



Building for
a Green Future:
Cities and
the IRA

2023 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

SUPPORTED BY



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Authors

Katherine Levine Einstein
Associate Professor, Political Science
Boston University
kleinst@bu.edu

David M. Glick
Associate Professor, Political Science
Boston University
dmglick@bu.edu

Maxwell Palmer
Associate Professor, Political Science
Boston University
mbpalmer@bu.edu

Stacy Fox
Executive Director, Initiative on Cities
Boston University
sfox@bu.edu

Erin LeBlanc
Research Assistant, Initiative on Cities
Boston University

Contributors

Erin Tatz
PhD Candidate, Political Science
Boston University

Danielle Mulligan
Associate Director, Initiative on Cities
Boston University

Initiative on Cities

Boston University
75 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215

bu.edu/ioc
[@BUonCities](https://twitter.com/BUonCities)
617-358-8080
IOC@bu.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Passed in 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) features unprecedented federal investment in environmental initiatives. It provides around \$370 billion in resources for clean energy technology.¹ These investments come primarily in the form of tax credits and grants available to state and local governments, nonprofits, and individual households.² For example, the Solar for All program “provide[s] up to 60 grants to States, Tribal governments, municipalities, and nonprofits to expand the number of low-income and disadvantaged communities that are primed for residential and community solar investment — enabling millions of families to access affordable, resilient, and clean solar energy.”³ Despite these massive investments, the Biden Administration has expressed growing concerns and frustration about the slow pace with which federal dollars are translating into concrete projects.⁴

Local governments are critical partners — and potential obstacles — to implementing federal policies like the IRA. Local governments can choose whether or not to apply for IRA grants. Moreover, through their control over land use and permitting and local regulations, local governments dictate what gets built and where it gets built. The clean energy technologies funded by the IRA, such as solar panels, solar arrays, and heat pumps, require building new infrastructure on a small or large scale. Finally, local leaders are key partners to the federal government in communicating to their constituents trying to access IRA resources.

To better understand local communities’ experience of the IRA, we surveyed a nationally representative sample of 118 mayors leading cities over 75,000 residents. These interviews give us insights into mayoral experiences, as well as the experiences of individual households trying to access IRA resources. In addition, we supplemented our survey of mayors with interviews with clean energy technology companies, analysis of state-level laws and regulations, and results from the previous decade of Menino Survey responses.

Below, we highlight **four key challenges** to implementation of the IRA at the local level:

- 1.** Knowledge of the complex provisions of the IRA is low both among members of the general public and local officials.
- 2.** Many local governments, particularly smaller communities, lack the capacity to apply for IRA grant funding, especially when confronted with a formidable federal bureaucracy.
- 3.** Onerous local permitting processes combined with public opposition to new infrastructure projects make it more challenging to build clean energy infrastructure.
- 4.** Fragmented local building codes and environmental regulations create a challenging patchwork for clean energy companies to navigate, and mayors are largely reluctant to relinquish local control over these laws and regulations.

1 Stokes, L. “This Year Was the Beginning of a Green Transition.” *New York Times* (Dec. 25, 2022) via <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/25/opinion/gas-prices-crisis-climate-change.html>

2 The White House. “Building a Clean Energy Economy: A Guidebook to the Inflation Reduction Act’s Investments in Clean Energy and Climate Action.” CleanEnergy.Gov (Jan. 2023, v2) via <https://www.whitehouse.gov/cleanenergy/inflation-reduction-act-guidebook/>

3 The White House. “Building a Clean Energy Economy: A Guidebook to the Inflation Reduction Act’s Investments in Clean Energy and Climate Action.” CleanEnergy.Gov (Jan. 2023, v2) via <https://www.whitehouse.gov/cleanenergy/inflation-reduction-act-guidebook/>

4 Lee, M.J. and K. Liptak. “Biden impatient behind the scenes as projects funded by his legislative accomplishments are slow to materialize.” *CNN Politics* (Dec. 20, 2023) via <https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/20/politics/biden-impatient-legislative-accomplishments-slow-to-materialize/index.html>

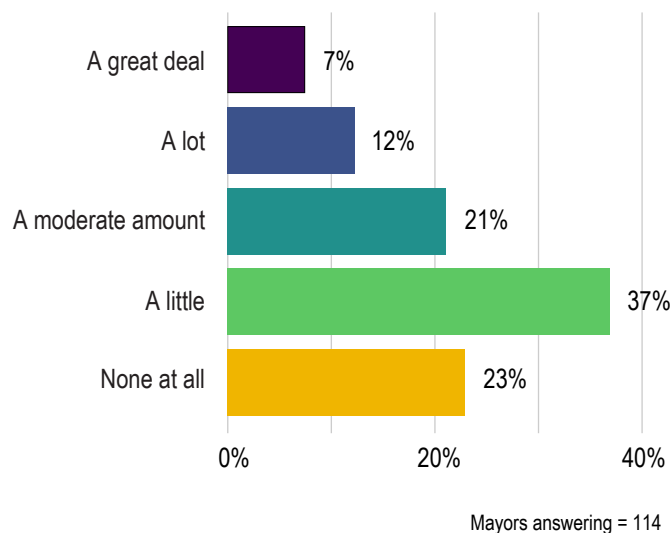


LOCAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

We surveyed mayors in summer 2023, one year after the law's passage. Learning lessons from mayors about early implementation can be useful to steer federal resources in future phases. Perhaps in part reflecting the law's recency, 60 percent of mayors said that the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has only had a little impact on their community or no impact at all.

Figure 1. IRA Impact on Community To Date

Last year's Inflation Reduction Act included incentives for things like electric cars, solar panels, and heat pumps. Thus far, how much impact has the legislation had in your community?



A small number of mayors felt unsure about some of the program's provisions. As one put it, "We're largely ignorant of these resources." Another said, "Even though the IRA offers the opportunity to achieve our city's goals, it's hard to wrap our heads around. It's not the normal funding process."

