

Policy Priorities of Municipal Candidates in the 2014 Local Ontario Elections

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of a survey on the policy priorities of municipal candidates in the 2014 municipal elections in Ontario. As part of a survey of municipal candidates in 47 Ontario municipalities, we asked a series of questions relating to perceived policy priorities, election issues, and electoral success to shed light on the extent to which municipal political candidates are “policy seekers,” and the extent to which their policy priorities vary across municipalities and municipal types, successful and unsuccessful candidates, and urban and rural candidates. We find that reported policy priorities tend to fall into two major categories: fiscal issues and economic development or administration and good governance. The prominence of these fiscal and procedural priorities is steady across a range of local candidate types, including successful and unsuccessful candidates, incumbent and non-incumbent candidates, and even urban and rural candidates. Only in very large municipalities, according to our findings, does the structure of candidate priorities begin to diverge from this standard emphasis on finance and procedure.

Keywords: candidates, policy, municipal elections, Ontario

Résumé

Cet article présente les résultats d'un sondage des priorités politiques des candidats municipaux lors des élections municipales de 2014 en Ontario. Dans le cadre d'une enquête sur les candidats de 47 municipalités, nous avons posé une série de questions qui concernent leurs perceptions des priorités politiques et l'importance de certains enjeux électoraux. L'objectif était de savoir dans quelle mesure les candidats municipaux sont porteurs de politiques publiques si leurs priorités politiques varient selon le type de municipalités. L'analyse fait la distinction entre les candidats sortants, les candidats élus et perdants. Elle distingue aussi entre les candidats ruraux et urbains ainsi que les tailles des municipalités. Nous montrons que les priorités politiques rapportés par les répondants ont tendance à tomber dans deux grandes catégories: les enjeux budgétaires et fiscaux ainsi que le développement économique, l'administration et une gouvernance responsable. L'importance de ces priorités est relativement similaire peu importe les types de candidats élus ou non, sortants ou non ainsi que les candidats des municipalités rurales ou urbaines. Cependant, dans les très grandes municipalités, les priorités des candidats divergent des enjeux typiques tel que les finances et l'administration.

Mots clés: candidats, politiques publiques, élections municipales, Ontario

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Introduction

To what extent are municipal political candidates “policy seekers”? Do successful and unsuccessful candidates vary in the kinds of policies they believe to be important? Do policy priorities vary across municipal elections, or are candidates in differing municipalities simply fighting the same battles on different turf? Drawing on a survey of electoral candidates in the 2014 municipal elections in Ontario, this paper examines the reported policy priorities of municipal electoral candidates. We first explore the structure of these priorities taken as a whole, and then attempt to understand the extent to which candidates’ priorities vary based on electoral success, incumbency, urban or rural context, and the size of the municipality.

Our results suggest that the policy priorities of municipal candidates have a remarkably similar structure across the province of Ontario. Most candidates for office are concerned primarily with fiscal and procedural issues, insisting that the first priority of new municipal councils ought to be in the area of taxation and spending or in the area of accountability, transparency, and community engagement. The prominence of these two procedural priorities is steady across a range of local candidate types, including successful and unsuccessful candidates, incumbent and non-incumbent candidates, and even urban and rural candidates. Only in very large municipalities, according to our findings, does the structure of candidate priorities begin to diverge from this standard emphasis on finance and procedure. Thus, despite the growth of a wide and complex policy agenda in Canada’s largest cities, our findings suggest that a self-selection effect among electoral candidates in many Canadian municipalities may serve to reinforce a more traditional cluster of fiscal, administrative, and economic concerns.

Background: Municipal Elections and Local Candidates

While the study of Canadian electoral politics has largely focused on federal and provincial elections, an interesting body of research has begun to build on the subject of municipal elections. Canadian research on municipal voting behaviour has suggested that levels of turnout, while generally lower than in federal and provincial elections, do vary on the basis of municipal size and issue salience (Kushner, Siegel, and Stanwick 1997; Cutler and Matthews 2005). Particular kinds of voters, such as property owners, are more likely to vote in municipal elections (Kushner and Siegel 2006, McGregor and Spicer 2014) while turnout is considerably reduced in neighbourhoods with high numbers of recent immigrants and visible minorities (Siemiatycki 2006). Like turnout, levels of information and voter awareness are also low at the municipal level; this might be explained in part by the absence of informational cues provided by political parties in local campaigns (Chong and Druckman, 2007, Kushner and Siegel 2006, Milner 1997).

