



JANUARY 2017

2016 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

Supported By
citi



This year's Menino Survey of Mayors, based on interviews held during the summer of 2016, was conducted during a pivotal period in our nation's history. It delves into many of the most salient issues raised during the presidential election, exploring mayoral views on key issues such as race relations, immigration, and economic inequality.

The Menino Survey remains the only systematic and statistically representative survey of American mayors. The findings presented here are based on views shared by more than 100 sitting mayors from cities all across the country. These mayors illustrate the diversity of local elected officials and illuminate their shared sensibilities as they seek to grow local economies, protect vulnerable residents, create inclusive communities, and stay attuned to the needs of those they were elected to serve.

In this, the third year of the survey, it has also become abundantly clear that mayors are remarkable collaborators. Whether forging connections with community leaders or the White House, they are adept at building the coalitions necessary to govern successfully. Still, they remain an underutilized asset in American politics — often sought to run for higher office but reluctant in many instances to do so.

We are honored to have had the opportunity to speak with so many dynamic urban leaders and we hope to provide them with a voice on some of the most complex and pressing issues facing their cities. We thank the participating mayors for their time and candor.

We are also deeply grateful for the support of Citi, without whom this work would not have been possible.

Finally, we are thankful for the support of Boston University, whose leadership has guided us through three years of this important work.



Graham Wilson
Director
Boston University Initiative on Cities



Katharine Lusk
Executive Director
Boston University Initiative on Cities

Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Initiative on Cities at Boston University seeks to research, promote, and advance the adaptive urban leadership strategies and policies necessary to support cities as dynamic centers of inclusive economic growth and positive development in the 21st century. Founded by a proven urban leader, the late Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, and a highly regarded academic, Professor Graham Wilson, the Initiative serves as a bridge between world-class academic research and the real-life practice of city governance.

Initiative on Cities

Boston University
75 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215

www.bu.edu/ioc

[@BUonCities](https://twitter.com/BUonCities)
617-358-8080
IOC@bu.edu

Director, Professor Graham Wilson

Authors

Katherine Levine Einstein
Assistant Professor, Political Science
Boston University
kleinst@bu.edu

David M. Glick
Assistant Professor, Political Science
Boston University
dmglick@bu.edu

Conor LeBlanc
Marketing & Communications Specialist
Initiative on Cities, Boston University
conorleb@bu.edu

Editor & Contributor

Katharine Lusk
Executive Director
Initiative on Cities, Boston University
klusk@bu.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword 3

Executive Summary 4

Methodology: 102 Survey-Interviews..... 6

The Mayors: Traits and Aspirations..... 8

Mayoral Policy Priorities 12

People Priorities 20

Building a City’s Image: Mayoral Views on What’s Important 24

Promoting Inclusivity in Urban America 29

 Racial and Economic Inclusion 29

 Call for Poverty Alleviation 32

Intergovernmental Relations and Federalism..... 37

 Cities and the 2016 Federal Election..... 39

Conclusion 43



FOREWORD

Several years ago, Tom Menino, then the Mayor of Boston, declared that we were living in “the era of the city.” It is fitting, then, that his name and legacy should live on with the Menino Survey of Mayors. This survey is a window providing insight into how our nation’s mayors think, act and perceive their world. For mayors, it is a helpful tool for taking the pulse of our peers. For those with a stake in the successful futures of cities, the survey represents an important gathering of the perspectives and priorities of our urban leaders. Perhaps most importantly, the survey is a megaphone, a voice for mayors of cities big and small, liberal and conservative, established and emerging.

In 2017, we will welcome a new President of the United States, a new Congress, and new Cabinet members and Department leaders. With a recent election season that was highly contentious, a transition of power at this scale is bound to be steeped in uncertainty. And yet, each day, our neighborhood streets must be paved. Our schools must open. Our police officers and fire fighters must assume their awesome responsibilities. Trains and buses must run on time. Simply put, as mayors, we are tasked with ensuring that our cities continue to function. Amidst the potholes, the schools, the public safety policies and the traffic delays, we must remember who stands at the center of our work: people. Ultimately, a mayor’s job is about connecting with and supporting people.

The 2016 Menino Survey tells us much about how mayors are engaging with their citizens. It tells us how our peers are confronting complex issues like poverty, inclusion, and immigration. It helps explain how we work with federal agencies and give voice to what we and our colleagues want from the new presidential administration. Over half of Americans already live in cities and they are joined by more each year. As their leaders, we must be heard.

The era of the city is well upon us. We must continue to work together to understand how to best guide our increasingly urban nation to an ever more prosperous and equitable future.

Mayor Mick Cornett
R - Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Mayor Nan Whaley
D - Dayton, Ohio

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **POVERTY – Mayors are deeply concerned about urban poverty and the challenges facing their poorest residents.** Relative to two years ago, socioeconomic issues — like poverty, affordability, and income disparities – are more frequently mentioned as top policy priorities by America’s mayors. Mayors also rank poverty, rather than income inequality or the shrinking middle class, as their most pressing economic concern. This focus was shared by both Democrat and Republican mayors, although Democrats were 15 percentage points more likely to be concerned with poverty. Mayors are concerned about economic challenges ranging from unequal transit access to racial wealth gaps, but they are most frequently concerned about the lack of middle class jobs for those without a college degree and a lack of living wage jobs. Collectively, these findings suggest a deep sensitivity to the needs of most economically disadvantaged residents who call cities home.
- **INCLUSION – Mayors worry about many resident groups being left out or left behind, and believe there are both formal and informal means by which they can build more inclusive communities.** In keeping with their focus on poverty, nearly a quarter of mayors identified the poor as the group they most need to do more to help. Nearly half of surveyed mayors selected “those living in or near poverty” as the most “excluded” group in their city. Some mayors shared specific policy remedies that may help to alleviate challenges facing their poorer constituents, ranging from expanding affordable housing to universal pre-school. Black residents represent another group of concern for many mayors. Half selected the black community as one of the two most marginalized, and nearly a quarter feel that blacks and/or other minorities have the least trust in local government. Here, though, mayors tend to believe the best thing they can do is create a culture of mutual respect and understanding, including through more visible, direct ties to black residents and community leaders. Ultimately, many mayors believe that inclusion has benefits that extend beyond social cohesion. Most noted how diversity contributes to their city’s creativity and innovativeness, helps current businesses and the economy, and makes the city more attractive to new residents and businesses.
- **ETHNIC DIVERSITY & IMMIGRATION – Mayors worry a lot about building more inclusive communities that also welcome immigrants and Latinos.** Just over a quarter of mayors selected immigrants as the most marginalized group in their community, while a similar number indicated Latinos. Mayors feel that their existing immigrant communities play a significant role in the incorporation of immigrants, and a large proportion, 40 percent, believe their business community also “helps a lot” in creating a culture of inclusion. Lastly, mayors believe the single best thing they can do to support immigrants is to create a welcoming environment, whether through public recognition of their importance in the community, access to government support or improved language services.
- **CITY IMAGE – While mayors believe that a wide variety of attributes strengthen their cities’ reputations, it is critical that their city be regarded as a safe place for businesses, residents, and visitors.** Mayors consistently and overwhelmingly rated low crime as highly important to their city’s image across multiple constituencies: businesses, city residents, and individuals living outside the city. Other important traits varied by audience. Mayors want businesses and investors to view their community as “business friendly” and well-educated. They want prospective visitors to perceive the city as a physically attractive and socially and artistically vibrant place. Perhaps their most important constituency – residents – was also the one where mayors placed the greatest emphasis on a reputation for safety, followed distantly by cleanliness and affordability.



- **POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS – Mayors work closely with local and regional government and believe in-person interactions with constituents are important for maintaining a good connection with their city.** As cities are often cited as policy laboratories, this year’s survey asked mayors to name a policy or program where they had “gone it alone” without support from higher levels of government. While mayors named a wide array of initiatives where they had taken the lead, many were quick to name government partners or community groups that had also played a role. They similarly viewed relationships with their constituents as very important, and considered in-person interaction the best way to learn about constituents’ views. Mayors say they rely on public events, informal networking and neighborhood meetings to remain connected, with far fewer citing technology tools as the best mechanisms to hear from constituents. Lastly, two-thirds of mayors cite “interpersonal skills” as those most critical to effective mayoral leadership, reinforcing the value of human engagement.
- **FEDERAL COLLABORATION – Mayors frequently lauded the Obama Administration as a strong ally and, months before election day, worried about the effects of the 2016 presidential campaign on their diverse constituencies.** Throughout the summer of 2016, mayors shared deep concerns about the impact of the presidential campaign rhetoric as well as their hopes for the next administration. Mayors reported adverse local consequences of the national rhetoric, ranging from empowering fringe elements in their communities to sowing anxiety and fear among their diverse urban constituencies. In contrast, mayors expressed strong support for the Obama White House, citing ready access to the President – whom many lauded as an “urban champion” – and fruitful relationships with key cabinet departments. They gave high marks to most federal agencies, including Housing and Urban Development, Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Transportation. They were more reserved in their support for the Environmental Protection Agency, with half of mayors feeling it hindered their city. This echoes comments shared in the 2015 Menino Survey, where mayors expressed frustration with “unfunded mandates” like expanded stormwater management regulations. A number of mayors expressed a need for the next president to make infrastructure investment a top priority, including roads, bridges and mass transit.
- **PARTISAN IMMUNITY – Across a wide range of topics and issues, mayors’ views are identical regardless of whether they live in a red or blue state.** One of the most consistent patterns in the 2016 responses is that mayors’s answers were virtually identical irrespective of whether their cities are located in “blue” or “red” states. Across a range of questions, including those on polarizing election issues such as race, immigration, priorities, and economics, mayors in states that President-elect Donald Trump won provided similar answers to those in states that he lost. Urban leaders’ values, priorities, and concerns are the same whether or not the leaders govern “coastal elites.” This does not mean that mayors themselves are non-partisan; Republican and Democratic mayors differ on a number of important policy areas, though there are also points of commonality.
- **HIGHER ELECTED OFFICE – America’s mayors are interested in and actively recruited for higher political office, though many would be happy if mayor was their last public office.** Seventy-six percent of surveyed mayors reported being “seriously” recruited to run for higher office. Perhaps unsurprisingly, mayors rate the most prestigious offices as most appealing, including the U.S. Senate and governor, as well as appointed roles in the Cabinet. In contrast, the House of Representatives, state legislature, and city council are all relatively unappealing. Interestingly, two-thirds of mayors participating in the survey have professional experience in business, suggesting their interest in higher office is not due to a professional track as “career politicians.” The most attractive future career option for mayors is a role outside of government, such as running a nonprofit, working in academia or returning to business. This suggests that recruiting them to remain in politics is not necessarily an easy task.

METHODOLOGY: 102 SURVEY-INTERVIEWS

The survey explores a wide range of leadership and policy issues using a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions. The mayors provided information about their views on everything from career ambitions to tackling poverty to federal agencies.

Recruitment

In total, 465 mayors representing all U.S. cities with over 75,000 residents were invited to participate in the 2016 Menino Survey of Mayors. Mayors received personalized email invitations from the Director of the Boston University Initiative on Cities with follow-up requests by telephone.

Who are the mayors? Demographics of participating cities

Hailing from 41 states, the 102 mayors who participated in the survey represent cities that are largely similar to those in the nation as a whole. **Table 1** compares the participating cities' traits to the universe of U.S. cities with over 75,000 residents. Participating cities skewed larger, with an average size of approximately 262,000 residents. The average U.S. city with over 75,000 residents has 223,000 residents.¹ Consistent with a slight skew toward larger cities, participating cities also tended to be somewhat poorer with slightly different racial demographics. The sample cities generally reflect the geographic distribution of U.S. cities with over 75,000 residents (16 percent Northeast, 32 percent South, 25 percent Midwest, and 28 percent West in the sample compared to 11 percent, 33 percent, 17 percent, and 40 percent overall, respectively). The combination of the slight skew toward larger cities and away from the Western cities suggests that relatively large suburban communities common in the West, often with city manager systems, are slightly underrepresented. Forty-two percent of participating cities have strong mayor systems compared to 36 percent in the target population. Therefore, to the extent the sample skews at all, it skews toward policymaking cities with active mayors. Moreover, because the survey covers such a wide array of topics, the authors are not concerned about mayors selecting into the survey based on particular substantive issues or concerns, which would bias the results. Mayors were invited to a survey about policy and city leadership, leaving them unable to opt in or out with knowledge of the substance.

Prior iterations of the Menino Survey of Mayors suggest that the skew toward large cities may exist because of city staffing issues. Large cities frequently have more structured and hierarchical staff, which often includes an employee whose job focuses exclusively on scheduling. Thus, while mayors of larger cities typically have greater responsibilities, their schedules are more routinized, making it easier to schedule interviews.

¹ While some media outlets have promoted surveys of American mayors, we stand by the Menino Survey as the only scientifically valid offering. Our participating cities more closely resemble national cities (calculated by metrics like average city size, mayoral partisanship, and geographic distribution) than any other mayoral survey currently in circulation.



Table 1: Sample city traits vs. the national population

	In Sample	In Sample Over 75K	All Cities Over 75K
Population	261,836	281,722	222,946
Percent black	17.7%	18.1%	14.5%
Percent Latino	18.4%	18.7%	24.5%
Median income	\$50,633	\$50,107	\$55,010
Median housing price	\$201,210	\$193,393	\$237,049
Poverty rate	15.0%	15.1%	13.5%
Unemployment rate	10.0%	9.9%	10.1%
N	102	94	465

THE MAYORS: TRAITS AND ASPIRATIONS

Participating mayors hail from a wide variety of backgrounds. **Table 2** summarizes the participating mayors themselves. Around one-quarter are female and 80 percent are white. Seventy percent are Democrats and 28 percent are Republicans. This partisan distribution is virtually identical to that reported in a rigorous political science study of mayoral partisanship.² Interestingly, almost two-thirds of mayors who contributed to the survey have backgrounds in business, while one-third have backgrounds in law, suggesting they bring diverse professional experiences to their time in the mayor's office.