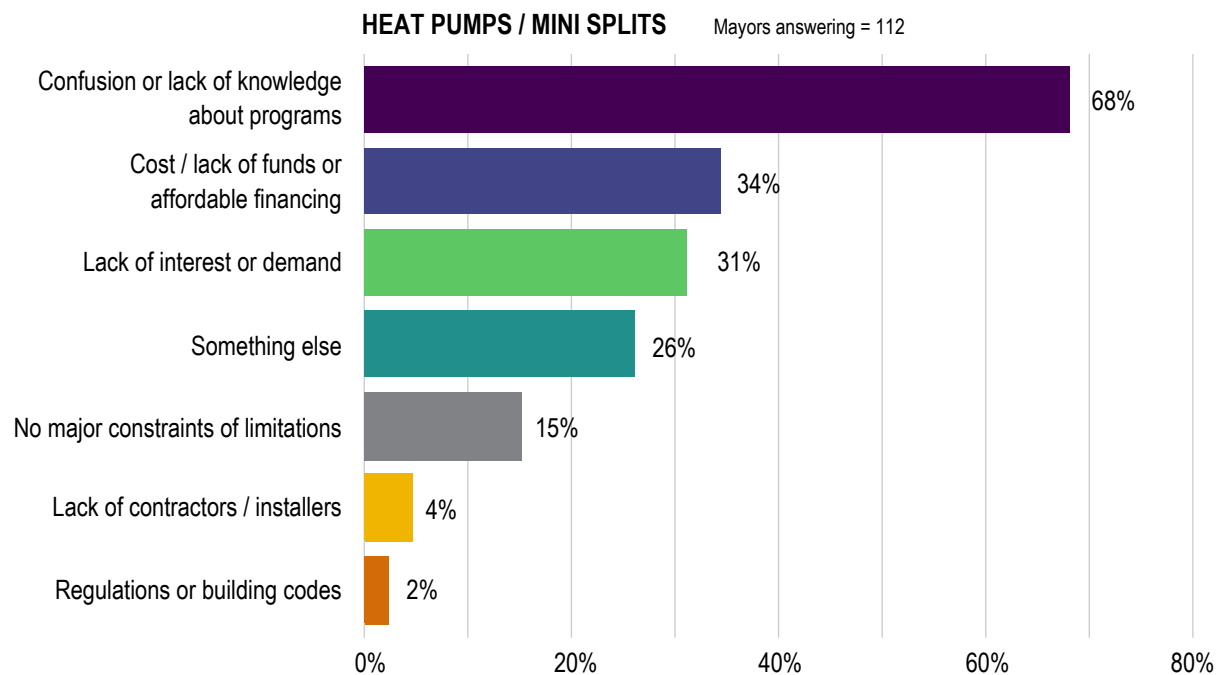
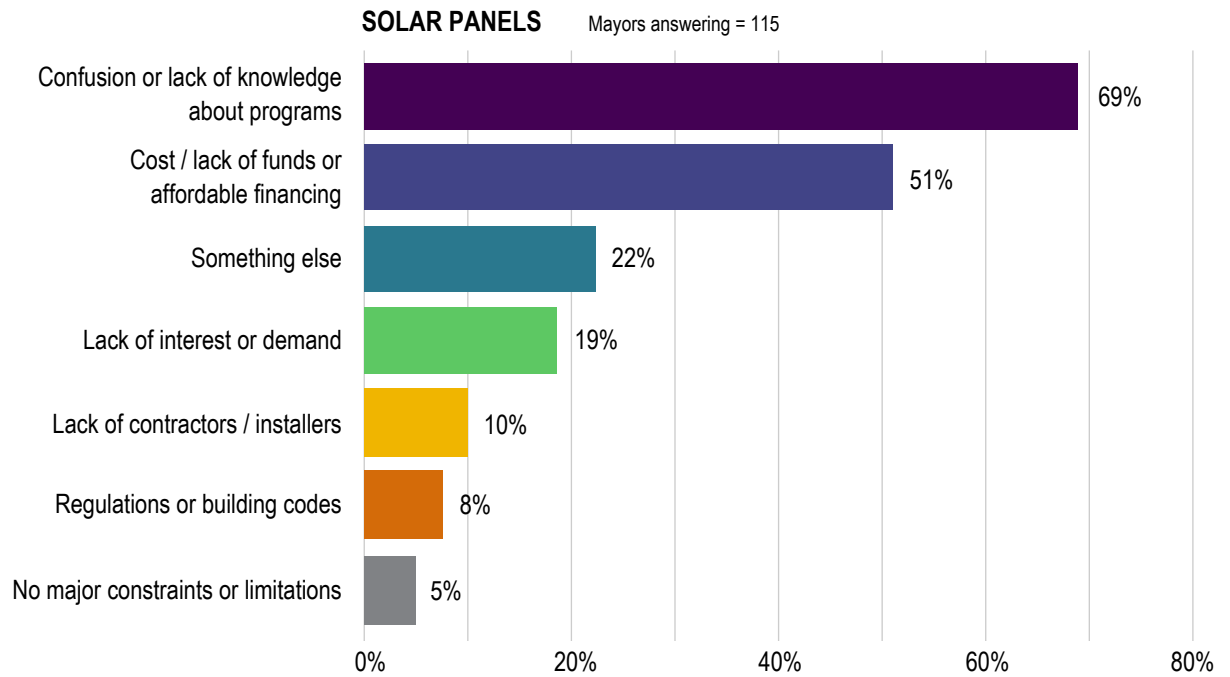
More frequently, mayors cited a lack of knowledge among the broader public about programs available to individual households. For example, the IRA includes support for residential mini split/heat pump installations. When asked about the top two constraints on adoption, a striking 68 percent of mayors cited public confusion or lack of knowledge of the programs. The next

most popular option, by a distant margin, was cost or homeowners' lack of funds, cited by 34 percent of mayors. Mayors' views on solar panel uptake were fairly similar: 69 percent highlighted confusion or lack of knowledge about federal subsidies supporting solar. The next most popular option was again cost or lack of funds, listed by 51 percent of mayors.



Figure 2. Constraints on Solar and Heat Pump Uptake Among Residents

Among other things, the IRA increased federal subsidies for _____. What, if anything, are the top two constraints or limitations on _____ uptake among your residents?

