

THE YORK UNIVERSITY/TORONTO STAR SURVEY

**2014 GREATER TORONTO SURVEY ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS & THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE
UPCOMING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

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2014 GREATER TORONTO SURVEY ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The upcoming local elections in the Greater Toronto Area have received greater scrutiny than in recent years. Much of the attention in the media has been on polling data, especially in the race to become the next mayor of Toronto. There has been far less reliable survey data on what people living in the GTA think about local governance issues and their priorities for local government spending.

The past four years have been stormy ones in a number of GTA municipalities (Toronto, Brampton, Mississauga) in terms of the conduct of their mayors. It is interesting and important to see how this has affected what people living in the GTA think.

The Institute for Social Research at York University conducted in-depth interviews with more than 600 residents of the GTA over the past four weeks to gather accurate information about how the GTA can be a better, fairer place to live and work.

The findings are organized into four themes: (1) satisfaction with local politicians; (2) support for electoral changes; (3) acceptable revenue sources; and (4) spending priorities.

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

- Significantly, the **overwhelming majority (90% plus) reported that their quality of life is satisfactory or very satisfactory.**
- There are interesting findings about **satisfaction with their local politicians.**
 - Only 10% think that federal politicians do a better job than local politicians.
 - Although 43% of respondents feel that their mayor is doing a good or very good job, there are huge differences between those living in the City of Toronto (where Rob Ford is mayor) and everywhere else. **55% of those in the rest of the GTA think this about their own mayor, whereas in Toronto only 28% think this** (which of course corresponds to the core support that the Ford Nation enjoys).
 - Similar numbers of residents (48%) think that their local councillors are doing a good or very good job. There is no different here between the City of Toronto and the rest of the GTA.
- Most, however, support changing or improving **how local elections work.**
 - Most (58%) believe that mayors should have to receive the **majority of votes cast to win**, not simply the most votes, to win.
 - A vast majority (79%) support a **recall mechanism** for voters so they can remove a duly elected mayor at any point during their term if people are unhappy with his or her conduct. Support for a recall mechanism is stronger in the 905 area code than in the City of Toronto.
 - Only a small portion (17%) support the **GTA becoming its own province** within Canada.
- Views about **acceptable revenue sources** for municipal governments are evolving.
 - **Although a majority (57%) support keeping property taxes at their current level, a significant number (21%) support increasing taxes.** It is notable that only 10% want a property tax cut.
 - This trend is even more pronounced in the **City of Toronto where 31% of respondents think that taxes should go up.** This compares to only 9% in the rest of the GTA. This suggests that Toronto voters have little enthusiasm for a mayoral candidate who is making tax cuts a high priority.
 - A vast majority of respondents want the **federal (75%) and provincial (82%) governments to contribute more to support municipal government services.**
 - The surprising finding about other revenue sources for GTA municipalities is that almost half of respondents support more **user fees for services (49%) and toll roads (47%).**
 - Support for user fees is even across the GTA.
 - Residents of Toronto are **much stronger supporters (57%) of toll roads than those living in the 905 areas (36%).** This may be a reflection of perceptions of who would have to pay those tolls.

- **Spending priorities** are also evolving.
 - In five policy areas (roads, public transportation, schools, recreation, facilities for seniors), more than 85% of respondents would like spending to stay the same or increase. **A majority favour increasing spending on public transportation and facilities for seniors.**
 - Significantly, only 17% favour increasing spending on police, and **20% support cutting spending on police.**
 - **If municipal politicians need to make budget cuts, the largest number (21%) of respondents by far favour cutting police budgets.** Only 5% favour cutting politician salaries or programs for the poor. Roads and public transportation cuts are supported by similarly low numbers (7-8%).
 - Residents of the **City of Toronto**, in comparison to those living in the rest of the GTA, **are much more likely to favour increased spending on public transportation (57%/37%) and roads (62%/39%).** This dovetails well with the finding above that Toronto residents are also much more likely to support property tax increases.

