

CARP Municipal Poll Report September 7, 2014

Key Findings

Two thirds of members live in cities and virtually all agree these cities (and towns) should have recall power over mayors and councilors. Most see this recall power being exercised by a simple majority of council. Two thirds do not agree Canadian municipalities currently have enough tools to deal with wrongdoing by elected officials.

While the majority agree cities and municipalities should be given more governance and revenue raising powers, only a third think the largest cities should be treated with special status as “city states”. The majority agree Toronto should not become a separate entity (nor the GTA) and, while some argue for de-amalgamation, most prefer the status quo.

Members see infrastructure and zoning as the most important municipal responsibilities, but many also opt for mayoral recall powers. Revenue raising and taxation are seen to be important. In a related finding, the wide majority prefer the “strong council” system to the “strong mayor” model of municipal government.

The vast majority voted in the last municipal election and will vote in the next one even though few say municipal politics has the most impact on their lives. When asked why municipal politics is not engaging, most say decisions are made to suit developers, not citizens, that only old ideas are presented, that the same people run; in short, because they feel shut out. The answers to this are seen to be a seniors’ champion with real powers and term limits, as well as an end to closed door council meetings. In other words, transparency, openness and citizen engagement.

When asked how to fund municipal services in an era of downloading, many members focus on demanding money from other layers of government, despite the fact there is only one taxpayer. Other solutions include tax increases, tolls and congestion charges. There is agreement municipalities need more tools to finance underfunded programs, and these include other levels of government, gas tax, new user fees and charges and more municipal amalgamation.

Electoral Preference

One half of members will vote Liberal if the election were held today, while one third would vote Conservative. One eighth will vote NDP.

Detailed Findings

The plurality of members lives in mid-size cities (50,000 to 1 million - 40%), while one quarter live in the major metropolises (23%).

Do you live in an urban or rural environment?

Major metropolis (1 mil or more)	23%
City (50K to 1 mil)	40%
Town (10K to 50K)	16%
Rural (less than 10K)	20%

Virtually all members agree towns and cities should have recall powers for mayors and councilors (94%), and as many as two thirds agree “strongly” (64%).

Do you agree or disagree all towns, cities and municipalities should have provisions for recall of councilors or mayors in cases of egregious wrongdoing?

AGREE	94%
Strongly agree	64%
Agree	30%
DISAGREE	5%
Disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	1%
DON'T KNOW	1%

The plurality think a majority vote of councilors should be enough to recall a mayor or councilor (40%), while one quarter think a mid-term referendum should be scheduled (27%). One fifth set the bar higher at a unanimous vote at council (18%), while one tenth believe the next election is the best recall mechanism (10%).

If there were a new power of recall for egregious behaviour by mayors/councillors, who should exercise it?

Majority vote at council	40%
Mid-term referendum	27%
Unanimous vote at council	18%
Voters at next election	10%
NO RECALL PROVISIONS	2%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	9%

Just one quarter agree Canadian municipalities currently have the tools to deal with wrongdoing by mayors and councilors (28%), and two thirds disagree this is the case (64%).

Do you agree or disagree Canadian cities have enough tools to deal with conflict of interest and criminal behaviour by elected municipal officials?

AGREE	28%
Strongly agree	4%
Agree	24%
DISAGREE	64%
Disagree	42%
Strongly disagree	22%
DON'T KNOW	9%

The majority agree municipalities should have more self-governance and revenue raising powers (55%), while just more than a third disagree (36%).

Municipalities fall under the responsibility of the province, which sets most financial and governance regulations. Do you agree or disagree that municipalities should be given more power to raise revenues and govern themselves?

AGREE	55%
Strongly agree	14%
Agree	41%
DISAGREE	36%
Disagree	26%
Strongly disagree	10%
DON'T KNOW	9%

The majority disagree that the largest cities should become independent “city states” with powers similar to provinces (59%), and just one third agree with this proposition (33%).

Do you agree or disagree the largest cities in Canada, Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, should be treated differently from other towns and cities, and be given special status as “city states” with their own governance similar to provinces?

AGREE	33%
Strongly agree	9%
Agree	24%
DISAGREE	59%
Disagree	37%
Strongly disagree	22%
DON'T KNOW	8%

Three-in-ten think Toronto (or the GTA) should become a separate entity (29%), and most of these see the GTA as separate but not a province (19%). One fifth think Toronto should split back into 6 cities (20%) while the plurality think things should stay as they are (40%).

Do you agree or disagree Toronto, as the fourth largest city in North America, or the Greater Toronto Area, should be governed separately from the province of Ontario?

YES	29%
Toronto should be a province	1%
GTA should be a province	3%
Toronto should be separate/not a province	6%
GTA should be separate/not a province	19%
NO	60%
Toronto should de-amalgamate into 6 cities again	20%
Things should stay as they are	40%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	11%

Infrastructure is seen to be a municipality's most important responsibility (19%), followed by zoning powers (14%), power of mayoral recall (12%), taxation and other revenue raising (12% and 11%, respectively) and transit and transportation (10%).

