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**Why Insulate New Institutions?  
Evaluating Pre- and Post-Change Support for Metropolitan  
Reform in Greater London and Toronto**

Recognizing that policy outcomes are affected by the rules and procedures by which they are generated, governments alter institutions in ways that support their preferred policies both during and beyond their mandates. To insulate new institutions against future tampering these same governments often make significant efforts to build elite and grassroots support prior to initiating reforms. Recent regional government reform processes in London and Toronto provide an opportunity to test the value of this insulation strategy. Where British Prime Minister Tony Blair used a "Big Tent" approach to build widespread pre-change support for the Greater London Authority (GLA), Ontario Premier Mike Harris's use of a "Big Stick" to create Megacity Toronto spawned strong opposition. Despite radically different reform processes, elite support is now high for both new legislative bodies. More surprisingly, post-change opinion poll evidence shows that public support for the once hated Megacity is higher than for the GLA. These results appear to undermine the insulation strategy and suggest that local elite will reverse strongly held beliefs to take full advantage of new environments. They also suggest that consultation is unnecessary as long as the public believe progress is being made on an issue of concern. But where local leaders may always sell-out to stay in power, those who believe in the value of public participation should not despair. Additional evidence demonstrates that the public does not reward upper-tier governments that make empty promises or rely on bully tactics.

## Governing Greater London

To cope with the 18th-century population explosion during which Greater London's population grew from one million in 1801 to nearly six million in 1891, the Conservative Government in Whitehall created the London County Council (LCC) in 1888 to coordinate and deliver services for Londoners. Elected LCC councillors and aldermen were responsible for the management, planning and coordination of transportation and sewage. Recognizing that urban areas require micro and macro attention, 28 metropolitan boroughs were created in 1899.

By the early 1950s the capital's population had outgrown the LCC's capacity to provide urban solutions to regional problems as only 3.35 million of the region's 8.35 million inhabitants lived within the LCC's jurisdiction. Established to address the LCC's lack of effectiveness, the Royal (Herbert) Commission recommended that a new and larger regional body be created. Introduced in the *London Government Act 1963*, the boundaries of Greater London were widened to contain parts of Essex, Kent, Surrey, Hertfordshire, Croydon, East Ham and West Ham, the number of metropolitan boroughs increased to 32, and an elected, upper-tier metropolitan authority with broad planning powers called the Greater London Council (GLC) was brought in to replace the LCC (Byrne, 1990; Chandler, 1991; Foley, 1972; Rogers & Fisher, 1992; Thornley, 1992).

Unlike the Labour dominated LCC, power on the GLC swung back and forth between Labour and Conservative majorities. Labour won the first election in 1964, the Conservatives the next two in 1967 and 1970. Labour regained control in 1973, but then again lost to the Conservatives in 1977. Concerned that past Labour GLC governments had frequently overstepped their mandates, the 1977 Conservative GLC administration commissioned a report into the scope and jurisdiction of the regional body. The resulting Faulk Report recommended that the GLC's strategic role be enhanced but direct service delivery powers be reduced. However, no immediate action was taken.

After gaining control of the GLC in 1981, the radical left Labour leader Ken Livingstone came into constant conflict with Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher – elected to national office in 1979. Partly in reaction to Livingstone's constant taunts and defiance,