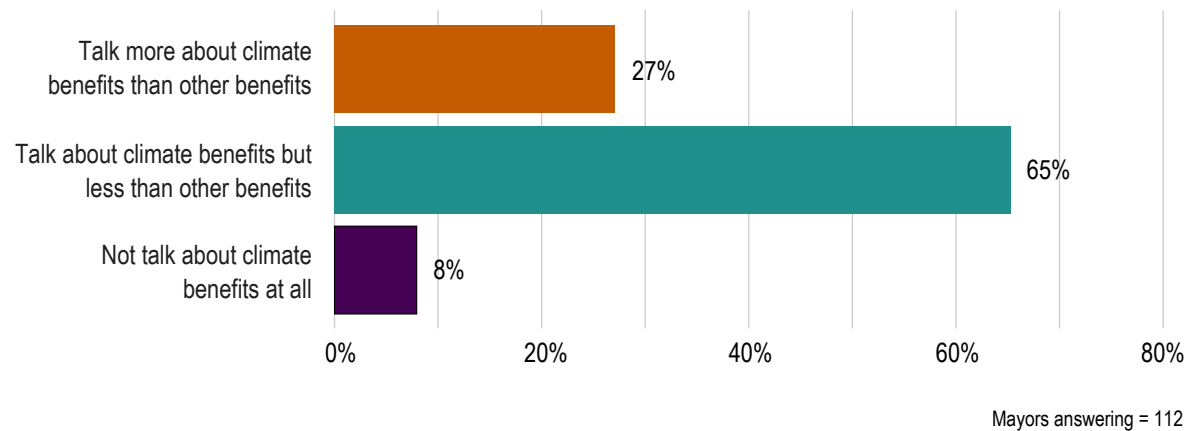




If public confusion or lack of knowledge are indeed substantial obstacles, mayors and others have a clarifying and communications role to play. Mayors believe that the best messaging to encourage adoption of climate-friendly technologies, such as heat pumps and battery-powered lawn tools, involves emphasizing both the climate and non-climate benefits of these innovations. Sixty-five percent of mayors say that optimal messaging for such technologies would highlight climate benefits, but less than the other benefits. Only 27 percent endorse discussing climate benefits more than other benefits. A mere eight percent believe it best not to discuss climate benefits at all.

Figure 3. Messaging to Encourage Adoption of Climate-Friendly Technologies

When encouraging adoption of new electrification technologies like heat pumps and battery powered lawn tools, governments and companies can use a variety of different messages. Some focus more on climate benefits, while others might emphasize basic product benefits like cost, comfort, or usability. If the goal were to get the largest number of your residents to consider such technologies, would it be more effective to:



LOCAL CAPACITY AND FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY

As noted above, the IRA provides opportunities for individuals and local governments to apply for funding. When asked an open-ended question about how easy or difficult it has been for their city to take advantage of the IRA's programs, 45 percent of mayors described the process as difficult. Only 38 percent said it had been easy to participate, with the remaining mayors either saying the process had been neutral, or that they weren't sure.

When asked... how easy or difficult it has been for their city to take advantage of the IRA's programs, 45 percent of mayors describe the process as difficult.

Mayors regularly commented on the perceived complexity of the IRA's application process. One mayor described the process as having "a lot of red tape and regulatory requirements. It is very hard for local government to access resources." They noted they have "sophisticated staff capable of getting grants and competing for funding. Despite this, it has been hard to access the funds because of the large number of unnecessary and burdensome requirements." Another mayor said that IRA resources "require research into grants and grant applications and we are restricted on employing people to do this work."



Having a sustainability officer in place appeared to be associated with smoother local grant application process. Several mayors noted that their sustainability officers were handling all grant activities related to the IRA. Importantly, cities that have sustainability officers are also mostly higher capacity places, meaning that the overall staff capacity may also explain their relative ease in navigating the IRA's complex provisions.

Given links between government capacity and citizen size, cities with larger populations were 13 percentage points more likely than smaller cities to rate participation in the IRA as easy (29 percent versus 16 percent). One mayor of a larger city noted that they had an easier time accessing IRA resources *"because of the size of our city. We have staff or grant writing and reporting."* Another described their process as *"very easy, but I will say we actually staff this*

"There has been a lot of planning around the IRA, but having the staff to apply for grants and stay on top of it all is difficult..."

area. I hired to specifically staff in this area." In contrast, smaller cities consistently lamented that inadequate staffing had hindered their efforts at obtaining IRA grants: *"A city our size, we don't have a great grant writing capability. We have a very good delegation in Congress, we're unified and well represented, but, as a city government, an area we need to do a better job is taking advantage of what the federal government has done over the last few years to make money available."* Another small city observed that *"There has been a lot of planning around the IRA, but having the staff to apply for grants and stay on top of it all is difficult [...] Some things fall through the crack because some parts of the IRA are not a top priority and we don't have the staff in a small city. It is a manpower issue."*

The challenges some mayors have faced in accessing resources may lead a small number to perceive the process as biased or unfair. A few mayors said they believed that IRA resources go disproportionately to coastal cities or cities located in states that are politically important to the Biden administration. One mayor described accessing IRA programs as *"difficult [...] These programs are for blue states or swing states. Red states like [X] do not seem to get the benefit."*

PERMITTING AND COMMUNITY OPPOSITION

There are substantial local regulatory barriers to translating federal dollars into concrete projects. The IRA, and other federal environmental initiatives, require building, which means navigating state and local permitting processes.

In America's highly decentralized policy environment, building requires homeowners, contractors, or developers to navigate complex land use and construction regulations and requirements. These requirements dictate both the standards by which projects must be constructed and where new clean energy technology and housing can be placed. Moreover, they shape the process by which new developments come to fruition.

Process requirements offer unique opportunities for small and vocal oppositional groups to block or delay developments.⁵ Zoning and local land use requirements frequently require new developments to receive special permits or variances from existing zoning codes. To obtain these permits and variances, developers must present their plans before public hearings. Previous research on housing developments has shown that attendees at these

⁵ Einstein, K.L, D. Glick, and M. Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*. Cambridge University Press.



meetings are overwhelmingly opposed to the construction of new housing, and are often able to, at a minimum, shrink and delay new housing developments — adding to the overall cost of housing construction and reducing the total number of units produced.⁶ Recent evidence suggests that such community opposition extends to clean energy projects.⁷

HOUSING, COMMUNITY OPPOSITION, AND LAND USE REGULATIONS

Housing policy helps to illuminate the ways in which zoning, land use and permitting, and community opposition can stymie building key infrastructure investments like those at the center of the IRA. The joint impact of land use regulations and community opposition on housing development and housing prices has been well-documented in academic research⁸ and policy circles.⁹ Mayors also recognize land use regulations and community opposition in the realm of housing. In 2017, 60 percent of mayors described housing policy in their city as dominated by a small group with strong views.

Indeed, in response to an open-ended question — where they could cite any policy area — a number of mayors described housing-related issues as places where they felt their personal views were most misaligned with their constituents. In particular, multiple mayors stated that they wanted to build more housing than their constituents. As one mayor put it, *“I’m probably more pro-development than my constituents as a whole.”*

Mayors were strongly supportive of statewide legislation that would facilitate the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) — an additional, small housing unit added to an existing housing lot — by streamlining the permitting process. Sixty percent of mayors endorsed adopting a law similar to California¹⁰ and Oregon’s legislation¹¹ permitting property owners to construct ADUs without going through a lengthy permitting process. This strong support persisted across high and low housing cost cities. Intriguingly, this support was relatively bipartisan. While Democratic mayors (66 percent) were 19 percentage points more likely than their Republican counterparts (47 percent) to endorse pro-ADU statewide legislation, such differences were fairly muted compared with divisions on more highly nationalized issues such as welfare spending and climate change.¹²

6 Einstein, K.L., D. Glick, and M. Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America’s Housing Crisis*. Cambridge University Press.

