

# 2016 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

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*The Menino Survey was initiated in 2014 by the Boston University Initiative on Cities, co-founded by former Boston Mayor Tom Menino and Political Scientist Graham Wilson. It continues in 2016 with the support of Citi.*

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The 2016 Menino Survey of Mayors details insights and perspectives shared by a representative sample of over 100 mayors from 41 states. Now in its third year, the Menino Survey seeks to take mayors' pulse on key contemporary challenges, leadership styles, and expectations for the future.

While prior years of the Menino Survey have delved more deeply into infrastructure needs and fiscal priorities, this year's survey focused on "people priorities." Mayors discussed topics like inclusion, poverty, and immigration – all key themes in the 2016 presidential election.

Results and the full copy of the report, along with all the figures noted below, are available at [www.surveyofmayors.com](http://www.surveyofmayors.com).

## KEY FINDINGS

### POVERTY

Mayors are deeply concerned about urban poverty and the challenges facing their poorest residents. Our findings suggest a deep sensitivity to the needs of the most economically disadvantaged residents who call cities home.

- 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 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.

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## 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.

- Many mayors believe that inclusion has benefits that extend beyond social cohesion. Nearly three-quarters of mayors (72%) noted how diversity helps make their city a creative and innovative place. About one out of every three mayors (32%) said diversity helps their current businesses and economy, and 25% believed diversity makes their city attractive for both new businesses and new residents.
- Nearly a quarter of mayors (23%) feel the group they most need to do more to help is the poor. 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.
- Half of mayors believe the black community is among the most marginalized groups in their city. Additionally, nearly a quarter feel that blacks and/or other minorities have the least trust in local government. To increase trust in these communities, mayors tend to believe the best thing they can do is create more visible, direct ties to black residents and community leaders.

## ETHNIC DIVERSITY & IMMIGRATION

Mayors worry a lot about building more inclusive communities that also welcome immigrants and Latinos.

- More than a quarter of mayors (27%) selected immigrants and 28% selected Latinos as the most marginalized group in their community.
- Mayors feel that their existing immigrant communities play a significant role in the incorporation of immigrants and 40% believe their business community also “helps a lot” in creating a culture of inclusion.
- 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’ reputation, 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.
- Mayors placed the greatest emphasis on a reputation for safety with their most important constituency—their own residents—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.

- While mayors named a wide array of initiatives where they had taken the lead, many were still 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.
- Many mayors said they rely on public events (48%), informal networking (44%) and neighborhood meetings (42%) to remain connected. Only 27% of mayors cited social media and just 23% cited email as the best mechanisms to hear from constituents.
- Nearly two-thirds of mayors (64%) cited “interpersonal skills” as those most critical to effective mayoral leadership, reinforcing the value of human engagement.

## **FEDERAL COLLABORATION**

Throughout the summer of 2016, mayors shared both deep concerns about the impact of the presidential campaign rhetoric as well as their hopes for the next administration.

- Mayors frequently lauded the Obama Administration as a strong ally, citing ready access to the President – whom many praised 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.
- Months before election day, mayors worried about the effects of the 2016 presidential campaign on their diverse constituencies. They 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.

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- Mayors rely on the federal government for critical funding support, particularly for infrastructure. A number of mayors expressed a need for the next president to make infrastructure investment a top priority, including roads, bridges and mass transit. In fact, when asked about what they want from the new president, support for transportation/ infrastructure was the most common policy-specific aspiration.

### 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. Eighty-six percent of mayors found a nongovernmental role to be appealing or very appealing. This may indicate that recruiting mayors for another political office is a difficult task.

### PARTISAN IMMUNITY

One of the most consistent patterns in the 2016 responses is that mayors' 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, policy priorities, and economics, mayors in states that President-elect Donald Trump won provided similar answers to those in states that Hillary Clinton won.
- Urban leaders' values, priorities, and concerns are the same whether or not the leaders govern "coastal elites."