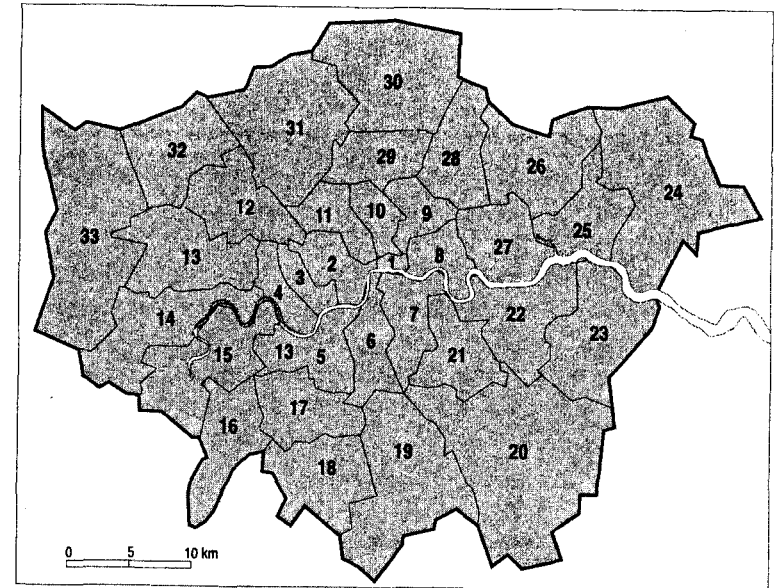


Figure 1: The Boroughs of Greater London (1964-Present)

1. City of London	12. Brent	23. Bexley
2. Westminster	13. Ealing	24. Havering
3. Kensington and Chelsea	14. Hounslow	25. Barking & Dagenham
4. Hammersmith & Fulham	15. Richmond	26. Redbridge
5. Wandsworth	16. Kingston	27. Newham
6. Lambeth	17. Merton	28. Waltham Forest
7. Southwark	18. Sutton	29. Haringey
8. Tower Hamlets	19. Croydon	30. Enfield
9. Hackney	20. Bromley	31. Barnet
10. Islington	21. Lewisham	32. Harrow
11. Camden	22. Greenwich	33. Hillingdon

Source: UK Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

Thatcher's cabinet tabled *Streamlining the Cities* – a 1984 White paper proposing the abolition of the GLC (and the other six British metropolitan county councils). A year later, the GLC was disbanded with most its powers and responsibilities transferred back to central

government, appointed boards or local borough councils. While the Thatcher reforms were justified in the name of efficiency, Ian Loverland (1999: 91) states, "one need not be unduly cynical to conclude that their primary purpose was to remove a potentially significant source of opposition to central government."

Calls for a new regional governance body practically began the day the GLC was abolished, but detailed proposals took some time to develop. In preparing their 1992 election Manifesto, Tony Blair's New Labour began a consultation process by launching a discussion paper entitled *London: A World Class Capital* (Labour Party, 1992). Responses were collected and announced in *An Elected Voice for London* (Labour Party, 1996), in which Labour endorsed an elected, London-wide strategic authority. Failing to win in 1992, New Labour used a similar strategy to develop their 1997 election manifesto. In 1996 a public discussion paper entitled *A Voice for London* (Association, 1996) was launched in which the party reiterated its commitment to a London-wide strategic authority that would speak up for London within Britain, Europe and globally – a pledge that broadly corresponded with the wishes of the public. The proposal was sketchy and issues such as boundaries, structure and electoral system were left open for debate (Labour Party, 1996). In their 1997 Manifesto New Labour took their commitment one step further, promising a referendum on this issue.

Two months after winning the May, 1997 General Election, Tony Blair issued the *New Leadership for London Green Paper* (Great Britain, 1997) that proposed a new London Authority with a directly elected, executive mayor and scrutinizing assembly. Over 1,200 individuals and organizations responded to the proposal. On March 28, 1998, a White Paper, entitled *A Mayor and Assembly for London* (Great Britain, 1998a), was released in which the mayor and assembly's power were detailed. In the foreword, John Prescott – Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Transport and Regions – stated that London needed a new regional government to "...fill the democratic deficit created by the abolition of the GLC in 1986, to provide strong strategic leadership and restore accountability..." and to find solutions to "...many pressing issues – congestion and pollution poverty and social exclusion – all of which reduce the quality of life for Londoners and visitors and

threaten to undermine London's international competitiveness" (Great Britain, 1998a). The proposal was advertised widely on billboards, radio and newspapers and a summary of the White Paper posted to every London household.

