

Governance, identity and service delivery in Metro Vancouver: desire for change, but no consensus

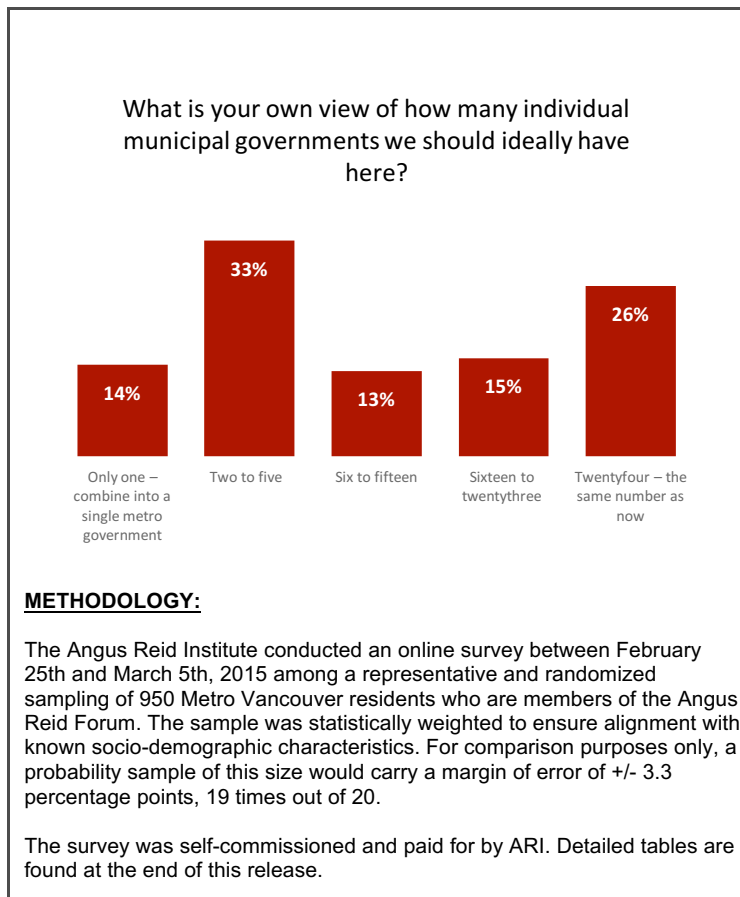
More agreement around which services should be delivered regionally, locally

April 12, 2015 – People living in Metro Vancouver are expressing some desire for change in the way they are governed at the regional level, and on the ideal number of municipalities in the region. However, there is little consensus on what those changes should look like.

That said, there is much more consensus among respondents over issues regarding which services should be led and managed at the regional level, and which ones should be delivered by existing local governments.

Those are among the findings of an Angus Reid Institute public opinion poll that canvassing broad opinions among Metro Vancouver region residents about how their sense of regional and local identity, views on governance, shared services, and the ideal number of municipalities for Metro Vancouver.

The poll findings may serve as a possible starting point for discussion in regards to regional governance and related issues in Metro Vancouver, issues that would seem to merit further study in the future.



Key Findings:

- 74 per cent of respondents say they'd like to see at least one fewer municipality in Metro Vancouver, though there is little clear agreement on how many they'd like to see instead
- Respondents are also split on what kind of regional government is better – two-in-five (41%) chose the current system and the remaining 60 per cent are divided between other options
- Most say certain services including economic development (64%) transportation (77%) and social housing (57%) should be led and delivered at the regional level, but are split on the idea of regional policing

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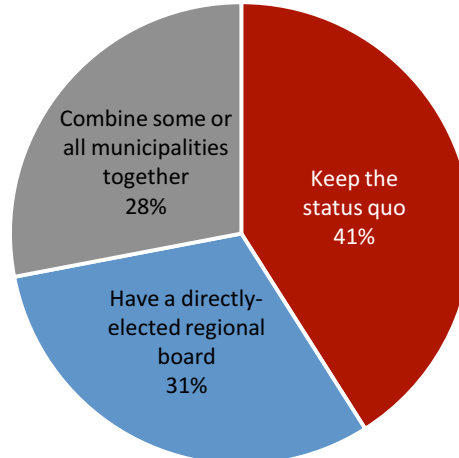
What kind of region do we want?

This Angus Reid Institute poll of Metro Vancouver residents asked two key questions on the overall fundamentals of the region's urban governance model. The responses highlight little consensus, and some – but not massive – appetite for change.

