



Vinyl Islands—Asphalt Sea

Calgary's majority-minority communities

Northeast.

In Calgary—a rapidly-growing metropolis, sectored by freeways and topography—cardinal directions have certain flavours associated with them; **Northeast** is the strongest. Published by the City of Calgary in 2022, the Calgary Equity Index (CEI) is a tool for “monitoring and identifying disparities in equity across communities.” (Meth. 3)

Its findings starkly confirm what Calgarians intuitively know: nearly every community east of Centre St and north of Glenmore Tr is "Below Benchmark". Meaning that, barring few exceptions, this boundary houses every community in the bottom quintile (Meth. 13-8) of Total CEI Score, aggregated from various metrics of human development.

(Figure 1)

Victim to a vicious intersection of unlucky geography, and poor urban policy, Calgary's Northeast risks becoming what Doug Saunders calls a failed “arrival city” (226)—an immigrant banlieue devoid of social capital or social mobility. Northeastern communities are built to a complete state, all at once—unable to incrementally adapt or grow, their trajectory is fixed. Crammed into the hopefully ultimate sprawls of Calgary's modernist experiment, our newest Canadians are awarded a canvas with no paints, an antiseptic environment doomed to decay.

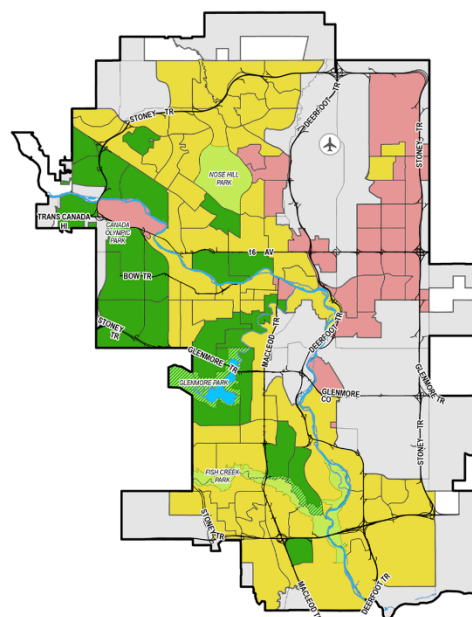


Figure 1 Total CEI Score

2021, by Community Service Area

Red | Lowest quintile – Green | Highest quintile

aggregated from scores in:

Economic Opportunity

- Core Housing Need
- Low Income Measure After Tax
- Unemployment Rate
- Youth/Low Income Transit Pass Sales

Human and Social Development

- Early Development Instrument
- High School Graduation
- Post-Secondary Education
- Violent Crime
- Property Crime

Physical Environment and Infrastructure

- Access to Community Spaces
- Access to Green Space
- Access to Healthier Food Stores
- Walk Score
- Bike Score
- Transit Score

Population Health

- COPD Prevalence
- Diabetes Prevalence
- Mental Illness Prevalence
- Self-Perceived Health

Municipal Voting Rate (2022, City of Calgary)

Socio-spatial exclusion | *the 3-axis model*

In *Social Exclusion and Space*, Ali Madanipour theorizes a 3-axis model of exclusion—**economic, political, and cultural** (207). Together, economic opportunity, access to decision-making, and shared cultural narratives, guide analysis of social exclusion, a form of marginalization that Madanipour argues is inherently “socio-spatial” (205). Arguably—via “unconscious tacit agreement” as Engels puts it (56)—the Northeast’s policy-reinforced socio-spatial exclusion, constitutes *de facto* segregation.

Figure 2 **Socio-spatial economic exclusion in Calgary**
(2021 Calgary profile, City of Calgary) by Census Tract, data from the 2021 Census of Canada

