



# The United States Conference of Mayors

1620 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006  
Phone (202) 293-7330 • Fax (202) 293-2352  
E-mail: [info@usmayors.org](mailto:info@usmayors.org) URL: [usmayors.org](http://usmayors.org)

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Contact:

Elena Temple 202-286-1100 | [etemple@usmayors.org](mailto:etemple@usmayors.org)  
Sara Durr 202-215-1811 | [sara@durrcommunications.com](mailto:sara@durrcommunications.com)  
Tom Testa 617-959-3887 | [ttesta@bu.edu](mailto:ttesta@bu.edu)  
Kamran Mumtaz (Citi) 202-879-6878 | [kamran.mumtaz@citi.com](mailto:kamran.mumtaz@citi.com)

## NEW MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS REVEALS TOP PRIORITIES FOR CITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

*Addressing Aging Infrastructure, Enhancing Relationships with State and Federal Officials & Implementing Policing Reforms Among Top Goals*

Washington, D.C. – The U.S. Conference of Mayors in partnership with The Boston University Initiative on Cities, with the support of Citi, today released the 2015 Menino Survey of Mayors, which details the most pressing needs and policy priorities of mayors in cities across the country. America’s mayors are on the front lines of promoting prosperous and safe communities, with aging urban infrastructure, policing, municipal finance, and their relationships with constituents, other cities and higher levels of government as top concerns. The Menino Survey of Mayors, the only nationally representative survey of American mayors, sheds light on these areas and more.

Released during the Conference’s 84<sup>th</sup> Winter Meeting in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the 2016 Mayors Compact for a Better America, the survey – named in honor of the late Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston – also underscored the mayors’ collective call for the presidential candidates and Congress to focus on issues of importance to cities and their metropolitan areas, urging national leaders to invest in and help protect communities.

Notably, mayors shared common perspectives, despite city size and location or their party affiliation. Mayors cited the need to fix crumbling roads, grow mass transit, and repair water infrastructure, as well as a desire to improve pedestrian and bike infrastructure while raising concerns about receiving too little financial support from federal and state government. On the issue of policing, mayors overwhelmingly supported efforts such as body cameras, civilian review boards, and data-driven evaluation.

“While the findings of this study are revealing, they are not surprising,” said USCM CEO & Executive Director Tom Cochran. “The fact that crumbling infrastructure and policing reforms top the list of priorities only underscores that the fact that mayors are less focused on ideology, and are more interested in getting things done. Mayors know the needs of their residents and they are committed to responding to those needs.”

The Menino Survey of Mayors sought to gain insight into the specific needs of mayors within a broad spectrum of mayoral challenges and contemporary realities. The researchers interviewed mayors in person at the 83rd Annual Conference of Mayors in San Francisco, and over the phone or by email in the months that followed. The survey was made possible by support from Citi.

“Mayors are innovators, collaborators, and problem solvers by nature, often taking action when other levels of government cannot. The BU Initiative on Cities was co-founded by one of America’s greatest mayors, Tom Menino, and we have a profound respect for the job mayors do every day,” said **Graham Wilson, Director of the BU Initiative on Cities**. “We hope that the Menino Survey shines a light on their leadership and helps mayors communicate the needs, challenges, and achievements of cities today.”

Significantly, the Survey reveals that mayors often turn to each other for inspiration and help in tackling their challenges. As the Survey shows, “Mayors draw policy ideas from a wide array of cities, with New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Denver, Austin, Salt Lake City and Boston garnering an especially high number of mentions... and the list of responses included a range of cities with a variety of traits. The prominence of the city may matter less than their reputation for policy innovation as the majority of mayors said they look to cities that are leaders in tackling specific challenges that mayors are facing at home.”

“The findings of this survey illustrate the importance and appeal of The U.S. Conference of Mayors as an organization,” said **Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake of Baltimore, Maryland**. “The Conference provides mayors an arena for like-minds with shared challenges to convene, exchange ideas and debate policy solutions. The data shared here is invaluable and helps us to advance our policy goals to uplift working families who live in our cities and metropolitan areas.”

“The Menino Survey was a great opportunity to bring together mayors from across the country to hear directly from them what they see as the top priorities facing their cities. From aging infrastructure and the need for quality affordable housing to crime prevention and budget constraints, mayors face a common set of challenges that require drawing upon the best of the public and private sectors,” said **Ed Skyler, Citi’s Head of Global Public Affairs and a former New York City deputy mayor**. “The survey reveals the deep frustration among mayors, who feel they are ultimately responsible for fixing what is broken but aren’t getting the support they need from the state or federal government to do so.”

The key findings of the survey – which can be read in full at [www.usmayors.org](http://www.usmayors.org) are below. Follow the conversation on social media using the hashtag #USCMwinter16 or #MeninoSurvey.

- **INFRASTRUCTURE:** A majority of mayors surveyed reported that aging and underfunded physical infrastructure is the greatest shared challenge facing their city and identified specific projects they would prioritize for investment.
  - In 2014, infrastructure topped the list of mayoral challenges. In 2015, mayors named their greatest shared challenge - one where they could typically rely on other government partners for help. Continued underinvestment in infrastructure rose to the top, with more than half of mayors naming it in an open-ended question as the greatest shared challenge facing their city. Topping their list of needs, overwhelmingly, is roads.
  - Specific “big ticket” priority projects: if mayors were the sudden beneficiaries of a large unrestricted capital grant to devote to a specific project, they would invest in mass transit (22%), roads (20%), and water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure (18%).
  - Modestly-priced priority projects: with a small unrestricted capital grant that they could devote to just one project, mayors would invest in bike and pedestrian infrastructure (20%), parks (19%), roads (15%) and municipal buildings (14%).
  - While mayors most often must partner with state and federal government to address infrastructure priorities, they’re “not confident” that either will adequately help them solve their challenges.
- **BIKING:** Mayors express strong support for improved accessibility for cyclists even if it means sacrificing parking or driving lanes, in addition to naming bike infrastructure as key funding priority.
  - More than 70% of mayors supported the tradeoff favoring improved bike accessibility in their city, even if it comes at the expense of parking and driving lanes.
  - Democratic and Republican mayors differ in their level of support for street designs that favor cyclists over drivers, with 44% of Republican mayors and 81% of Democratic ones endorsing improved bike accessibility.

