

PART 6

What the People Think

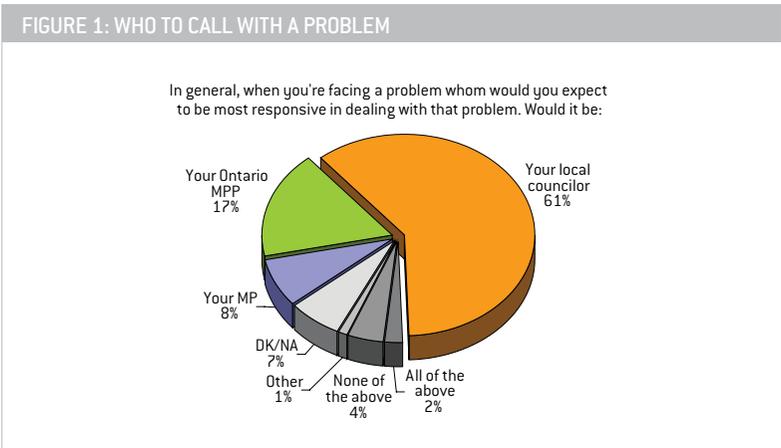
The Columbia Institute's Centre for Civic
Governance Checks in on the Public Pulse



Ontario Polling on Local Government Issues

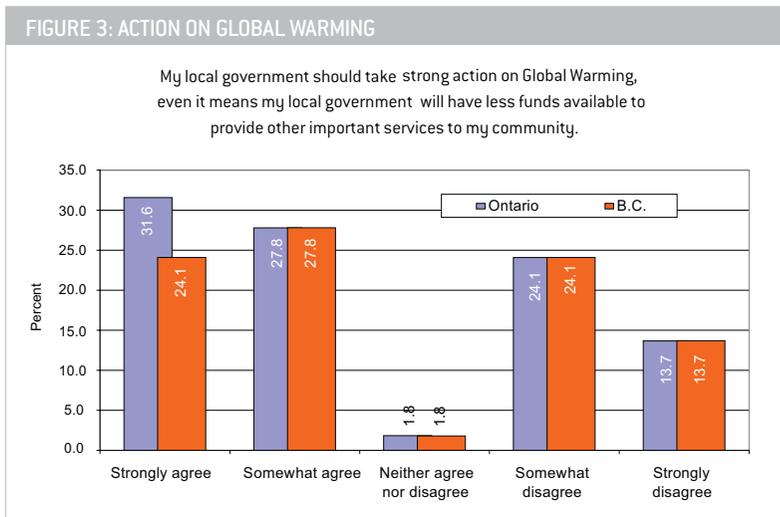
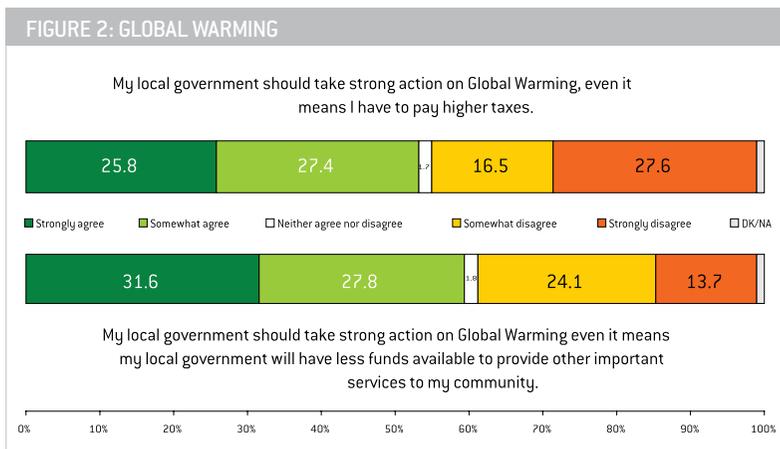
BOB PENNER is the CEO of Strategic Communications, a full service communications, fundraising, and polling firm that has offices in Toronto and Vancouver.

The Columbia Institute commissioned polling questions to determine how Ontarians view local government issues. This poll was fielded in Ontario from June 5 to 11, 2007 and we got a sample size of 604 people, with a margin of error of four, 19 times out of 20. In some places, the results from this poll are compared with a similar poll conducted in British Columbia in March, 2007.



The first question in this poll concerns who people will call when they have a problem (Figure 1). Sixty-one per cent say they would call their local councillor, as opposed to their Member of Parliament or MPP. People find local councillors more responsive than their other representatives. When we asked a similar question in BC we found the numbers for local councillors are lower there than in Ontario.

In the poll we asked questions about global warming (Figure 2). The question here is, “Would the people support action by their local councillor to deal with global warming, even if it involved raising taxes?” The response is a tie. Nevertheless, that’s strong support for taking action on global warming.



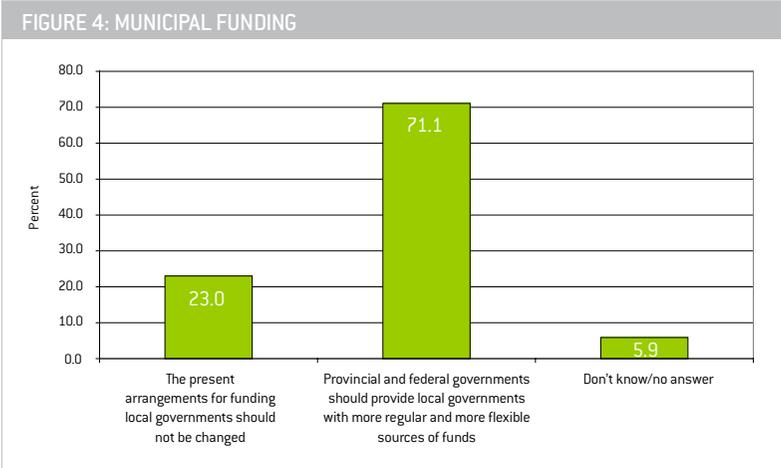
One thing that I have noticed in our polling for municipal elections since 1991 is that the issue of taxes has steadily fallen in importance, election after election. I wouldn't suggest that tax rates aren't important, but they aren't as important as they used to be. It used to always be crime and taxes. Now it's crime and something else.