7 Stokes, L., E. Franzblau, J. Lovering, and C. Miljanich. 2023. “Prevalence and predictors of wind energy opposition in North America.” *PNAS* (v. 120, n. 40) via <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2302313120>

8 Schuetz, J. 2022. *Fixer Upper: How to Repair America’s Broken Housing Systems*. Brookings Institution Press.

9 The White House. “Biden-Harris Administration Announces Actions to Lower Housing Costs and Boost Supply.” Briefing Room (Jul. 27, 2023) via <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/07/27/biden-harris-administration-announces-actions-to-lower-housing-costs-and-boost-supply/#:~:text=Reducing%20barriers%20to%20build%20housing,affordable%20and%20zero%20emissions%20housing>

10 California Department of Housing and Community Development. “Accessory Dwelling Units.” Accessed Jan. 22, 2024 via <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-and-research/accessory-dwelling-units>

11 Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. “Guidance on Implementing the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) Requirement.” March 2018, updated September 2019 via https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/Publications/ADU_Guidance_updatedSept2019.pdf

12 Einstein, K.L., D. Glick, and M. Palmer. 2024. “When Are Mayors Polarized?” Working Paper.



Figure 4. Implementing CA and OR Accessory Dwelling Unit Policy in Your State

California and Oregon have recently passed state laws allowing property owners to construct Accessory Dwelling Units without going through a lengthy permitting process. How supportive would you be of a similar policy in your state?

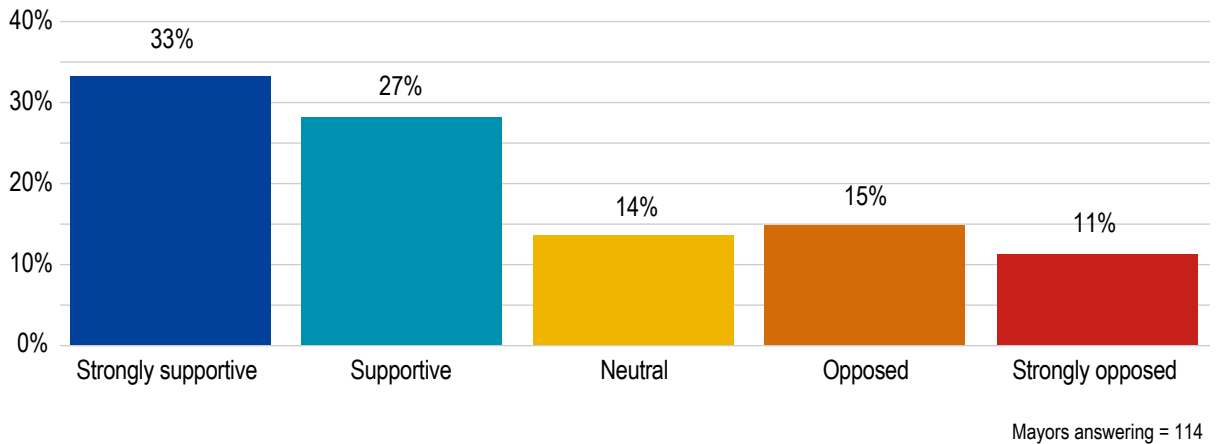
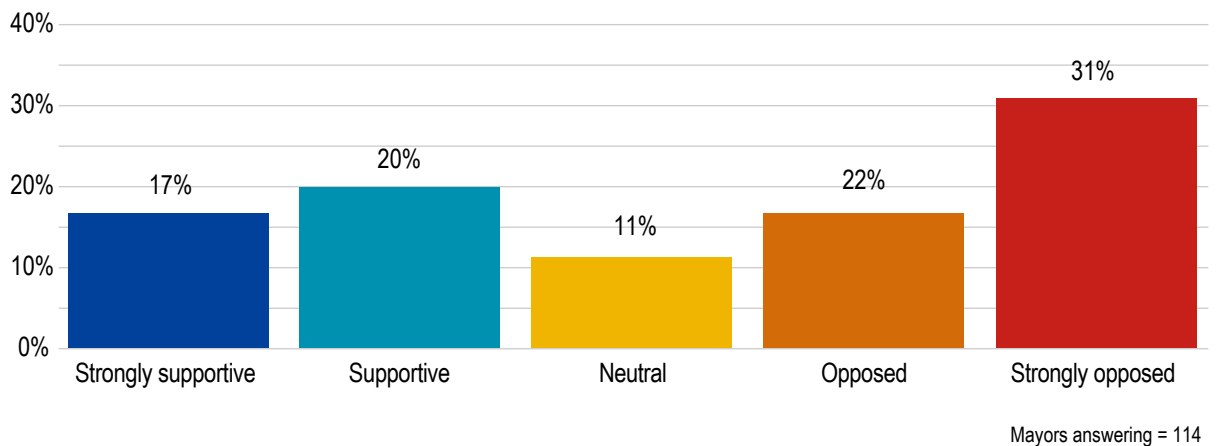


Figure 5. Implementing OR and MT Housing Permitting Policy in Your State

Oregon and Montana recently passed state legislation that required cities over a certain size (10,000 in Oregon and 5,000 in Montana) to eliminate single-family zoning and allow the development of duplexes by right. How supportive would you be of a similar policy in your state?



Importantly, this support for state-imposed streamlining of local land use regulations does not extend to all pieces of legislation. We also asked mayors about their support for state legislation like that in Oregon¹³ and Montana¹⁴ that banned single-family zoning and allowed the construction of duplexes in all lots “by right” in cities over a certain size (10,000 in Oregon and 5,000 in Montana). Here, a majority of mayors (53 percent) opposed statewide legislation aimed at relaxing the housing permitting process, with proportions again remarkably similar in cities

13 Oregon Legislative Assembly. “House Bill 2001.” Accessed Jan. 24, 2024 via <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2019R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB2001/Introduced>

14 State of Montana. “Governor Gianforte Announces Bold, Transformational Pro-Housing Zoning Reform.” Accessed Feb. 2, 2024 via https://news.mt.gov/Governors-Office/Governor_Gianforte_Announces_Bold_Transformational_Pro-Housing_Zoning_Reform



with high and low housing costs. The partisan split was considerably sharper in this policy area: 68 percent of Republicans *strongly* opposed statewide legislation that would eliminate single-family zoning, compared with only 24 percent of Democrats. Importantly, though, a minority of Democrats (46 percent) supported such a policy.