Table 2: Traits of participating mayors

Sex	Female Male	25% 75%
Race	White Black Latino Other	80% 13% 5% 2%
Partisanship	Democrat Republican Other	70% 28% 2%
Professional Background	Law Business	33% 67%
Highest Degree	BA/BS JD MBA PhD Other	45% 33% 5% 4% 13%
Average Years in Office		5.7

Mayors are widely recruited to run for higher office, but they rate non-governmental office as more appealing than any higher office.

Regardless of their interest in higher office, a large majority of mayors are viewed as attractive candidates by party officials. Seventy-six percent of mayors said they had been seriously recruited to run for higher office.

The mayors' assessments of the attractiveness of other political offices provide insight into their potential career paths and, indirectly, how they view the mayoral role. **Figure 1** tabulates the mayors' views about a variety of government positions. When asked to consider the appeal of certain political offices — from city council to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)³ — as well as a non-government option, mayors rated a role outside of government most highly with roughly half describing such jobs as very appealing (and over 80 percent rating them as very or somewhat appealing).

Among the political offices mayors considered, the most popular was governor, with over 60 percent of mayors describing it as very or somewhat appealing. At least 50 percent of mayors similarly rated Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of HUD, and U.S. Senator as very or somewhat appealing. In contrast, city councilor, state legislator, and U.S. Congressperson were all relatively unattractive, with less than 25 percent of mayors viewing those positions as very or somewhat appealing. In at least some cases, the middling enthusiasm for other positions stems from mayors' satisfaction with their current jobs. As one said, *"I really like being mayor. It's a great gig."*

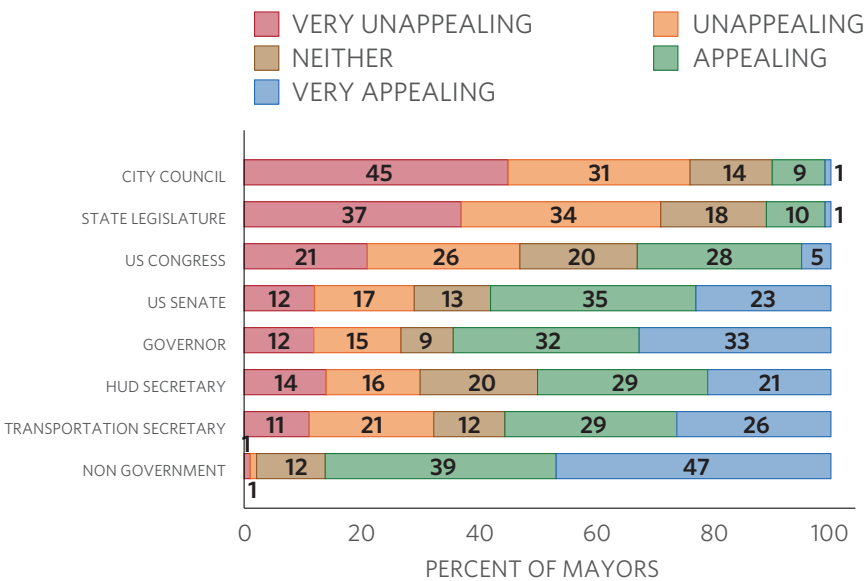
² Elizabeth R. Gerber and Daniel J. Hopkins, "When Mayors Matter: Estimating the Impact of Mayoral Partisanship on City Policy," *American Journal of Political Science*, 2011, 55(2): 326-339.

³ Secretaries of HUD and Transportation were included because both were occupied by former mayors at the time of the 2016 Menino Survey interviews.



Figure 1: Mayors’ ratings of attractiveness of other positions

ATTRACTIVENESS OF OTHER POSITIONS



Mayors seem to base the appeal of other offices largely on prestige and power, meaning they are not especially distinct from other politicians in how they rate the appeal of government roles. The mayors do, however, seem to lean toward executive offices: three of the four political offices with the highest mean ratings were Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of HUD, and governor. As one Western mayor noted: “I decided a long time ago that I don’t have a great legislative personality. I like to surround myself with intelligent people and have some control over that... U.S. Congress, I thought about it at one time, but have decided I’d be miserable.” Another explained his derision of the legislative positions by saying, “The production rate in Congress would make me crazy in less than a month.” Of course, as the data show, these sentiments were not universal, and many mayors saw federal legislative positions as attractive despite the limitations on impact and control inherent in Congress.

“The production rate in Congress would make me crazy in less than a month.”

Executive positions — especially those that take advantage of mayors’ urban and governing expertise — were relatively more appealing. One Northeastern mayor of a medium-sized city cited HUD as especially attractive because, “CDBG funds [Community Development Block Grants from HUD] are a lifeline for urban mayors.” Similarly, a Southern city mayor highlighted his governing experience as a rationale for his high rating of the governor’s office: “As mayor, I have the capacity to move the

needle on really important issues, and I think that as governor it's the same way." We can infer, then, that mayors enjoy roles where they feel like they have the ability to exercise power and be action oriented.

Mayors believe that interpersonal skills are the most critical to effective leadership at the local level.

Perhaps no group is better positioned to illuminate what it takes to be a successful mayor than mayors themselves. Mayors selected two traits they believe are most important to effectiveness in office. The list of options is summarized in **Figure 2**. These options were designed to capture both the range of functions mayors are involved in (e.g., things ranging from financial management to crisis management) and the variety of skill types mayors may rely on, from harder skills such as policy expertise to softer ones like empathy. Mayors noted that many or all of the traits on the list were important and that they struggled to pick just two.

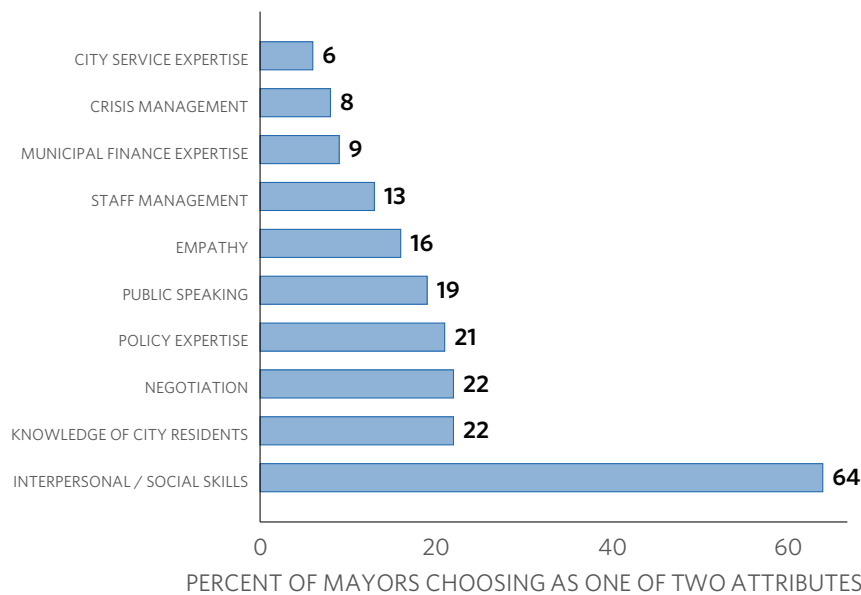
The most popular skill, by a very wide margin, was interpersonal/social skills, which two-thirds of mayors selected. The preponderance of mayors choosing this option demonstrates their belief in the importance of softer skills, a finding bolstered by the lack of consensus on any of the other options. Attributes ranging from policy expertise to empathy were cited with roughly equivalent frequency and about 40 percentage points less often than interpersonal skills. These findings are interesting given the frequency with which mayors come from business backgrounds that often emphasize and rely on such skills. They also speak to the role of mayor as a visible leader who is required to maintain a level of intimacy with constituents and other officials that other types of political executives cannot. As one Western mayor noted, *"It's all about communicating and relating."*

"As mayor, I have the capacity to move the needle on really important issues, and I think that as governor it's the same way."



Figure 2: Attributes/skills that make a mayor effective

ATTRIBUTES FOR EFFECTIVENESS AS MAYOR



Some may wonder whether there are different types of mayors such that some rely heavily on soft skills and others on more technical expertise. The responses did not back up this supposition. There were no clear skill clusters or pairs of traits that were mentioned together at abnormally high rates. For those who selected interpersonal skills, the most common second traits selected were policy expertise, knowledge of city residents, and negotiation.

Interestingly, mayoral responses did not appear to vary by demographic or city traits. One might expect that factors such as time in office or gender would be associated with different leadership styles and skills. The data contradict such hypotheses. Parsing responses by these traits produces results that look very similar to the overall results. Interpersonal/social skills always tops the list, and the relative frequencies of the other options are similar.

MAYORAL POLICY PRIORITIES

Policy implementation requires political leaders to make difficult tradeoffs about where to expend their energy and political capital. Like all chief executives, mayors wield influence by setting the agenda and utilizing their institutional powers. Mayors' responses to a variety of open- and closed-ended questions illustrate how they weigh these tradeoffs in determining what policies to prioritize.

Relative to two years ago, mayors are more focused on economic issues such as poverty, affordability and inequality, and less preoccupied with their cities' finances.

In both the 2014⁴ and 2016 surveys, each mayor reported his or her current top two policy priorities in response to an open-ended prompt. Responses were coded⁵ in a set of manageable categories explicated in **Table 3**. In the 2016 survey, the most commonly cited category (**Figure 3**) was quality of life, garnering about 25 percent of responses. Just over 20 percent mentioned economic development. A similar portion (20 percent) highlighted socioeconomic issues. Issues such as education and financial management were cited less often.

Two of these top priorities — economic development and quality of life, which includes salient topics like crime and policing — are unsurprising local government priorities squarely in a mayor's bailiwick. The third most commonly cited priority — socioeconomic issues (addressing inequality, affordable housing, etc.) — is perhaps more unexpected; while cities naturally face high demands to support lower income residents, redistributive policies traditionally fall to higher levels of government.

⁴ *Mayoral Policy Making: Results from the 21st Century Mayors Leadership Survey*; Glick, David; Levine Einstein, Katherine; and Lusk, Katharine. October 2014. Boston University Initiative on Cities. <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/9212>

⁵ Two researchers coded the list into categories independently and agreed on over 85% of characterizations.

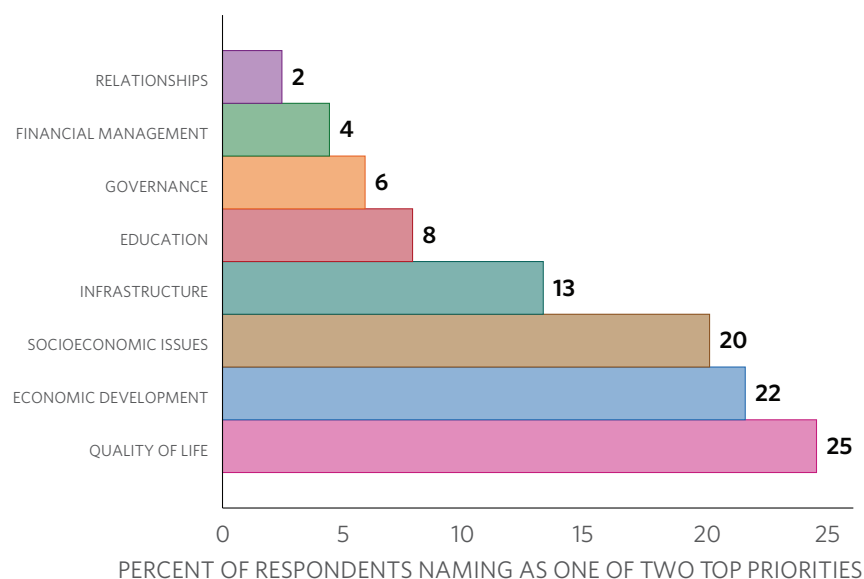


Table 3: Policy priorities coding/categorization

Category	Subcategory/examples
Financial Management	Budgeting Financing Federal/State Funding Generating Revenue
Economic Development	Attracting Development Managing Growth
Governance	Labor Leadership Technology
Socioeconomic Issues	Poverty Housing Affordability Racial and Income Disparities Inequality in Health Care Access
Infrastructure	Operations Transportation
Quality of Life	Crime Planning and Sustainability Healthy Living
Relationships	Local State Federal

Figure 3: Mayors' top two policy priorities

MAYORS' TOP TWO POLICY PRIORITIES



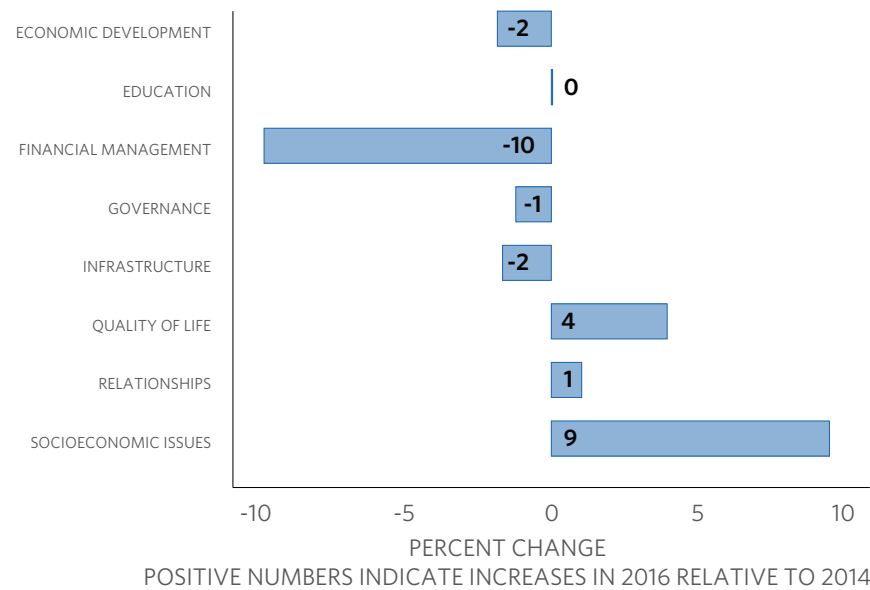
In addition to being cited at surprisingly high rates, these socioeconomic issues also comprised the only category that was mentioned at notably higher rates in 2016 relative to the 2014 survey (when mayors answered an identical question). The net changes (2014-2016) in the percent citing each type of policy priority are summarized in **Figure 4**.