Should local government take action on global warming, even if it means local government has less money for other important services? The answers are strongly on the "agree" side (Figure 3). People are prepared to sacrifice some other services to deal with global warming.

This is a forced choice question on municipal funding (Figure 4). We asked the following:

Some people believe that local governments have an adequate tax base to provide services and infrastructure for local communities and that its important for local governments to live within their means. They say that the present arrangements for funding local governments should not be changed. Other people believe that local governments do not have an adequate tax base to provide services and infrastructure for local communities. They say that the provincial and federal governments should provide local governments with more regular and more flexible sources of funds. Which is closer to your view?

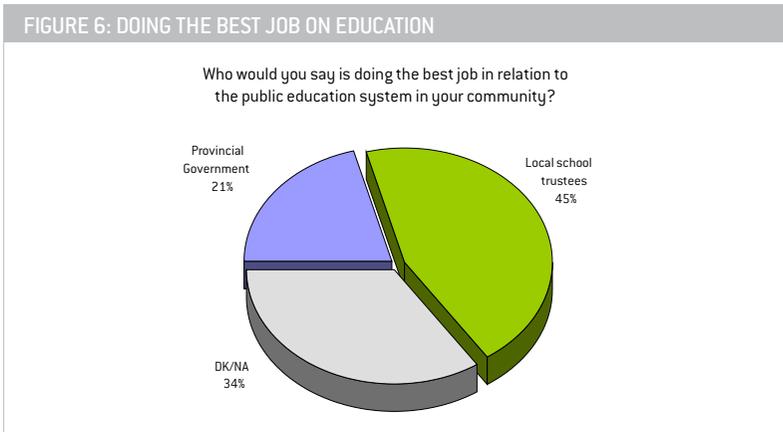
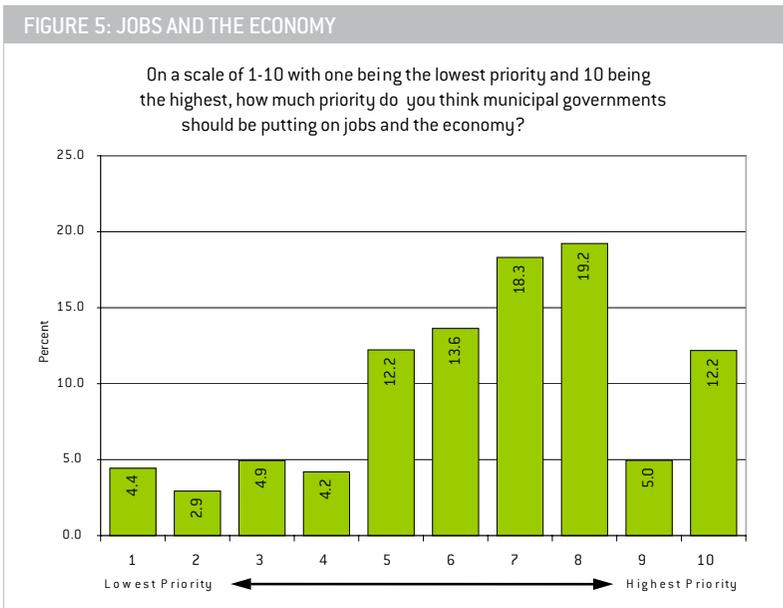
The results show that 71 per cent of people think that municipal governments should have more regular and more flexible sources of funding from provincial and federal governments (Figure 4). That is an overwhelming and positive result. People in BC think the same thing.



The responses are pretty consistent across the regions of Ontario, but this feeling is stronger in northern Ontario.

The next question involves a 10-point scale on jobs and the economy (Figure 5). We asked, “How much priority do you think municipal governments should be putting on jobs and the economy?” You can see that overwhelmingly people believe that municipalities should be dealing with economic issues.

We asked some education questions, starting with, “Who would you say is doing the best job in relation to public education in your



community?” Here we have local school trustees at 45 per cent and the provincial government at 21 per cent (Figure 6). Responses in the various regions of Ontario are similar to each other.

What is the main problem facing public education in each region? This was an open-ended question. Lack of funding was overwhelmingly perceived by the public in every part of Ontario as the main issue facing the public education system (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: TOP THREE EDUCATION ISSUES BY REGION	
TORONTO	SOUTHWEST ONTARIO
1. Lack of funding	1. Lack of funding
2. Quality/standards	2. Quality/standards
3. Crowded classrooms	3. Not enough teachers
REST OF GTA	CENTRAL ONTARIO
1. Lack of funding	1. Lack of funding
2. Crowded classrooms	2. Crowded classrooms
3. Quality/standards	3. Discipline, violence/safety/drugs
EAST ONTARIO	NORTH
1. Lack of funding	1. Lack of funding
2. Lack of discipline	2. School closures/not enough schools
3. Crowded classrooms	3. Violence/safety/drugs



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