Mayors' survey responses paint a mixed picture. They largely recognize the joint effects of the permitting process and community opposition on their local housing markets and support some policy tools that might address these problems. But, likely in no small part due to attachment to local control over land use, they are considerably more tepid about some policy reforms. Indeed, multiple mayors provided follow-ups to closed-ended questions about the Oregon and Montana reforms that underscored their concerns about erosion of local control. One mayor said their *"opposition to housing preemption is about local control."* Another said they were *"strongly opposed because local government should set zoning. [We] know what works for our cities."* One argued that they *"don't want to give [the state] a blank check. [Local] context is important."* We see a similar pattern in mayors' views on clean energy and land use regulations.

CLEAN ENERGY, COMMUNITY OPPOSITION, AND LAND USE REGULATIONS

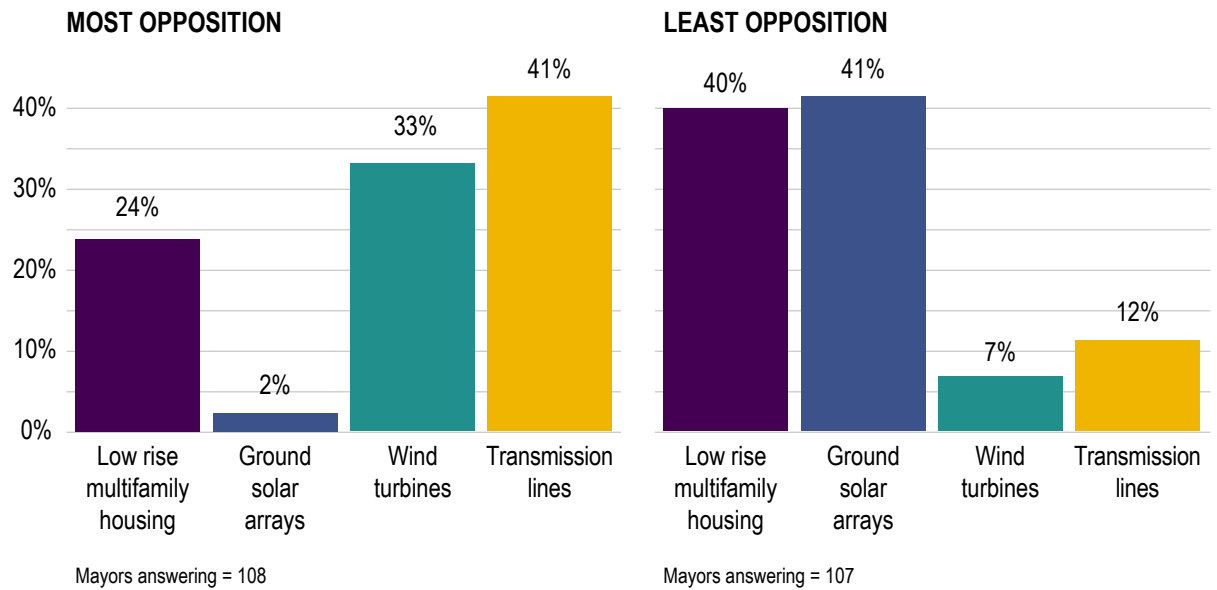
Mayors see community opposition to new development extending to at least some environmental issues. When we asked mayors to rank which use of space would generate the most opposition among their residents, the most frequently selected options were transmission lines (41 percent) and wind turbines (33 percent). Low-rise multifamily housing was cited by only 24 percent of mayors. These results are striking; despite well-documented and deeply entrenched opposition to new housing, mayors believe that some clean energy infrastructure investments are even more politically toxic. Indeed, 40 percent of mayors actually said that low-rise multifamily housing would attract the least opposition among these potential development projects (the most popular response to this formulation of the question was ground solar arrays, cited by 41 percent of mayors).

There were intriguing regional variations. Northeastern (51 percent) and Western (46 percent) mayors were comparatively more likely to cite transmission lines as attracting opposition than their counterparts in the Midwest (27 percent) and South (36 percent). In contrast, Southern (40 percent) and Midwestern mayors (46 percent) were significantly more likely to highlight opposition to wind turbines than officials in the Northeast (27 percent) and West (15 percent). Mayors in the South (12.5 percent) were especially unlikely to cite multifamily housing.



Figure 6. Most/Least Opposition from Residents on Use of Available Space in City

In general, which potential use of available space in your community would generate the most/least opposition from your residents.



FRAGMENTED REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT AND LOCAL RELUCTANCE TO CEDE CONTROL

Local permitting processes engender a fragmented regulatory environment that is challenging for clean energy companies to navigate, building on the challenges cities already face from anti-development residents. Moreover, reforming these policies is difficult as a consequence of local officials’ attachment to local control. We explore each of these challenges in turn.

FRAGMENTED REGULATIONS: BUILDING CODES, ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS, AND THE COST OF BUILDING

A solar company, heat pump installer, or electrician operating in multiple local jurisdictions has to navigate many zoning/land use permitting processes — potentially for hundreds of communities — as well as keep track of different building and electrical codes. The complexities multiply as companies attempt to cover a larger number of jurisdictions — possibly across multiple states — with each jurisdiction adding in layered requirements. On top of our survey of mayors, we conducted interviews with multiple solar companies nationwide to understand their experiences of local permitting and regulations. These interviews help to illustrate how fragmentation in the local regulatory environment might hinder the widespread adoption of clean energy technologies. One company’s



response exemplifies the challenges inherent in each state and local government being able to set their own permitting processes:

"The sections that are applicable to solar are primarily article 690 and article 691 of the National Electrical Code. Different localities sometimes follow different codes, and this is updated, so the solar company often has to check with relevant local level for the permitting process before installing solar [...] This is one of the arguments in favor of more comprehensive solar laws at the state level. Then solar panel companies would not have to deal with different codes at the local level/checking which code which area is using every time they go through the permitting process on solar in different localities."