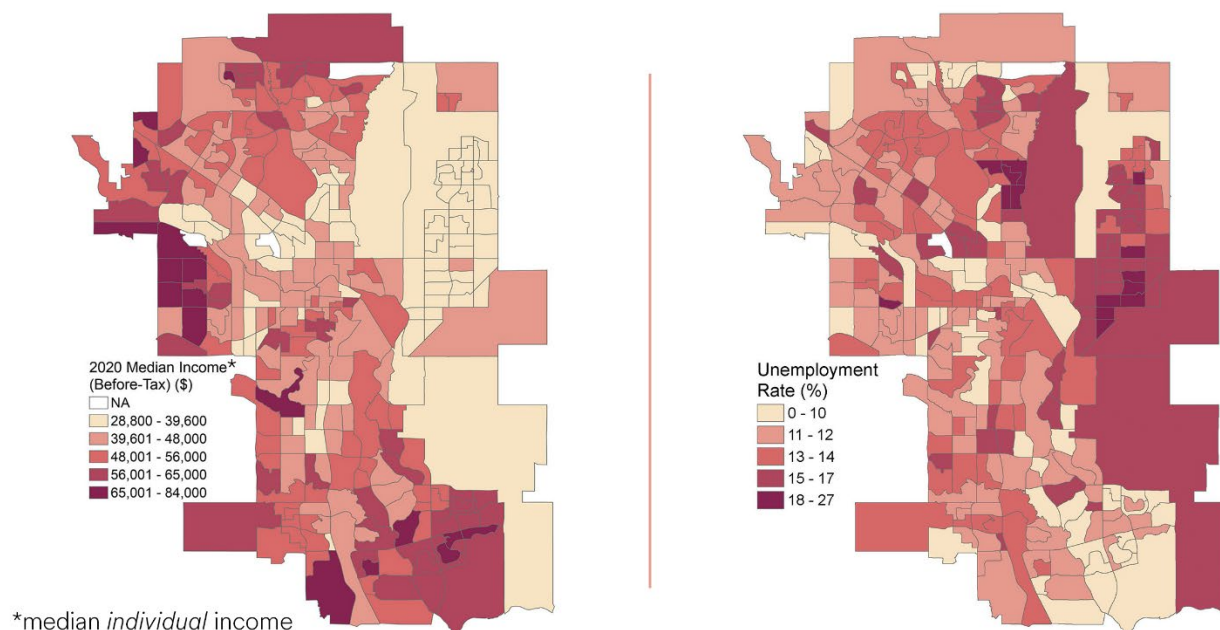


Figure 2 presents a clear overall gradient across the city—a richer and more employed population in the Southwest, a poorer and less employed population in the Northeast. While this data is not ideal due to COVID-19, and outliers are scattered across both maps (notably low-income clusters around the University, and Bowness areas) these

maps demonstrate Northerners are at least excluded from more dignified economic opportunities. Perhaps only somewhat less employed than average, these available jobs are *overwhelmingly* low-paying.

Socio-spatial political exclusion in Calgary

Figure 3 CEI Benchmark

by Community Service Area, data from 2021 civic election

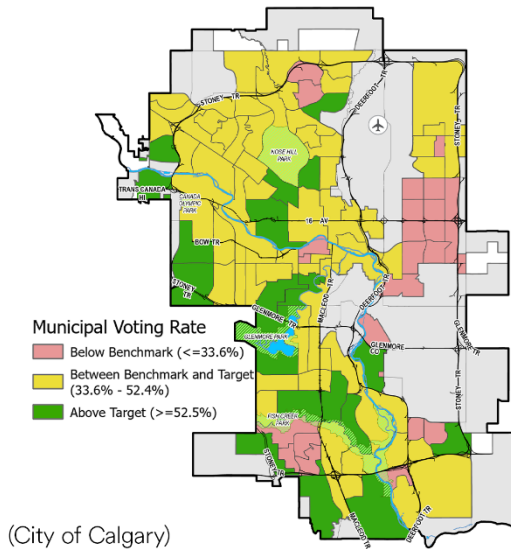
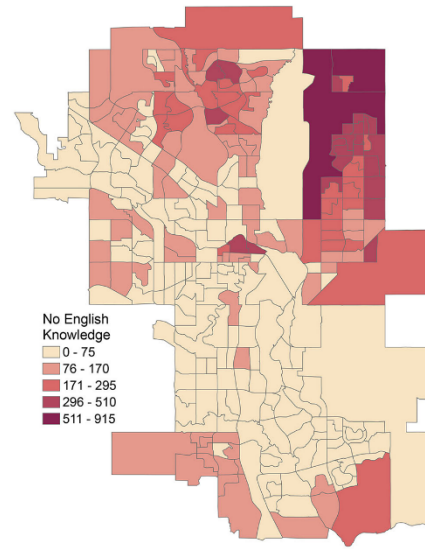


Figure 3 illustrates low turnout in Ward 14, and the Northeastern Ward 10. I suspect turnout differential deeper into the Northeast is attributable to a strong campaign from Coun. Dhaliwal whose Punjabi heritage perhaps inspired participation in these communities where Punjabi nearly eclipses English as the most common mother tongue (27% to 30%, Ward 5 profile, pp 6).

While representation in elected positions is important, democracy is about “active civil society” (Putnam 155). Also, remember that Figure 3 measures turnout of *eligible voters*—it does not factor non-citizens, nor especially the English-illiterate (Figure 4) for whom our politics is wholly inaccessible.

Figure 4 Calgary profile

by Census Tract, data from 2021 Census of Canada



Civil participation is encumbered in the Northeast. Not only by language barrier—especially when interfacing with Calgary’s anglophone majority—but by suburbanism. As Robert Putnam theorizes, especially of “re-potted” homeowners, the detached environment confounds or erodes social capital (161). According to the 2022 Fall Survey of Calgarians, when Northeasterners are asked to rate, on a scale of 10, their regular involvement in “local community events”, about **two-thirds** of respond **5 or lower**.

