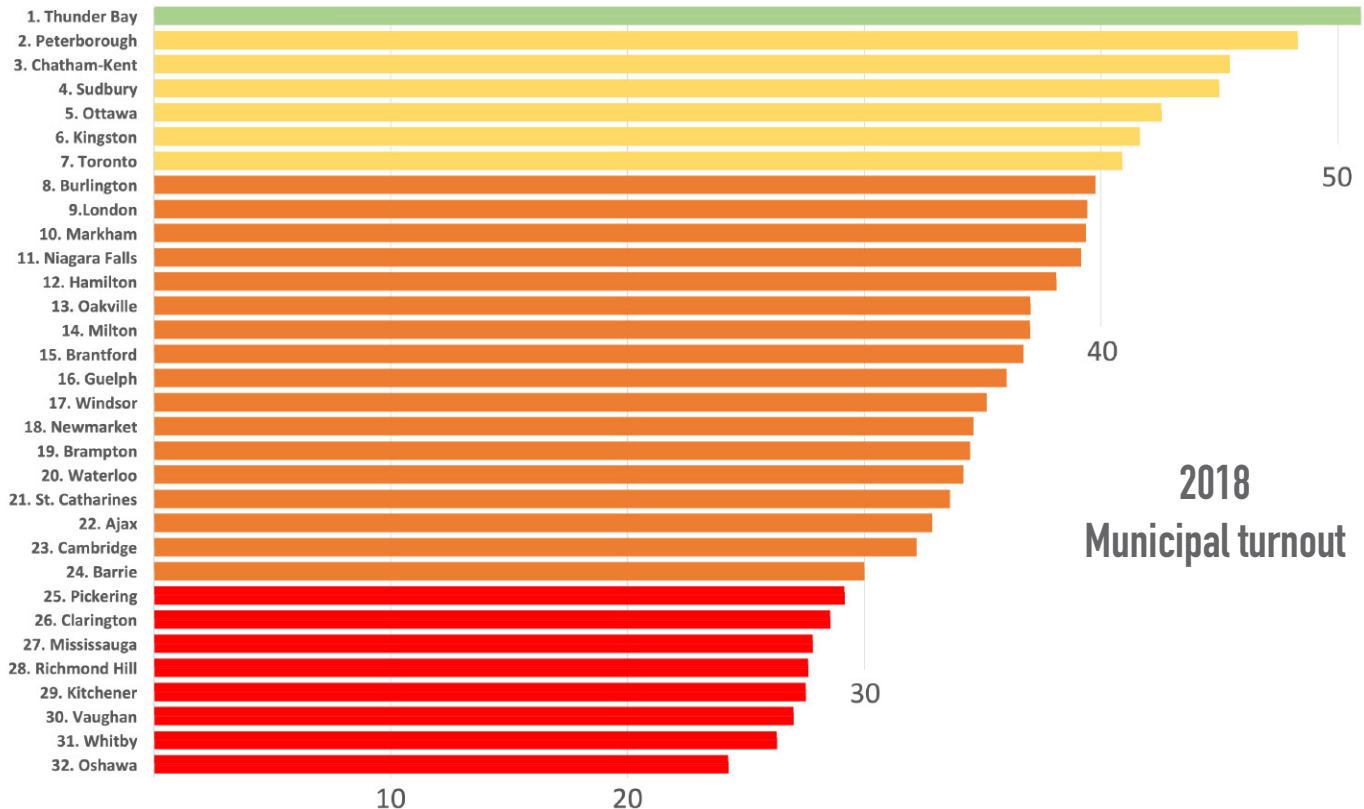
This report is a collaboration between Armstrong Strategy Group and Unlock Democracy Canada. This is the first edition and we look forward to receiving feedback. There are many other indicators that could be included and our goal is to enhance the metrics over time, so we can all improve our democracies together.

