

Open Letter Issued by the Bureau of Municipal Research, 24 Isabella Street, Toronto 5



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An independent fact-finding organization  
reporting to the public on civic affairs.

# CIVIC AFFAIRS

May 30, 1952

## THE TURNOUT IN CIVIC ELECTIONS

Fellow Citizens:

On the 15th of April, the City Council gave its approval to the 1952 budget for Toronto. Some of the highlights were:

Current municipal and school expenditures in excess of \$70 million--or close to \$110 for every man, woman and child in the city.

School expenditures along estimated at just under \$30 million.

Expenditures to be met from earnings by the waterworks, housing authority, T.T.C. and similar enterprises not part of the \$70 million total.

\* \* \*

Property taxpayers responsible for producing nearly \$60 million tax revenues.

Through Ontario grants, provincial taxpayers to subsidize Toronto's current budget to the extent of \$5½ million, and to provide \$2¼ million additional towards the City's capital expenditures on roads.

Current revenues in excess of \$5 million to come from fines, licenses, fees and sundry sources.

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Present debenture debt of \$100 million--about \$47½ million to be paid off through taxation in 1951 and future years; the remainder from utility earnings and local improvement charges.

Confirmation of \$32½ million of capital financing already authorized but not yet debentured.

New capital authorizations totalling \$15 million.

How can we reconcile the level of civic spending with the voting record in the last municipal elections? The Bureau's tabulation, set out

in the following pages, shows that the turnout dropped back from the gains made in the two previous years. Less than half the people eligible cast ballots for the office of mayor. And under one-third of the possible vote was registered in controller and ward elections.

In the suburbs, where municipal expenditures are also heavy and rising steadily, the local voters in most cases were even less active. In seven of the twelve suburbs, the head of council was given an acclamation at the last election. Taking the latest year in which the chief office was contested, the suburban turnout averaged a mere thirty percent of the possible vote. In individual suburbs contested for this year, the best result was chalked up by New Toronto with a 52.5 percent poll; Weston ran a close second with a 51.5 percent vote; the three remaining suburbs fell far below the Toronto turnout of 49.5 percent.

#### Importance of a Large Vote

Voting, we are often reminded, is a duty of citizenship. At the local level, as elsewhere, the success of democracy depends on the belief that the people are quite capable of governing themselves. Moreover, experience would indicate that popular government has never been seriously threatened by wrong decisions of an active electorate. It is frequently hampered, however, by the lack of expression at the polls by a sufficiently wide and representative body of citizens. Organizations that are concerned to combat unhealthy or subversive influences are usually satisfied that the desired result can be achieved by securing a large turnout of voters.

Light voting in municipal elections is not a weakness peculiar to the Toronto area. In recent years, the same situation has been common throughout the United States and other parts of Canada.

In our own City, a couple of years ago, a telephone service was set up to make it easy for electors to ensure that their names are on the voters lists. Some of the suburbs have followed suit. Again, an effort is made to enlist the interest of parents by an appeal directed to the children in Toronto schools. Yet the voters do not turn out. There is nothing to be gained, however, by merely deploring the situation as we find it. Indeed, civic-minded organizations will be on the wrong track if their energy is directed primarily to pressing the reluctant voter into service.

Local citizens seem little interested in municipal issues which directly involve their financial and personal well-being. At the same time, they will turn out in force to take advantage of a special sale at one of the larger stores. During the world series play offs, thousands of Toronto people stay glued to their radios. The Maple Leaf Gardens is packed regularly for hockey games; and even grand opera can fill this great arena to capacity. People have not lost their enthusiasm for community affairs. But in urban centres there is a fierce competition for their attention every waking hour.

It is in such a setting that all those agencies interested in a larger vote must launch their appeals. The responsibility is not an easy one. Therefore, the case for civic voting must be put in the simplest terms and made attractive to the widest number of people. Colourful

advertising techniques are needed; but the campaigns should never be cheapened. Convince the electors that issues of immediate importance are at stake and they will turn out. Their interest will be spontaneous and genuine. Leave them with a feeling that voting is an onerous duty and many will be content to stay away.