Lacking better data, I anecdotally infer that regular involvement in local politics or community *organizations* is substantially lower still.

Figure 5 Socio-spatial cultural exclusion in Calgary
 (2021 Calgary profile, City of Calgary) by Census Tract, data from the 2021 Census of Canada

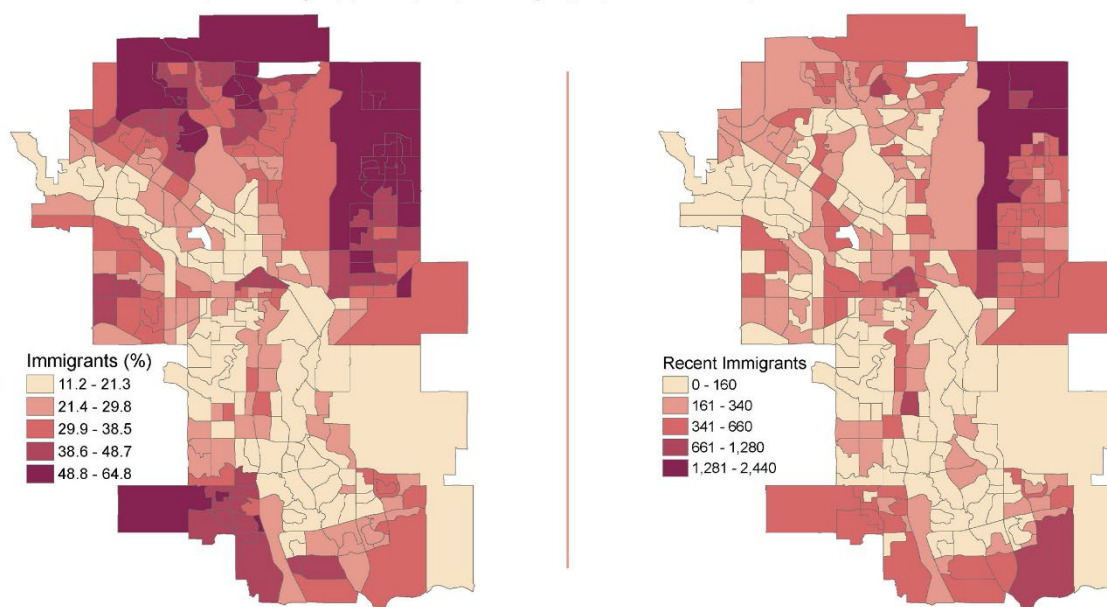


Figure 5 confirms, a great deal of the Northeast is majority-minority. Nonetheless, the 2022 Fall Survey of Calgarians shows Northeasterners respond **8 or greater 67.3%** of the time when asked to rate their Calgarian pride, and **10 most often**. An identical proportion respond **7 or greater** when rating the City of Calgary's "inclusivity and acceptance for all," and **8 most often**—these modal ratings hold typical across all four quadrants.

While Calgarians everywhere increasingly understand their identity in terms of pluralism, this integrative attitude is not reflected in the spatial reality—in the legacies of exclusionary (single-use) zoning.

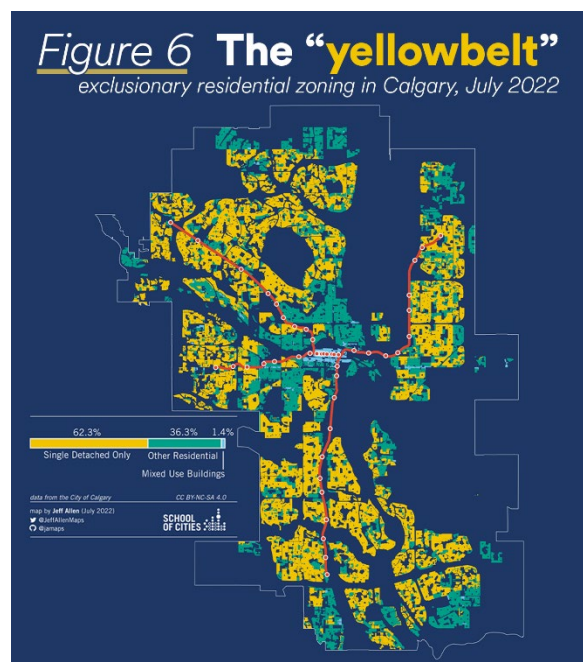
Inferring from the contrast in recent immigration, ethnic segregation appears more concentrated in the Northeast over time. It's possible that recent immigrants are self-selecting where their ethnic community is already established—about as voluntarily as a toboggan settles at the bottom of a hill.

Amidst our housing crisis, even well-established Canadians find spatial pickiness difficult to maintain. Other corridors of interest in Figure 5 include the Red Line, and future Green Line alignment—in Seton and Centre St, where transit-oriented development and zoning reform like R-CG and H-GO has increased housing completions in recent years.