# Municipal Democracy Index

ONTARIO 2021 RANKINGS

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>1 Peterborough</b> | <b>14 Cambridge</b>      |
| <b>2 Whitby</b>       | <b>15 Toronto</b>        |
| <b>3 Clarington</b>   | <b>16 Waterloo</b>       |
| <b>4 London</b>       | <b>17 Guelph</b>         |
| <b>5 Ajax</b>         | <b>18 Ottawa</b>         |
| <b>6 Kitchener</b>    | <b>19 Mississauga</b>    |
| <b>7 Chatham-Kent</b> | <b>20 Kingston</b>       |
| <b>8 Oakville</b>     | <b>21 Milton</b>         |
| <b>9 Burlington</b>   | <b>22 Markham</b>        |
| <b>10 Vaughan</b>     | <b>23 Niagara Falls</b>  |
| <b>11 Hamilton</b>    | <b>24 Sudbury</b>        |
| <b>12 Thunder Bay</b> | <b>25 Oshawa</b>         |
| <b>13 Newmarket</b>   | <b>26 Pickering</b>      |
|                       | <b>27 Barrie</b>         |
|                       | <b>28 St. Catharines</b> |
|                       | <b>29 Brantford</b>      |
|                       | <b>30 Windsor</b>        |
|                       | <b>31 Brampton</b>       |
|                       | <b>32 Richmond Hill</b>  |

# Measure 1: Voter Turnout



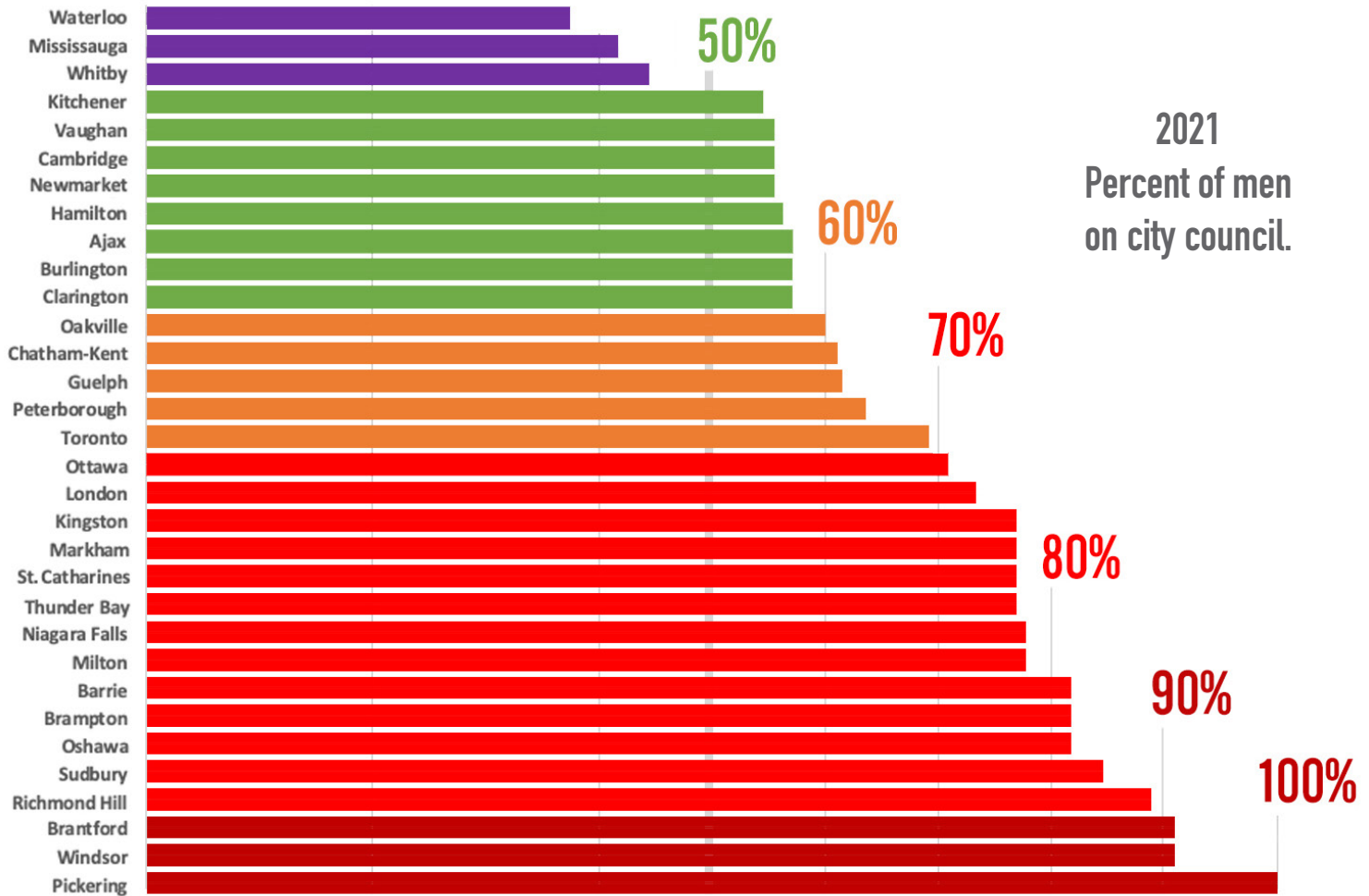
Voter turnout is a simple and effective measure of democratic health. There are many reasons why people don't vote, but any way you look at it, low turnout is a bad sign.

