

MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

2018 SUMMARY
OF KEY FINDINGS

The 2018 Menino Survey of Mayors details insights and perspectives shared by a representative sample of 110 mayors from 37 states. Now in its fifth year, the Menino Survey is based on interviews with mayors on their pressing challenges, priorities, and expectations for the future.

This year's Survey explores mayoral views on economic development — including corporate recruitment, financial incentives, the sharing economy, and social mobility — as well as public health, housing, and intergovernmental relations.

SOCIAL MOBILITY & LIVING-WAGE ORDINANCES

A third of mayors believe that insufficient living-wage jobs are a key obstacle to achieving social mobility, and just over 40 percent believe that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances. But this issue is highly polarized, even at the local level, with Republican and Democratic mayors expressing markedly different opinions.

- Mayors believe that insufficient living-wage jobs (32%) and high housing costs (27%) are the top two obstacles to achieving social mobility for residents. [Figure 2]
- Democratic mayors are 30 percentage points more likely to cite living-wage jobs as a top obstacle than their Republican counterparts, while Republican mayors are 17 percentage points more likely to believe that there are no obstacles to social mobility in their cities. [Figure 3] Mayors of high-cost cities are more likely to say housing costs stymie social mobility, while those in less expensive cities more often say lack of living-wage jobs. [Figure 4]
- Forty-one percent of mayors agree that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances, “even if it results in some companies moving away or fewer jobs”; 48 percent of mayors disagreed with this proposed trade-off. [Figure 5] Not one Republican respondent agreed that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances when coupled with the potential loss of economic activity and jobs.

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 2018 with the support of Citi Community Development and The Rockefeller Foundation.



RECRUITING NEW EMPLOYERS

When recruiting new employers to their community, mayors say that they emphasize workforce skills and quality of life. Mayors perceive the competition for Amazon's second HQ as abnormally focused on tax incentives.

- Mayors selected their communities' workforce skills and composition (62%) and perceived quality of life (56%) as the top two factors they emphasize when pitching business leaders on their community. [Figure 10]
- In contrast, 45 percent of mayors say that "tax breaks and other financial incentives" was one of the top two factors influencing Amazon's HQ2 decision. [Figure 11] This contrasts with just 16 percent of mayors who said they emphasize tax incentives when recruiting companies generally.
- Just over half of mayors (55%) say that the city that wins a competition to recruit a company or facility sees clear net benefits in the long run. [Figure 7]
- Mayors are divided between prioritizing resident jobs or growing the tax base. Fifty-nine percent of mayors say they would choose a new large employer located inside their cities that primarily provides jobs for non-city residents over a new large employer outside their city's borders that employs their residents. [Figure 12]

EMPLOYER TAX BREAKS: POLICY VS. POLITICS

The vast majority of mayors view using financial incentives for securing new jobs as "good policy," but they do not agree on whether it is also good politics.

- Eighty-four percent of mayors say that recruiting jobs and investments with financial incentives is good for their cities. Among these, 52 percent (or 44% of all mayors) feel that such incentives are unpopular with constituents. [Figure 6]
- While mayors generally think that economic development incentives are good for their own city, 61 percent of them also agree that other cities overuse these incentives. [Figure 8]
- Sixty-two percent of mayors say it would be good if cities could commit to refraining from offering incentives, but that doing so is "unlikely to happen." [Figure 9]

SHARING ECONOMY: RIDE SHARE TO HOME SHARE

A majority of mayors believe that the sharing economy has had a positive effect across all income levels, for residents of color, and for the business community.

- The sharing economy is not evenly distributed across cities. While nearly all mayors reported the presence of ride- and home-sharing services, just half report having car sharing and two-thirds offer bike share.
- In those cities that have the services, the overwhelming majority of mayors report that ride- and bike-sharing services have had positive impacts on their cities. [Table 2]
- Home-sharing services like Airbnb receive the fewest positive assessments and raise the most concerns. While about 45 percent of mayors say the impact of home-sharing services is positive, about 20 percent say the impact has been negative or very negative. [Table 2]

- A majority of mayors believed that the sharing economy has had a positive effect across all income levels, for residents of color, and low-income residents. A few worried about negative effects on residents of color and low-income individuals. [Figure 13]
- Just over half of all mayors believe these services need to be more tightly regulated. Democratic mayors were much more likely to support greater regulation of sharing economy services than their Republican counterparts (67% vs. 18%, respectively). [Figure 35]

HEALTH: COMMUNITY CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

Mayors observe a wide range of health challenges confronting their communities from diabetes and obesity to mental health, but believe constituents hold them accountable for a different set of health concerns.