These complaints comport with a wide body of empirical research on housing development: housing developers operating in multiple jurisdictions must learn potentially hundreds of sets of regulations, whose interpretations are often left up to the discretion of appointed boards and commissions or elected city councils.¹⁵

Some mayors shared similar concerns about this regulatory patchwork, and its impact on the promulgation of clean energy technologies, when we asked them open-ended questions about changes they would like to see in their building codes and environmental regulations. Multiple mayors highlighted simplifying or relaxing local building codes. One mayor suggested:

"This might be an area where I'm more conservative than the norm, but I would like [building codes] to be more business friendly. Less red tape. This is one of the biggest complaints I get as mayor. This is a huge headache for me, and I just wish that the rules were simpler, more friendly, and I think there are too many opportunities for mid-level bureaucrats to throw their power around. No one wants a building to burn down, but to some extent, if you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. If you're a fire inspector, then if you're looking for things that can cause a problem, I'm sure you'll find them. You have small business people trying their best, and you have Barney Fife, just mid-level bureaucrats who get a tiny bit of power and then they use it to make life unnecessarily miserable on folks who are generally trying to follow the rules. It is a big source of frustration. And generally, I wish maybe the codes were a little less stringent, but that's just me."

Another mayor observed: "Contractors do not understand the building codes and they are uninformed on installing solar." One strongly endorsed a "statewide code" saying "it is practically impossible to have widely varying codes."

Multiple mayors singled out building codes related to historic preservation as particularly problematic. One mayor said, "[Historic] restrictions need to be lightened because they're hurting downtown." Another wanted to change "standards in historic districts. We want to put in solar panels, but you can't see them from the sidewalk."

Twenty-three percent of mayors also wanted to see fewer local environmental regulations. Some simply wanted to see fewer regulatory impediments overall. One mayor complained that environmental standards are "too restrictive and reporting is cumbersome." Another felt that environmental regulations led to overly long permitting processes: "The environmental regulatory agencies [need] to be better staffed and funded so they can be more expeditious in their permitting." One singled out the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

"I think the EPA, the federal government, becomes so bureaucratic that they're not very responsive on issues. I'll give an example. We are a coastal city, we have a lot of tide gates, we've been trying to get a permit to replace these tide gates in the bridge that would allow us to raise and lower them more regularly rather than

¹⁵ Einstein, K.L, D. Glick, and M. Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*. Cambridge University Press.



depending on where the tide is, which would actually save the marsh and make for a much healthier marsh because we don't have to close them as often. To this, the federal government's response is, 'We don't like them, just take them out.' But if we did that, we'd have about 700 people that would be flooded out. So, I think the bureaucracy with the EPA and in general on environmental issues becomes so strong and not accountable to anybody and they have way too much say."

Multiple mayors cited the costs that these environmental regulations impose, describing them as *"unfunded mandates."*

A sizable minority of mayors expressed concerns about the counterintuitive impact that strengthening local building codes and environmental regulations might have on accomplishing broader environmental goals. These mayors supported regulations and stronger codes but felt they must be weighed against other goals. For example, one mayor wished *"that the codes would reconcile the inherent differences between environmental and infrastructure needs. For example, who wins if you want to put in a new sidewalk or water system, but you also want to protect the tree canopy? The issue is reconciling these differences between stringent environmental requirements coupled with withering infrastructure."*

Several mayors suggested that stronger building codes and environmental regulations actually hampered cities from accomplishing environmental goals, largely because of their negative impact on dense, transit-oriented development. They noted that relaxing building codes might facilitate the construction of affordable housing. One mayor wanted, *"more flexibility. More opportunities to do things like put special codes for affordable housing, special codes*

for environmental elements as well." Another wanted *"flexibility in order to incentivize construction of affordable housing."* Several mayors wanted building codes to allow for housing to be constructed closer together in order to permit more overall housing construction.

"There is currently competition between environmental standards and demand for housing. There needs to be flexibility to manage competing demands."

for housing to be constructed closer together in order to permit more overall housing construction. One mayor observed that state environmental law *"needs enhancements to better account for the climate impact of transit-oriented development."* Indeed, a few mayors noted similar tradeoffs between stringent environmental standards and housing development (which, some acknowledged, can come with its own environmental

benefits). One said, *"There is currently competition between environmental standards and demand for housing. There needs to be flexibility to manage competing demands."* Another observed that housing provided environmental benefits that were not incorporated into environmental regulations: *"[The] state environmental quality act need[s] enhancements to better account for the climate impact of transit-oriented development."*

California mayors seemed particularly aware of these tradeoffs, in large part because of the sizable and well-documented negative impact the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) has had on housing development. Passed in 1970, CEQA is an expansive statewide environmental law that, among other things, necessitates significant environmental review of a multitude of infrastructure projects — including housing — deemed to have a potential environmental impact.¹⁶ In addition to CEQA's pronounced impacts on housing projects, development opponents have used the law to stymie other environmentally beneficial initiatives, including solar and transit.¹⁷

16 California Department of Fish and Wildlife. "California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Review." Accessed Jan. 24, 2024 via <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Environmental-Review/CEQA#:~:text=The%20California%20Environmental%20Quality%20Act,declaration%2C%20or%20environmental%20impact%20report>

17 Gray, M.N. "How Californians Are Weaponizing Environmental Law - and How to Fix It." *The Atlantic* (Mar. 12, 2021) via <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/03/signature-environmental-law-hurts-housing/618264/>



While one mayor appreciated CEQA's stringent protections, all other mayoral comments related to CEQA were uniformly negative:

- *"In CA, CEQA needs major reforms. It's a real bear to get through. Cost of housing is higher because of CEQA requirements and process. It's onerous and takes years to get projects approved for new housing."*
- *"I think CEQA is way outdated, and we've actually seen it used to obstruct what I think are reasonable housing initiatives and the likes by those who are anti-housing and pro-conservation. And I think the move is finally happening in this state to relook at CEQA."*
- *"CEQA needs to relax its regulations. Getting new development in the city has been hard because various groups have challenged the developments through CEQA regulations, so relaxing these would help the city."*
- *"Restrictions are increasingly becoming challenges to be able to develop and build. The restrictions become so difficult because there is no local control over land use development. This is especially true due to CEQA which has become weaponized. Projects that would be good for the community often face insurmountable hurdles that cause extreme costs. This makes any development hard and is also true for building more housing. For example, CEQA has been used by community groups to challenge multifamily housing."*