The first question asked respondents to think about how they're governed in the region, and to choose the better of three broad (and in two cases, hypothetical) options:

- A significant minority (41%) chose to "keep the status quo, which means electing local mayors and councillors at the local level, who then represent their municipality at the regional level".
- One-third (31%) opted for a "directly-elected regional board" that deals with "selected issues but leaves most issues to local councils"
- About the same number (28%) chose the option of "combining some or all municipalities"

Thinking about the way we're governed in this region, overall, would you say it is better to



The results show a rather profoundly mixed view – essentially a three-way split – across the major segments of the Metro Vancouver population.

The status quo is slightly less popular with respondents living in the City of Vancouver, among men and among those with more formal education. It is somewhat more popular in suburban areas, among women and those with less formal education. (See detailed tables at the end of this release.)

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Does size matter?

Although this study is not focused specifically on amalgamation, it does make sense to canvass the issue, given that combining smaller local municipalities has been visited, and revisited in several major urban centres in Canada. Notably, there are differing views over whether such unions were for “better or for worse”, as separate studies and analysis show.

Among notable past examples of amalgamation, the City of [Halifax merged in 1996](#), while the City of [Toronto amalgamated in 1998](#), with six distinct municipalities dissolving into one single urban entity. In Ottawa, amalgamation occurred in 2001. While city staff there claim the move to fewer municipalities resulted in \$101 million in savings over [a three-year period](#), others have questioned whether city staffing levels have [grown disproportionately](#) since amalgamation occurred.

Nor does amalgamation always “take”. Case in point – the Island of Montreal, where individual municipalities were [amalgamated into one](#) in 2002. The public outrage over this was significant enough to turn it into a provincial election issue, and by 2004, more than 20 referenda were held in which 15 municipalities voted to leave the amalgamated city. This happened in 2006.

Currently, conversations are underway in and around Victoria, BC, over whether more than a dozen municipalities in a relatively small geographic area, making up roughly 360,000 people, should amalgamate.

The Angus Reid Institute poll asked Metro Vancouver residents to think specifically about the possibility of combining municipalities in this region, and to indicate how many individual municipalities were ideal in the region. Respondents were invited to choose their ideal number - anywhere between the current 24 local governments and one single regional government.

The responses underline significant disaffection with the status quo, but far from a consensus on what would be the optimal number would be:

- One-in-four (26%) say the region should stick with all 24 current local municipalities
- That leaves fully three-quarters (74%) of Metro Vancouver residents opting to amalgamate or combine at least some municipalities. But this large group find little agreement when it comes the all-important question of “how many”:
 - One-in-seven (14%) opt for one single regional government
 - One-third (33%) would like to see between two and five municipalities. This means almost half (47%) say the optimal number of municipalities is five or fewer
 - 13 per cent say between six and fifteen communities is best for the region
 - 15 per cent chose between 16 and 23 municipalities

Looking at views among the main segments of the Metro Vancouver population, the biggest differences are noted regionally. Those living in the City of Vancouver tend to be stronger proponents of five or fewer

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municipalities (58% versus 40% in the suburbs) while suburbanites are more in favour of keeping the current number of municipalities (31% versus 17% in the City of Vancouver). City of Surrey residents fall between Vancouver and suburban respondents, 53 per cent opt for five or fewer municipalities and a quarter (24%) for keeping the current number of municipalities. In any of these cases however, there is no “easy consensus” on this key question.

Service Delivery:

This region-wide Angus Reid Institute poll also looked at the delivery of municipal services and asked residents whether these should ideally be led and managed at a local municipality level or at the regional level. A total of eight specific municipal services were assessed. For three of these services, there is clearly an appetite to see regional control:

- Transportation: four-in-five (77%) said this should be regionalized (as it already is)
- Economic development: two-thirds (64%) said this should be handled at the regional level
- Social housing: well more than half (57%) saw this as a regional responsibility too

On one important issue, respondents are split: 51 per cent would like to see **policing** managed at the local/municipal level (this includes being serviced by local RCMP detachments) while 49 per cent would prefer a regional police service.