Ward Elections

Elected representatives often make the claim that a division of the City into wards is necessary in order to keep the council member or trustee in close touch with the electorate. This viewpoint is supported by English practice where the large council and an extensive ward breakdown is universal procedure. But it is evident from recent election returns in this City that the ward representatives are not the real drawing power in Toronto campaigns. The record of the past six years is quite revealing.

Actual Votes Cast as a Percentage of Possible

	ELECTED AT LARGE		ELECTED BY WARDS	
	Mayor %	Controllers %	Aldermen %	Trustees %
1952	49.5	33.0	32.3	31.7
1951	53.1	38.7	37.0	35.7
1950	52.8	38.1	37.6	35.8
1949	37.1	27.7	27.2	25.2
1948	44.9	32.6	32.5	30.2
1947	34.5	24.0	23.6	21.2

Before commenting a word of explanation is required. The fact that the percentage poll for mayor runs consistently so far ahead is due to the opportunity for incomplete balloting in the other election contests. The individual elector is asked to vote for four names on the controllers ballot but is quite at liberty to vote for fewer than four. With a full turnout of electors, 'plumping' could, theoretically, reduce the actual votes cast to 25 percent of the possible poll. Similarly, in ward elections, the voters are intended to mark two names on each ballot. In this case, however, 'plumping' or incomplete balloting could in the extreme cut the total vote to 50 percent of the possible.

In spite of the fact that incomplete balloting could reduce the percentage of actual votes in controller elections twice as sharply as in ward elections, the record for the former has been consistently better. Therefore, there is no doubt that a sizeable number who do go to the polls vote for the candidates at large but ignore the contests in their own wards. If there are some voters who reverse the procedure, the number is decidedly smaller.

One obvious reason for the wider interest in the mayoralty and board of control elections is the greater publicity which their work is bound to receive over the radio and in the press. However, newspaper and broadcasting officials try to improve the balance by consciously featuring ward happenings and by giving coverage to ward candidates at election-time.

In the following pages, shows that the turnout dropped back from the gains made in the two previous years. Less than half the people eligible cast ballots for the office of mayor. And under one-third of the possible vote was registered in controller and ward elections.

In the suburbs, where municipal expenditures are also heavy and rising steadily, the local voters in most cases were even less active. In seven of the twelve suburbs, the head of council was given no support at all in the last election. Taking the latest year in which the chief officer was contested, the suburban turnout averaged a mere thirty percent of the possible vote. In individual suburbs contested for this year, the best result was obtained at New Toronto with a 52.5 percent poll; Weston ran a close second with a 51.5 percent vote; the three remaining suburbs fell far below the Toronto turnout of 49.5 percent.

Importance of a Large Vote

Voting, we are often reminded, is a duty of citizenship. At the local level, as elsewhere, the success of democracy depends on the belief that the people are quite capable of governing themselves. Moreover, experience would indicate that popular government has never been seriously threatened by wrong decisions of an active electorate. It is frequently hampered, however, by the lack of expression at the polls by a widely diversified and representative body of citizens. Organizations that are concerned to combat inequality or conservative influences are usually entitled to expect that the desired result can be achieved by securing a large turnout of voters.

Light voting in municipal elections is not a weakness peculiar to the Toronto area. In recent years, the same situation has been common throughout the United States and other parts of Canada.

In our own City, a couple of years ago, a telephone service was set up to make it easy for electors to ensure that their names are on the voters lists. Some of the suburbs have followed suit. Again, an effort is made to enlist the interest of parents by an appeal directed to the children in Toronto schools. Yet the voters do not turn out. There is nothing to be gained, however, by merely describing the situation as we find it. Instead, civic-minded organizations will be on the wrong track if their energy is directed primarily to pressing the reluctant voter into service.