LOCAL CONTROL VS. STRONG FEDERAL AND STATE STANDARDS

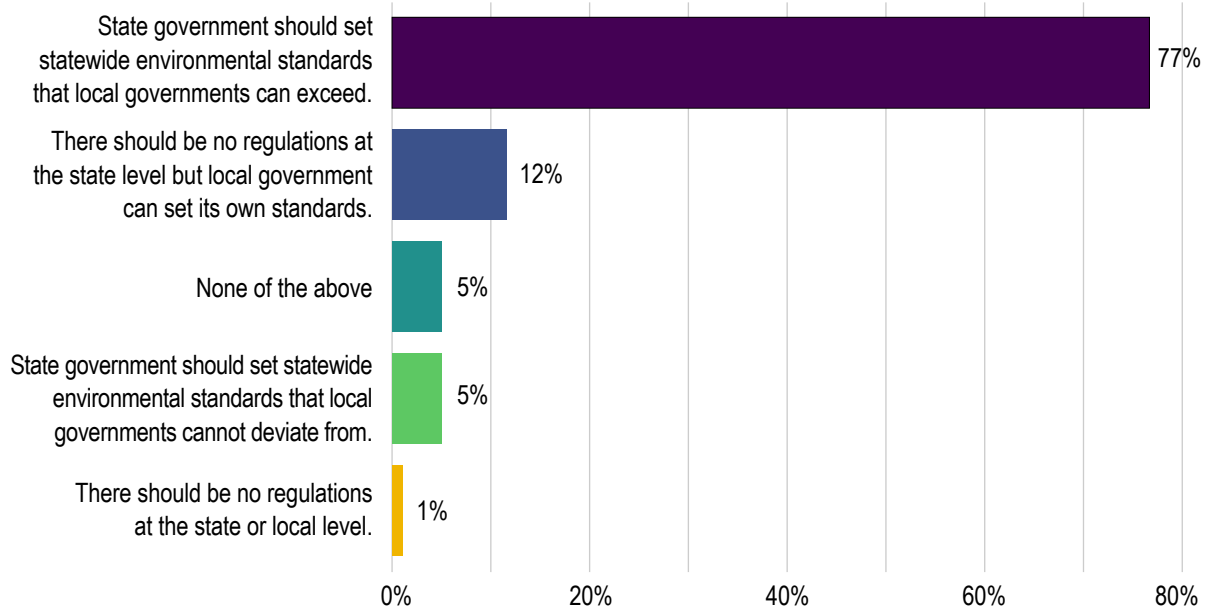
Addressing this obfuscatory local patchwork of building codes and environmental standards requires that fragmented local laws be replaced with state and federal standards. While a minority of mayors acknowledge the problems introduced by this proliferation of local regulations, a strong majority of mayors prefer maintaining greater local control to create stronger building codes and standards.

Eighty-nine percent of mayors wanted strong local control over environmental regulations, with local governments either exceeding state standards or setting their own. Eighty-one percent wanted similar levels of local control over building codes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, local officials are by and large eager to retain and enhance their political powers. Many mayors see local control as essential because the federal or state level is unequipped to understand the challenges that individual local governments face. One mayor said, *"Because we're so far away from [our state capital], the majority of individuals that are setting [state] air quality standards do not deal with the same issues that we have down here."*



Figure 7. Preferred Position on Control Over Environmental Standards

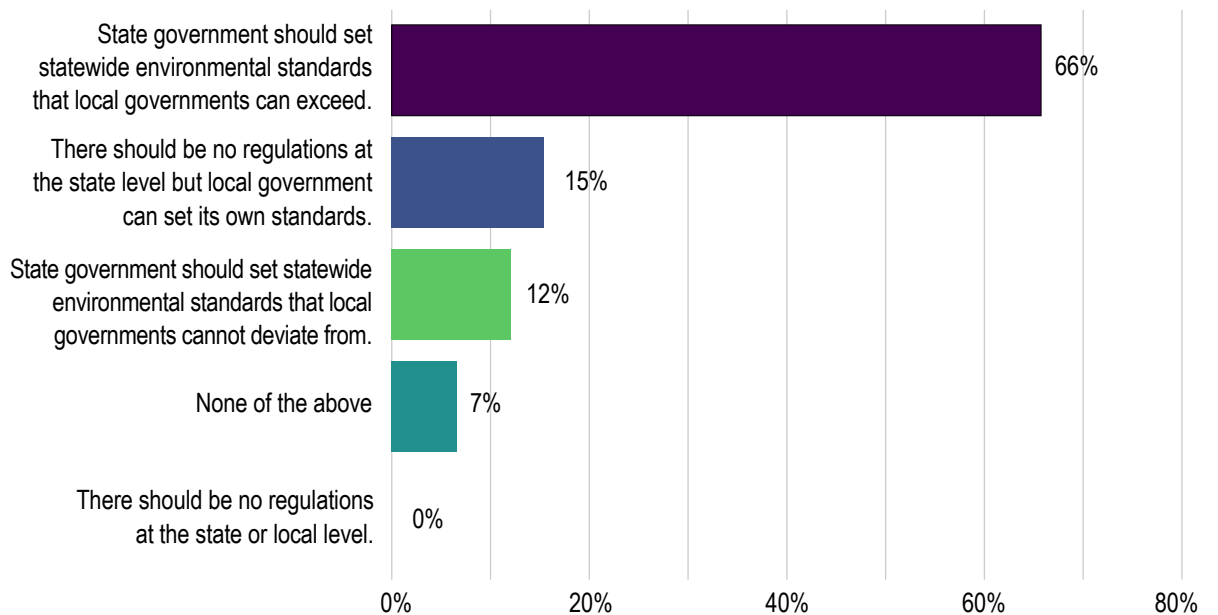
In some places, local governments control environmental standards, such as limiting construction around wetlands or in other sensitive habitats. In other places, state government controls environmental restrictions. Which of the following comes closest to your preferred position on control over environmental standards?



Mayors answering = 113

Figure 8. Preferred Position on Control Over Building Codes

In some places, local governments control policies like building and electrical codes. In other places, the state government mandates standardized codes. Which of the following comes closest to your preferred position on control over building codes?



Mayors answering = 113



Some mayors wanted local control so that they could move faster on their desired environmental goals. One mayor favored giving *“the city more control on building code issues like insulation and other things that make houses more sustainable.”* Another mayor expressed a desire to *“go even faster”* on environmental standards and create more *“electrification requirements.”*

Politically liberal mayors in red states emphasized local control as a tool for moving faster than recalcitrant state governments. One mayor said, *“We’re about to adopt a green building code for multifamily residents, but it’s triggered by the state so we’re slipstreaming them.”* Another described a recent water crisis as their impetus for wanting greater local control: *“I would like to see the city of [X] be able to impose whatever standards it deems best without the state of [Y] preempting us. We have a unique problem in that our primary water source [...] is polluted by environmental runoff that the state could regulate, but never does.”*

These results echo prior years of the Menino Survey. Mayors have consistently shown that they understand the importance of reforming building codes and zoning: indeed, in 2022, they listed both policies as the most influential tools at their disposal for combating climate change. Yet, when asked about which concrete policy changes they actually supported, they endorsed policies that encouraged electrification over more substantial regulatory changes.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The Inflation Reduction Act represents a generational investment in addressing climate change. Its potential impact is enormous. Local governments are key to bringing those climate infrastructure projects to reality. Our conversations with mayors suggest that there remain many challenges to realizing the IRA’s potential. Successful implementation of this critical federal policy will require:

- Better communication of IRA provisions and opportunities to both local governments and individual households.
- Support for local government capacity to apply to IRA grants, especially in smaller communities.
- Reforms to regulatory processes that create opportunities for vocal opponents to stop or delay climate infrastructure projects.
- Standardization of local permitting processes, zoning and land use regulations, and building codes.