SURVEY DETAILS

Respondents: 613

Male: 56% Female: 44%

Approximately 40% reported having children 17 or younger in their household

70% completed university degree or college diploma

40% from the City of Toronto, 60% from the rest of the GTA

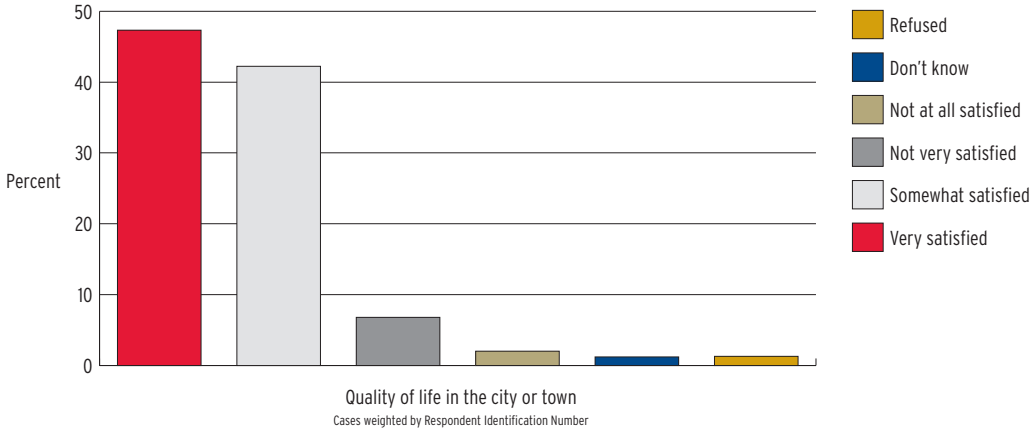
Interviews conducted in August - September 2014

Error Rate: 4%

QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE GTA

- Very high number of respondents (90% plus) reported being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their quality of life living in the Greater Toronto area

QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE CITY OR TOWN



GOVERNANCE ISSUES

JOB PERFORMANCE AND EXPECTATIONS

Rating of Mayor and (Local) Councillor

Job rating	Mayor (%)	Councillor (%)
Very good	10	11
Good	33	37
Average	30	38
Poor	13	10
Very poor	14	4
Total	100	100

Performance comparisons: municipal versus federal politicians

	number	percent
Municipal politicians do a <i>better</i> job	145	24
Municipal politicians do a <i>worse</i> job	60	10
There is no difference	331	54
Not sure	77	12
Total	613	100

Views on balance of power between the mayor and the councillors

	number	percent
Mayor has too much power	97	16
Councillors have too much power	80	13
Current balance is about right	341	56
Not sure	95	15
Total	613	100

CHANGES TO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**Support or oppose a system where the mayor needs to win a majority of the votes in order to win the election**

	number	percent
Support	357	58
Oppose	199	33
Not sure	57	9
Total	613	100

If support: prefer that voters rank the candidates or a run-off election?

	number	percent
Rank and count second choice	110	31
Run-off election with candidates who get the most votes	225	63
Not sure	22	6
Total	357	100

Support or oppose allowing a referendum to remove a municipal politician from office if many residents of the city are unhappy with the job that the he/she is doing?

	number	percent
Support	482	79
Oppose	102	16
Not sure	29	5
Total	613	100

Support or oppose making the Greater Toronto area a province

	number	percent
Support	105	17
Oppose	459	75
Not sure	49	8
Total	613	100

FUNDING SOURCES

Trade-off between taxes and services

Position	number	percent
Reduce taxes and services	76	12
Increase taxes and services	126	21
The balance between taxes and services about right	349	57
Not sure/ other response	63	10
Total	613	100

Expectations of federal and provincial government financial support

Provide a greater share of tax revenue to cities/towns	Federal Government (%)	Provincial Government (%)
Yes	75	82
No	18	14
Not sure	7	4
Total	100	100

User-fees for services and toll roads

Raise fees by using:	User fees (%)	Toll roads (%)
Yes	49	47
No	40	48
Not sure	11	5
Total	100	100

POLICY PRIORITIES

Spending on six areas: up, down or stay the same?

Spending area	% saying spending should:				Total
	Go up	Stay the same	Go down	Not sure	
Road maintenance and repair	47	45	5	3	100
Public transport	51	35	10	4	100
Policing	17	59	20	4	100
Schools	43	46	7	4	100
Recreational facilities for children and youth	39	53	6	2	100
Facilities for seniors	53	36	3	8	100

If municipal government needed to make budget cuts, where should they be made?

Area	number	percent
Policing	126	21
Recreational facilities for children and youth	76	13
Public transport	44	7
Road maintenance and repair	49	8
Politicians salaries, benefits and expenses	33	5
Municipal employees' salaries, benefits and expenses	29	5
Government cost, administration & expenses	21	3
Schools	26	4
Government does not need to spend less (may also mention raise taxes)	15	2
Cut spending on other services (may have mentioned specific area such as waste, housing, tourism, social services, welfare, etc.)	32	5
Other responses (spend wisely, sell land, tax business, charge user fees, etc)	30	5
Not sure where to cut	132	22
Total	613	100