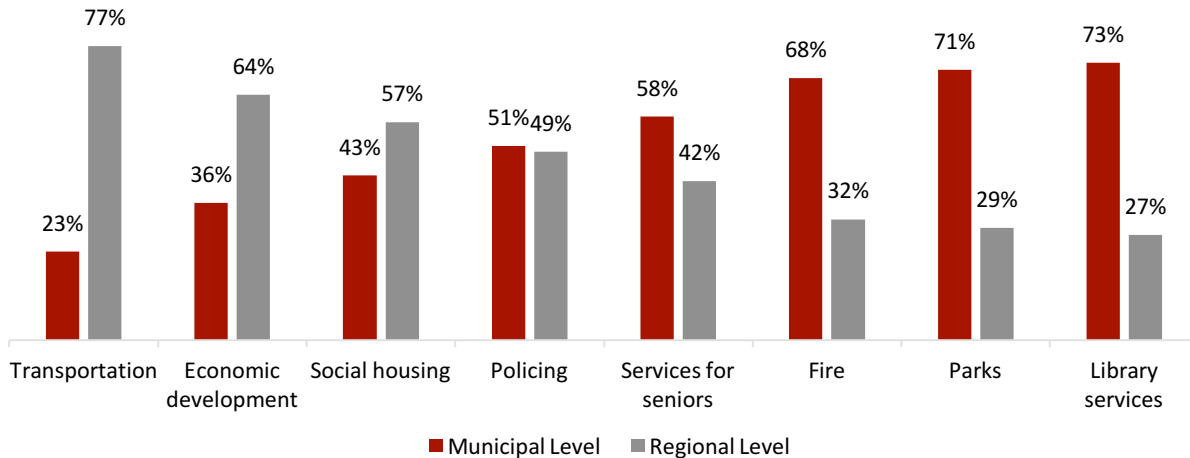
For the other four services assessed, most survey respondents would keep them managed and delivered by the local municipality:

- Libraries (73%)
- Parks (71%)
- Fire (68%)
- Services for seniors (58%)

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Ideally, should each of the following be led and managed at a local municipality level or at the level of a Metro Vancouver regional government?



Perspectives on services management vary markedly by people's views on the ideal number of municipalities in the region. Those opting for five or fewer municipal governments in the area are much stronger supporters of regional control over these services compared to their counterparts who would opt for the current 24 municipality model.

Those in the City of Vancouver tend to be the strongest proponents of having these services managed by a regional government: a majority would assign five of the eight that way (adding police and senior services to the regional list). Vancouverites are also close to split on fire protection and parks.

Residents outside of Vancouver and in the suburbs, on the other hand, are much stronger supporters of local municipal management of services.

And with respect to age, younger Metro Vancouver residents are stronger proponents of regional control than those middle-aged or older. People with more formal education are also more in favour of regional control over these various services.

How we identify ourselves:

Residents in the region generally identify more with their local municipality over the Metro Vancouver area as a whole by a margin of two-to-one: 64 per cent versus 36 per cent respectively.

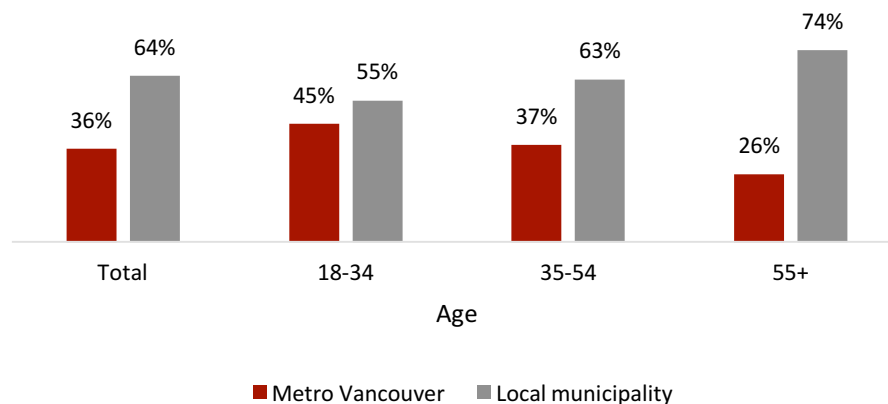
City of Vancouver residents are more likely to identify with the region (55%) whereas most of those living outside Vancouver identify with their own municipality (averaging seven-in-ten).

The survey results also show big differences across generations: those under 35 are almost evenly split as to how they identify (45% Metro Vancouver versus 55% local municipality) while fully three-quarters (74%) of those over 55 identify more closely with their local municipality.