- Mayors identified obesity/diabetes/heart disease (25%) and addiction/opioids (24%) as the top health challenges facing their cities. Other common responses include access to healthcare (14%), environmental threats (10%), and mental health (8%). [Table 3]
- They do not perceive any simple solutions to community health challenges and overwhelmingly believe that other levels of government are the “ideal level” for health policy decisions. [Figures 15 and 18]
- Nevertheless, there are some public health challenges for which a majority of mayors believe constituents hold them strongly accountable, including traffic accidents, gun violence, and exposure to toxins like lead. Hunger, opioid addiction and other forms of substance abuse, and mental health are areas where mayors perceive less local accountability, but still believe a majority of residents hold them at least a little accountable. [Figure 14]
- Mayors are divided on whether the city should get involved in personal choices that impact public health. Just over 50 percent support city oversight of gun ownership, while a third believe they should stay out of this type of personal decision. Just under half support engagement related to unhealthy food consumption, while a third believe local government should avoid interfering. [Figure 17]

HOUSING: DESIRED GROWTH

While mayors want to increase the amount of housing in their cities, their desired increases are relatively modest. They hope that a majority of these new units would be owner-occupied and that nearly one-third would be single-family homes.

- Half of the mayors indicate that they want less than a 10 percent increase in the number of housing units in their cities over the next 10 years. Just under a quarter favor a 10–20 percent increase in their housing stock, and just over a quarter want more aggressive (20%+) growth. [Figure 19]
- Mayors preferred that the majority (58%) of these potential new units be owner-occupied, with the remainder as rentals. [Figure 22] On average, mayors said that “ideally” 30 percent of new housing would be single-family homes, and preferred a mix of higher-density multifamily housing for the remainder of the new units. [Figure 23]
- Approximately 55 percent of mayors agree that cities should encourage “increasing housing density in popular established neighborhoods,” while 25 percent disagreed. [Figure 30]
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of mayors see affordable housing as part of the city’s infrastructure. [Figure 24]

CITY COUNCILS: INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

Mayors describe their relationships with their city councils as cooperative, and believe they wield at least some influence over their councils.

- An overwhelming majority of mayors (83%) believe their relationships with their city councils are either cooperative or very cooperative, with only 11 percent describing their working relationship as adversarial. [Figure 26]
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of mayors believe that their ideological leanings align with those of their city council. [Figure 27]
- Fifty-three percent (53%) of mayors feel that they have “a great deal” or “a lot” of influence over their city council. [Figure 28]
- A majority of mayors worry that Hispanics, Asian Americans, immigrants, low-income residents, and renters are under-represented by their councils. [Figure 29]

POLL: POLITICAL HOT BUTTONS

Mayors are divided on a number of salient contemporary issues and trade-offs, including marijuana legalization and allocating local government services to immigrants irrespective of their legal status, but find common ground on the extent of racial problems in the United States.

- One area where mayors overwhelmingly agree is the extent to which racism and discrimination is widespread. Roughly 90 percent of mayors disagreed with the statement that “racial problems are rare, isolated situations.” [Figure 30]
- Fifty-five percent of mayors support the legalization of marijuana in their cities, while 35 percent disagreed. [Figure 30] Many mayors suggested that their views on marijuana were less about philosophy or values and more about practical challenges related to policy implementation.
- Two-thirds of mayors agree that immigrants should receive local government services irrespective of legal status while 20 percent disagreed. [Figure 30] Democratic mayors were much more likely to support this than Republican mayors (86% vs. 29%, respectively.) [Figure 34]

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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 centers of inclusive economic growth and sustainable 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.