Our knowledge of Canadian municipal *candidates* is much more limited. Some researchers have examined municipal candidates from the perspective of representativeness, finding that the proportion of women and visible minorities at the municipal level is even lower than in Canadian provincial and federal politics (Andrew 2008). Others have focused on the advantages of incumbency for local candidates, noting the exceptional electoral advantage for municipal incumbents, particularly in the absence of a large-scale scandal or crisis in which voters choose to discard local incumbents *en masse* (Kushner, Siegel, and Stanwick 1997).

On a practical level, municipal councillors have representative, stewardship and policy-making roles (Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2014). The nature of policy at the local level, however, is largely dictated by provincial legislation. Operating within the confines of provincial legislation limits municipal influence on major policy areas. Looking at local policy issues councillors are constrained by the fact that council exercises its powers collectively which means that individual members of council have little to no capacity to independently control policy outcomes or actions. Additionally, as Ontario municipalities mature, councillors’ powers can be further limited by the fact that some authorities are delegated to municipal staff to allow council to focus on higher-level policy issues. In many policy areas councils are approving ‘delegation of authority’ by-laws that permit municipal administration to make decisions such as site plan approvals. Policy limitations from provincial regulation, and those that curb the independent power of councillors, might affect the policy types councillors identify with and the policies they support and pursue.

Overall, we know very little about the reasons that electoral candidates decide to run for office, as well as the policy goals that they may hope to accomplish, if any, should their candidacy be successful. Research at the federal and provincial levels suggests that a proportion of candidates are indeed motivated to run for office by policy-related goals (Docherty 1997, MacMillan and Loat 2010), but we do not know if the same motivations

apply locally. While most would agree that the policy discourse of provincial and federal elections is richer and more ideologically complex than at the local level, there are reasons to believe that local electoral candidates may in fact be *more* policy motivated than their federal and provincial counterparts, owing to the relative absence of political parties, party organizations, and pre-existing party platforms in most local elections. A study of local policy priorities might therefore have lessons for the federal and provincial levels as well.

Our focus on local policy priorities is also relevant for our understanding of local policymaking itself. In the past decade, Canadian scholars have emphasized the importance of a broad range of policy issues at the local level, such as infrastructure, housing, social policy, and immigration (Fowler and Siegel 2002, Andrew, Graham, and Phillips 2002). This expanded urban agenda has been taken up not only by urban policy researchers but also by prominent political actors, including major city mayors and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. At the same time, more historically-oriented local government scholars have pointed to a more delimited policy agenda at the local scale, one that is oriented around the simpler dichotomy between “boosters” and “cutters”: those who wish to promote a municipality using aggressive promotional techniques, relocation incentives, and attractive local cultural and recreational institutions, and those who simply wish to keep taxes and spending low (Magnusson 1983). A study of the policy priorities of municipal electoral candidates might therefore teach us something about the extent to which the “expanded municipal agenda” has replaced the older “boosters and cutters” debate in the minds of municipal candidates themselves.

This paper is intended to serve as a first attempt to summarize the policy priorities of municipal electoral candidates in Canada, exploring the structure of these priorities across municipal contexts and differences in municipal candidates themselves. To our knowledge, this is the first such study in the Canadian context. We hope that it will contribute to a growing research interest in the comparative dynamics of local electoral politics, local political ideas, and the role of elected officials in the municipal policy process.

Data and Research Design

Early in 2014, a team of researchers from the Universities of Toronto, Carleton, McMaster, Montreal, Western, Sydney, California, and the European University Institute in Italy designed attitudinal surveys to probe voters on the subject of internet voting in the 2014 municipal elections. In addition to surveys of voters, questionnaires for municipal candidates and local election administration were also crafted. Surveys were administered to 47 municipalities who used Internet voting in their 2014 elections, amounting to about 11 percent of the Ontario municipalities running elections in 2014.¹ These communities agreed to participate in the research to learn about stakeholders’ attitudes regarding the use of internet voting in local elections. The candidate survey was administered after the election, from November 7, 2014 to November 21, 2014, and completion was voluntary.²

The municipalities in which surveys were administered include a mix of small, medium, and large communities with widely varying demographic profiles. Municipalities vary in size from populations of about 500 to more than 300,000 residents (see the Appendix for a complete list of participating municipalities). The majority of the municipalities that participated in the candidate survey are relatively small in size; 78 percent have populations of fewer than 25,000 persons. The sample includes four large municipalities with populations over 100,000 (Burlington, Cambridge, Markham, and Sudbury), four medium-sized municipalities between 25,000 and 100,000 persons (Ajax, Guelph, Innisfil, and Quinte West); and 39 smaller towns from across the province. This distribution is in fact roughly representative of the province as a whole: 70 percent of Ontario municipalities have populations of fewer than 10,000. While these municipalities were not selected randomly, they do appear to be representative of Ontario municipalities more generally, with respect to population, demographics, and their geographic distribution across the province.