Some have proposed that low voter turnout could simply be a sign that "everyone is happy." However, if someone is happy with the status quo, they should feel motivated to vote for the incumbent mayor and council!

## Voter disengagement is caused by either:

- Lack of awareness and information about the general issues and/or candidates
- Undervaluing the importance of local government
- Lack of choice
- Lack of faith in the system

## Measure 2: Gender balance on City Council



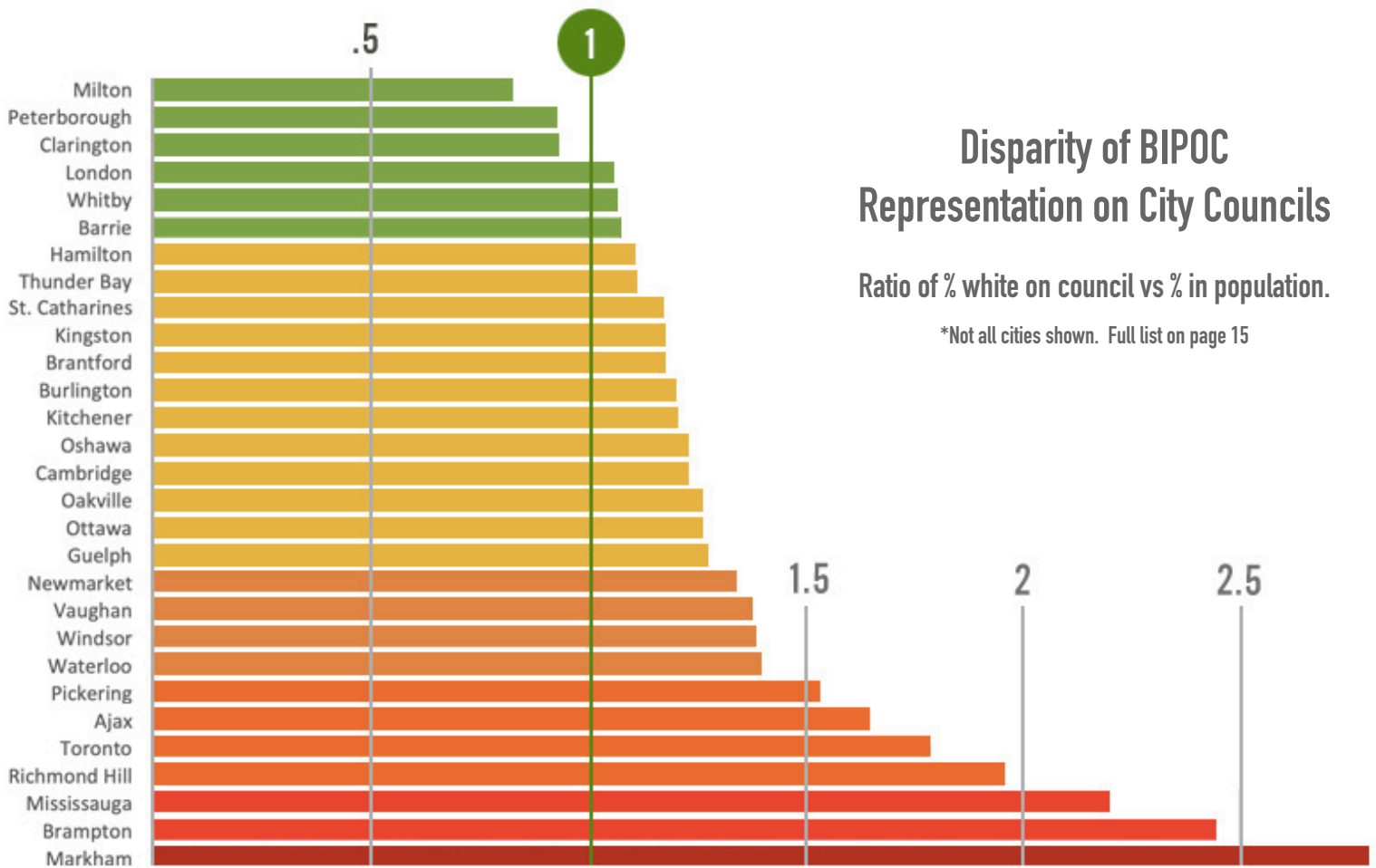
It's been more than 100 years since women were given the right to vote in Canada. Yet, somehow, we still have male-dominated government.