Local citizens seem little interested in municipal issues which directly involve their financial and personal well-being. At the same time, they will turn out in force to take advantage of a special sale at one of the larger stores. During the world series play-offs, thousands of Toronto people stay glued to their radios. The Maple Leaf Gardens is packed regularly for hockey games; and even grand opera can fill this great arena to capacity. People have not lost their enthusiasm for community affairs. But in urban centres there is a fierce competition for their attention every waking hour.

It is in such a setting that all those agencies interested in a larger vote must launch their appeals. The responsibility is not an easy one. Therefore, the case for civic voting must be put in the simplest terms and made attractive to the widest number of people. Community

But the major responsibility for the success of the ward system depends on the work of ward candidates and neighbourhood associations of ratepayers or electors. Unless the ward representative can maintain a lively interest in what he is doing on behalf of his own constituency, the ward system will do more to dampen than to bestir public interest in civic affairs.

This year the strength of voting in the ward contests fell off more sharply than the poll for candidates at large. Compared with the votes cast for the mayor and controllers, the ward contests attracted less backing in this election than in any of the previous five years. It is a point for ward candidates to remember in the coming election.

To present and prospective ward representatives, the Bureau makes this suggestion: more than handbills or door-bell ringing is needed to build solid support for civic affairs. The candidate who can explain the work of municipal bodies so that people become conscious of their practical importance and of the need for representatives of stature and integrity will draw out a larger vote. And the chances are, if he does this job well, most of the extra votes will come his way.

*E. J. Farrell*  
President

*Eric Hardy*  
Director

Resident Owners	128,098	132,398	137,181	141,111
Total Resident Voters (Owners, tenants, their wives or husbands)	119,679	123,369	127,551	131,711
Non-Resident Owners	29,313	26,078	26,551	26,551
Total Non-Resident Voters (Owners, tenants; their wives or husbands)	53,967	55,888	56,951	57,091
Total Owners	151,511	150,226	155,951	158,202
Total Voters	178,628	179,257	184,502	188,802
Public School Supporters	152,818	151,151	151,151	151,151

Individuals Who Voted in Each Ward

Ward	1949	1950	1951	1952
1	13,872	13,807	13,881	17,697
2	10,391	13,734	17,288	18,059
3	4,311	8,435	8,585	8,190
4	12,839	15,819	15,988	14,886
5	17,838	23,464	23,253	19,988
6	21,718	30,349	30,852	27,752
7	10,302	14,141	14,717	15,510
8	17,831	25,598	26,005	21,987
9	18,618	24,418	25,323	22,515
	179,297	178,671	177,171	160,508

advertising techniques are needed; but the campaigns should never be abandoned. Convince the electors that issues of immediate importance are at stake and they will turn out. Their interest will be spontaneous and genuine. Leave them with a feeling that voting is an onerous duty and many will be content to stay away.

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Elected representatives often make the claim that a division of the City into wards is necessary in order to keep the council member or trustee in close touch with the electors. This viewpoint is supported by English practice where the large council and an extensive ward system has universal procedure. But it is evident from recent election returns in this City that the ward representatives are not the real drawing power in Toronto campaigns. The record of the past six years is quite revealing.

Actual Votes Cast as a Percentage of Possible

ELECTED BY WARD		ELECTED AT LARGE		
Mayor	Controllers	Mayor	Controllers	
1952	33.0	33.0	33.0	1952
1951	38.7	38.7	38.7	1951
1950	38.1	38.1	38.1	1950
1949	37.7	37.7	37.7	1949
1948	38.0	38.0	38.0	1948
1947	38.0	38.0	38.0	1947

Before commenting a word of explanation is required. The fact that the percentage poll for mayor runs consistently so far ahead is due to the opportunity for incomplete backing in the other election contests. The individual elector is asked to vote for four names on the controller ballot but is able to vote for fewer than four. With a full turnout of electors, 'plumping' could, theoretically, reduce the actual votes cast to 25 percent of the possible poll. Similarly, in ward elections, the voters are intended to mark two names on each ballot. In this case, however, 'plumping' or incomplete backing could in the extreme cut the total vote to 50 percent of the possible.

