Analysis of Public Opinion Polls Conducted by the City of Toronto*

Insights on Front Yard Parking, Traffic Calming, and Boulevard Cafes

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This paper analyzes data from the City of Toronto's public opinion polls on key municipal projects. We use a dataset covering several initiatives, including front yard parking, boulevard cafes, and traffic calming. Our analysis reveals significant variation in voter turnout and approval rates across these different projects. The findings provide insights into community engagement and policy preferences, with potential implications for future urban planning and public consultation processes

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*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/timchen0326/sta304_paper_1.

1 Introduction

Public opinion polls are an essential part of local governance, offering insights into how communities perceive proposed municipal projects. In the City of Toronto, polls are regularly conducted on topics such as front yard parking, traffic calming, and the installation of boulevard cafes. These polls not only influence policy decisions but also serve as a proxy for measuring community engagement.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the data collected from these polls and to uncover key trends in public opinion. Specifically, we analyze voter turnout, the proportion of favorable outcomes, and how these vary across different types of projects.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a detailed description of the dataset used. Section 3 presents the analysis of the data, including graphical representations of the results. Finally, Section 4 discusses the findings and concludes with potential implications for future polling processes.

2 Data

The dataset used for this analysis was sourced from Gelfand (2022) and conducted using R Core Team (2023). It contains information on several public polls, including fields such as the number of ballots cast, ballots in favor, ballots opposed, and poll results. The dataset spans a period from 2015 to 2023 and covers various municipal initiatives.

The following figure shows the distribution of the number of ballots cast for different types of municipal applications, providing an overview of public participation.

Table 1 provides a summary of the poll results for different application types, including the number of "In Favour" and "Opposed" results for each type.

Table 1: Summary of Poll Results

Application Type	Poll Result	Count
Appeal - Front Yard Parking	In Favour	165
Appeal - Front Yard Parking	Opposed	29
Appeal - Front Yard Parking	Response Rate Not Met	5
Boulevard Cafe	In Favour	45
Boulevard Cafe	Opposed	28
Boulevard Cafe	Response Rate Not Met	37
Commercial Boulevard Parking	In Favour	3
Commercial Boulevard Parking	Opposed	6
Commercial Boulevard Parking	Response Rate Not Met	7
Front Yard Parking	In Favour	508

Table 1: Summary of Poll Results

Application Type	Poll Result	Count
Front Yard Parking	Opposed	18
Front Yard Parking	Response Rate Not Met	13

The dataset also contains information on whether the response rate was met, which is crucial for validating the results of a poll. The following figure shows the proportion of polls that met the response rate requirement.

3 Results

3.1 Voter Turnout

Voter turnout, as measured by the number of ballots cast, varies significantly across different application types. For example, Traffic calming initiatives attracted an average of 200 ballots per poll, while front yard parking attracted an average of 100 ballots, as seen in Figure 1, while front yard parking proposals generally receive fewer votes. This suggests that residents are more engaged with policies that directly affect public infrastructure and safety.

3.2 Poll Results

The majority of polls analyzed resulted in a favorable outcome ("In Favour"), particularly for front yard parking and boulevard cafes. As shown in , most applications were supported by the public, although there were notable exceptions in the case of traffic calming initiatives, which received a higher number of "Opposed" votes.