While all three levels of government suffer from gender imbalance (at time of print, all ten provincial premiers are men) the gap is widest at the municipal level. Pickering tops the list with its all-male council, but they

are not alone in their general failure. The majority of these cities are nowhere close to achieving gender balance.

Any type of demographic distortion within an elected body is a symptom of larger problems. An inclusive and level playing field would produce legislatures and councils that reflect the communities in which we live.

# Measure 3: Reflective Diversity on City Council



While gender representation in government is grossly distorted, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) representation is almost non-existent.

This is most apparent when the data is presented as a ratio rather than just raw numbers. The cities that may appear to be doing the best at a first glance, are often actually doing the worst. Toronto for example, has four BIPOC councillors - far more than most councils. But

Toronto council remains 85% white, while the city's actual population is majority BIPOC.

Lack of diverse representation not only harms the policy-making process but is also a clear sign that politics today is an insiders' game that attracts certain demographics at the expense of others.

On this chart, the benchmark is a ratio of 1.

## Measure 4: User Experience Design

In the world of technology, user experience (or UX, for short) is about maximizing the simplicity and comfort of a device or application—especially for first-time users. But UX doesn't apply only to laptops or smartphones. Anything can be designed with UX in mind: a store, a car or even a pen. Or democracy!

Our democratic institutions can feel inviting, intimidating or even invisible, depending on how they're designed. These are the mechanics of inclusion: the small details that can pull people in - or push them away.

This dataset explores various ways that municipalities are trying to make local government more inclusive.

### A) Civics 101

Home Depot offers free weekly workshops because customers will buy more tools if they know how to use them. Democracy is no different! The first step towards encouraging public participation is offering a free course or workshop that explains how government works.

Pickering gets the highest points in this category, for their Pickering101 program. *“Through weekly, two-hour classes, city staff experts provide participants with the knowledge they need to understand, and actively engage in, the planning and processes behind the facilities, services, events, and programs that touch their everyday lives.”*

### B) Participatory Budget

One of the fastest-growing trends in municipal governance is Participatory Budgeting (PB) which takes a small portion of the city's Capital Budget and puts it directly into the hands of local residents.

London, Ontario gets high marks for their Neighbourhood Decision Making program (currently in its 5th year) which puts \$250,000 in annual funding directly into the hands of local residents.



*“Residents know the needs of their neighbourhoods better than anyone. They’re the ones with great ideas to help make their neighbourhood stronger, safer, connected and vibrant. But some ideas need a bit of cash to come to life. That’s why the City of London created our Neighbourhood Decision Making Program, where residents submit their ideas and get to vote on which ideas they want to see come to life.”*

~ City of London



## C) Lobbyist Registry

Many voters have given up on politics because they feel that lobbyists have too much power at the expense of ordinary voices. One way to rebuild public trust and minimise political abuse is the use of a lobbyist registry that tracks who is trying to influence whom.

Only Ottawa, Toronto & Vaughan get full points for their mandatory registration of all lobbyist activities.

## D) Election Campaign Finance Subsidy

Election campaigns can be expensive so fundraising is an important part of the process. Wealthy donors can have a disproportionate impact on government policy when less affluent people cannot afford to contribute as much money to candidates. A rebate program for political contributions can level the impact by amplifying the power of smaller donations.

Only eight Ontario cities have a rebate program. For a \$100 campaign contribution Ajax, Markham, Toronto & Vaughan offer the most generous rebate at 75%. Ottawa and Oakville follow with 50%. Mississauga and Whitby offer 25%.

## E) Electoral system (2018)

First Past the Post has been widely discredited as a voting system that distorts results, discourages diverse voices from participating, rewards negative

campaigning and produces false mandates.

Ranked ballots, on the other hand, have a strong track record of improving democratic outcomes, and are used for local elections across the USA and by every political party in Canada to elect their own leaders.