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Overall, which of the two would you say you yourself identify with more closely: your local municipality where you live or the Metro Vancouver area?



This key dimension of identification also relates to views on amalgamation and services. Those who identify with their local municipality are much more likely to opt for maintaining the status quo in terms of the overall governance model and for keeping the various services under local municipal management.

Likewise, when respondents living outside of Vancouver proper were asked how they would describe where they live to people in and around BC, fully four-in-five said they would usually (44%) or always (35%) say their own local municipality. (See detailed tables appended.)

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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When you describe where you live to people in and around BC, do you say you live in Vancouver or your own local municipality?				
(Unweighted totals)	Excluding Vancouver residents (715)	Region		
		Vancouver (-)	Surrey (168)	Other (547)
Always say I live in Vancouver	6%	-	6%	6%
Usually say Vancouver	15%	-	12%	16%
Usually say my own municipality	44%	-	41%	45%
Always say I live in my own municipality	35%	-	41%	33%

When you describe where you live to people in and around BC, do you say you live in Vancouver or your own local municipality?						
(Weighted totals)	Excluding Vancouver residents (700)	Gender		Age		
		Men (328)	Women (371)	18 – 34 (181)	35 – 54 (255)	55+ (264)
Always say I live in Vancouver	6%	6%	6%	12%	5%	3%
Usually say Vancouver	15%	13%	17%	26%	14%	9%
Usually say my own municipality	44%	49%	40%	44%	46%	42%
Always say I live in my own municipality	35%	33%	37%	18%	36%	46%

Overall, which of the two would you say you yourself identify with more closely: your local municipality where you live or the Metro Vancouver area?				
(Unweighted totals)	Total (950)	Region		
		Vancouver (235)	Surrey (168)	Other (547)
Metro Vancouver	36%	55%	31%	29%
Local municipality	64%	45%	69%	71%

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Overall, which of the two would you say you yourself identify with more closely: your local municipality where you live or the Metro Vancouver area?

(Weighted totals)	Total (950)	Gender		Age		
		Men (466)	Women (485)	18 – 34 (276)	35 – 54 (352)	55+ (323)
Metro Vancouver	36%	39%	33%	45%	37%	26%
Local municipality	64%	61%	67%	55%	63%	74%

Ideally, should each of the following be led and managed at a local municipality level or at the level of a Metro Vancouver regional government?
Municipal government

(Unweighted totals)	Total (950)	Region		
		Vancouver (235)	Surrey/ (168)	Other (547)
Library services	73%	62%	79%	76%
Parks	71%	57%	77%	75%
Fire	68%	54%	75%	73%
Services for seniors	58%	47%	63%	62%
Policing	51%	38%	57%	55%
Social housing	43%	41%	49%	42%
Economic development	36%	25%	42%	39%
Transportation	23%	17%	26%	25%

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Municipal government

(Weighted totals)	Total (950)	Gender		Age		
		Men (466)	Women (485)	18 – 34 (276)	35 – 54 (352)	55+ (323)
Library services	73%	68%	77%	68%	75%	74%
Parks	71%	69%	72%	69%	72%	71%
Fire	68%	67%	70%	61%	71%	72%
Services for seniors	58%	55%	61%	51%	59%	64%
Policing	51%	47%	55%	44%	54%	54%
Social housing	43%	43%	43%	39%	43%	47%
Economic development	36%	34%	37%	28%	39%	39%
Transportation	23%	19%	27%	20%	24%	25%

Ideally, should each of the following be led and managed at a local municipality level or at the level of a Metro Vancouver regional government?
Metro Vancouver regional government

(Unweighted totals)	Total (950)	Region		
		Vancouver (235)	Surrey (168)	Other (547)
Transportation	77%	83%	74%	75%
Economic development	64%	75%	58%	61%
Social housing	57%	59%	51%	58%
Policing	49%	62%	43%	45%
Services for seniors	42%	53%	37%	38%
Fire	32%	46%	25%	27%
Parks	29%	43%	23%	25%
Library services	27%	38%	21%	24%

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Metro Vancouver regional government						
(Weighted totals)	Total (950)	Gender		Age		
		Men (466)	Women (485)	18 – 34 (276)	35 – 54 (352)	55+ (323)
Transportation	77%	81%	73%	80%	76%	75%
Economic development	64%	66%	63%	72%	61%	61%
Social housing	57%	57%	57%	61%	57%	53%
Policing	49%	53%	45%	56%	46%	46%
Services for seniors	42%	45%	39%	49%	41%	36%
Fire	32%	33%	30%	39%	29%	28%
Parks	29%	31%	28%	31%	28%	29%
Library services	27%	32%	23%	32%	25%	26%

