

2017 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors details insights and perspectives shared by a representative sample of 115 mayors from 39 states. Now in its fourth year, the Menino Survey seeks to take mayors' pulses on key contemporary challenges, leadership styles, and expectations for the future.

This year's Survey delves into the ways in which mayors are tackling critical urban issues of both local and global import—from housing young families and aging residents to mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change—while confronting federal and state funding gaps. The Survey offers insight into how mayors are rallying individually and as a collective to affect positive change.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Across the country, mayors of all types of cities are concerned about housing affordability and access.

- Fifty-one percent (51%) of mayors cite housing costs as the most common reason that people move out of their city. [Figure 2]
- Thirty-five percent (35%) of mayors say that zoning and development issues had the biggest impact on voters' approval ratings of their performance as mayor. [Figure 3]
- Mayors are split on whether to prioritize addressing problems in the rental or homeownership markets.

HOUSING REFORM

There is no one-size-fits-all solution that would remedy the housing challenges that mayors are facing today.

- Only a small share of mayors (13%) say their cities' housing stock fit their residents' needs "very well" or "extremely well." [Figure 5]
- Mayors in all regions believe there is a mismatch between their current housing stock

The Menino Survey was initiated in 2014 by the Boston University Initiative on Cities, co-founded by the late Mayor of Boston Tom Menino and Political Scientist Graham Wilson. It continues in 2017 with the support of Citi and The Rockefeller Foundation.



Results and the full copy of the report, along with all the figures noted, are available at www.surveyofmayors.com.

and the needs of their cities, but it was most pronounced in the western United States, where forty-five percent (45%) felt there was a significant mismatch between the available housing options and the needs of their constituents. [Table 2]

- There is less agreement on what changes are needed to ensure a city's housing supply is able to meet demand. More affordable multibedroom units (39%), increased home ownership (36%), and upgrades to older housing (30%) topped the list of desired changes. [Figure 6]
- Mayors cited a range of obstacles to improving housing access for their constituents. The lack of government funding tops the list of barriers for improving housing access for low-income residents, while difficulty obtaining bank financing is the greatest barrier for middle class families and residents of color. [Figure 7]
- Even when the need is apparent, mayors still face challenges in expanding housing options for some constituents. Fifty-five percent (55%) believe that a new affordable housing development for families would generate controversy, while a housing project for seniors would be virtually free of opposition. [Figure 8]

CLIMATE CHANGE

A majority of mayors are committed to local action on climate change, but the issue is politicized even at the local level.

- Eighty-four percent (84%) of mayors believe climate change to be the result of human activities, compared to sixty-eight percent (68%) of the general US public.¹ These numbers differ considerably by party, with ninety-five percent (95%) of Democratic mayors and fifty percent (50%) of Republican mayors holding this view. [Figure 9 and Table 8]
- Two-thirds of mayors say that cities should take action on climate change even if doing so requires financial costs. These responses are highly polarized by party—Democrats were almost universally supportive of this trade-off, while only twenty-four percent (24%) of Republicans agreed or strongly agreed. The number of Republicans agreeing with this trade-off declined significantly from a similar query three years ago—with a twenty (20) percentage point increase in those who oppose taking action. [Figures 10 and 11; Table 10]
- Mayors cite a range of top climate/sustainability priorities, including reducing the number of vehicles on the road (36%), upgrading city buildings and vehicles (31%), and sourcing greener energy (27%). [Figure 12]
- Mayors also see a number of city-level policies—ranging from increasing residential density to updating building codes—as integral parts of any serious effort to address climate change, but pushed back on the need to institute new costly regulations on the private sector. [Figure 13]

¹ "Global Warming Concern at Three-Decade High in US," *Gallup News*, March 17, 2017.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

Mayors, often across party lines, are concerned about their relationships with state and federal governments.

