

[SUMMER](#)

- [BACK TO SCHOOL](#)
- [NEW NAVIGATION](#)

[RSIQ IR Q V#](#)[Cheers for educators](#)

Torontonians put economy ahead of cutting taxes: poll

Nearly half of people surveyed said Toronto's mayor should concentrate on improving the economy and creating jobs

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Fewer than one in five Torontonians believe the next mayor's top priority should be keeping taxes down, according to a poll commissioned by the Toronto Board of Trade being released Friday.

Instead, nearly half of the 506 [people](#) surveyed said Toronto's leader should concentrate first on improving the economy and creating jobs.

Forty-three per cent of respondents selected growing the economy, 37 per cent picked delivering city services and 17 per cent chose keeping taxes down – the only options the board and pollster Innovative Research Group offered.

"I think it is the first time in memory that people will say municipal voters are putting the economy first," Carol Wilding, the president of the board, said.

"If you cast your mind back to some of the other elections and what were the ballot questions – whether it was the bridge [to the island airport in 2003] or certain services – we've never ... seen the economy put as that ballot question."

It is a bit of a surprise that so few respondents selected keeping taxes down considering the strong polling performance of Rob Ford, the mayoral candidate whose focus on perceived waste, over-spending and high taxes has dominated the campaign so far.

An Ipsos-Reid poll conducted last weekend and released this week found Mr. Ford has opened up an 11-point lead over his closest competitor, George Smitherman. Joe Pantalone, Rocco Rossi and Sarah Thomson – are lagging behind the top two, the poll found.

Ms. Wilding said the explanation is simple. "If you don't have a job," she said, "you can't pay taxes."

The Board of Trade's poll found that respondents had less confidence in Toronto's municipal government (with an average confidence level of 4.72 out of 10) than in the [federal government](#) (4.81) and the province (5.11).

"It probably reflects a lot of anecdotal evidence we have on disappointment or frustration with city hall right now during this election," said Peter Loewen, the University of Toronto political science professor who wrote and analyzed the poll.

Confidence in city hall was much lower among middle-class respondents – people earning between

\$40,000 and \$80,000 – than among the poor or wealthy.

But there was essentially no difference in confidence in city hall among those who speak English at home and those who do not.

“You might say confidence is low with city hall, but it’s not lower among one group than among another,” Prof. Loewen said. “That’s quite a positive finding, I think.”

With Rob Ford in the lead, some have wondered how the Etobicoke councillor would work with the council colleagues he’s been fighting for years. The poll provides some insight into what Torontonians would like to see: more than half say council should have final say, while a third say it should be the mayor.

Respondents would prefer more new blood on council. Fifty-seven per cent said Toronto needs to elect new councillors more often, while 33 per cent say it’s more important their elected representatives be experienced. Those councillors should focus on city-wide issues more often than those that affect their ward, the poll found.

The Board of Trade’s telephone survey was conducted between July 22 and July 30. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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