We asked municipal clerks in participating cities and towns to circulate the survey via email to all eligible municipal candidates. This included any candidate running for the positions of head of council, regional chair, local council at large or by ward, and regional council at large or by ward.³ Clerks were also asked to send out one reminder or thank you message a week after the survey had commenced. Municipal clerks were the ideal individuals to send out the survey given that they oversee the local election process and work firsthand with candidates. This approach ensured that candidate identities were anonymous to the researchers.

In addition to the primary questions of the survey—which focused on levels of satisfaction with the online voting process and attitudes toward internet voting—we added a suite of questions to probe candidates’ opinions regarding salient election issues, policy priorities, and demographic profiles.⁴ These questions were intended to

take advantage of a rare opportunity to survey municipal electoral candidates directly, and to provide a first look at the policy priorities of candidates for elected office at the local level.

While the municipalities and the candidates who participated in this survey do appear to resemble the broader population of municipalities and candidates in Ontario, it is important to keep in mind that the primary goal of the study was to assess the strengths and weaknesses of municipal online voting. Communities and candidates were not selected randomly—all of the municipalities involved in the study were approached because they decided to offer internet ballots in the 2014 municipal elections. The decision to use internet voting may be symptomatic of larger differences between municipalities or municipal councils: in willingness to innovate, for example, or in attitudes toward technology. This may in turn impact the candidates who choose to run for election in those municipalities. Previous research has demonstrated that Ontario municipalities that decide to deploy internet voting generally exhibit greater concern over community participation and the health of local democracy, and are less resistant to structural changes to the election process, than those which did not.⁵ Those who participate in elections in such municipalities might therefore differ in systematic ways from those who participate in municipalities that have refused to adopt online voting procedures.

Of the 832 candidates that ran for election in municipalities where candidate surveys were distributed 485 started the survey, with 299 completing the questionnaire.⁶ This represents a response rate of 58 percent and a completion rate of 36 percent. The sample of candidates includes more men (67 percent) than women (33 percent). Respondents have a median age of 40 years, a median annual household income range of \$80,000 to \$99,000, and report having completed 'some university'. Incumbents comprised 33 percent of the sample, and 48 percent reported having won their seat in the election (9 percent stated that they had won by acclamation). On the whole, then, the sample is mostly male, educated, has an above-average household income, and is more likely to have been a challenger than an incumbent.

Survey participants were also self-selecting and were invited to take part in the questionnaire not to express their policy priorities but instead to express a view about the election process and the internet voting system. Given the nature of this larger project, the self-selection process was likely to attract candidates who either loved or hated the internet voting option. While the effect of this self-selection bias on municipal policy priorities is unclear, it is worth noting the context in which participants were asked to complete the policy-related survey questions.

For all of these reasons, our findings are intended to serve as a starting point, rather than a definitive statement, in an emerging research conversation about policy and politics at the local level in Canada. Given that we know very little about municipal candidates' policy beliefs and priorities, our results make a valuable contribution to our understanding of how municipal elections work. While we are modest about the extent to which our findings can be generalized to the province—or the country—as a whole, we believe that the results themselves, covering almost fifty diverse municipalities across the province of Ontario, are worthy of consideration even on their own more limited terms.

In the sections that follow, we provide a descriptive overview of the policy priorities communicated by candidates and then evaluate whether priorities vary based on four independent variables: electoral success, incumbency, urban, suburban or rural contexts, and municipal size. We measure electoral success by whether a candidate reported winning his/her seat in the 2014 municipal election. This variable is included on the basis that elections often focus on certain priorities that are important to voters and so we would expect candidates embracing those same priorities to be more successful. In other contexts candidates employing strategies of issue entrepreneurship have experienced electoral success (DeVries and Hobolt 2012), illustrating the impact of issues on election outcomes.