For the most part, the lists of top policy priorities remained stable. All but two areas shifted by fewer than four percentage points. The socioeconomic category doubled from 10 percent in 2014 to 20 percent in 2016. Moreover, there is no clear pattern as to the cities that drove this change. While mayors of cities with higher poverty rates were more likely to name priorities in this category, the increase from the 2014 survey was about the same (roughly 10 percentage points) for high and low poverty cities. Financial management seems to have been a more prominent concern in 2014, when 15 percent of mayors cited it as one of their top two policy priorities, compared to only five percent in 2016.



Figure 4: Percent change in distribution of top two priorities, 2014-2016

PERCENT CHANGE FROM 2014

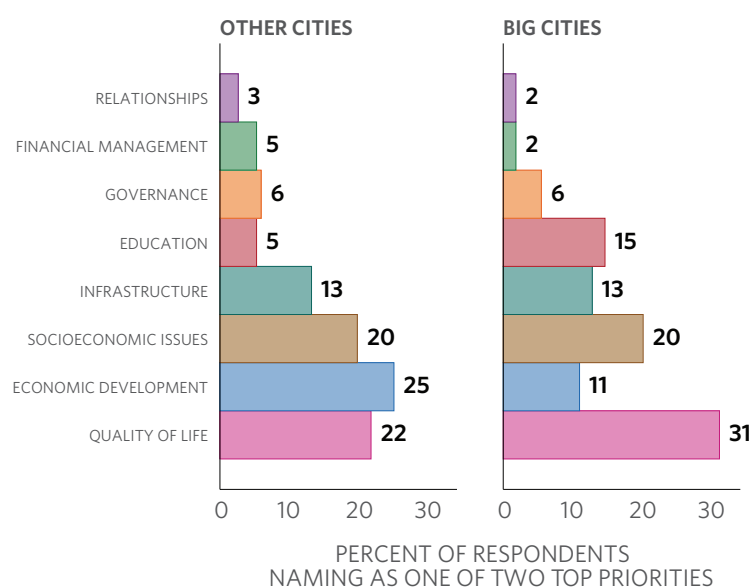


Large and small cities diverge in their priorities, as they have in years past. Smaller cities are more focused on economic development while larger cities are chiefly focused on quality of life concerns.

Interestingly, as in 2014, the 2016 survey reveals marked differences in the policy priorities of big city mayors (defined as cities with over 300,000 residents) and mayors of medium-sized and smaller cities. **Figure 5** illustrates these results. Perhaps reflecting their cities’ limited economic power, mayors of smaller cities rated economic development as their top priority (over 25 percent). In contrast, only 11 percent of big city mayors selected it. Moreover, 31 percent of big city mayors named quality of life issues, about 10 percentage points more so than mayors of small or medium-sized cities. Socioeconomic issues were an area of convergence, cited by 20 percent of mayors in cities big and small as one of their top two policy priorities.

Figure 5: Top two policy priorities by city size

TOP TWO PRIORITIES: BY CITY SIZE



Mayoral policy priorities also differ by partisan identification, with socioeconomic issues of chief concern to Democrats while Republicans are more focused on policies related to quality of life.

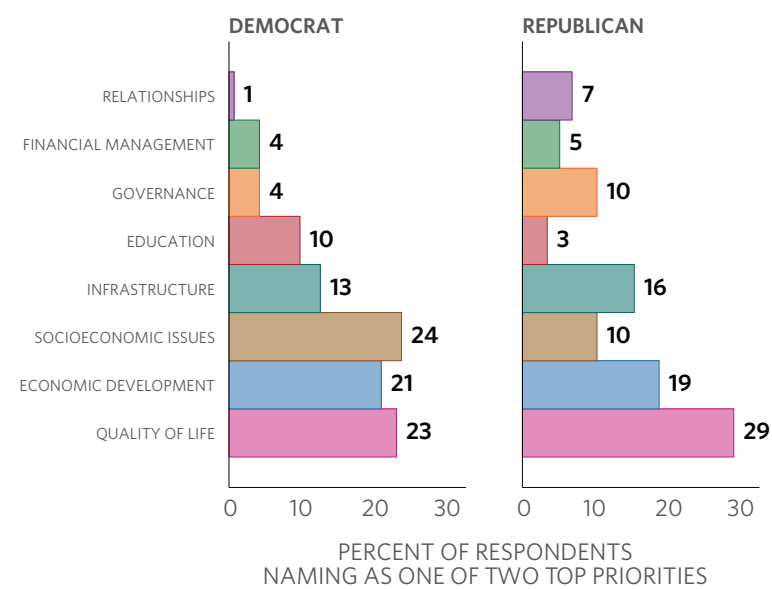
Almost 25 percent of Democrats listed socioeconomic issues as one of their top two policy priorities, compared with only 10 percent of Republicans (**Figure 6**). Republican mayors, in contrast, place a slightly higher emphasis on quality of life concerns: Almost 30 percent of Republican mayors selected them as one of their top two policy priorities, while just over 20 percent of Democrats did the same. Economic development is similarly prominent on both lists, with roughly 20 percent of Democratic and Republican mayors naming it among their chief priorities.

While partisanship and city size are associated with notable differences in priorities, mayors of wealthy cities (identified as being in the top third of the national distribution of property values) and less wealthy ones (bottom third) provided relatively similar lists. Both sets of mayors were most likely to select quality of life concerns as one of two top priorities. Mayors of poorer cities were more inclined to choose economic development by only five percentage points. More striking, perhaps, is the similarity on socioeconomic issues: About 20 percent of both sets of mayors cited them as top concerns.



Figure 6: Top two priorities by party identification

TOP TWO PRIORITIES: BY PARTY IDENTIFICATION



Mayors’ policy goals are constrained in important ways by higher levels of government.

Mayors conveyed priorities from two additional angles that speak to ways that constraints, such as the public or other levels of government, affect policy. Specifically, in response to an open-ended question, mayors noted one policy area in which they have recently gone it alone without support from other levels of government (Figure 7) and one policy or action they would pursue if they did not have to worry about electoral constraints (Figure 8).

Mayors work on a wide variety of issues. Some of these issues are core local government matters, while others may be more unexpected. At times, mayors work hand in hand with other levels of government, but they are unafraid to “go it alone.” When asked to describe a time when they had gone it alone on a policy or program, mayors cited a wide variety of topic areas. The lack of consensus indicates that mayors are taking on a range of issues at the local level. Indeed, the most commonly cited area, infrastructure, was only noted by 14 percent of mayors. Responses that fell within infrastructure included a mix of projects ranging from so-called “complete streets” to transit development to municipal buildings. Other common response categories include youth summer jobs programs, police and public safety reform, economic development, and the environment. While recent efforts to increase the minimum wage and expand family leave have received national attention, only five percent of mayors mentioned either issue, highlighting the degree to which mayors are focusing on a broad array of challenges.

Perhaps the most notable story about going it alone is the range of issues mayors mentioned. Indeed, activities that fell into the “other” category made up the plurality of responses, and they are not included in Figure 7 below. Policies falling into this “other” category included everything from needle exchanges to immigration programs to reading initiatives.

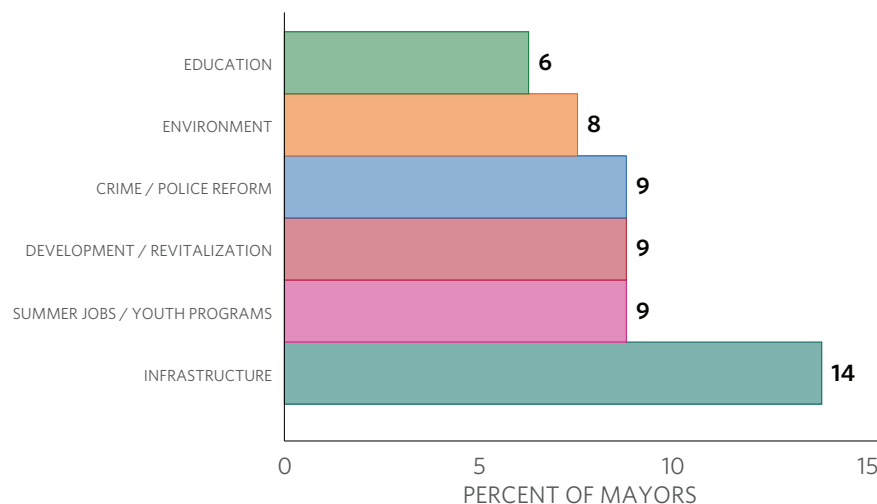
However, partnership with other layers of government is customary and even essential for mayors. The variety of programs in this list suggests that mayors are generally not tackling major initiatives without external collaboration or support. As one Western mayor put it, *"I don't know if there's anything I've done that's actually completely alone."* A Midwestern mayor similarly noted: *"Do you really go anything alone?... Revitalization, obviously, we work with HUD sometimes. We work with the state sometimes. Budget reform is impacted by various mandates and changing laws, and things of that nature."* On the other hand, some mayors embraced the premise of the question. As one said, *"I just want to tell you that we receive almost no support from any other level of government on anything we've done. In fact, we've gotten active opposition with a couple of arenas."*

Rather than clustering around, for example, major infrastructure investments, mayors are selecting a plethora of smaller initiatives. While much of the contemporary media rhetoric surrounding local governments suggests that cities are forced to tackle significant policy programs as a consequence of federal and state intransigence, a combination of fiscal and regulatory constraints may limit independent mayoral (and city) activism to more modest policy agendas.

"Do you really go anything alone? [On] revitalization, obviously, we work with HUD sometimes. We work with the state sometimes. Budget reform is impacted by various mandates and changing laws, and things of that nature."

Figure 7: Policy areas in which mayors have "gone it alone" without support from higher levels of government

COMMONLY CITED POLICY AREAS WHERE MAYORS HAVE GONE IT ALONE



Excludes options named more than once but less than 5% of the time:
Drug Programs, Homelessness, Revenue Diversification, Minimum Wage and Family Leave, Non Discrimination, and Other



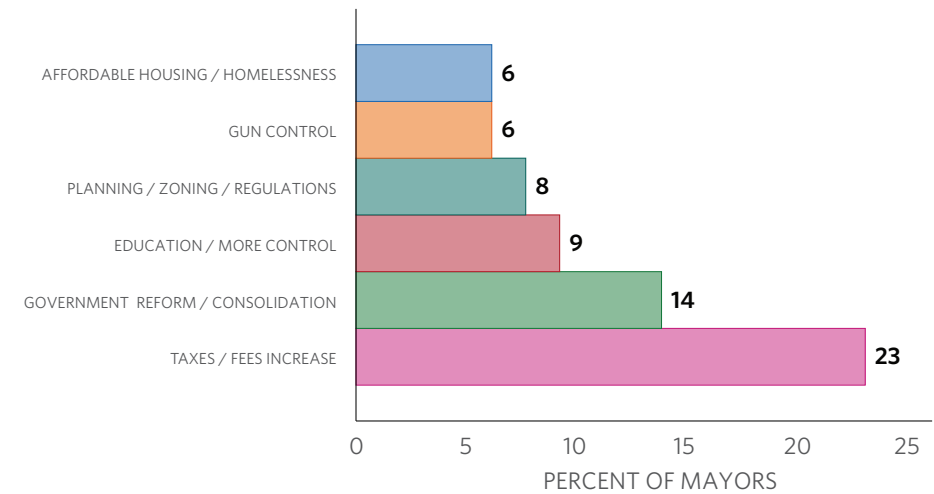
If reelection were no concern, mayors say they would tackle politically unsavory tasks like raising taxes and introducing new fees.

Mayors were asked to reveal a policy they would pursue or repeal if they did not have to worry about reelection. When contemplating this unconstrained policy hypothetical, nearly a quarter of mayors mentioned something related to increasing taxes or fees, representing the most common category. These responses ranged from general property tax increases to specific fees levied with an associated spending priority. The next most common response involved reorganizing the allocation of power. Responses in these categories included things such as changing to a strong mayor system or consolidating the city and county governments. Other common responses fell into categories such as education (often a desire for more control), planning/zoning, and enhanced gun control. Interestingly, West Coast mayors in particular worried not only about reelection concerns, but also the potential for voters to overturn policy initiatives via referenda. As one Western mayor put it: *“The problem in the West and [other] places that have it is not so much reelection pressure but the existence of the [ballot] initiative and referendum. It would be the right thing for [my city] to adopt a local sales tax. But those who would be financially disadvantaged would refer me to the voters, and they would fund a giant campaign to kill it.”*

“The problem in the West and [other] places that have it is not so much reelection pressure but the existence of the [ballot] initiative and referendum. It would be the right thing for [my city] to adopt a local sales tax. But those who would be financially disadvantaged would refer me to the voters, and they would fund a giant campaign to kill it.”