In Ontario's 2018 municipal elections, all single-tier and lower-tier municipalities were given the option to use ranked ballots. Only one city, London, chose this option. The positive results can be seen at [www.LondonLeads.ca](http://www.LondonLeads.ca)

(Two other cities held referendums on the topic: Kingston and Cambridge. In both cases, the voters endorsed a switch to ranked ballots.)





Thunder Bay Clerk John Hannam (Amy Hadley/CBC)

## F) Voting options

You can pay your bills online, over the phone, at your local bank branch or by mail. These types of options help ensure that different kinds of people, with different needs, all have access.

For this index measure, we didn't place any particular value upon one voting method over another (paper ballots VS online voting, for example) but rather we simply measured how many options were provided by each municipality. Most municipalities scored zero points, because they only offer one method. A dozen cities offered two methods, and only one city offered three: Thunder Bay. (In-person, online or by phone).

## G) Mailed election materials

Good visual communication is all about the effective use of words, graphics, colour and layout. Sadly, government-produced election materials often look as exciting as a 1970s phonebook.

We awarded points in this category based on two sets of criteria:

- 1) Effective use of colour, graphics and design.
- 2) Providing information about the Why and Who, rather than just When and Where.

Newmarket and Toronto won top marks for overall design, while Ajax and Newmarket got extra points for mailing a full candidate list. Peterborough received extra points for their generous and unrivaled use of exclamation marks.(!!!)



**Your City. Your Vote.**  
**October 22**

[toronto.ca/elections](http://toronto.ca/elections)

 TORONTO

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## H) Hospitality

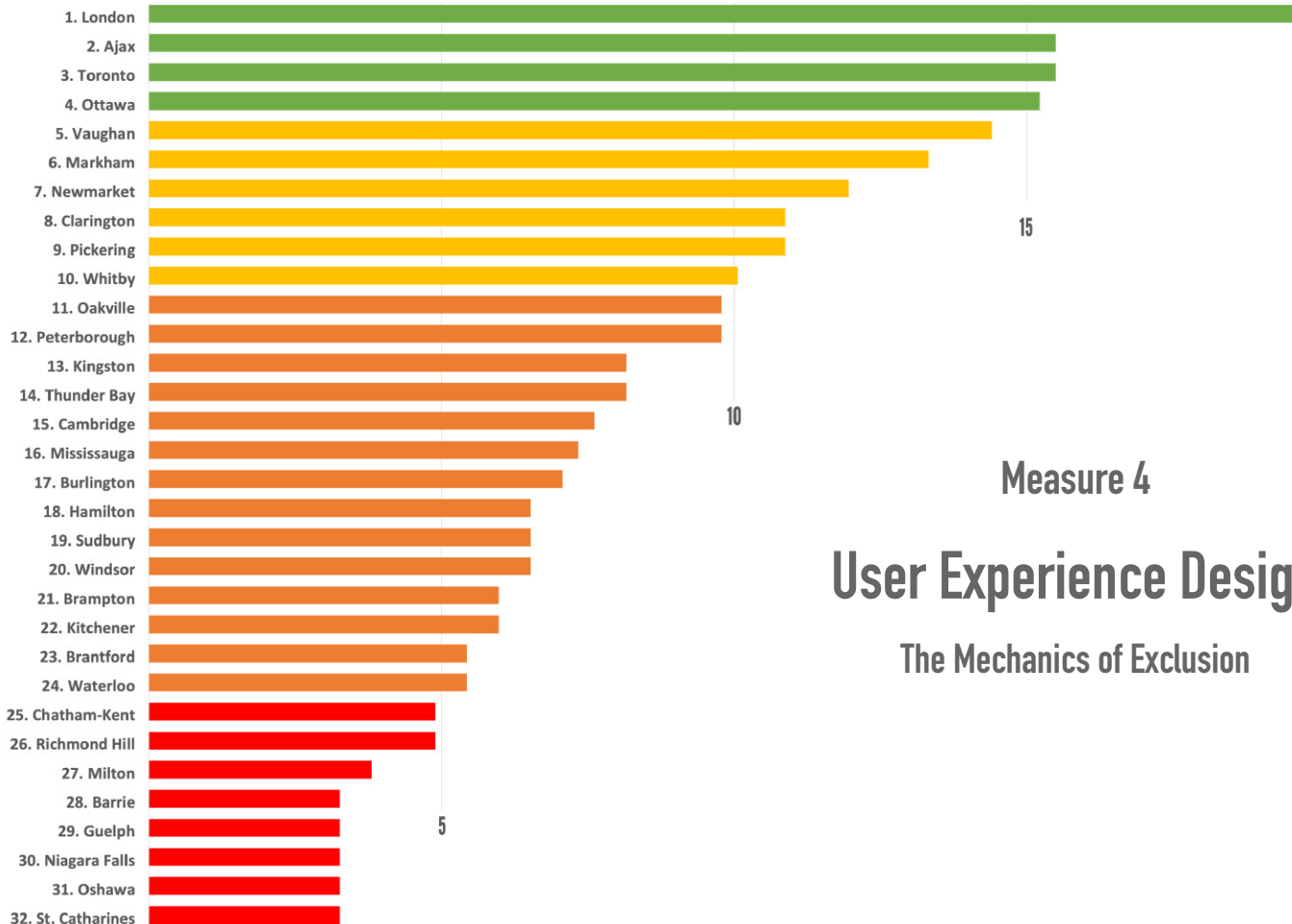
Serving drinks and food is a universal gesture of warmth and inclusion. Yet most municipalities have inexplicably banned all food and beverages at city council meetings.