In spite of the fact that incomplete backing could reduce the percentage of actual votes in controller elections to as low as 25 percent, the record for the former has been consistently better. Therefore, there is no doubt that a sizable number do go to the polls for the candidates at large but ignore the contests in their own wards. If there are more voters who favored the procedure, the number is doubtably smaller.

The obvious reason for the wider interest in the majority and board of control elections is the greater publicity which their work is found to receive over the radio and in the press. However, newspaper and broadcasting officials try to increase the balance by consistently featuring ward campaigns and by giving coverage to ward candidates.

VOTING ANALYSIS

In Toronto civic elections, the vote is given under provincial law to individuals who are owners or tenants of real property assessed at not less than \$400. The wife or husband of such an owner or tenant is also entitled to vote. In every case, voters must be British subjects of the full age of twenty-one.

Individuals may vote for aldermen in each ward in which they are qualified electors. All may vote for mayor, controllers and aldermen, but only public school supporters cast ballots for Board of Education candidates. The years shown are those for which the elected members held office whether elections were in January or the previous December. The two separate school representatives to the Board of Education are appointed by the Toronto and Suburban Separate School Board. This Board, which holds office for a two-year term, was elected in December 1951.

Individuals Eligible to Vote

In each ward, the citizens who have the vote are those who are owners or tenants of property in that ward, whether resident there or in another ward or actually outside the City. One individual will be listed as non-resident owner or tenant in all those wards where he meets the property qualifications; but a voter's name cannot be listed twice for one ward even though he has residence there and is the owner or tenant of other property in the same ward.

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>
Resident Owners	128,098	134,348	132,394
Total Resident Voters (Owners, tenants, their wives or husbands)	318,679	323,163	317,186
Non-Resident Owners	29,373	26,078	26,557
Total Non-Resident Voters (Owners, tenants; their wives or husbands)	59,949	55,884	57,008
Total Owners	<u>157,571</u>	<u>160,426</u>	<u>158,951</u>
Total Voters	<u>378,628</u>	<u>379,047</u>	<u>374,194</u>
Public School Supporters	352,848	351,228	346,432

Individuals Who Voted in Each Ward

<u>Ward</u>	<u>1949</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>
1	13,272	19,807	19,283	17,697
2	10,391	13,734	13,286	12,059
3	6,313	8,435	9,586	8,590
4	12,839	15,819	15,966	14,586
5	17,833	23,464	22,253	19,865
6	21,718	30,349	30,852	27,759
7	10,302	14,641	14,717	13,510
8	17,983	25,598	26,005	23,927
9	18,646	24,408	25,323	22,515
	<u>129,297</u>	<u>176,255</u>	<u>177,371</u>	<u>160,508</u>

But the major responsibility for the success of the ward system depends on the work of ward candidates and neighborhood associations of ratepayers or electors. Unless the ward representative can maintain a lively interest in what he is doing on behalf of his own constituency, the ward system will be more of a mere formality than a public interest in civic affairs.

This year the strength of voting in the ward contests fell off more sharply than the poll for candidates at large. Compared with the votes cast for the mayor and controllers, the ward contests attracted less backing in this election than in any of the previous five years. It is a point for ward candidates to remember in the coming election.

To present and prospective ward representatives, the Bureau makes this suggestion: more than handball or door-bell ringing is needed to build solid support for civic affairs. The candidate who can explain the work of municipal bodies so that people become conscious of their practical importance and of the need for representatives of stature and integrity will draw out a larger vote. And the chances are, if he does this job well, most of the extra votes will come his way.