Figure 8: Actions mayors would pursue if they did not have to worry about elections

COMMONLY CITED POLICY AREAS WHERE MAYORS WOULD DO MORE IF NOT CONSTRAINED BY ELECTORAL CONCERNS



Excludes options named more than once but less than 5% of the time:
Pension reform, Marijuana legalization, Minimum Wage, Environment, and Other

PEOPLE PRIORITIES

In addition to considering important policy tradeoffs, mayors also considered the people they believe need more help or attention from government. As with policy priorities, mayors answered an open-ended question: Which two constituencies (however you define them) do you think your city government most needs to do more to help? The responses, coded into manageable categories, are displayed in **Figure 9**.

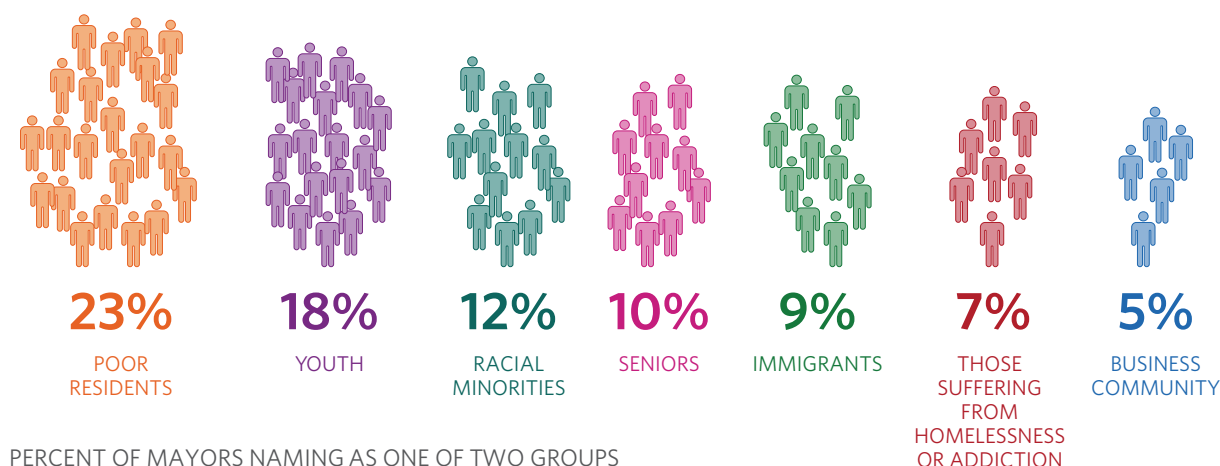
Mayors feel they need to do more to support a wide range of under-served constituencies, with the poor and youth among the most frequently cited.

Although there was no single group for whom a large proportion of mayors were concerned, nearly a quarter cited poor residents and 18 percent felt they needed to do more to support youth. Interestingly, mayors were relatively unlikely to describe constituencies here by racial/ethnic background. Blacks were the most likely racial/ethnic group to be named, garnering just 10 percent of responses. Combined with the two percent of responses citing Latinos, only 12 percent of mayors mentioned groups likely to be racial minorities.

The range of responses mayors provided was striking. Groups ranging from nonprofits to the disabled to the business community featured in multiple mayors' responses. While some mayors spoke of groups familiar to census categories or common political and policy discourse, others thought about constituencies in non-demographic terms. In fact, most of the constituencies mayors mentioned were connected by traits other than race or ethnicity. This finding may speak to how mayors think about groups and communities in ways that defy census traits and categorizations.

Figure 9: Top two "constituencies" city government needs to do more to help

TWO GROUPS LOCAL GOVERNMENT MOST NEEDS TO DO MORE TO HELP



Excludes options named more than once but less than 5% of the time:

Those affected by neighborhood change, Politically marginalized, Middle class, Those with low transit access, The disabled, Non profit groups, Ex felons



City demographics affect the kinds of constituencies mayors believe need the most help. In poor cities (bottom third of the housing value distribution), for example, mayors were more likely to prioritize the needs of poor residents. In cities with higher black populations, mayors were more likely to name blacks as a constituency in need of help compared to mayors of cities with lower black populations.

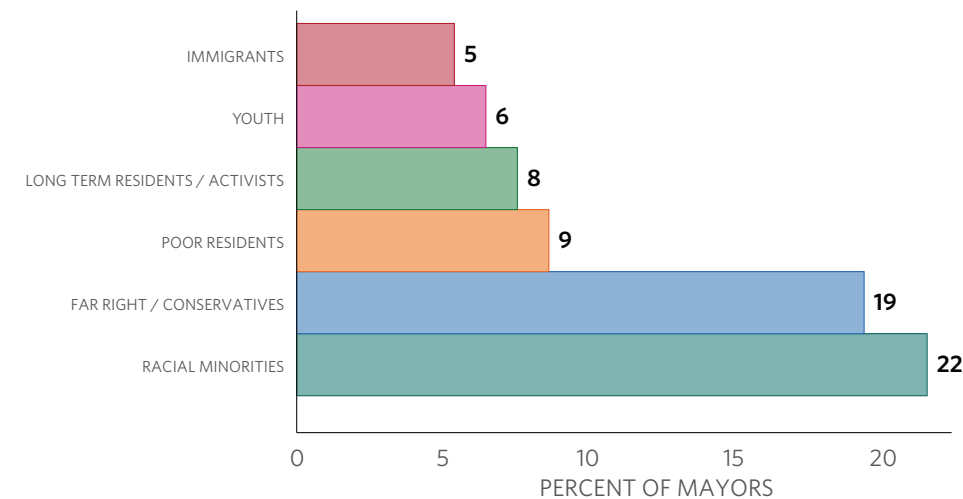
Mayors feel that extreme political rightists, those living in poverty, and minority groups are least likely to trust local government.

In addition to naming groups that city government should do more to help, mayors also named one group that has the least trust in local government. Their responses, coded into categories, are summarized in **Figure 10**. The most commonly cited group, racial minorities, was named by 22 percent of respondents. This category includes those responses citing blacks, African Americans, Latinos, or minorities in general. The second most common response was “far right/conservatives” which includes responses such as “right wing ideologues,” “white conservatives” and, as one mayor put it, “small business owners fueled by talk radio.”

Other groups mayors noted ranged from the business community to long-term residents threatened by changes to their city. This mix of groups and the range in types of groups (e.g. ideological, racial, economic) further speak to the variety of ways mayors think about their residents and the degree to which this thinking is contextual. More generally, the responses to this question included a mix of national and local groups and influences. Some mayors noted the effect of national issues around race and policing and how incidents elsewhere can reverberate locally and erode trust. Others focused more on groups that lack trust in local government for strictly local reasons. For example, one mayor explained: “It’s more neighborhood groups who are resistant to change and who fought us on our light rail project. They’re still doing that – fighting us on any changes in building heights.”

Figure 10: Perceptions of constituencies with the least trust in local government

CONSTITUENCIES MAYORS NAMED AS HAVING THE LEAST TRUST IN GOVERNMENT



Excludes options named more than once but less than 5% of the time:
General government skeptics, Low info / uninformed residents, Extreme leftists, Seniors, Business community

Sadly, mayors felt they could do relatively little to redress this lack of trust in government. As one Western mayor put it when discussing left-leaning activists who lacked trust in his city's government: *"I can make sure they get their public hearings and they get their access to a committee that's making recommendations to the city council, stuff like that. That's not going to help much. They're a very vehement crowd."* Another Western mayor lamented the challenges that low levels of information created in improving trust in government: *"They don't have much trust in city government because they don't know what they're talking about... We struggle with it. How do we reach these people and let them know what the issues are, because, again, we don't have the daily newspaper that most people read anymore? Social media does a weak — very thin — job of getting information out."*

In spite of the proliferation of social media tools and other technologies, mayors still value face time, relying on traditional mechanisms to stay connected to their constituents.

Mayors provided insights into how they derive their people and policy priorities by indicating how they best hear from and understand constituents. Echoing the above quotation about the limits of social media, most mayors rely on face-to-face interactions more than technological tools to learn about the needs of their constituents. When asked to select the two items from a list of potential avenues of information, mayors prioritized in-person connections. They cited public events most frequently, followed by informal community interactions and neighborhood meetings (included below in **Figure 11** along with responses).

Taken in concert, these results suggest that mayors find in-person interactions to be more useful sources of constituent information than technological options like social media, email, or mobile apps. As one Western mayor put it, *"[The] most important [thing] is to get out, just working with people. All this other stuff, you can read all that, but when you actually get out and talk to groups, I think that is the most important."* Another said, *"Circulation — I mean, neighborhood meetings and informal community interactions. I just try to stay in circulation all the time."* This insight is particularly relevant given mayors' emphasis on the value of interpersonal and social skills, as discussed in a previous section of this report.

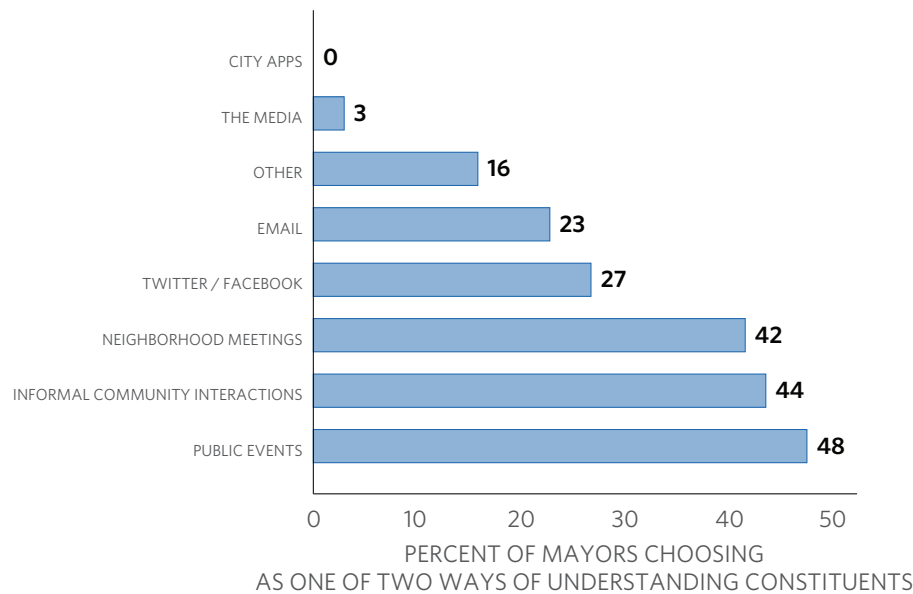
Some mayors also indicated that they use a variety of channels in order to get certain types of information and reach different constituencies. As one said, *"Neighborhood meetings are a good way to understand some constituents, but there's a cohort of people who come to neighborhood meetings. There are many, many more people who don't."* Notably, some mayors said that they often receive long, thoughtful, detailed emails, while casual in-person engagements out in the community can introduce more top-of-mind constituent considerations. *"I'd say the informal community interactions [are most important for staying connected to my constituents]. Walking, when I go to Costco, or walking down the street, people talk to me. Or, when people don't know I'm around, I listen to what they have to say."*

"They don't have much trust in city government because they don't know what they're talking about... We struggle with it. How do we reach these people and let them know what the issues are, because, again, we don't have the daily newspaper that most people read anymore? Social media does a weak — very thin — job of getting information out."



Figure 11: Top two ways mayors best “hear from and/or understand” their constituents

WAYS OF HEARING FROM CONSTITUENTS



“I’d say the informal community interactions [are most important for staying connected to my constituents]. Walking, when I go to Costco, or walking down the street, people talk to me. Or, when people don’t know I’m around, I listen to what they have to say.”

Given differences in city types, personal traits, and leadership styles, one might expect notable variation in the ways that mayors hear from their constituents. Their responses reveal no such differences and instead show that mayors of different types vary little in the ways they hear from their constituents. Men and women provided relatively similar lists. Men were somewhat more likely to name each of the three in-person options (public meetings, informal community interactions, and neighborhood meetings) while women were about 10 percentage points more likely to name social media, but overall the differences were small.

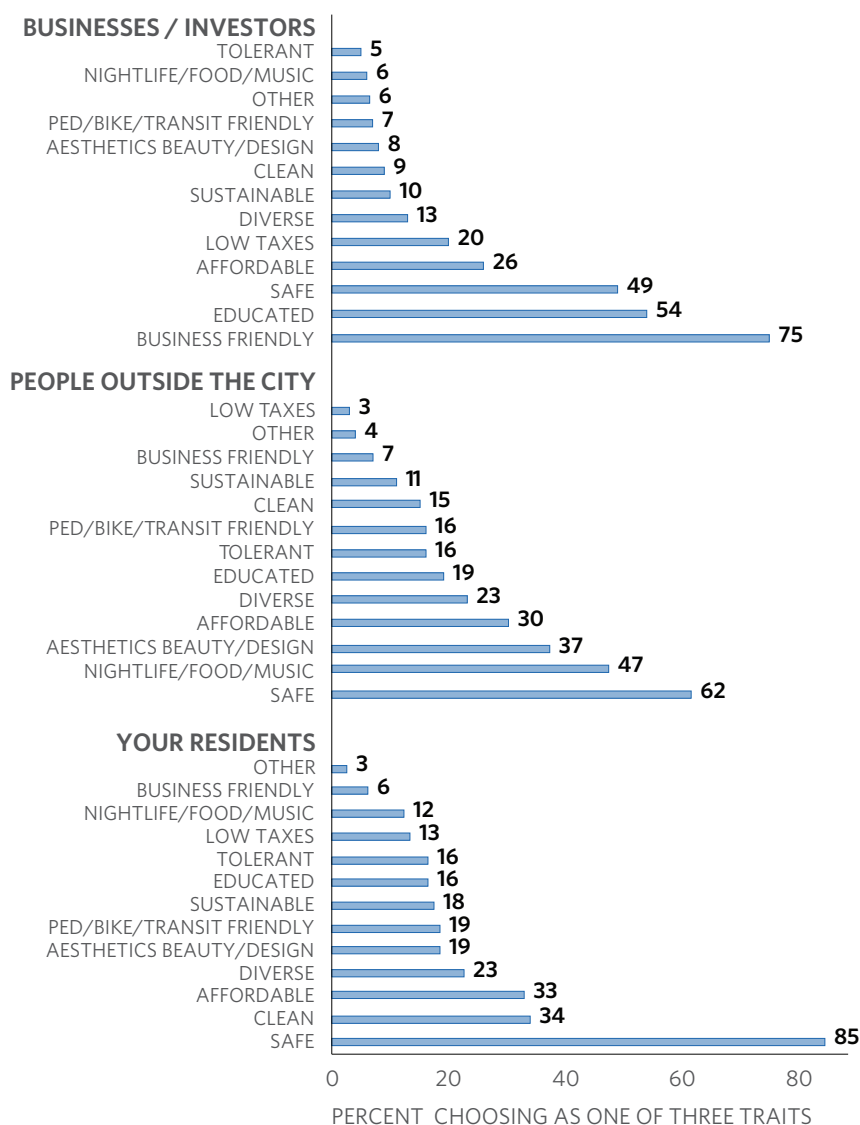
Similarly, mayors who have been in office longer than the sample average provided responses much like those their less experienced counterparts offered. This suggests that ways of connecting do not evolve with time in office and that there is not a wave of new mayors who are more reliant on new technologies in this area. The most notable difference was that longer serving mayors were more likely to choose neighborhood meetings while newer mayors were more likely to choose informal interactions in the community. Finally, the responses do not vary significantly by city size.