¹⁸ Einstein, K.L., D. Glick, M. Palmer, and S. Fox. “2022 Menino Survey of Mayors: Mayors and the Climate Crisis.” Boston University Initiative on Cities (Jan. 2023) via <https://www.surveymayors.com/files/2023/01/2022-Menino-Survey-Climate-Report.pdf>



METHODOLOGY

We invited mayors of all cities over 75,000 residents to participate in the Menino Survey of Mayors. Each mayor received an invitation at their official email account, as well as follow-up phone calls. We spoke with 118 mayors between June and September 2023 about a variety of topics ranging from land use and permitting, to clean energy and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), to government accountability and control. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in person or over the phone. Mayors' responses and participation remain anonymous, to ensure they can speak freely about a wide range of issues. As Table 1 shows, the sample of participating cities closely mirrors the broader population on traits including size, racial demographics, housing prices, and geographic distribution.

Table 1. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All US Cities with Populations >75,000

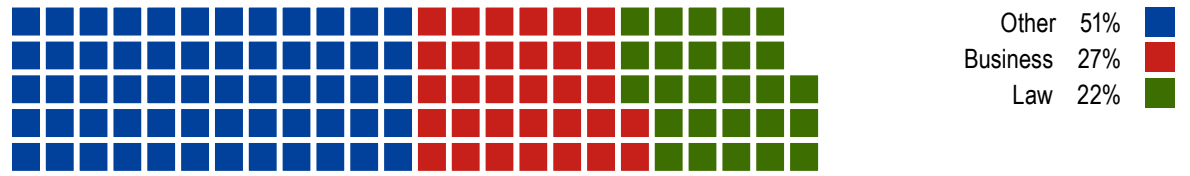
	Surveyed Cities	All Cities
Number of Cities	118	507
Average Population	234,446	222,597
Average Percent White	51.4%	46.9%
Average Percent Black	14.6%	14.3%
Average Percent Hispanic	20.9%	26.1%
Average Percent Asian	8.1%	8.1%
Average Median Housing Price	\$356,661	\$354,049
Region	% of Sample	% of Cities
Midwest	20.3%	15.4%
Northeast	11.9%	9.5%
South	34.7%	34.7%
West	35.6%	40.4%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), published by the US Census Bureau.

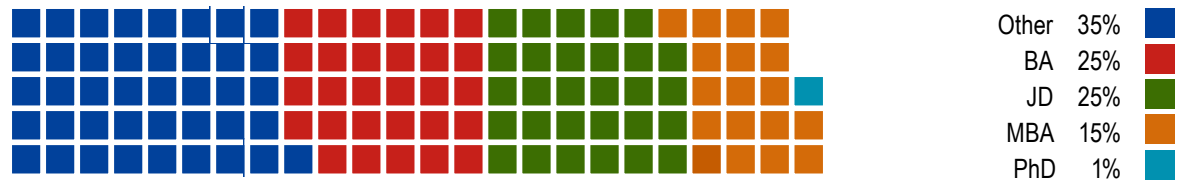


Figure 9. Demographics of Surveyed Mayors

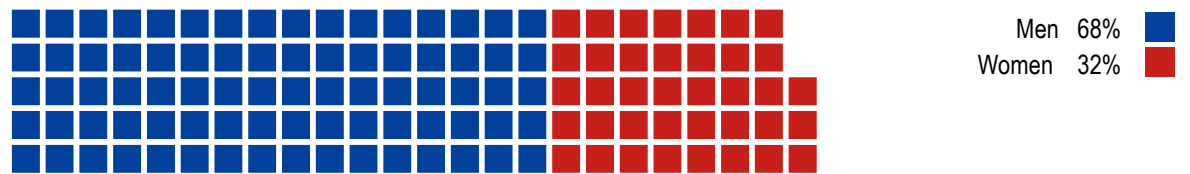
Professional background



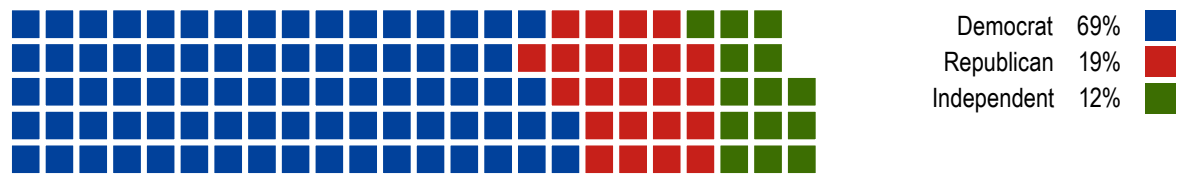
Highest degree



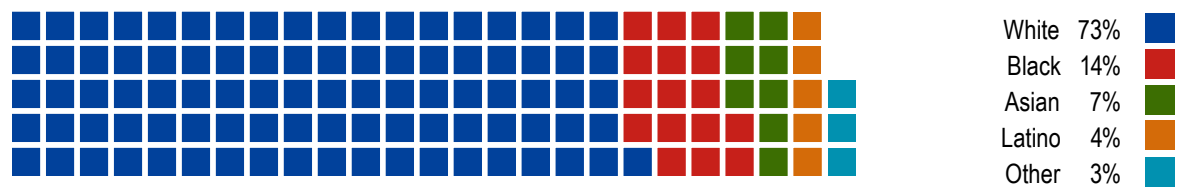
Gender



Party



Race



Boston University Initiative on Cities

To learn more about the Menino Survey of Mayors, visit surveyofmayors.com

The Boston University Initiative on Cities leads research in, on, and with cities in pursuit of sustainable, just, and inclusive urban transformation. We marshal the talents and resources of wide-ranging disciplines across Boston University spanning the social, natural, computational, and health sciences. The Menino Survey is named for the late Mayor Tom Menino, who co-founded the Initiative on Cities in 2014 following 20 years as Mayor of Boston.