After passing a city-wide referendum, New Labour introduced the *Greater London Authority Act* (Great Britain, 1998b) that received Royal Assent on November 11. The Greater London Authority has the general power to enact policies that further any one or more of its principal purposes: (1) promoting economic development and wealth creation; (2) promoting social development; and, (3) promoting the improvement of the environment. In addition to pursuing these goals, the GLA must take into consideration how their policies will affect health and sustainable development. The key player in the GLA is the mayor who sets the budget and develops the overall strategies for transport, planning and the environment and approves strategies for economic and cultural development. The mayor also appoints many committee heads and members of four new pan-London bodies: Transport for London, London Development Agency, Metropolitan Police Authority and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. Much like New York City Council, the Greater London Assembly scrutinizes the actions and non-actions of the executive mayor. The Greater London Assembly's main power is the ability to overrule all or part of the mayors' budget with a two-third majority.

On May 4, 2000, former GLC leader Ken Livingstone took up where he left off when three quarters of a million voters elected him to office. Following a bitter dispute and split with New Labour, Livingstone was elected mayor as an independent. Twenty-five Assembly members were elected using a "mixed" style Additional Member System (AMS) in which 14 are elected from single-member constituencies and 11 top-up members on a London-wide basis through proportional representation. No party was elected with a majority – with the Conservatives holding nine, New Labour holding nine, Liberal Democrats four and Green Party three of the 25 available Assembly seats. Livingstone controls an approximately £32 million operating budget as well as directs £3.3 billion previously spent by central and borough governments on police, fire, transport and economic development, with which he directs the actions of 55,000 employees.

Ken Livingstone was readmitted to the Labour Party following his

2000 electoral victory. He was then re-elected mayor in 2004 with a sizeable majority. In the June 10, 2004 Greater London Assembly elections, the Conservatives elected nine members – maintaining their numbers from 2000, Labour seven – a drop of two, Liberal Democrats five, and the Green and UK Independence Parties two members each (www.londonelects.org). The next Greater London elections are in 2008 (www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/gla.cfm).

### Assessing pre- and post-change institutional support in Greater London

The above section provides the basic structural form and developmental progress of the GLA. This section begins to assess the value of building pre-change elite and public support for new institutions. Support in the pre-change period is measured by assessing elite and public opinion prior to Livingstone and the Assembly members taking office. Post-change support is assessed by gauging later attitudes and behavior. These data are later compared to similar information from Greater Toronto.

#### *Pre-change support for the GLA: Blair's "Big Tent"*

Prior to and after their 1997 General Election victory New Labour used a "Big Tent" strategy to build support for changing London's governance structure which included anticipating and accommodating demands of opponents and conducting widespread public consultation before implementing change.<sup>1</sup> These tactics were seen as necessary as New Labour knew it would face opposition and demands from other national parties. According to Bob Neill, leader of the GLA Conservative group, New Labour's fears of Conservative Party opposition were well founded:

We'd always been opposed to a London-wide Authority as a party and that was the manifesto from which we fought the election. We'd accepted it largely as a voice for London, but not the proposed structure and not necessarily a directly elected

<sup>1</sup> The term "Big Tent" was first brought to my attention during an interview with Bob Chilton – former Chief Executive Officer of the GLA.

mayor. It may have been an early acceptance, there might be an argument on that one, but it was inherited and we stuck with it.<sup>2</sup>

Less hostile than the Conservatives, but still demanding, one of the longest held Liberal Democrat policies has been electoral reform as under the single member plurality system they suffer more than any other major party in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> By highlighting the need for more sustainable environments, the blossoming Green Party also captured Labour's attention – especially since the Greens planned to field a strong slate of candidates in the first GLA elections. While detrimental to their own immediate election fortunes, New Labour attempted to gain support from the Liberal Democrats by incorporating a more proportional electoral system into the *Greater London Authority Act* (Dunleavy & Margetts, 1988: 2). To accommodate the Green challenge New Labour required that every piece of legislation passed by the GLA be assessed for potential impact on sustainability. As Blair began to build consensus support for the GLA among traditional rivals even the Conservatives changed their strategy – eventually running a full slate of candidates. According to Bob Neill:

Should we continue with absolute opposition or should we change? The evidence seemed to suggest that on balance it (the current process) would lead to some kind of London-wide structure. So the first thing to do was to turn round the party's attitude to that.... A consensus emerged pretty quickly: *it wouldn't do our electoral prospects...any good to be seen to be rigidly opposed to the idea of a Mayor*. Then there was a poll on the same day. So that's why the Tory Party started shifting.<sup>4</sup>

To support their attempts to build elite consensus through concession, New Labour also made great efforts to win public favor on this issue. Part of this effort included providing the public with ample information on the proposed arrangements and time to contribute to the GLA

<sup>2</sup> Interview, Bob Neill, Leader of Greater London Authority Conservative Group, August, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of the effects of Britain's single-member plurality system, see Dunleavy, et al., 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Bob Neill, Leader of Greater London Authority Conservative Group, August, 2000.

debate. In addition to the previously described pre-election consultation documents and government papers, the issue generated a huge amount of media coverage with the London-focussed *Evening Standard* and *Guardian* each running almost 1,000 articles on the Greater London Authority between New Labour's election in May 1997 and when the GLA took power in July 2000.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most importantly, New Labour twice gave the public the final say on the GLA by campaigning on the idea during the 1997 General Election and holding a London-wide referendum in which 72 % of those who voted supported the new institutions (Table 1).

New Labour continued to consult even after the Act had received royal assent. For example, the *Shape of Things to Come*, a consultation paper setting out the proposals for the initial organization of the GLA, garnered 44 detailed responses from London boroughs, organizations later absorbed into the GLA, organizations later transformed into functional bodies, academics, professional groups, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations (Government Office for London, 1999). Far from an empty consultation, the follow up report entitled *Shaping Up for the Mayor and Assembly* shows that some of the recommendations were used to change how transition would take place and how some specific organizational arrangements would be handled (Greater London Authority, 1999).

#### *Post-Change Support for the GLA*

Like the pre-change period, post-change support for the GLA can be garnered from elite and public points of view. On the first, there are two key relationships within the GLA – among the members of the assembly and between the assembly and the mayor. Assembly voting patterns show a high level of consensus within the new chamber. Of the 161 motions raised in the Assembly during 2001, 142 (88 %) were passed. This high percentage shows that despite the presence of four strong minority groups – one of which was hostile to the very idea of a new government for London – only 12% of the tabled motions were voted down. At the very least, this high level of agreement indicates that no party was working to systematically undermine the Assembly.

5 Based on a FT Profile count of articles in these papers including the words "London Mayor," "Mayor for London," "Greater London Authority" or "GLA."

**Table 1: 1999 GLA Referendum Results by Borough (%)**

Borough	Yes	Turnout	Borough (cont'd)	Yes	Turnout
Barking & Dagenham	74	25	Houslow	75	32
Barnet	70	36	Islington	82	35
Bexley	63	35	Kensington & Chelsea	70	28
Brent	78	37	Kingston upon Thames	69	41
Bromley	57	40	Lambeth	82	32
Camden	81	33	Lewisham	78	30
City of London	63	31	Merton	72	38
Croydon	65	38	Newham	81	29
Ealing	77	33	Redbridge	70	36
Enfield	67	33	Richmond upon Thames	71	45
Greenwich	75	33	Southwark	81	33
Hackney	82	35	Sutton	65	35
Hammersmith & Fulham	78	34	Tower Hamlets	78	36
Haringey	84	30	Waltham Forest	73	34
Havering	61	34	Westminster	72	32
Hillingdon	63	35	Total	72	34
Question: Are you in favor of the government's proposals for a Greater London Authority, made up of an elected Mayor and a separately elected Assembly?					