BUILDING A CITY'S IMAGE: MAYORAL VIEWS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Mayors not only serve as policy leaders, but they also serve as advocates and ambassadors for their cities. How they want others to perceive their cities is indicative of both their priorities and their perceptions of other people's priorities.

Participating mayors assessed the top three areas/attributes where they would like their city to be perceived as above average. They were asked to rank these attributes in the context of three distinct audiences: businesses/investors, people outside the city, and residents. Mayors indicated the traits they wanted their cities to be known for independent of whether the city was actually excelling in those areas. The full list of attributes and the mayors' responses (organized by the three groups) are summarized in **Figure 12**. These same data are reported by trait to allow for comparisons across two of the groups in **Figure 13**.

Figure 12: Top attributes mayors want attributed to their city by three different groups





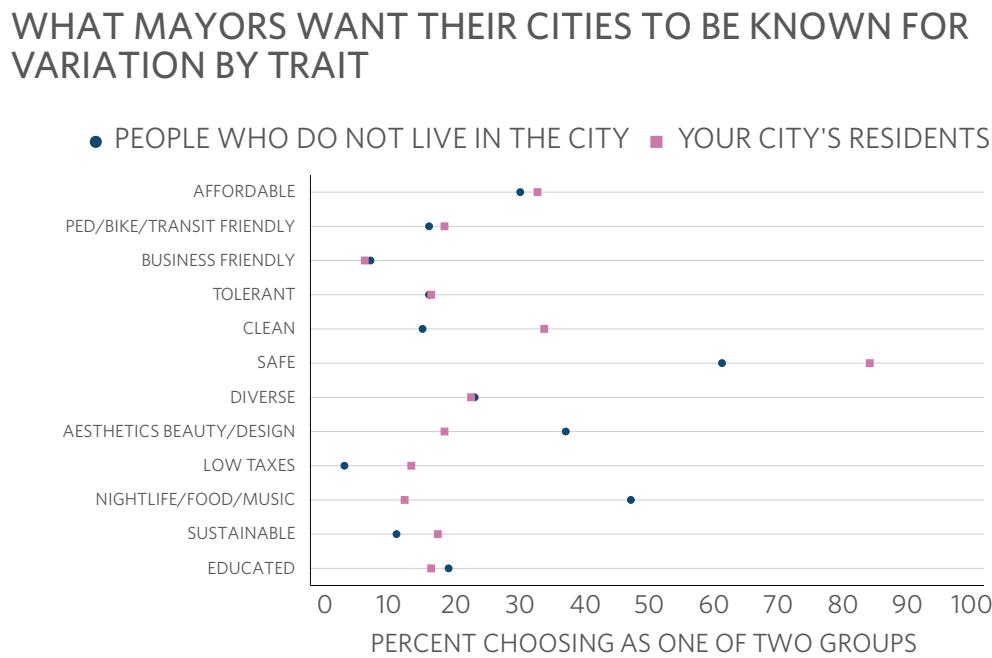
Being perceived as a safe city is paramount, but otherwise mayors want to project different images and attributes to different groups.

Safety appears to be a primary consideration for mayors. For all three groups, mayors selected safe as one of their top three most frequent responses. Over 80 percent of mayors selected safe as a top three attribute for residents, and 60 percent did the same for people outside the city. Safety was the only trait to appear in the top three for each of the three different groups. In fact, no other trait appeared in the top three more than once. As one Western mayor succinctly put it, *“If you’re not safe—nothing else matters.”*

There are also sharp differences in how mayors want each of the three groups to perceive their cities. Recruiting and retaining businesses is a critical part of a mayor’s job and is more nuanced than simply having low taxes. In fact, only 20 percent of mayors cited low taxes as one of the three key traits they thought would most appeal to business interests, compared to 75 percent who selected business friendly and 54 percent who selected educated. Unsurprisingly, mayors largely did not believe that being seen as business friendly or educated was as important for their residents or people outside the city.

We can infer that, at times, mayors will highlight different policy agendas and tailor their messages to the needs of a given audience, whether they are addressing businesses and investors, residents, or outside visitors. Still, safety remains paramount. As Figure 13 shows, “safe” was the most common attribute for both residents and outside visitors, though mayors emphasized it more when thinking about their actual residents. Generally, when thinking about different audiences, mayors implicitly believe that their residents and outsiders often value essentially the same things. There were some notable differences: mayors were more likely to want to be known for safety and cleanliness when considering a resident audience and nightlife and beauty for those outside city.

Figure 13: Top attributes mayors want associated with their city by audience type



The most desired traits vary somewhat with city size. For example, while mayors of smaller and larger cities provided relatively similar answers, smaller city mayors were more likely to emphasize safety for all three audiences. In contrast, big city mayors were more likely to say they wanted their cities to be known for things such as tolerance and bike/transit friendliness. Perhaps more surprisingly, small and large cities were equally likely to name aesthetics/design and nightlife/food/music.

While mayors do not view diversity as a central focus in promoting their city, it is still perceived as an asset for a variety of reasons.

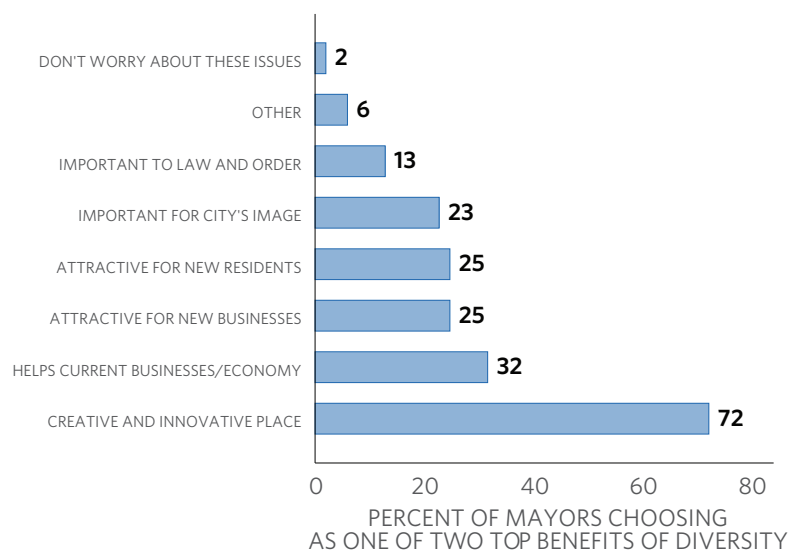
While diversity did not appear as one of the top options for any of the audiences considered, mayors regularly cited it as an important trait for their cities, appearing as one of the six most common responses across all three audiences.

Mayors were largely unified in the belief that the primary benefit of diversity is to make the city a creative and innovative place. More than two-thirds of mayors selected this option from a list when asked to pick their top two benefits of diversity for the city. The full set of answers is depicted in **Figure 14**.

The second and third most mentioned benefits of diversity both focused on business rationales. One-third of mayors underscored diversity's capacity to help current businesses and more than a quarter emphasized diversity's ability to attract new businesses. The mayor of a mid-sized city illustrated this point: *"I think [diversity] really helps business, the economy. We see it as part of our economic development aesthetic."*

Figure 14: Top benefits of diversity to the city

BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY





These results differ in important ways when the sample is cut by the cities’ percentage of minority residents and the party affiliation of the mayor. Starting with racial demographics **(Figure 15)**, mayors governing cities in the top third of the minority population distribution were just as likely as their counterparts in the bottom third to highlight diversity as making their cities creative and innovative places. Mayors of whiter cities, however, were about 10 percentage points more likely to emphasize diversity’s ability to attract new residents and new businesses when compared to mayors governing more diverse communities. In contrast, mayors of more diverse cities underscored diversity’s benefits for the city’s current businesses/economy and the city’s image.

Mayors’ views on the benefits of diversity varied considerably by political affiliation. Democratic mayors were about 15 percentage points more likely **(Figure 16)** to stress that diversity would help their current businesses/economy, while Republican mayors were 20 percentage points more likely to mention diversity’s capacity to attract new businesses. Democratic mayors were 10 percentage points more likely to cite diversity’s ability to make the city a more creative and innovative place and almost 15 percentage points more likely to mention diversity’s capacity to attract new residents. Republican mayors, on the other hand, were almost 15 percentage points more likely describe diversity as important for their city’s image. It is important to note that more racially diverse cities also tend to be more Democratic.

Figure 15: Benefits of diversity by city minority population

BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY BY MINORITY POPULATION TERCILE

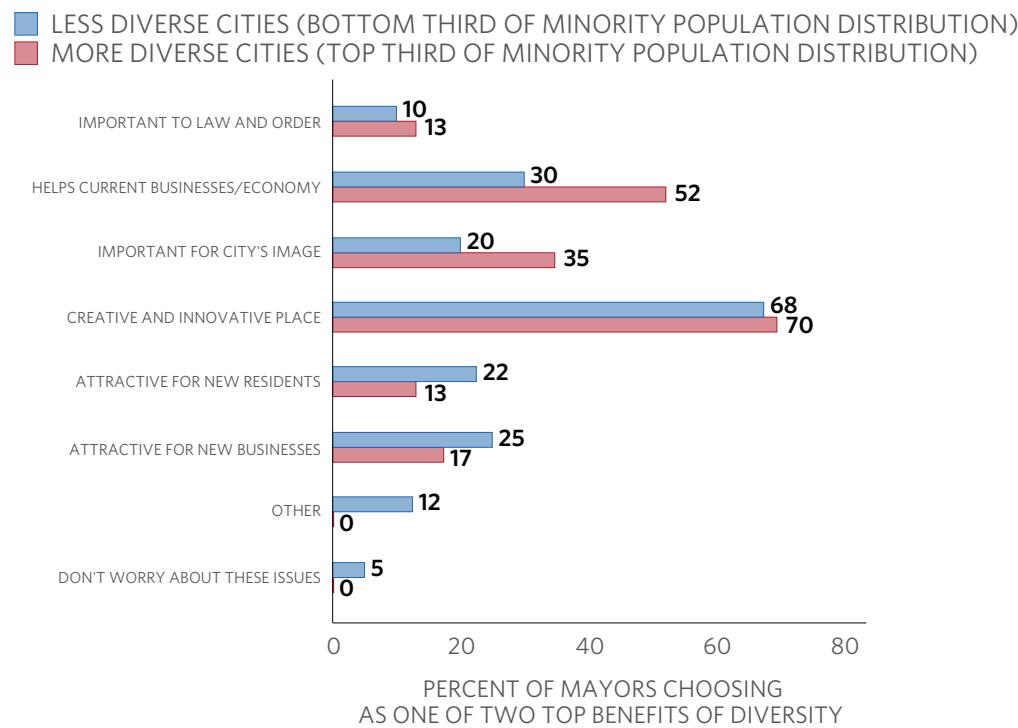
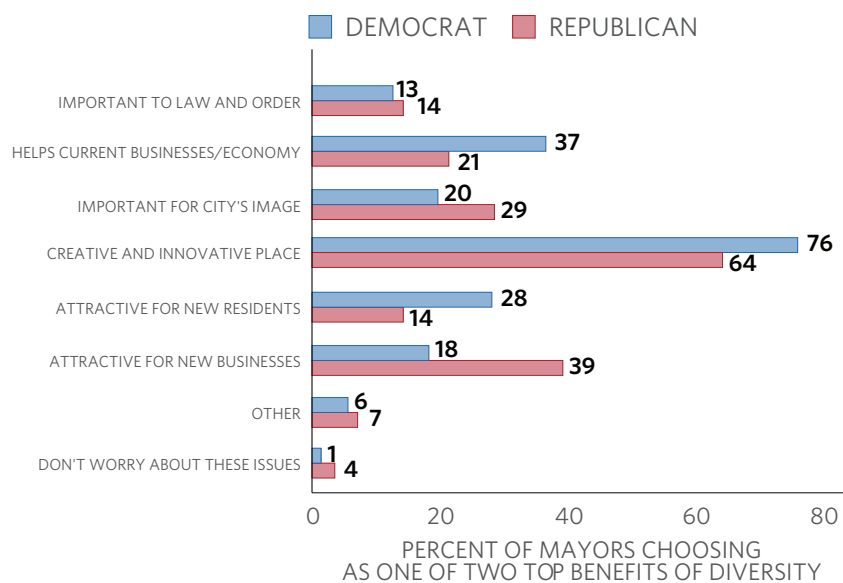


Figure 16: Benefits of diversity by party identification (ID)

BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY BY PARTY ID





PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY IN URBAN AMERICA

Mayors present a remarkably consistent view in their concern and focus on their poorer residents. Whether in response to questions related to jobs and economic opportunity or excluded constituencies, mayors made it clear that the needs of those living in poverty are pressing concerns.