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Individuals Eligible to Vote

In each ward, the citizens who have the vote are those who are owners or tenants of property in that ward, whether resident there or in another ward or actually outside the City. One individual will be listed as non-resident owner or tenant in all those wards where he meets the property qualifications; but a voter's name cannot be listed twice for one ward even though he has residence there and is the owner or tenant of other property in the same ward.

Table with 5 columns: Ward, 1951, 1950, 1949, 1948. Rows include Total Owners, Total Voters, Public School Supporters, and various categories of voters.

Individuals Who Voted in Each Ward

Table with 5 columns: Ward, 1951, 1950, 1949, 1948. Rows list individual ward voting data for various categories.

While the ward totals are correct, it should be remembered that this makes for some duplication in the aggregate figures because in each year a small proportion of those voters entitled to a franchise in more than one ward exercised this right. These multiple voters, then, show up as individuals in the voter-count of more than one ward and the aggregate of "individuals who voted" is therefore slightly higher than the actual number of people who turned out at the polls.

VOTES CAST ON VARIOUS BALLOTS

Votes for Mayor

In the voting for mayor, each individual has only one vote as either resident or non-resident. Therefore, the highest number of votes is total residents plus non-residents who live outside Toronto. No figures are available on these non-residents but their number is small. Consequently, for "possible" votes we have used the total number of resident voters only. This method gives the closest practical calculation but percentages of actual to possible votes are slightly too high.

Table with 5 columns: Year (1949-1952), Actual, Possible. Rows show total actual and possible votes for mayor.

Actual as % of Possible

Table with 5 columns: Ward, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952. Rows show percentage of actual to possible votes for each ward and for all wards.

Votes for Controllers

The same individuals may vote for candidates to the Board of Control as for mayor. Each person is entitled to vote for four candidates. The possible vote then is just four times the possible vote for mayor. However, some individuals who turn out may mark fewer than four names on the ballot. This largely accounts for the smaller actual vote, compared with the possible, than in the contest for mayor. Such incomplete voting indicates one of two things: 1) the elector does not know enough about the candidates or has not seen to it that four men he is prepared to support were nominated; or, 2) in order to assist a particular candidate, the elector has resorted to 'plumping'.

Table with 5 columns: Year (1949-1952), Actual, Possible. Rows show total actual and possible votes for controllers.

*Repeat the year headings in future releases.*

Ward	Actual as % of Possible			
	1949 %	1950 %	1951 %	1952 %
1	25.3	37.9	36.1	31.0
2	25.8	35.4	34.6	29.0
3	27.6	39.4	40.0	35.9
4	25.3	32.8	34.0	29.9
5	22.4	31.3	31.3	26.3
6	24.9	35.3	36.6	31.0
7	30.3	40.2	41.0	34.5
8	30.3	41.6	43.2	36.7
9	38.3	48.4	51.1	43.2
All Wards	27.7	38.1	38.7	33.0

Votes for Ward Representatives

	Aldermen			Trustees		
	1950	1951	1952	1950	1951	1952
Actual	264,519	280,483	184,768	182,161	182,355	143,101
Possible	702,726	758,094	572,670	508,868	510,344	474,042

Ward	Actual as % of Possible			Ward	Actual as % of Possible		
	%	%	%		%	%	%
1	37.4	34.2	*	1	*	*	*
2	34.0	31.5	28.5	2	31.5	*	28.1
3	*	28.5	24.7	3	*	26.3	23.9
4	31.7	33.4	30.4	4	*	31.2	28.5
5	33.9	34.0	30.2	5	30.3	31.7	28.9
6	36.3	36.7	33.5	6	33.6	34.1	30.8
7	37.7	38.6	34.9	7	36.2	*	*
8	41.9	42.3	38.7	8	38.9	39.3	36.5
9	46.3	48.4	*	9	43.9	47.7	*
All Wards	37.6	37.0	32.3	All Wards	35.8	35.7	31.7