Next, we assess whether priorities differ based on incumbency, gauged by whether or not a candidate reported being an incumbent or a challenger. At the municipal level in Canada incumbency has been shown to offer the greatest advantage in terms of electoral success (Kushner, Siegel, and Stanwick 1997). Based on incumbents' experience in office we might expect their policy priorities to differ from their non-incumbent counterparts.

Third, policy priorities are examined in the context of the perceived density and development level of the area in which the candidate reported running for election, including urban, suburban, or rural locations. Communities with varied population densities and land area might prioritize distinctive issues based on these differences (Sancton 2011). A more dense area for example, might value public transit as a top priority whereas economic development and investment might be expected to take precedence in a more rural area. Urban

priorities can also be tied to municipal size, expected to be on the radar of larger municipalities (Church et al. 2015).

Finally, we look at priorities by municipal size. Municipalities are separated into three categories based on their 2014 census population figures: small (0 - 9,999), medium (10,000 – 99,999) and large (100,000+). These three categories were based on previous research on local elections and municipal size (Kushner, Siegel, and Stanwick 1997). We know that municipal size can impact voter participation and other aspects of local elections (Frandsen 2002, Kushner, Siegel, and Stanwick 1997) and might also engender differences in policy priorities.

The Structure of Local Policy Priorities

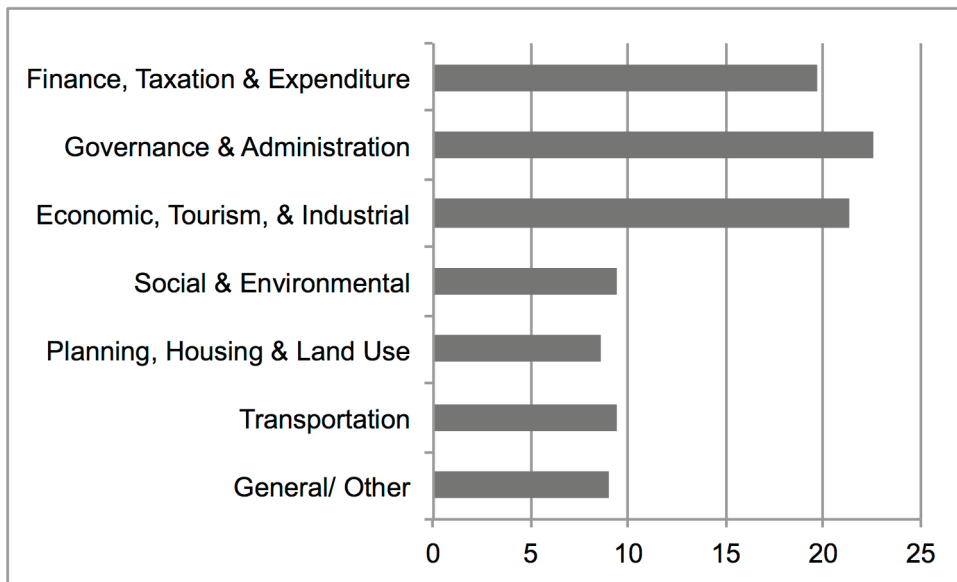
To attempt to capture candidates' policy priorities, we asked respondents to provide an open-ended response to the question, "What should the main priorities of [Municipality Name] municipal government be for the next term?" We asked respondents to provide up to three priorities; because of wide variation in the number of priorities that candidates actually provided, we decided to code the top priority listed by each candidate. We then sorted each response into two separate categorical lists: a fine-grained list of seventeen categories (reported in Table 1) and a smaller list of seven broad policy areas (reported in Figure 1).⁷ Each of these lists were coded by both of the authors from candidates' original responses, with initial agreement in 93 percent of cases; we resolved the remaining cases by discussion and came to a consensus on all of them.