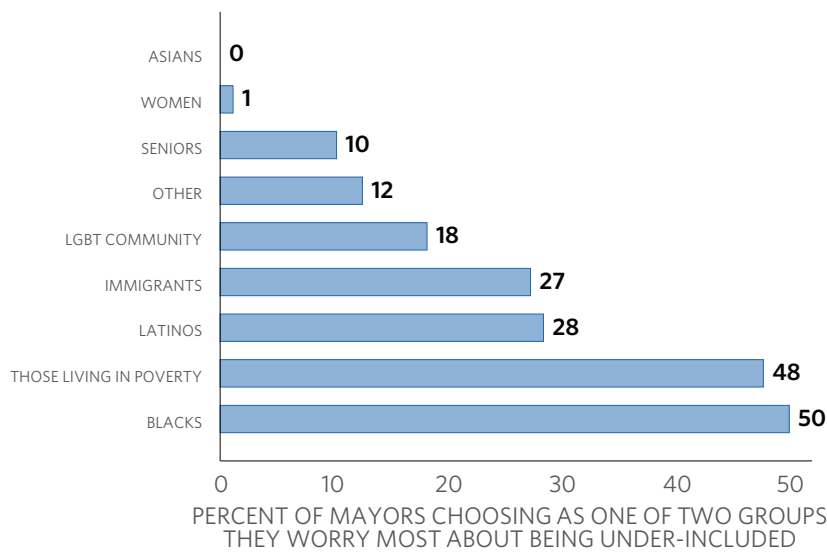
Racial and Economic Inclusion

A significant majority of mayors are concerned with issues of inclusivity in their communities, particularly in relation to black residents and those living in poverty.

Sixty percent of mayors said they worry a lot about inclusivity issues in their cities. These responses did not vary by a city’s minority population, with the exception of a couple of mayors of low-minority cities who did not worry about inclusivity at all. Mayors also most often worried about blacks and those living in poverty being excluded. Almost half of the mayors mentioned each of these groups when asked to name the two they worry most about **(Figure 17)**. More than one-quarter highlighted Latinos and immigrants, while one-fifth selected gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender residents. Mayors were not worried about Asians (zero percent), women (one percent), and seniors (10 percent), even though several mayors noted that government should do more to help the elderly. These differences suggest that mayors differentiate social inclusion from government support, while still placing some groups (e.g., black residents and the poor) on both lists.

Figure 17: Groups mayors worry about being “under-included” in their city

WHO IS UNDER-INCLUDED?

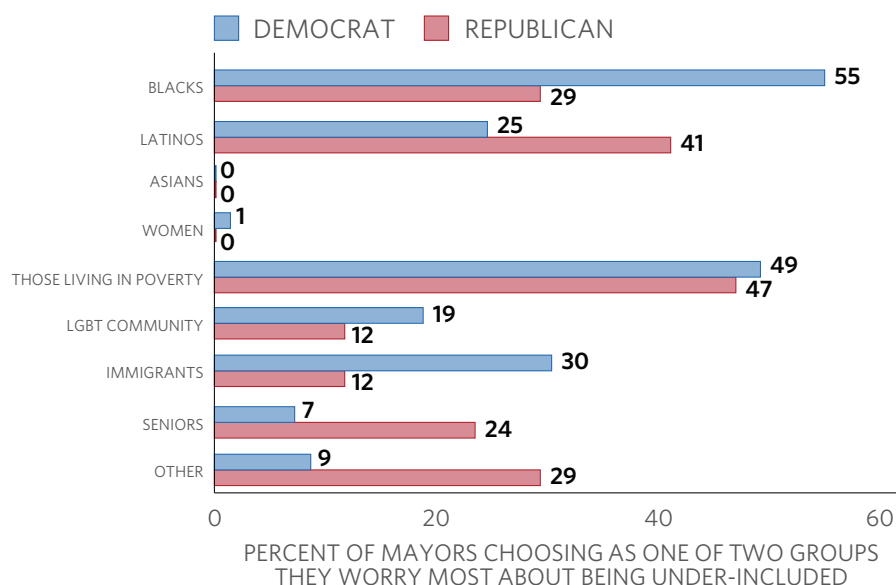


While mayors across party lines worry about poorer residents being excluded, Democrats' and Republicans' responses otherwise vary considerably.

Democrats (**Figure 18**) worry most about blacks (55 percent compared to 29 percent for Republicans) and immigrants (30 percent compared to 12 percent). Republicans are significantly more concerned about the exclusion of Latinos (41 percent compared to 25 percent for Democrats) and seniors (24 percent to seven percent). Democrats and Republicans are equally concerned about the poor, with nearly half of mayors from both parties saying they worry about those living in poverty. Despite this shared concern, other views about poverty and economic challenges vary by party identification.

Figure 18: Groups mayors worry about being under-included. Responses by party

WHO IS UNDER-INCLUDED? BY PARTY



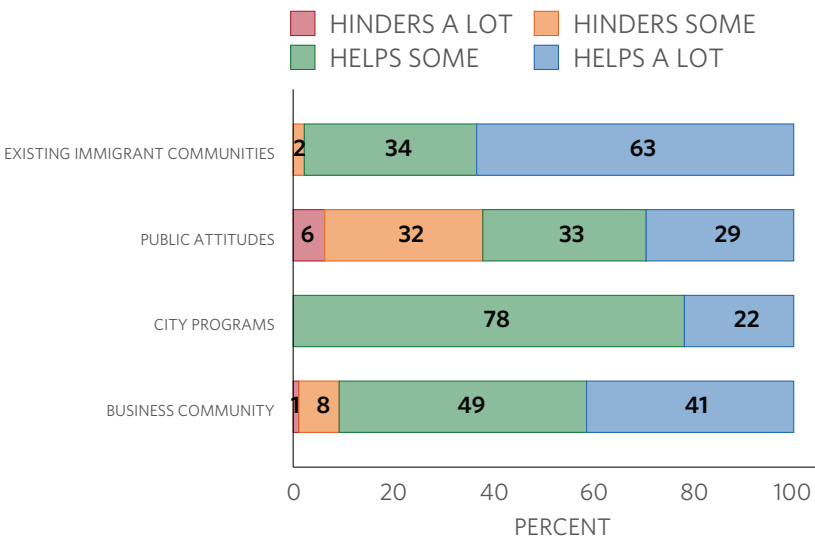
Mayors simultaneously worry about immigrants being under-included and express confidence that important attributes of their cities have a positive impact on immigrant incorporation.

A focus on the incorporation of immigrants (**Figure 19**) — named by 27 percent of mayors as under-included — reveals insights into the factors that affect inclusion and incorporation. Mayors indicated the degree to which four variables help or hinder the incorporation of new immigrants in their city. Mayors said that both existing immigrant communities and the business community were generally helpful, indicating a confidence in their cities' ability to incorporate new immigrants. Sixty-three percent of mayors said that existing immigrant communities help a lot, and 41 percent of mayors believed the same of the local business community. Interestingly, a sizable proportion of mayors worried that local public attitudes might, in some cases, hinder the incorporation of residents; nearly 40 percent of mayors believed that these attitudes hindered some or a lot. Several mayors particularly lamented the impact of the 2016 presidential election on exacerbating these anti-immigrant public attitudes. One Southern mayor noted: *"There's a lot of negativity out there, particularly [with] Trump... For people who buy into [anti-immigrant sentiment], they've got a national person feeding into their fears."*



Figure 19: Views on city attributes that help and/or hinder incorporating new immigrants

HELPING OR HINDERING INCORPORATION OF IMMIGRANTS



In many cases, mayors offer more general suggestions of public recognition — rather than policies or programmatic interventions — as the “single best thing” they can do for under-represented groups in their cities.

In addition to having relatively consistent views about which groups are at risk of being under-included and which are not, mayors across city types have consistent views on interventions that can address some of the specific challenges these groups face.

In response to an open-ended prompt that was coded into broad categories, 27 percent of mayors said that the “single best thing” they can do for blacks is to emphasize inclusion and take steps to ensure public acknowledgement of their presence as valued community members. Mayors’ language about these public engagement efforts was often non-specific. One Midwest mayor stated that his answer was the same for blacks, Latinos, and immigrants: “Power, direct access to power... Being able to get them directly to the people that are in the governing positions.” Another 17 percent of mayors focused on education, and 16 percent cited improving police relations. No other single best thing was mentioned more than seven percent of the time.

Capturing the mix of policy and social leadership responses to this question, one mayor said: “I think the single most important thing I can do as the mayor would be a convener, a convener for these really hard conversations that we need to be having about how our police interact with our minority communities, how our minority communities are impacted by education and housing and transportation and poverty.”

Inclusion and public recognition was also the most commonly cited single best thing that mayors said they can do for Latinos (31 percent) followed by improving education (16 percent). A full 44 percent of mayors said that public recognition and acknowledgment was the best thing they could do for immigrants. As with blacks, the language regarding these efforts was fairly broad. One Southern mayor described her single best thing for Latinos and immigrants in the following way: “It’s really continuing

to speak and frame all the issues in our community in a welcoming way.” Another mayor said, “It’s a lot of those basic things, just making sure that we’re seen as being warm and welcoming.” No other policy or action registered above 10 percent.

Some specific policy or programmatic ideas revolved around language access for municipal services. Another mayor focused on the specific employment challenges skilled and unskilled immigrants may face: “A lot of time, with immigrants, what happens is they just come in, and they get stuck doing whatever job they get... They might not have the licensing to do [what they used to do] in this country, but at least you can put them in an environment where they’re around something that they have professional expertise in and they have a chance for economic advancement.”

For mayors, there is no leading city they look to that is effectively confronting matters of race and inclusion.

When asked to name a leading city on race relations, many mayors struggled to produce an answer. Some said things like, “It’s easy to think of bad examples,” and others simply named their own cities (approximately 20 cities were named once). Dallas, mentioned by seven mayors, was the most commonly cited city.⁶ Many of the interviews occurred in the weeks immediately following the murder of five Dallas police officers and the city’s response to the tragedy. Atlanta was named six times and Boston, New York, and New Orleans were named four times each.

Call for Poverty Alleviation

For all of the national rhetoric related to income inequality, poverty is foremost on the mind of America’s urban leaders.

When asked whether they worried most about poverty, income inequality, the shrinking middle class, or none of the above, a plurality of mayors (over 40 percent) selected poverty (**Figure 20**). These responses vary, however, by city demographic traits. Mayors of wealthy cities, for example, worry relatively more (by over 10 percentage points) about income inequality, while mayors of less affluent cities were about 20 percentage points more likely to select poverty as their chief concern (**Figure 21**).

“I think the single most important thing I can do as the mayor would be a convener, a convener for these really hard conversations that we need to be having about how our police interact with our minority communities, how our minority communities are impacted by education and housing and transportation and poverty.”

⁶ For this and the other questions about leading cities, when mayors mentioned more than one city, the authors only counted the first city mentioned for the official tallies.



Figure 20: Mayors' top economic concern

MAYORS' TOP ECONOMIC CONCERN

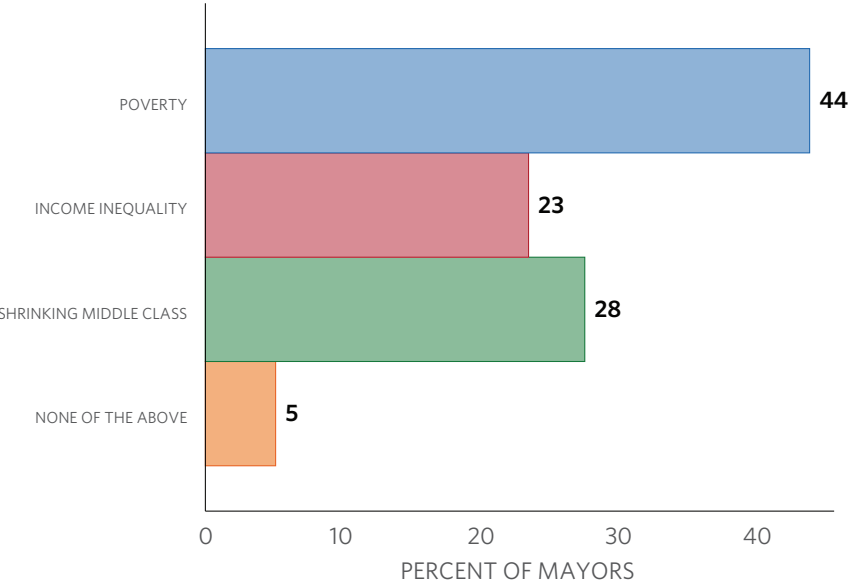
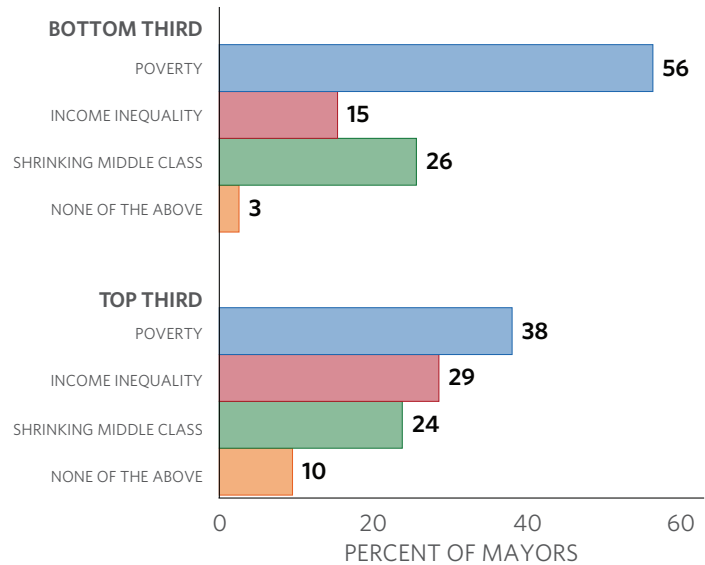