- Mayors are very concerned about preemption, especially from state governments, with fifty-seven percent (57%) reporting much less or less than average autonomy from their state governments—this is up ten (10) percentage points from two years ago. [Figure 16]
- Mayors are divided, by party and issue, concerning their ability to thwart disfavored actions from the Trump administration. Mayors are optimistic that they can do “a lot” in response to objectionable federal level actions pertaining to the environment or policing, but are less sanguine about their ability to counteract the administration when they disagree on education and immigration policies. [Figure 19]
- Mayors are looking for new ways to be heard, relying on a mix of tactics to influence policymakers at higher levels including hiring lobbyists, working with their delegation, and personal meetings and discussions. [Figure 18]

MITIGATING FEDERAL FISCAL SHORTFALLS

Facing funding cutbacks, mayors are looking to a variety of alternative funding sources, particularly own source revenues.

- Mayors are more pessimistic than years past about the level of financial support they are receiving from federal and state governments. This pessimism is shared by both Republican and Democratic mayors. [Figure 14]
- They believe they have the resources to fund just half of their city’s infrastructure needs over the next five years.
- In the face of federal cuts, specifically, mayors are looking to a range of sources to make up for shortfalls. They believe new state taxes or resources are the most promising way to close funding gaps for education and roads and bridges, while citing new local taxes and resources as the most promising way to fund water infrastructure and bike/pedestrian improvements. [Figure 20]
- Mayors saw little, if any, promise for non-profits or privatization to help fill federal funding gaps across a range of issues. On the other hand, they did see promise for public-private partnerships to help with affordable housing. [Figure 20]
- In a few instances, mayors report that federal budget shortfalls are “not an issue” though many did say that there was no way to make up for a lack of federal resources in areas such as mass transit and affordable housing. [Figure 20]

CITY-TO-CITY NETWORKS

Mayors generally, though not universally, value city-to-city policy networks as tools to signal priorities and influence national and global issues.

- Two-thirds of mayors gave positive and/or optimistic reasons for cities participating in policy networks and compacts. [Figure 21]

- Of these two-thirds, about sixty-five percent (65%) see political or signaling value (e.g., strength in numbers) as a benefit of such commitments. [Figure 22]
- Forty-five percent (45%) emphasized more tangible resources and/or benefits of collaborating around shared interests and goals. [Figure 22]
- More than half of mayors agreed that binding commitments to climate pacts or networks are important mechanisms for fighting climate change. [Figure 13]
- Some mayors are more skeptical of the value of such compacts and tended to see joining them as primarily political rather than substantive.

DATA AND POLICY EVALUATION

Mayors use a wide variety of data to evaluate key policy arenas; the amount of consensus about how to evaluate performance varies considerably by issue. [Figure 23]

- Some policy areas lend themselves to clear evaluative metrics. Mayors chiefly look to graduation rates as a way to assess education policy, while crime rates are used to evaluate both police department performance and public safety.
- Other policy areas yield a more diverse array of potential metrics. When evaluating constituent views, mayors look to surveys, but also neighborhood contacts, citizen complaints, and glean constituent views from media coverage.
- There were no consensus metrics for evaluating housing, economic performance, and equity, although the unemployment rate was frequently cited by a number of mayors as a way to evaluate the economy.
- Mayors struggled the most with identifying a mechanism to evaluate equity. In most cases, they couldn't name a single measure by which they might judge it.

Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Boston University Initiative on Cities (IOC) was co-founded in 2014 by the City of Boston's longest-serving mayor, Tom Menino, and BU Professor of Political Science, Graham Wilson. The IOC operates as a cross-university research initiative bridging the divide between urban scholarly research and local governance, both domestically and internationally. It seeks to understand and advance the transformative urban leadership strategies and policies necessary to support cities as dynamic, inclusive centers of economic growth and positive development. To fulfill this mission, the IOC leads the only scientifically-rigorous survey of American mayors, convenes multi-stakeholder conferences on pressing urban issues, and supports early-stage urban research in the social, natural, computational, political, and health sciences. The Initiative also provides fellowship opportunities that embed BU graduate students in mayors' offices in the U.S. and abroad, and leads executive leadership programs on urban governance and power.

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