Table 1: Policy priorities of local candidates

<i>Policy Priority</i>	<i>Includes comments relating to:</i>	<i>Top policy priority*</i>
1. Civic Administration	Council relations with staff, open government, hiring CAO, etc.	7 (17)
2. Downtown revitalization	Improvements to downtown core	3 (7)
3. Economic development	Creating employment opportunities, attracting business, etc.	16 (39)
4. Education	Schools etc.	1 (3)
5. Environment	Clean air, water quality, sustainability	3 (7)
6. Good Governance	Transparency, accountability, civic engagement	15 (37)
7. Infrastructure	Construction, maintenance	4 (10)
8. Parks and Recreation	Recreational expansion, improving parks & public spaces, etc.	2 (5)
9. Planning, Development & Land Use	Controlling development, housing, zoning, etc.	5 (12)
10. Policing, Crime & Law Enforcement	By-law enforcement, crime control, etc.	2 (5)
11. Poverty	Affordable housing, homelessness, etc.	4 (9)
12. Taxes and Civic finances	Budget, reducing or controlling taxes, etc.	20 (48)
13. Tourism	Development of tourism	1 (2)
14. Transit	Transit development	2 (5)
15. Transportation	Traffic, roads, transportation infrastructure	7 (16)
16. Local/ Specific	Unique items e.g. nuclear waste contest	2 (5)
17. General/ Other	e.g. Improving services for seniors & youth	7 (16)

*Percentage citing as the 'top' policy priority. Numbers in parentheses refer to the total number from which the percentage is calculated.

**Please note percentages are rounded and may not total 100.

Figure 1: Policy Priorities of Local Candidates, Collapsed Categories (Percent)

What policy priorities are most important for municipal candidates? Figure 1 outlines the overall distribution of responses in the dataset. The figure suggests two issues of outstanding importance for municipal candidates: fiscal and economic issues, and issues of good local governance.

Fiscal and Economic Concerns

Taken together, the two categories in Table 1 most clearly related to economic and fiscal concerns—“Taxes and Civic Finances” and “Economic Development and Jobs”—represent about 36 percent of the total responses. Candidates who focused on taxes and spending were divided between those who called for reductions in property tax rates and spending levels and those who wished to hold taxes steady and control spending with rigorous fiscal discipline. Unlike the earlier debates between “boosters” and “cutters” (Magnusson 1983), there are few boosters to be found in our results. Fiscal debates in these municipalities appear to be divided instead between “cutters” and those who might be called “stoppers”—candidates who wish to maintain civic spending and taxation at current levels.

Responses in the “economic development and jobs” category, representing about 16 percent of the total, mostly focused on creating employment opportunities or stimulating general economic development. Some candidates focused on specific local industries, such as attracting migrant workers for local agricultural production, while others stated their preference in more general terms like “economic development” and “getting jobs.”

These priorities are grounded in an emphasis on maintaining a municipality in a state of robust fiscal health and economic competitiveness. This is, of course, a key policy priority for most electoral candidates at all levels of government. At the municipal level, however, scholars have long noted the particular importance of economic and growth policy in an atmosphere of inter-municipal competitiveness (Peterson 1981). While the origin of this emphasis on economic and fiscal policy remains a matter of debate, our findings confirm the importance of such issues for municipal electoral candidates across Ontario.

Governance, Procedure, and Administration

The next most common policy priorities in our results relate to matters of governance and administration. These responses do not focus on a particular policy domain, such as transit or the environment, but rather on the operation and management of local governments. The majority of comments in the “good governance” category made reference to themes such as accountability, transparency, honesty, and engagement with local residents. Those in the civic administration category addressed a range of themes, including reforms to the council-administration relationship, hiring a new chief administrator, and reforms to the local voting process.⁸

Taken together, these two categories represent 22 percent of responses. The consistent emphasis on governance and administration issues suggests that existing local governance frameworks and management approaches are often believed to be in need of improvement. The prominence of these procedural issues may be related to recent trends in local governments to adopt practices of open government, increased accountability, and greater citizen engagement (Chuong et al. 2012).

Municipal Policy Priorities: Money and Procedure

Overall, then, the top priorities identified by municipal candidates in our sample fall into two broad categories: the finances of local government and the administration and management of local government. These responses suggest that candidates place much more emphasis on the “how” of local government than on the “what”—*how* local governments get things done rather than *what* it is that they do.

For students of contemporary urban policymaking, these results are striking. They suggest that the “expanded urban policy agenda” may not have captured the interest of many electoral candidates in municipalities across Ontario. Instead, our results reflect the persistence of a much older municipal policy agenda, one that is more focused on the procedural issues of finance and administration than on substantive policy debates about issues like poverty, planning, and housing. Increased concerns about these substantive policy debates might therefore be confined mainly to very large municipalities which were not in our sample (such as Toronto, Hamilton, Mississauga, and Ottawa), with smaller and medium-sized municipalities carrying on within an “unreconstructed” policy agenda. Compared to policy debates at the federal and provincial levels in Canada—and perhaps to policy debates in very large cities as well—it would appear that the breadth of policy debates in most of Ontario’s municipalities is quite limited.