3.3 Response Rate

Meeting the response rate requirement is essential for validating poll results. As shown in Figure 2, response rates were more likely to be met for boulevard cafes and front yard parking polls. This could indicate a higher level of engagement in these areas, possibly due to their direct impact on property use.
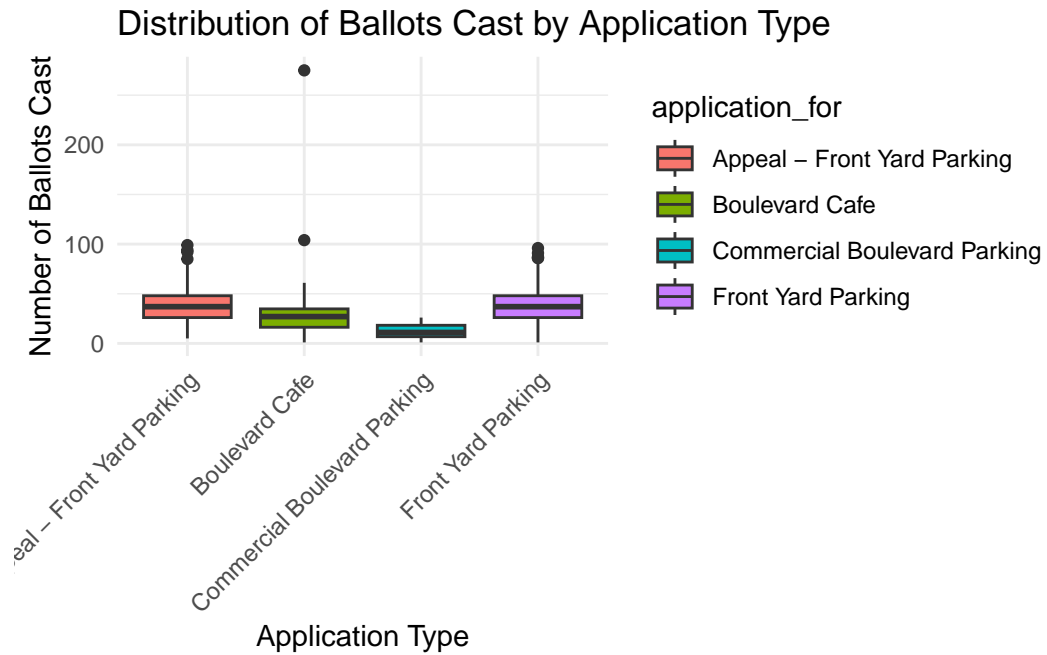
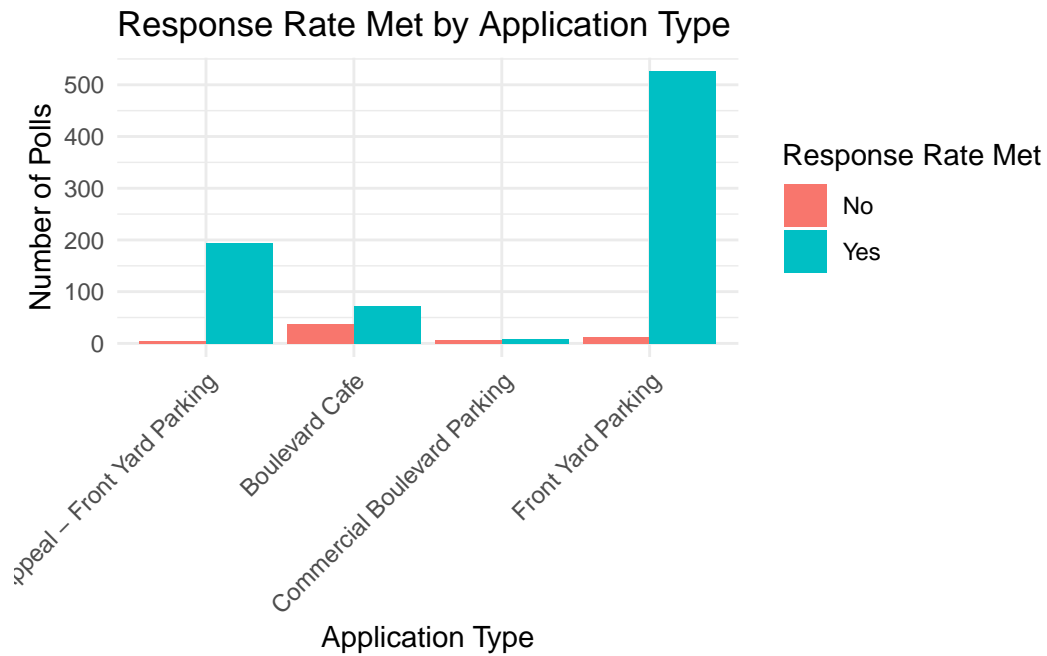Figure 1: Distribution of Ballots Cast by Application Type

Figure 2: Response Rate Met by Application Type

4 Discussion

4.1 Key Findings

One of the most significant findings in this analysis is the variation in voter turnout based on the type of municipal application. Traffic calming initiatives, which have a direct impact on road use and safety, attracted the highest number of ballots cast, indicating strong public interest in infrastructure-related projects.

In contrast, front yard parking polls typically received lower voter turnout, possibly because they are seen as affecting a smaller portion of the population. However, these polls still garnered high levels of support from those who participated.

4.2 Limitations and Future Work

One limitation of this study is the potential for missing data. For instance, certain polls lack complete address information, which could impact the analysis of geographic trends in polling results. Future work could explore more granular patterns in voter engagement by incorporating additional demographic and geographic data.

Additionally, further research could investigate the long-term outcomes of these polls, examining whether the results led to sustained community satisfaction with the implemented policies.

Appendix

References

Gelfand, Sharla. 2022. *Opendatatoronto: Access the City of Toronto Open Data Portal.* https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=opendatatoronto.

R Core Team. 2023. *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing.* Vienna, Austria: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. https://www.R-project.org/.