- **POLICING:** Mayors broadly support police reforms recently advocated by the President’s Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing and others, but express important reservations about some policies, including those they support in principle.
  - Mayors overwhelmingly support an array of proposed reforms, including body cameras (with 93% strongly supportive/supportive), independent investigations for all police related shootings (87%), publicizing arrest and crime statistics by demographics (85%), evaluating police departments based on arrest and crime statistics (74%), and civilian review boards (65%).
  - Democrats and Republicans were equally committed to the reforms, evincing no differences in their high levels of support for the proposed policies.
  - However, as one mayor noted, “the devil’s in the details.” Many mayors expressed the importance of moving cautiously to protect individual rights and privacy and promote fairness.
  
- **POVERTY AND INEQUALITY:** Cities, especially big cities, are aggressively pursuing a wide variety of policies targeting the challenges faced by low-income residents.
  - The vast majority of mayors (74%) have programs that address the lack of job training and workforce development needs in their city. Approximately half of all those interviewed are focused on high housing costs (57% of responding mayors), limited access to healthy foods (54%), limited access to government social and emergency assistance programs like SNAP (51%), and limited access to living wage jobs (49%).
  - Both large and small cities are aggressively tackling poverty, although big cities are taking on even more of the challenges affecting low income residents. On average, big cities are addressing more than five (5.5) challenges confronting the poor, while smaller communities are tackling just under four (3.8). Still, top priorities – job training, housing, food access, etc. – are similar regardless of city size.
  - While many cities have programs to address challenges faced specifically by low income residents, mayors believe inequality – the gap between rich and poor - is one area where they have limited control. They also believe constituents hold them to little account for any income inequality that may exist at the local level.
  
- **HOUSING:** Mayors, particularly those in more expensive cities, are committed to addressing high housing costs although affordable housing mandates are not universally embraced as a tool.
  - More than half of the mayors interviewed say they’re aggressively addressing housing affordability in their city.
  - When it comes to affordable housing, mayors work with a wide array of partners but their chief allies are the federal government (named by 62% of respondents) and nonprofits (60%).
  - 60% of mayors governing more expensive cities support mandates requiring developers to include affordable housing in new projects, even if they deter some new development.
  - Overall, just 40% of mayors supported the tradeoff and affordable housing mandate.
  - Democratic mayors were more likely to agree with the implementation of these types of mandates. Half of Democratic mayors supported the tradeoff, compared with 20% of Republican mayors.
  
- **MUNICIPAL FINANCE:** Mayors nationwide are focused on the fiscal health of their cities, although they vary in their preferred methods to improve and stabilize it.
  - Mayors believe their fiscal management skills are an important driver of constituent approval and—unlike many other areas of constituent interest—this is one where they believe they possess real control.
  - In order to improve their city’s fiscal health, mayors would be least likely to raise property taxes (52% cite it as least appealing of the options), privatize city services (35%) or eliminate city programs (35%). Mayors are

less opposed to other remedies, including reducing city staff (27%), raising other taxes and fees (22%), and renegotiating union contracts (24%).

- Partisan distinctions did emerge in mayors' reactions to potential fiscal tools. Republicans feel stronger opposition to raising property taxes (74%) than their Democratic counterparts (43%), while Democrats are more likely to oppose privatization (45%) than Republicans (9%).

- **CONSTRAINTS:** Mayors, regardless of party affiliation, are feeling increasingly constrained by state regulations and the aggressive efforts of some of their state legislatures to limit local autonomy. They also express frustration with the current funding environment, notably the lack of financial support available at both the federal and state levels.

- Mayors believe they receive too little financial support from state and federal government relative to other cities, and are overly burdened by restrictions from their state government.

- Mayors feel generally constrained by their states, but also express specific pain points. If they could repeal or change particular state laws, many would expand their local revenue-raising options (19 mentions), alter the distribution of state revenue (8 mentions), and alter idiosyncratic limitations on their policy-making autonomy (8 mentions).

- Mayors feel they have better allies at the federal level, although many can still name restrictions and regulations they would like to see changed. If mayors could repeal or change federal rules, many would revise Environmental Protection Agency rules (14 mentions), gun laws (7 mentions) and immigration laws (7 mentions).

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*About The United States Conference of Mayors – The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are nearly 1,400 such cities in the country today, and each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. Like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/usmayors](https://www.facebook.com/usmayors), or follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/usmayors](https://twitter.com/usmayors).*

*About the Initiative on Cities – The Boston University Initiative on Cities researches, promotes, and advances the adaptive urban leadership strategies and policies necessary to support cities as dynamic centers of growth and positive development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Founded by a proven urban leader, Former Mayor of Boston Thomas Menino, and a highly regarded academic, Professor Graham Wilson, the Initiative serves as a bridge between academic research and the real-life practice of city governance.*

*About Citi – Citi, the leading global bank, has approximately 200 million customer accounts and does business in more than 160 countries and jurisdictions. Citi provides consumers, corporations, governments and institutions with a broad range of financial products and services, including consumer banking and credit, corporate and investment banking, securities brokerage, transaction services, and wealth management.*