When London Councillor Maureen Cassidy was newly elected, her first motion was to allow food in the council chamber. “I remember sitting for hours in the gallery as a member of the public with my stomach growling” she said. “We were treating adults like children, as if they could not be trusted to

conduct themselves properly. To encourage greater participation in civic life, I felt we should make it as easy and comfortable as possible for the constituents to do so.”

## I) Your worship

The smallest details can make someone feel welcome and empowered as a visitor, or feel small in the presence of others’ power. Nothing represents top-down power better than referring to an elected mayor as his or her ‘worship’.



### Measure 4

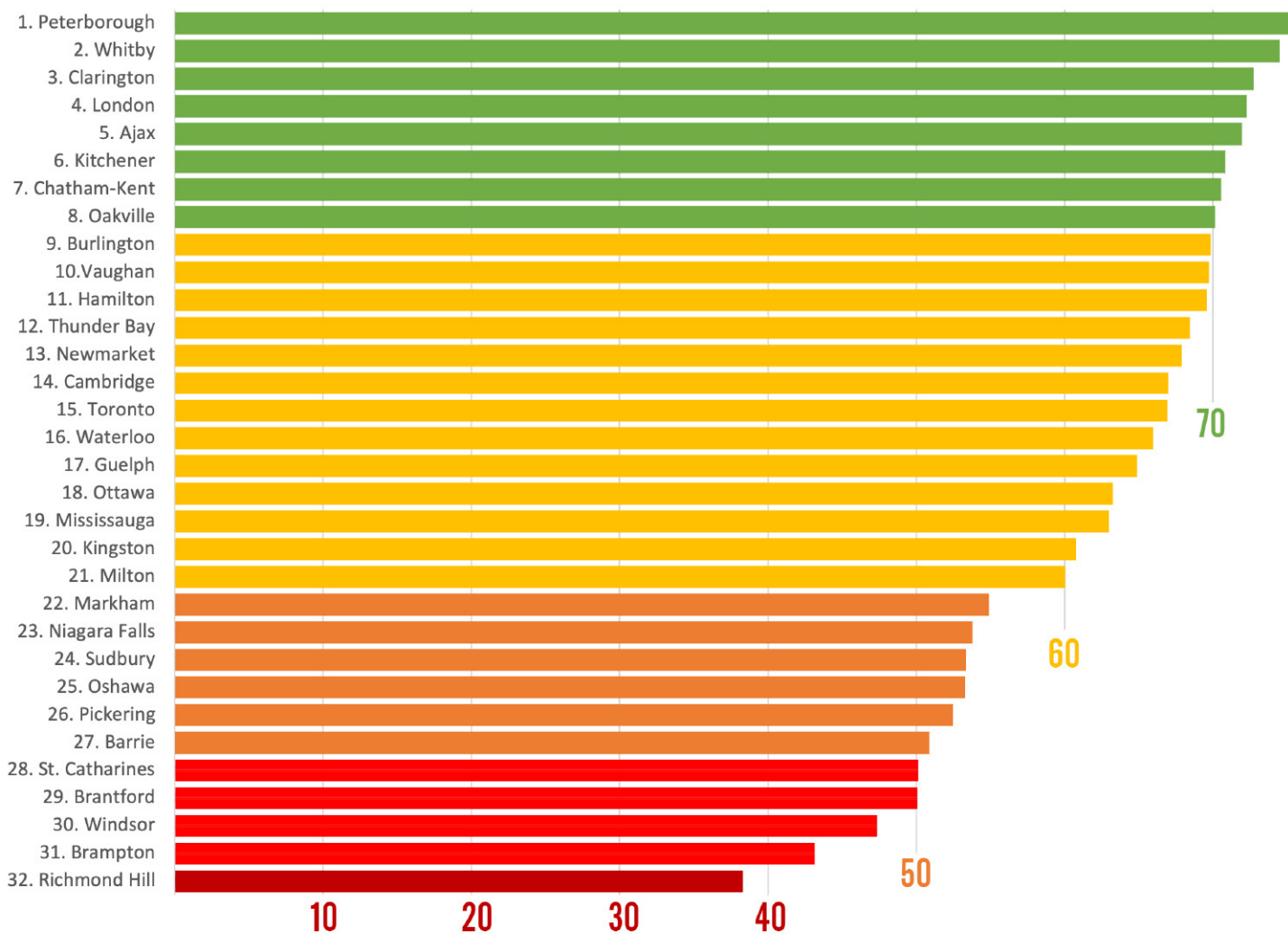
## User Experience Design

### The Mechanics of Exclusion

ONTARIO 2021

# Municipal Democracy Index

Overall rankings based on cumulative points from a possible total of 150



## Data Sources

### Voter Turnout

2018 municipal election results, as published by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario

### Gender on City Councils

Original data, confirmed by Councillors and Mayors via correspondence.