Figure 21: Mayors' top economic concerns by housing price tercile

MAYORS TOP ECONOMIC CONCERNS BY HOUSING PRICE TERCILE

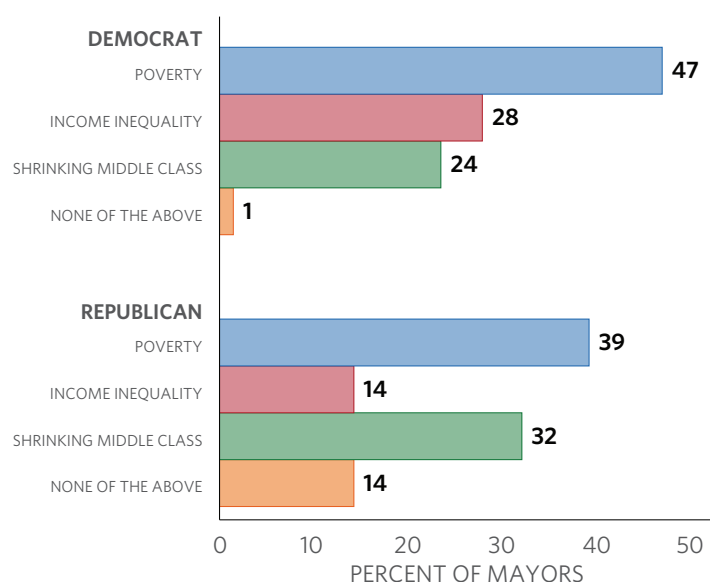


Despite sharing a concern about poverty, Republican and Democratic mayors are largely divided in their views of top economic concerns.

Republican and Democratic mayors also exhibited important differences (**Figure 22**): Democratic mayors were about 10 percentage points more likely to highlight poverty and about 15 percentage points more likely to mention income inequality. Republicans, on the other hand, selected none of the above more often than Democrats by a margin of just under 15 percentage points. There are some points of commonality: although Democrats were significantly more likely to highlight poverty, it did prove to be the most popular category for members of both political parties.

Figure 22: Mayors' top economic concerns by party

MAYORS TOP ECONOMIC CONCERNS BY PARTY ID

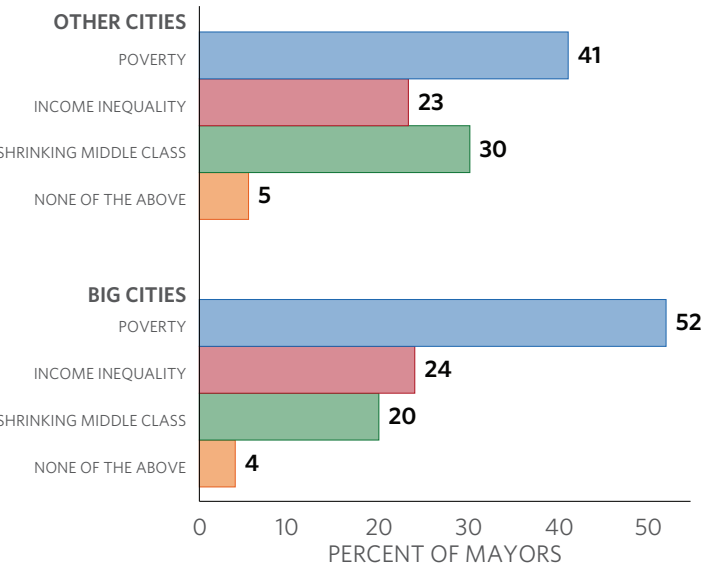


Finally, mayors of big cities were 10 percentage points more likely to select poverty and 10 percentage points less likely to select the shrinking middle class (**Figure 23**). Mayors selected income inequality at equal rates irrespective of city size.



Figure 23: Mayors' top economic concerns by city size

MAYORS TOP ECONOMIC CONCERNS BY CITY SIZE



Twenty percent of mayors believed that the single best thing they could do for those in poverty was to address housing concerns, while another 20 percent highlighted education. Job/skills training followed closely with 14 percent of responses, and improved access to city services (10 percent) rounded out the top four. Mayors were able to provide highly specific policy proposals (e.g., afterschool programs, housing subsidies) when asked about those living close to poverty, which contrasted to the more symbolic gestures they provided when asked about the single best thing they could do for blacks, Latinos, and immigrants. For example, one mayor who focused on jobs noted the need to move toward localized and targeted job fairs, rather than more general efforts. *"We're really focusing on our most underserved neighborhoods and not relying on these broad job fairs... We started doing these micro-targeted job fairs with a lot of preparation with employers in advance."*

As with race relations, mayors don't believe any one city is an exemplar in tackling poverty.

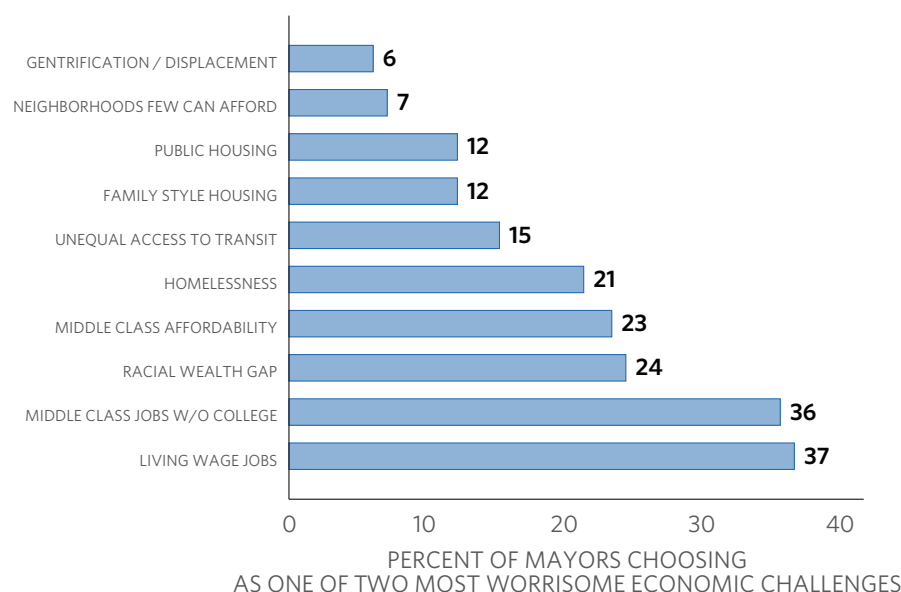
Mayors were asked to highlight cities they considered leaders in tackling poverty and workforce development. Again, mayors struggled to consistently identify leading cities, which may indicate how challenging these issues are. As one mayor said, *"Well, I don't know that anybody is doing a great job on that."* When asked to name a leader in tackling poverty, mayors most often responded by saying that no city stood out (19 percent of responses). The cities named most often were New York (cited six times) followed by Seattle and Louisville, which were named four times each. Denver, Miami, and Salt Lake City were named three times each. When asked to name a leading city in workforce development, mayors followed a similar pattern. Mayors said that no city came to mind nine times, which was the most common response. Boston and Louisville were both named six times followed by New York and Dallas which were each named by three mayors.

In spite of a low national unemployment rate and modestly growing economy, mayors are concerned about economic opportunity — particularly stable, well-paying jobs for their less educated residents.

When asked to select the two most worrisome economic challenges (potential options are displayed with response rates in **Figure 24**), mayors were most likely to focus on jobs, with one-third selecting the lack of middle class jobs accessible without a college degree and one-third choosing the lack of living-wage jobs. In light of the low national unemployment rate, this concern about jobs is striking. The racial wealth gap, middle class affordability, and homelessness each garnered concern from more than 20 percent of mayors. Interestingly, mayors appear to be comparatively less concerned about neighborhood affordability as less than 10 percent said they were worried about neighborhoods that few can afford or gentrification/displacement. While this does not rule out neighborhood affordability as an issue facing cities, it does indicate that gentrification is a secondary worry relative to bread and butter economic issues.

Figure 24: Mayors' top housing and employment challenges

HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES





INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND FEDERALISM

Mayors must rely on a broad array of federal agencies for help tackling poverty, promoting economic development, and investing in infrastructure and housing. A presidential election year offers an opportunity to reflect on the best and the worst mayoral allies in Washington, D.C. As President-elect Donald Trump takes office, it will be important for his administration to consider the priorities and perspectives of America’s mayors.

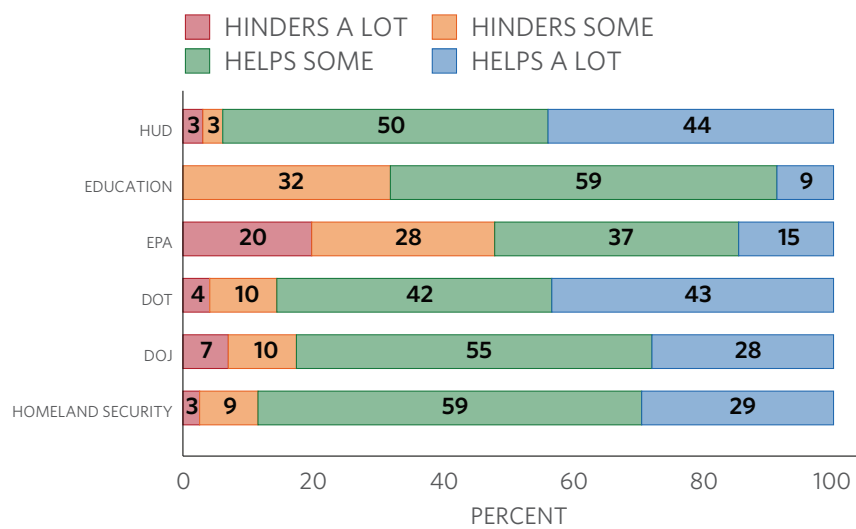
In prior years, the Menino Survey of Mayors has delved into specific regulatory burdens the federal government has imposed on cities. In contrast with their state governments, mayors actually felt relatively warmly toward the federal government, and, in many cases, wanted stronger, rather than weaker, federal regulations. That said, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) stood out as less popular than other federal agencies, with many mayors worried about its unfunded mandates.

In the 2016 survey, mayors provided largely positive evaluations of the federal agencies with which they regularly work. A majority of mayors described most of the federal agencies included on the survey — the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Education, Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Justice (DOJ), and Department of Homeland Security — as helpful. As one big city mayor explained: *“Under [the Obama] administration, HUD, EPA, and Transportation have been working really effectively with cities. Then the Justice Department has been a constructive partner. It’s been a real sweet season of coordinated effort between the agencies.”*

There are, however, some important variations. Less than half of mayors, for example, believe that the EPA is helpful. Moreover, while strong majorities offered support for HUD, the DOT, the DOJ, and Homeland Security, a sizable minority – over 30 percent – believed that the Department of Education hindered cities some or a lot.

Figure 25: Mayoral views on federal agencies

HELPING OR HINDERING FEDERAL AGENCIES



Interestingly, mayors hold similar views on federal agencies across partisan, regional, and economic lines. There are, however, some notable variations. Republican mayors' ratings of the EPA, for example, were almost one point lower than Democrats' (on a five-point scale). Mayors from cities in the Northeast had more favorable opinions of the EPA and the DOT, rating each a half point higher than mayors in the rest of the country. Finally, mayors of less affluent cities found HUD and the DOT more helpful (by one-third of a point) than those governing the most affluent cities.

Related to these general issues of federalism, the survey also included two topical questions about policy at all levels of government. First, it posed an open-ended question about what policy, at any level of government, would most help reduce gun violence in a mayor's city. Mayors generally endorsed strengthening various state and federal government regulations. The most frequent responses called for stronger background checks, restricting the flow of guns, stronger enforcement of existing laws, and an assault weapon ban. Some mayors focused on more systemic policies, such as education and improved economic opportunities. A very small minority — three out of a sample of 102 — took more traditionally conservative stances and proposed more protections for gun owners and more local control. Another five mayors suggested not making any policy changes.

New York City tops the list as a key influencer of both federal policy and the national urban agenda.

Mayors also provided insight into influences on federal policy related to cities. They did so in two ways. First, mayors were asked to name one city that they consider to be a leader in influencing federal policy and in setting the national agenda for cities. A small number of cities stand out. Twenty-one percent of mayors named New York as the leading city for influencing federal policy. Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., were each mentioned by 12 percent of the mayors. No other city was mentioned more than four percent of the time. New York was also the most commonly cited for setting the national agenda for cities, garnering 26 percent of the responses. Boston was mentioned by nine percent of mayors, while Los Angeles and Philadelphia each received six percent of responses. Some mayors indicated that their responses reflected a given city's mayor more than the city itself. One mayor said, "Well, I think that then you have to look at who is setting the national agenda through the lens of who the mayor is." before naming Mayors Greg Fischer (Louisville, KY), Eric Garcetti (Los Angeles, CA), Martin Walsh (Boston, MA), Mitch Landrieu (New Orleans, LA), Sly James (Kansas City, MO), and Stephen Benjamin (Columbia, SC).