Ideally, should each of the following be led and managed at a local municipality level or at the level of a Metro Vancouver regional government?								
Metro Vancouver regional government								
(Weighted totals)	Total (950)	Identify With		Ideal number of municipal governments				
		Metro Van. (341)	Local municip. (609)	One only (135)	2 – 5 (312)	6-15 (119)	16-23 (138)	24 – same as now (246)
Transportation	77%	86%	72%	75%	83%	78%	74%	72%
Economic development	64%	72%	60%	72%	72%	68%	61%	50%
Social housing	57%	64%	53%	60%	61%	62%	57%	48%
Policing	49%	60%	43%	65%	58%	50%	41%	34%
Services for seniors	42%	51%	37%	54%	52%	38%	31%	30%
Fire	32%	42%	26%	47%	39%	28%	23%	20%
Parks	29%	39%	24%	46%	31%	31%	21%	22%
Library services	27%	38%	21%	40%	30%	21%	24%	23%

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		Metro Van. (341)	Local municip. (609)	One only (135)	2 – 5 (312)	6-15 (119)	16-23 (138)	24 – same as now (246)
Transportation	23%	14%	28%	25%	17%	22%	26%	28%
Economic development	36%	28%	40%	28%	28%	32%	39%	50%
Social housing	43%	36%	47%	40%	39%	38%	43%	52%
Policing	51%	40%	57%	35%	42%	50%	59%	66%
Services for seniors	58%	49%	63%	46%	48%	62%	69%	70%
Fire	68%	58%	74%	53%	61%	72%	77%	80%
Parks	71%	61%	76%	54%	69%	69%	79%	78%
Library services	73%	62%	79%	60%	70%	79%	76%	77%

We'd like to put some options in front of you, some of them are hypothetical. Thinking about the way we're governed in this region, overall, would you say it is better to:				
(Unweighted totals)	Total (950)	Region		
		Vancouver (235)	Surrey (168)	Other (547)
Keep the status quo, electing mayors and councilors at the local level, who then represent their municipality	41%	35%	39%	44%
Have a directly-elected regional board that deals with some selected issues but leaves most issues with local councils	31%	34%	31%	30%
Combine some or all municipalities together	28%	31%	30%	26%

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We'd like to put some options in front of you, some of them are hypothetical. Thinking about the way we're governed in this region, overall, would you say it is better to:

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		Men (466)	Women (485)	18 – 34 (276)	35 – 54 (352)	55+ (323)
Keep the status quo, electing mayors and councilors at the local level, who then represent their municipality	41%	38%	43%	42%	40%	40%
Have a directly-elected regional board that deals with some selected issues but leaves most issues with local councils	31%	32%	30%	28%	33%	33%
Combine some or all municipalities together	28%	30%	27%	30%	27%	27%

When you think of the idea of combining municipalities in this Metro Vancouver region, what is your own view of how many individual municipal governments we should ideally have here?

(Unweighted totals)	Total (950)	Region		
		Vancouver (235)	Surrey (168)	Other (547)
One – combine into a single metro government	14%	20%	14%	12%
2 – 5 – combine into fewer, larger municipalities	33%	38%	39%	28%
6 - 15	13%	13%	10%	13%
16 – 23 – combine some	15%	11%	14%	16%
24 – the same number as now	26%	17%	24%	31%

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		Men (466)	Women (485)	18 – 34 (276)	35 – 54 (352)	55+ (323)
One – combine into a single metro government	14%	16%	13%	15%	13%	15%
2 – 5 – combine into fewer, larger municipalities	33%	32%	34%	32%	35%	31%
6 - 15	13%	13%	12%	12%	11%	14%
16 – 23 – combine some	15%	14%	15%	18%	13%	13%
24 – the same number as now	26%	25%	27%	23%	28%	26%

When you think of the idea of combining municipalities in this Metro Vancouver region, what is your own view of how many individual municipal governments we should ideally have here?			
(Weighted totals)	Total (950)	Identify With	
		Metro Vancouver (341)	Local municipalities (609)
One – combine into a single metro government	14%	20%	11%
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