### BIPOC (General Population)

StatsCan 2016 (“Visible Minority” + “Aboriginal Peoples”)

### BIPOC (On councils)

Original data, confirmed by Councillors and Mayors via correspondence.

### User Experience Design (A, B, C, D, G, H, I)

Original data via correspondence with Clerks

### User Experience Design (E)

2018 municipal election results, as published by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario

## Additional material and best practices from *Teardown: Rebuilding Democracy from the Ground Up* (Penguin, 2019)

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**Graphic Design** Page 17

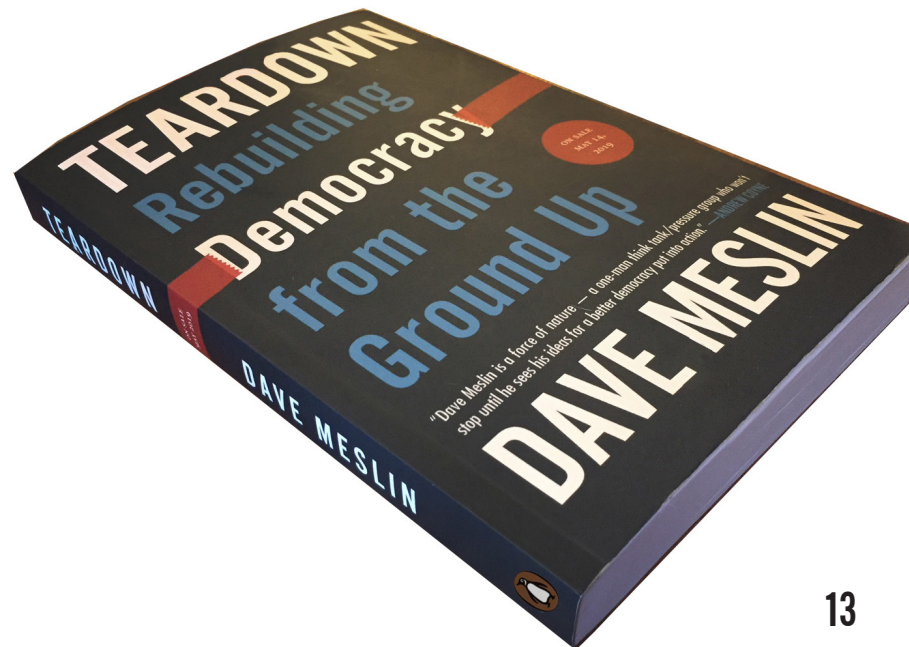
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# Methodology

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## Voter Turnout (Weighted to 50 points)

Turnout  $\div$  2

## Gender on Council (Weighted to 25 points)

(100 minus male %)  $\div$  4

max = 25

## BIPOC on Council (Weighted to 25 points)

(White percentage of council  $\div$  white population)  $\div$  4

max = 25

## User Experience Design (Weighted to 50 points)

Nine metrics, with a total possible score of 92. Each score was then divided by 1.84 to create a score out of 50.