Urban geopolitics

Those of lower socio-economic classes only partially ‘choose’ the neighbourhood they live in: they get to pick whatever is available, after everyone above them. While housing completion remains high at Calgary’s fringes, the suburban dream is experiencing a low-tide era of gentry exclusivity.

I find Orfield’s spawl moratorium paradox (351) particularly resonant in Calgary, where the built environment was mostly developed post-World War II. Single-detached residential zoning coats most of our land in a thick regulatory lacquer. Illustrated in **Figure 6**, stunting natural growth only increases development pressure further out.



This housing completion (supply) differential between inner and outer suburbs causes forms a sellers’ market inside, and a buyers’ market outside—thus, spatial gentrification.

Results may vary: Inclusionary zoning reform allows land cost to spread across more dwellings; status-quo zoning gradually excludes the socio-economic ladder, as the increased land cost requires ever-greater capital to purchase. Such is the calculus and proposal laid out by Madanipour—social inclusion through inclusionary zoning and decommodification of space (210).

As policy inaction defines housing and rental unaffordability in Canadian inner-cities, “immigration has become suburbanized” Saunders remarks in *Maximum Canada* (224). Arguing that this “segregat[ion] into the lower-density outskirts” is more alienating and isolating than older immigrant districts of inner-cities (225-6).

Lacking integration with the established urban economy, and especially lacking the density or mixed-use required to nucleate its own, suburban immigrants face a “Canadian dream” that is “delayed, deterred, frustrated, and even lost” (227).

Velocity: Design: Comfort.

Diametrically opposite our picturesque sierras, avoided by our sacred rivers, lacking any other organic landmark of the kind we like to name electoral districts after (like Nose Hill and Fish Creek); the Northeast's best claim to natural amenity—the Nose Creek Valley—was destroyed to make way for Deerfoot Trail a half-century ago. Hidden behind the great plateau of the Calgary International Airport, McCall, Sunridge and Meridian—the horizontal equivalent of what Mike Davis calls an "architectural glacié"(217)—the Northeast is a metaphorical islet, isolated from our urban core by an *asphalt sea*, without a focal point of its own.



Near Whitehorn—residents are separated from the next easternmost community, Highland Park, by 5km of asphalt and golf course

Calgary's topography challenges the pedestrian integration authors like Saunders, Jacobs, and Davis argue is critical for urban cohesion and inclusion. Especially so when paved, and replete with interchanges. Defined primarily in reference to Deerfoot Trail and its perpendicular arterials, the communities of the Northeast have always demanded car ownership.

Their wiggly and terrifyingly wide residential streets mediate high-speed conflict between cars, pedestrians, and other cars, simply removing pedestrian viability from the equation. Contrary to

the grid present in Calgary's integrated core, this impermeable design elongates walking distances, renders public transit impractical, and thus traps communities in an addictive cycle of car-dependence.



A 4-way intersection in Redstone, about 100ft corner-to-corner

Eradicated is the "sidewalk ballet" (Jacobs 153). Lacking comfortably traversable streets and especially the "substantial quantity of public places used evening and night" (152) that Jane Jacobs argues is necessary for a safe and vibrant street. The Northeast's single-use regime replaces the intricate ballet with a rather simple motion, repeated in modularity: exit from a front door; enter a car; and the ensuing performance is perhaps more akin to *Flight of the Bumblebee*.

When communities now are born comprehensively planned, complete with a logo and corporate brand guidelines, Engels' tale of Manchester's alienating "labyrinth" (59) serving the interests of capital over community—comes to mind. Purpose-built for affordability—risking Swiss cheesification in a hailstorm—the opposite extreme besets the Northeast: *dystopian orderliness*.

Dolores Hayden similarly blames these "organizing principles [under] monopoly capitalism" (170) for women's frustration. Examining land-use as a means of excluding or integrating women, her underlying question implores recontextualization: What would a **non-racist Calgary** be like?

A non-racist city

As an aging nation with a declining birthrate, we must not confuse socio-economic deficits as externalities of immigration; they are exclusionary choices. While immigration certainly presents challenges, only poor, or paternalistic responses to lead to failure.



A classical-revival-revival business hub near Castleridge

As both an "at-risk, segregated" and "bedroom-developing" (344) suburb in Myron's categorization, the Northeast fortunately resides within the tax-base of a consolidated metropolis. Calgarians everywhere are fortunate that the City of Calgary worries about Equity Indices at all, and that we're having conversations about inclusionary land-use well ahead of our peers. A non-racist Calgary—soon 2 million strong—will proactively ensure community vibrance and participation are not privileges merely for the inner-city, the highly-educated, or politically involved. A non-racist Calgary will ensure **the Right to the City for all**.

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