\*Acclamation

In the elections of ward representatives, an individual may vote in each ward where, as resident or non-resident, he has the required qualifications. The wife or husband is also entitled to a multiple vote. As there are two aldermen to be chosen from each ward, the possible number of votes is twice the total voters (both resident and non-resident) on the lists. For trustees, the number is twice the total public school supporters (both resident and non-resident). Non-residents living outside Toronto are included in both these totals. Therefore figures on the possible vote are complete and a fully accurate analysis can be made. In arriving at the total possible vote for all wards, it should be remembered that the possible vote from those wards in which there have been acclamations has been excluded. With two candidates to be elected in each ward voters may fail to exercise their full franchise by 'plumping' or, for other reasons, voting for only one candidate.

While the ward totals are correct, it should be remembered that these figures are for some duplication in the aggregate figures because in some wards a small proportion of those voters entitled to a franchise in more than one ward exercised this right. These multiple voters, when shown up as individuals in the voter-count of more than one ward and the aggregate of "individuals who voted" is therefore slightly higher than the actual number of people who turned out at the polls.

VOTES CAST ON VARIOUS BALLOTS

In the voting for mayor, each individual has only one vote as either resident or non-resident. Therefore, the highest number of votes is total residents plus non-residents who live outside Toronto. No figures are available on these non-residents but their number is small. Consequently, for "possible" votes we have used the total number of resident voters only. This method gives the closest practical calculation but percentages of actual to possible votes are slightly too high.

Year	Actual	Possible
1952	156,921	317,186
1951	171,737	323,163
1950	168,118	318,672
1949	121,101	327,013

Actual as % of Possible

Year	%
1952	49.2
1951	53.1
1950	52.8
1949	37.1

Votes for Controllers

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Year	Actual	Possible
1952	119,168	1,268,746
1951	200,832	1,232,652
1950	152,083	1,241,716
1949	122,221	1,308,132

COMPARISON WITH SUBURBAN VOTING

The basis of comparison used is the percentage of the actual votes to the possible number of votes that could have been cast for candidates contesting the CHIEF OFFICE in each of the thirteen municipalities of Greater Toronto. Because the chief office has been filled in some cases by acclamation, the comparison is made for the two most recent years in which the office was contested in each municipality. In the case of Mimico, the Mayor is elected every second year for a two-year term.

Table with columns: Municipality, Office, Date Last Contested, Actual as % of Possible, Previously Contested, Actual as % of Possible. Rows include Mimico, New Toronto, Weston, TORONTO, Long Branch, Swansea, Etobicoke, Leaside, Forest Hill, Scarborough, York, North York, East York, and Suburban Average.

\*\*Estimated

Actual as % of Possible

Table with columns: Ward, Actual, Possible, Actual as % of Possible. Rows for wards 1-9 and All Wards.

Votes for Ward Representatives

Table with columns: Aldermen, Trustees, Actual, Possible, Actual as % of Possible. Rows for 1950 and 1951.

Actual as % of Possible

Table with columns: Ward, Actual, Possible, Actual as % of Possible. Rows for wards 1-9 and All Wards.

Acclamation

In the elections of ward representatives, an individual may vote in each ward where, as resident or non-resident, he has the required qualifications. The wife or husband is also entitled to a multiple vote. A person is eligible to be chosen from each ward, the possible number of voters is twice the total voters (both resident and non-resident) on the lists. For trustees, the number is twice the total eligible voters (both resident and non-resident). Non-residents living outside Toronto are included in both these totals. Therefore figures on the possible vote are complete and a fully accurate analysis can be made. In arriving at the total possible vote for all wards, it should be remembered that the possible vote from those wards in which there have been acclamations has been excluded. With two candidates to be elected in each ward voters may fail to exercise their full franchise by 'punching' or, for other reasons, voting for only one candidate.