### A) Civics 101

Youth or seniors program: 3 points

Planning course: 4 points

Full all-ages course: 10 points

### B) Participatory Budget Yes/No: 10 points

### C) Lobbyist Registry

Voluntary program: 2 points

Names only (no dates / time): 4 points

Comprehensive + mandatory program: 10 points

### D) Campaign rebate Percent of rebate $\div$ 10

### E) Voting system (2108)

First-Past-the-Post: Zero points

Ranked Ballots: 10 points

### F) Voting options

Only one option: Zero points

Two options: 5 points

Three options: 10 points

Mobile Vote Bus: 2 bonus points

### G) Mailout to voters (part 1: content)

When: 1 point

Where: 1 point

Why: 2 points

Who (names): 2 points

Who (photos): 2 points

Who (text): 2 points

### Mailout to voters (part 2: design elements)

Colour: 2 points

Icons: 2 points

Bleed: 2 points

Exclamation marks: 2 points

### H) Hospitality in the Council Chamber

Allow water only: 1 point

Allow drinks + food: 5 points

Serve only water: 1 point

Serve drinks + food: 5 points

### I) Your Worship

Start with 4 points, then:

Title appears on website: Minus 2

Title appears in social media: Minus 2

# Raw data (Full data sets available at [tinyurl.com/Ontario2021](https://tinyurl.com/Ontario2021))

	Voter Turnout	% men on Council	White population (%)	White on Council (%)	A: Civics 101	B: Participatory Budget	C: Lobbyist Registry	D: Campaign Finance	E: Election System	F: Voting options	G: Mailout to voters (Content)	G: Mailout to voters (Design)	H: Allow drinks and food	H: Serve drinks or food	I: Your Worship
Ajax	32.9	57.1	43.3	71.4	0	3	0	7.5	0	5	4	2	5	1	4
Barrie	30.0	81.8	84.2	90.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4
Brampton	34.5	81.8	26.0	63.6	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	2
Brantford	36.7	90.9	84.6	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	1	0	2
Burlington	39.8	57.1	82.9	100.0	0	0	2	0	0	5	2	0	0	0	4
Cambridge	32.2	55.6	81.0	100.0	0	0	0	0	3	5	2	0	0	0	4
Chatham-Kent	45.4	61.1	92.0	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	0	0	2
Clarington	28.6	57.1	92.1	85.7	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	4	5	0	4
Guelph	36.0	61.5	78.2	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4
Hamilton	38.1	56.3	78.7	87.5	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	4
Kingston	41.6	76.9	84.7	100.0	0	0	0	0	3	5	2	2	1	0	2
Kitchener	27.5	54.5	75.1	90.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	0	4
London	39.5	73.3	81.6	86.7	0	10	0	0	10	5	2	2	5	0	2
Markham	39.4	76.9	22.0	61.5	0	0	0	7.5	0	5	2	4	1	1	4
Milton	37.0	77.8	94.3	77.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	4
Mississauga	27.8	41.7	41.7	91.7	0	0	0	2.5	0	0	2	4	1	0	4
Newmarket	34.7	55.6	74.2	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	6	5	0	2
Niagara Falls	39.2	77.8	87.0	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4
Oakville	37.0	60.0	68.5	86.7	0	0	0	5	0	0	2	2	5	0	4
Oshawa	24.3	81.8	81.1	100.0	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	4
Ottawa	42.6	70.8	69.1	87.5	4	0	10	5	0	0	2	4	1	0	2
Peterborough	48.3	63.6	87.9	81.8	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	6	1	0	4
Pickering	29.2	100.0	55.9	85.7	10	0	0	0	0	5	2	0	1	0	2
Richmond Hill	27.6	88.9	39.7	77.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	0	2
St. Catharines	33.6	76.9	84.7	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	2
Sudbury	45.0	84.6	86.5	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	7	2	0	1	0	2
Thunder Bay	51.0	76.9	82.8	92.3	3	0	0	0	0	10	2	0	0	0	0
Toronto	40.9	69.2	47.3	84.6	0	0	10	7.5	0	0	3	6	0	0	2
Vaughan	27.0	55.6	64.4	88.9	3	0	10	7.5	0	0	2	0	0	0	4
Waterloo	34.2	37.5	71.5	100.0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	4
Whitby	26.3	44.4	72.9	77.8	3	3	0	2.5	0	5	2	2	1	1	2
Windsor	35.2	90.9	72.0	100.0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	4



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