Variation in Local Policy Priorities

There are many reasons to expect variation in the structure of municipal electoral policy debate that we have discussed above. A first expectation, noted earlier in the paper, relates to municipal *size*. Given the very wide range of policy tasks in which large cities are involved, from transit to extensive public health services to policing, we might expect candidates in large cities to express a richer range of policy priorities. We might further expect the same distinctions between rural and urban municipalities.

We might also anticipate variation among types of candidates themselves. For instance, we would expect greater dissatisfaction with governance and administration among challengers when compared with incumbents. Unsuccessful candidates might also articulate a wider array of policy priorities when compared with those who were successful: after all, the power of incumbency in local elections means that those who choose to challenge the incumbent may do so not with the intent of winning office but instead to call attention to a policy issue about which they are particularly passionate. To test these possibilities, we have evaluated how policy priorities vary on the basis of four key distinctions: (1) whether a candidate was successfully elected or not; (2) whether the candidate was an incumbent or not; (3) whether the candidate described her or his electoral setting as urban, suburban, or rural; (4) the size of the municipality, characterized by small, medium, or large.⁹

Electoral Success

Successful and unsuccessful candidates, whose responses are summarized in Table 2, do not differ significantly from one another in their policy priorities.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, some successful challengers appear to have run for office primarily to express their dissatisfaction with the current council; one unsuccessful candidate, for instance, suggested that the new council’s top priority should be “minimizing the damage these nimrods might inflict.” Even with these kinds of responses, however, the differences between successful and unsuccessful candidates are modest. Overall, the chi-square value listed at the bottom of the table ($\chi^2 = 6.209$; $p=0.400$) is not significant, suggesting that the differences in the table could well be due to chance.

Table 2: Policy priorities by electoral success (percentages)*

<i>Policy priority</i>	<i>Successful</i>	<i>Unsuccessful</i>
Finance, Taxation, & Expenditure	19.1 (21)	21.5 (26)
Governance & Administration	18.2 (20)	24.8 (30)
Economic, Tourism, & Industrial Policy	20 (22)	21.5 (26)
Social & Environmental Policy	10.9 (12)	9.1 (11)
Planning, Housing, & Land Use Policy	12.7 (14)	5 (6)
Transportation Policy	10.9 (12)	8.3 (10)
General/ Other	8.2 (9)	9.9 (12)
Total	100.00 (110)	100.00 (121)

N = 231; $\chi^2 = 6.209$; $p = 0.400$

*Numbers in parentheses refer to the total number from which the percentage is calculated.

Incumbency

When we compare incumbent and non-incumbent candidates, whose responses are summarized in Table 3, two differences are immediately noticeable. First, it appears that non-incumbents are more likely to emphasize issues such as civic administration and good governance than incumbents. Second, non-incumbents also cite taxes and civic finances as a priority more frequently than do incumbents. Thus, as we would expect, non-incumbents appear to be more likely to criticize government management and spending and more interested in fiscal or procedural reform. Once again, however, the chi-square figure at the bottom of the table ($\chi^2 = 9.021$; $p = 0.172$) suggests that we cannot rule out the possibility that these differences are simply due by chance.

Table 3: Policy priorities by Incumbency (percentages)*

<i>Policy priority</i>	<i>Successful</i>	<i>Unsuccessful</i>
Finance, Taxation, & Expenditure	16.2 (12)	21.3 (33)
Governance & Administration	13.5 (10)	26.5 (41)
Economic, Tourism, & Industrial Policy	23 (17)	20.6 (32)
Social & Environmental Policy	12.2 (9)	8.4 (13)
Planning, Housing, & Land Use Policy	12.2 (9)	7.1 (11)
Transportation Policy	9.5 (7)	9 (14)
General/ Other	13.5 (10)	7.1 (11)
Total	100.00 (74)	100.00 (155)

N = 229; $\chi^2 = 9.021$; $p = 0.172$

*Numbers in parentheses refer to the total number from which the percentage is calculated.

Urban, Suburban and Rural Voting Areas

We asked candidates if the area in which they ran for office was predominantly urban, suburban, or rural. Table 4 provides a breakdown of candidates' policy priorities in each of these three categories. The differences among the groups are modest and are not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.888$; $p = 0.196$).