What is the most important responsibility a large city should have under its own authority?

Infrastructure	19%
Land use/zoning	14%
Mayor/councilor recall powers	12%
Taxation	12%
Revenue-raising (fees, tolls, charges)	11%
Transit/transportation	10%
Law enforcement	7%
Public health/hospitals/clinics	5%
Education	1%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	9%

The wide majority believes the “strong council” system is preferable (85%) to the “strong mayor” system (12%) of governance.

Do you believe in a strong mayor system, under which the mayor makes most decisions after consulting with councilors, or the strong council system under which the mayor is just another vote among many?

Strong mayor system	12%
Strong council system	85%
DON'T KNOW	4%

Virtually all members voted in their last municipal election and will vote in the next one (92%).

Did you vote in the last municipal election and will you vote in the coming municipal election in your town or city?

YES	95%
Voted last time, will vote again	92%
Voted last time, don't know if I will vote this time	3%
Voted last time, will not vote this time	*
NO	6%
Didn't vote last time, will vote this time	2%
Didn't vote last time, don't know if I will vote this time	2%
Didn't vote last time, won't vote this time	2%

Members see provincial politics as having the most effect on their lives (44%), followed by federal politics (34%), then municipal politics (18%).

Which level of politics has the most influence on your life?

Municipal	18%
Provincial	44%
Federal	34%
International	1%
DON'T KNOW	4%

While most members say municipal politics is not engaging because decisions are made to suit developers, not citizens (30%), a significant minority think only old ideas are touted (16%) or that the same people run every time (10%). A similar proportion cites poor quality candidates (13%). These are all factors which contribute to a desire for term limits. One tenth stubbornly insist other levels of government are more meaningful (13%).

Why do you think people are not more engaged in municipal politics?

Decisions made to suit developers, not citizens	30%
No new ideas/nothing ever changes	16%
Federal/provincial politics more important	13%
Poor quality candidates	13%
Same people run every time	10%
Issues aren't important	4%
My vote doesn't count	3%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	12%

What members want from municipal politicians is engagement - and term limits. They want a seniors champion with real powers (20%), no more closed door council meetings (18%) and they want term limits to address the concerns raised previously (18%). Other promises which would be met with votes include home care for shut-ins (13%) and more affordable seniors' housing (11%).

Which of the following would prompt you to vote for the municipal politician who promised it?

Seniors affairs champion with real powers	20%
Term limits	18%
No closed-door council meetings	18%
Public health at home for shut-ins	13%
More affordable housing	11%
Downtown congestion charge	3%
Discounted/free transit for seniors	2%
Road tolls	2%
Discounted/free parking for seniors	1%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	12%

Most members want to shift the burden of municipal financing to other levels of government (30%), perhaps forgetting there is only one taxpayer. Other revenue sources are seen to be property tax increases (15%) and road tolls (10%).

Which of the following do you think is the most promising way to raise revenues for infrastructure and city-building?

Funding from other levels of government	31%
Property tax increase	15%
Road tolls	10%
Downtown congestion charge	9%
Sell/privatize services	7%
Sell/privatize real estate	5%
Advertising on municipal property/parks/schools	5%
User fees for parks/libraries/pools etc	3%
Parking surcharge	2%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	13%

The wide majority disagree that municipalities are well-prepared financially to handle services and costs which have been downloaded on them by provincial and federal governments (80%).

Do you agree or disagree municipalities are equipped and funded well enough to cope with services downloaded by the provincial and federal governments?

AGREE	14%
Strongly agree	1%
Agree	13%
DISAGREE	80%
Disagree	49%
Strongly disagree	31%
DON'T KNOW	6%

Once again, the largest group of members thinks the best way to fund underfunded municipalities is to shift the burden to other levels of government (35%), while one fifth want a (larger) share of the gas tax (19%). One tenth say revenue raising powers should be increased (11%) or that more cities should amalgamate for efficiencies of scale (10%).

What is the best way to help municipalities meet the needs of citizens and seniors who depend on services provided locally which may be underfunded?

Funding from other levels of government	35%
Share of gas tax	19%
Revenue-raising power (fees/charges/tolls)	11%
Amalgamate municipalities for efficiencies of scale	10%
Municipal bonds with tax free interest	7%
Municipal income tax (credit against prov/fed tax)	6%
New fees/charges/tolls	2%
OTHER/DON'T KNOW	10%

Electoral Preference

The Liberals (49% have maintained their vote share at the expense of the Conservatives (34%) The NDP (12%) remain in third place.

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are needed to see this picture.

More than 2200 CARP Poll™ online panel members responded to this poll between August 29 and September 1, 2014. The margin of error for a probability sample this size is about plus or minus 2%, 19 times out of 20