

Hazel McCallion is Canada's most popular mayor (Rob Ford is not)



[Kathryn Blaze Carlson](#) Oct 24, 2011 – 2:51 PM ET | Last Updated: Oct 24, 2011 3:56 PM ET

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion — Canada's oldest, longest-serving mayor — is also this country's most popular, narrowly beating out Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi while wholly out-shining beleaguered Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, who placed second-last in a poll released Monday afternoon that looked at Canada's 15 largest cities.

Ms. McCallion, the 90-year-old stalwart who has served as mayor of the Ontario city since 1978, appears to have emerged unscathed from a recent conflict-of-interest scandal, taking the top spot in the Forum Research poll with a 78% approval rating. Montreal Mayor Gerard Tremblay, who is in his third term after being re-elected in 2009, cannot say the same: He ranked last with a 32% approval rating amid a

string of perceived scandals under his watch, among the more recent involving his administration secretly spying on the city's auditor-general and the speaker of the council.

Lorne Bozinoff, president of the polling firm, said while it might not be entirely surprising to see the controversial "Stop the Gravy" mayor toward the bottom, Mr. Ford's rapid and continuing decline is noteworthy. The budget-cutting Toronto mayor has fallen in several consecutive polls since the beginning of this year, from 60% in February, to 57% in June, to 42% in September, to this month's 37% approval rating.

"His big thing during the election was stopping the gravy train, which is the generally well-received idea that we can have the same services but for less money because of cuts to the so-called gravy," Mr. Bozinoff said. "But what we're seeing is not a 'stopping of the gravy,' but rather the actual cutting of services. Closing a library or selling a zoo doesn't sound like stopping the gravy, it sounds like a service cut."

Mr. Nenshi of Calgary was a close second in the poll ranking Canada's favourite mayors.

Ms. McCallion is in her third decade in office while Mr. Ford and Mr. Nenshi were only elected last year, proving, Mr. Bozinoff said, that tenure is not the chief predictor of popularity. In Ms. McCallion's case, he cites persona, and in Mr. Nenshi's he cites vision.

"Hazel McCallion has a feisty image — I wouldn't say motherly, but I would say family-oriented," he said. "She's like everybody's favourite relative, and she's seen as a real builder of Mississauga. Mr. Nenshi is new, he's the rising star ... He's seen as having a real vision for the city, representing diversity and open government."

The poll also seems to show that Canadians do not so much like their mayors overall — the average approval rating was roughly 56%, Mr. Bozinoff said.

"Being mayor is a very tough job," he said. "There's that old saying that all politics is local, and local issues are the ones that affect our everyday life in real ways. If I ask a person what they think about Canadian foreign policy, they might give me a vague answer. But if I ask them about cuts to a transit service, that's a whole other story."

The top five mayors were Ms. McCallion, Mr. Nenshi, Quebec City Mayor Regis Labeaume, Surrey Mayor Diane Watts, and Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson. The mayors with the lowest approval ratings were Mr. Ford, Mr. Tremblay, Winnipeg Mayor Sam Katz, Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson, and Brampton Mayor Susan Fennel.

The poll was conducted from Oct. 21 to 23, and was based on a telephone survey of 6,763 randomly selected adults in Canada's 15 largest cities.



Aaron Lynett/National Post

Toronto Mayor Rob Ford ranked second-last on the list — ahead of only Montreal's Gerard Tremblay.

National Post

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