Table 4: Policy priorities by voting area (percentages)*

<i>Policy priority</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Finance, Taxation, & Expenditure	20.6 (14)	17.2 (10)	21.2 (21)
Governance & Administration	25 (17)	22.4 (13)	19.2 (19)
Economic, Tourism, & Industrial Policy	22.1 (15)	19 (11)	23 (23.2)
Social & Environmental Policy	7.4 (5)	15.5 (9)	8.1 (8)
Planning, Housing, & Land Use Policy	10.3 (7)	5.2 (3)	11.1 (11)
Transportation Policy	10.3 (7)	17.2 (10)	5.1 (5)
General/ Other	4.4 (3)	3.4 (2)	12.1 (12)
Total	100.00 (68)	100.00 (58)	100.00 (99)

N = 225; $\chi^2 = 15.888$; $p = 0.196$

*Numbers in parentheses refer to the total number from which the percentage is calculated.

Municipality Size

Finally, we assessed policy priorities of municipal candidates alongside municipal size. We first grouped municipalities into three categories: small municipalities (those with fewer than 10,000 residents), medium municipalities (10,000 to 99,999), and large municipalities (100,000 and higher). The responses of municipal candidates in each of these categories are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Policy priority by municipality size (percentages)***

<i>Policy priority</i>	<i>Small</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Large</i>
Finance, Taxation, & Expenditure	27.9 (19)	15.3 (17)	18.5 (12)
Governance & Administration	20.6 (14)	20.7 (23)	27.7 (18)
Economic, Tourism, & Industrial Policy	14.7 (10)	30.6 (34)	12.3 (8)
Social & Environmental Policy	5.9 (4)	9 (10)	13.8 (9)
Planning, Housing, & Land Use Policy	8.8 (6)	11.7 (13)	3.1 (2)
Transportation Policy	5.9 (4)	5.4 (6)	20 (13)
General/ Other	16.2 (11)	7.2 (8)	4.6 (3)
Total	100.00 (68)	100.00 (111)	100.00 (65)

N = 244; $\chi^2 = 34.930$; $p < 0.000$

*Numbers in parentheses refer to the total number from which the percentage is calculated.

**Small municipalities are those with populations between 0 to 9,999 persons; medium between 10,000 and 99,999; and large 100,000 and above.

The responses in Table 5 illustrate, above all, that the structure of municipal candidates' policy priorities described above applies to municipalities of all sizes; issues of civic finance and good governance are important for candidates across all of the municipal sizes. Beyond this structure, however, there are two noticeable differences. First, in small and medium-sized municipalities, economic development and jobs appear to be a more common policy priority than among candidates in large municipalities. In large municipalities, on the other hand, candidates appear to be more frequently concerned about transportation policy than in smaller places. Carrying out nonparametric tests of significance (chi-square) and association (Cramer's V) reveals a moderately strong, significant relationship between municipal size and candidate policy priorities ($\chi^2 = 34.930$, $p < 0.000$; $CV = .268$).

These findings strengthen the plausibility of our interpretation of the basic findings above; the difference between a municipality whose candidates are oriented around procedural issues of finance and administration

and those whose candidates reflect a more diverse urban policy agenda appears to be primarily determined by municipal size. In small and medium-sized municipalities, the policy agenda remains firmly focused on economic development and jobs, while a larger proportion of candidates in larger municipalities are concerned with issues of transportation and congestion. Interestingly, however, even in larger municipalities, we find few candidates who place social and environmental policy at the top of their list of policy priorities.

Conclusion

Local government scholars have long noted the tendency for municipal policy debates to emphasize questions of fiscal efficiency, good governance, and local development. The source of this constrained policy discourse has been a matter of debate for decades: some argue that the structure of the local political economy compels rational policymakers to pursue developmental rather than redistributive policies (Peterson 1981); others suggest that local demands for growth bring together disparate actors in favour of a limited set of policy objectives (Logan and Molotch 1987); still others argue that the emphasis on fiscal and development policies stems from local politicians' need to ally with local business leaders in order to build the capacity to get things done at the local scale (Stone 1989).