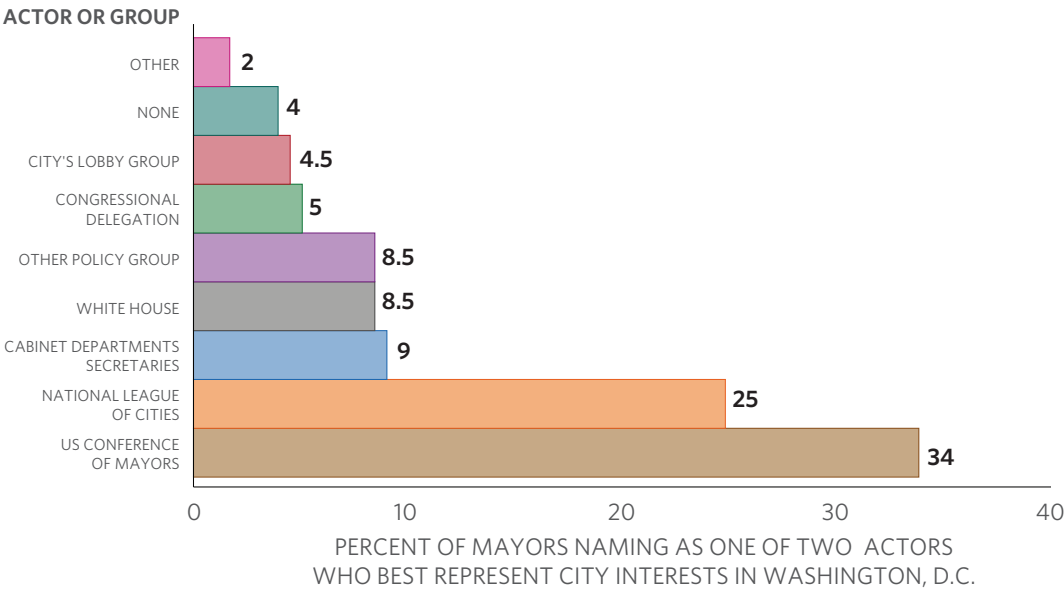
Relatedly, mayors consistently cited two major professional organizations – the National League of Cities and the United States Conference of Mayors – as the two actors that best represent the interests of cities to the federal government (**Figure 26**). Unsurprisingly, these two groups were the most frequent responses by a wide margin. A number of former mayors working in the Obama Administration were also cited fairly often, including Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro, Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx, and White House Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Jerry Abramson (whom one mayor described as, "The best thing ever"), and President Barack Obama himself. Interestingly, congressional delegations were mentioned by less than 10 percent of mayors.

"Under [the Obama] administration, HUD, EPA, and Transportation have been working really effectively with cities. Then the Justice Department has been a constructive partner. It's been a real sweet season of coordinated effort between the agencies."



Figure 26: Actors who best represent the interests of cities to the federal government

TOP TWO ACTORS FOR REPRESENTING CITY INTERESTS TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT



Cities and the 2016 Federal Election

This final section looks forward, illuminating how the election has affected cities and mayors’ hopes for the next administration. First, a reminder: interviews were conducted throughout the summer of 2016, before the outcome had been determined.

Mayors rely on the federal government for critical funding support, particularly for infrastructure

They also have come to view the White House as a valuable ally in important local policy issues, especially given the convening powers of the president, his ability to encourage cross-agency collaboration to reduce bureaucracy, and his potential to mediate public opinion.

Poverty, trust in government, public safety, working class jobs, challenges facing communities of color, and the incorporation of immigrants were all salient issues in the 2016 presidential election. Mayoral views and values in relation to these issues are especially noteworthy as the national electorate continues to divide further along urban/rural lines and by population density.

According to mayors, the presidential election inflamed public rhetoric both nationally and at the local level.

One third of the respondents said that the election’s primary effect on their work as mayor was that it inflamed public discourse. *“I think there’s definitely an ideological poisoning,”* said one Midwestern mayor. Another lamented the devolved nature of national political rhetoric: *“I am telling you when people at the presidential level and at the national level speak like they are street thugs or bullies on the playground... the citizens mimic that. Then take it from there, frankly. It validates their volatility and instability if they have any. It makes people very insecure.”*

Some mayors worried that President-elect Donald Trump might not be interested in serving the diverse constituencies of their cities.

Several mayors also explicitly cited concerns about Republican President-Elect Donald Trump, and suggested that Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton would be better for cities. One Midwestern mayor worried: *"I'm concerned about the possibility of an economic downturn triggered by the possible election of Donald Trump. [The election] creates an atmosphere of... contention that I'll be very happy to put behind us."* A Northeastern mayor observed that Trump's nomination had created a climate of fear in her city: *"I've got a presidential candidate who has really disenfranchised and railed against the majority of my population. He has railed against women, immigrants, Muslims, African Americans, Latinos; there aren't that many people left."* Another more explicitly raised long-term concerns about the impact of the campaign at the national and local level: *"I'm appalled. To put it more seriously, the fact that he has been able to tap into a pernicious style, strain, of American nativism sets us all back. It undoes the qualities that we aspire to as a country."*

Others noted the general uncertainty about the future of funding sources and programs that cities rely on (particularly in the event of a Trump victory) and said that some things were on hold given this uncertainty. One Southern mayor spoke of the *"tangible impacts right now because of the Democratic president... We've actually had the benefit of many grants and opportunities flow here, which has been great; transportation grants, housing grants. I worry that... if we have somebody different in the White House, we will see a lot of that dry up."* She specifically cited the *"infrastructure... transit and water and sewer and all of those other policies,"* that she worried would receive insufficient investments in the event of a Trump presidency.

Not surprisingly, mayors are hoping the next administration will be a friend of, and advocate for, cities. To a large extent, they hope the quality relationship they have had with the current White House persists.

Mayors were asked to name the primary thing that they are hoping for from the new administration, and the most common refrain was a hope that the next president would be an urban champion and a friend to cities (a notion put forth by roughly one-third of mayors). Specific responses included calls for the president to generally support and prioritize cities and a White House that understands what makes cities unique. The mayor of a mid-sized city said: *"I'm looking for an urban agenda. I'm looking for understanding that the needs of suburban America and rural America, not that they're not important; they are important needs. They are different than the needs of urban American."* Another mayor advocated for institutionalizing city leaders' role in the federal government by saying he would like to see the next president *"hire at least three mayors as cabinet secretaries."*

Citing policies like the Smart Cities Challenge, the Veterans Administration's commitment to battling veteran homelessness, and HUD funding, one Western mayor emphasized the effectiveness of the Obama Administration in particular: *"The competence of administration and the emphasis on tangible action that we've seen in the Obama Administration really does affect my work as mayor."*

In addition to their desire for an ally who understands the needs of cities — as distinct from other areas of the country — mayors hoped for increased funding support for infrastructure and reduced federal bureaucracy.

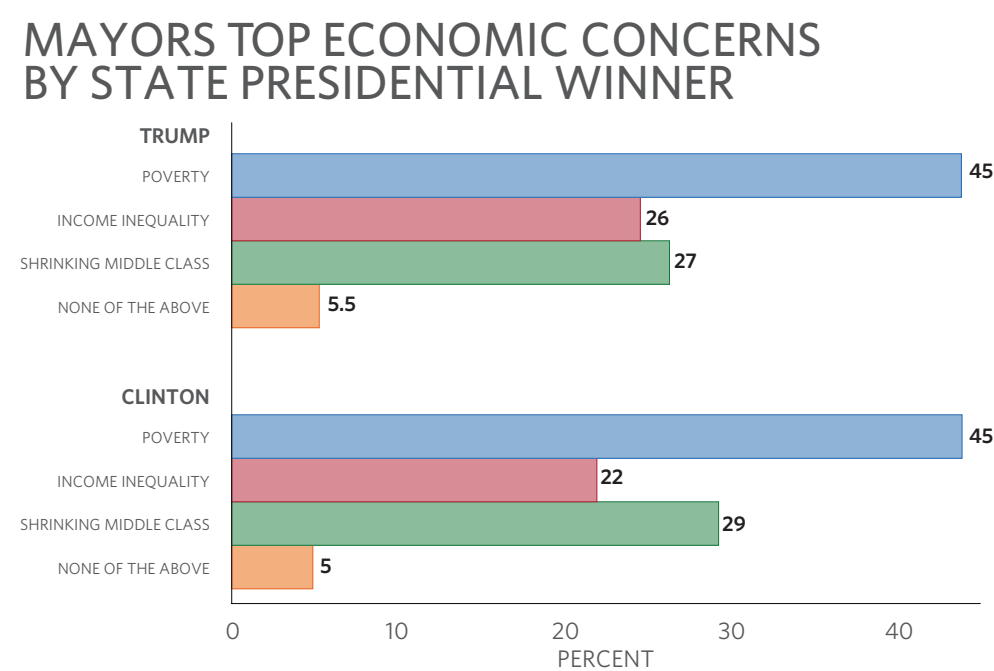
The most common policy-specific aspiration was greater federal support for transportation/infrastructure (over 10 percent of responses) and a better functioning federal bureaucracy. Just under 10 percent asked for greater local control, presidential leadership/character, and presidential accessibility. In the last analysis, mayors would especially welcome infrastructure policies explicitly targeted to urban needs and a more flexible bureaucracy responsive to mayoral concerns. More generally, they hope that the next administration can continue to be a collaborative partner that recognizes urban interests as distinct from those of rural and suburban areas, and as an important focus of national policy.



While Democratic and Republican mayors differ on many issues, mayoral priorities, preferences, and views often transcend partisan divides at higher levels of government.

Mayors from red and blue states⁷ expressed remarkably similar views and their responses rarely varied based on which candidate their state voted for in the 2016 presidential election. The consistency across states is striking given that many of the survey questions addresses complex issues at the heart of the 2016 election cycle, including poverty, race, and immigration. **Figure 27** shows that mayors had nearly the same breakdown of economic concerns regardless of which candidate their state ultimately supported.

Figure 27: Top economic challenge by state’s winning candidate in 2016 presidential election



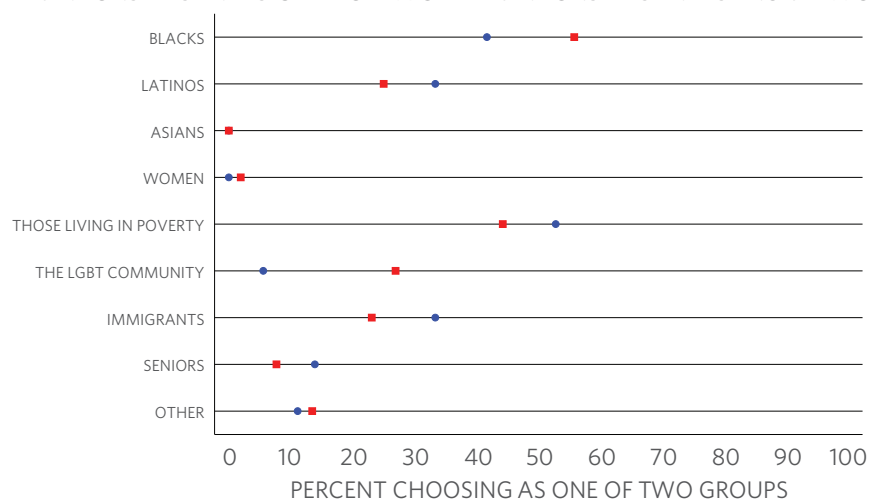
Likewise, mayors in red and blue states largely agreed on the importance of inclusivity to their cities with a statistically insignificant difference of just 0.12 on a five point scale. Mayors’ attitudes about the incorporation of immigrants were also quite similar, exhibiting very minor differences across state lines. Finally, with few exceptions, mayors in red and blue states agreed on the groups that are least included in their respective communities (**Figure 28**). Mayors from red states did name blacks more frequently (by 12 points) than their peers in blue states. The LGBT community represented the starkest difference: while nearly a third of mayors from red states were concerned that the LGBT community was underincluded, blue state mayors rarely mentioned them, perhaps reflecting a perceived threat to LGBT rights in many conservative states. Overall, mayors’ answers were quite similar despite national partisan divides over similar issues.

⁷ States are classified as “red” if they voted for Republican candidate Donald Trump and “blue” if they voted for Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential Election.

Figure 28: Mayors' top two groups that are under included by state Presidential winner

WHO IS UNDER-INCLUDED? BY STATE PRESIDENTIAL WINNER

• MAYORS IN STATES CLINTON WON • MAYORS IN STATES TRUMP WON



Mayors from red and blue states also shared strikingly similar views on their policy priorities, their relationships with federal agencies, and the attributes for which they want their city to be perceived. Simply put, mayors are likely to be unified on key issues irrespective of their states' political views. Many media outlets and academic reports have pointed to a growing divide between "coastal elites" and those in the heart of the country. The 2016 Menino Survey findings suggest that mayors in liberal and conservative states share more in common than one might expect.



CONCLUSION

Mayors rarely receive the national attention given to political leaders in Washington, D.C. or even those at the state level. Yet in many ways, mayors are critically important public officials. They are responsible for leading our cities, the economic engines of the United States and the sources of tremendous cultural and social vitality.

Having led the Menino Survey for three years, we have learned that Republican and Democratic mayors share many of the same concerns and values. In a time of great political change, uncertainty, and a growing urban/rural divide, mayors' steady leadership is more important now than ever.

We hope that this survey proves to be a valuable tool for understanding mayors and guiding those who support their work. We are grateful for having had the opportunity to speak with so many talented public servants and we look forward to continuing to learn about their dynamic leadership.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.





Boston University Initiative on Cities

bu.edu/ioc

www.surveyofmayors.com