Whichever of these theoretical approaches one finds most persuasive, our findings suggest a mechanism that may serve to reinforce this traditional municipal policy agenda: a self-selection effect among candidates themselves. This effect may add to the difficulty involved in moving beyond fiscal or governance issues into other areas of policy change, such as environmental policy or low-income housing. According to Clarence Stone (1993), for example, the work of policy change becomes more difficult as one moves away from the local status quo: redevelopment efforts are difficult, middle-class quality-of-life efforts are more difficult, and expanding opportunities to disadvantaged urban residences is most difficult of all. To carry out the more difficult changes requires politicians with the determination to do the hard work of building and maintaining complex coalitions of support or acceptance among the business community, middle-class advocacy groups, and the general public. Our survey results suggest that few municipal candidates run for office with such goals in mind. Thus, not only is it difficult to expand beyond development politics at the municipal level, few municipal candidates—at least in the municipal level, few candidates in the municipalities that we surveyed appear to be interested in even attempting to do so.

Overall, then, our survey of local candidates in the 2014 Ontario municipal elections suggests that many municipal elections, and the candidates that participate in them, have a similar structure of policy priorities. These priorities fall into two primary areas: fiscal and economic policy on the one hand, and procedural issues of governance and administration on the other. What unites these two categories is an emphasis on the *how* of local government, rather than a debate about *what* local governments are doing. The candidates in our survey reflect an array of policy priorities that is reminiscent of the traditional idea of municipal policy debates as oriented around procedural, fiscal, and economic growth concerns. Important policy issues like housing, social policy, and sustainability in Ontario's largest cities appear not to have "trickled down" into policy debates in smaller and medium-sized municipalities.

This basic structure of policy priorities is persistent across all of the kinds of municipalities and municipal candidates in our sample. It does not vary in statistically significant ways across successful and unsuccessful candidates, urban and rural candidates, or incumbent and non-incumbent candidates. Only in the case of municipal size do we find differences among candidates that are not likely to have arisen by chance: in small and medium-size municipalities, more candidates are concerned about economic development and jobs, whereas candidates in large municipalities are more likely to emphasize transportation and congestion issues. Thus, while our results suggest that all municipal elections are dominated by classic municipal debates about city finances and administration, it may also be the case—as Canadian advocates of "city charters" and increased fiscal and governance tools for big cities have often argued—that policy debates in Canada's largest municipalities are indeed increasingly different from those in smaller municipal governments. Future research could probe this point further, notably the implications this may have for the nature of municipal elections and the policy issues that are discussed, and priorities that are represented, at the local level.

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Notes

- ¹ 414 of Ontario's 444 municipalities are responsible for running local elections in the province.
- ² We intended to make the survey available for a two-week period, but extended the completion time because of requests by municipal officials to allow for more time.
- ³ It did not include candidates for positions on local school boards.
- ⁴ Please see the Appendix for a list of survey questions used in this paper.
- ⁵ This information comes from interviews with electoral administrators from across the province carried out as part of a larger project.
- ⁶ Candidate surveys were not completed in the municipalities of Huron Kinloss, South Glengarry, and West Elgin.
- ⁷ We collapsed the seventeen initial categories into the tighter categories to aid in the clarity and interpretation of our results, and to avoid the problem of low cell frequencies for chi-square calculations.
- ⁸ This emphasis on the voting process is almost certainly influenced by the placement of these survey questions in a broader set of questions about the Internet voting process.
- ⁹ We also tested for significant relationships between policy priorities and socio-demographic characteristics of candidates such as gender, income, and education, but found none. With respect to descriptive differences, aside from male candidates being more inclined to support finances and economic development as priorities, social items were not more likely to be supported by women, as one might expect (Tremblay 1993, 1998). No other notable descriptive differences stood out for these variables.
- ¹⁰ Please note that one of the assumptions of using the chi-square test is that expected cell counts must be > 5 and not less than 1. Given that we have smaller cell counts for some variables the precision of chi-square is reduced.

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Appendix 1: Participating municipalities

The following 47 Ontario municipalities took part in this research.

Addington Highlands
Ajax
Archipelago
Brockton
Brockville
Burlington
Cambridge
Carling
Central Huron
Cobourg
Deep River
Frontenac Islands
Grimsby
Guelph
Huron East
Huron Kinloss
Innisfil
Kenora
Kingsville
Laurentian Valley
Leamington

Lucan-Biddulph
Markham
McKellar
Middlesex Centre
Minden Hills
Mulmur
North Dundas
North Frontenac
North Glengarry
North Stormont
Port Hope
Quinte West
Shuniah
South Dundas
South Frontenac
South Glengarry
South Stormont
Southwest Middlesex
Springwater
Strathroy-Caradoc
Sudbury
Tay Valley
Tecumseh
Wasaga Beach
West Elgin
West Perth