However, the early relationship between the mayor and the Assembly has not been as congenial. The Assembly used its major scrutiny power to reject the Mayor's initial budget proposal in 2001. According to Pimlott and Rao (2001: 167), "...members of all parties...rejected the budget by 24 votes to one, eliminating all but the provision for additional police officers and reducing the precept increase to about one third of that originally proposed." The following year Labour and Liberal Democrat Party members cooperated to force the mayor to cut his budget by £85 million to £2.5 billion.<sup>6</sup> These stands by the Assembly show that some tension exists within London's

6 GLA Press Release, London Assembly agrees to Mayor's "sensible compromise" on budget 13-2-2002.

newest city hall, but to claim that this dissention indicates widespread dissatisfaction with the institutions would be a stretch. In sum, while the Assembly has made the mayor's life difficult at times, all parties seem to have adapted to and embraced the new institutions.

Public support for the GLA can be measured through public votes and opinion surveys. Starting with 1999 referendum, while 72% voted "yes" to the Greater London Authority, only 34% of registered voters cast a ballot. This result indicates that the institution was popular with those who voted, but the low levels of turnout do not indicate that the GLA captured the imagination of the local populace. The same holds for the 2000 GLA elections where only 35% of Londoners chose to vote in a widely publicized and dramatic race that saw Livingstone split with New Labour and Steve Norris replace a disgraced best-selling author Jeffery Archer as the Conservative mayoralty candidate.

**Table 2: Satisfaction with London Mayor**

Question: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way Ken Livingstone is doing his job as Mayor of London?				
Response	2000 (%)	2001 (%)	2002 (%)	2002-2000
Very satisfied	5	6	4	-1
Fairly satisfied	25	29	23	-2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	40	31	29	-11
Fairly dissatisfied	5	9	14	+9
Very dissatisfied	3	5	13	+10
Don't know	23	19	17	-6
Satisfied (very + fairly satisfied)	30	35	27	-3
Dissatisfied (fairly + very dissatisfied)	8	14	27	+19
Unsure (neither + don't know)	63	50	46	-17

Source: MORI The London Survey 2002. Results are based on 1452 face-to-face interviews conducted in the Greater London area between October 18 and December 10, 2002. Data are weighted by gender, age, work status and ethnicity.

Opinion polls reinforce the idea that despite New Labour's efforts, Londoners have little connection to the GLA. Table 2 shows results

from MORI *London Survey* polls conducted in 2000, 2001, 2002. When aggregated into "Satisfied," "Dissatisfied" and "Unsure" categories, the poll shows that 27% of those surveyed were satisfied and 27% dissatisfied with the performance of the mayor in 2002. Overall the poll suggests that Londoners are growing more familiar with the mayoral position moving from 63% or 46% being "neither satisfied or dissatisfied" or "unsure" between 2000 and 2002. This swing indicates that people are becoming more aware and opinionated about the office of mayor, but from an institutional perspective the position of mayor seems only relevant to a bare majority of Londoners.

**Table 3: Satisfaction with Greater London Assembly**

Question: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the London Assembly is doing its job?				
Response	2000 (%)	2001 (%)	2002 (%)	2002-2000
Very satisfied	2	2	1	-1
Fairly satisfied	17	15	8	-9
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	39	35	31	-8
Fairly dissatisfied	4	7	6	+2
Very dissatisfied	3	5	4	+1
Don't know	36	37	50	+14
Satisfied (very + fairly satisfied)	19	17	9	-10
Dissatisfied (fairly + very dissatisfied)	7	12	10	+3
Unsure (neither + don't know)	75	72	81	+6

Source: MORI The London Survey 2001. Results are based on 1,458 face-to-face interviews conducted in the Greater London area between October 31 and December 14, 2001. Data are weighted by gender, age, work status and ethnicity.

The results from Table 3 should be even more worrying for those who thought a "Big Tent" strategy would cause citizens to embrace the GLA. When asked about how satisfied they were with the new London Assembly in 2002, 9% responded positively and 10% negatively. That 81% were unsure about the mayor's legislative counterpart indicates a very low level of attachment to the Assembly. More seriously, this

category of respondents is 6% higher than when first asked in 2000 – signifying a lessening of support and or knowledge of the new institution. In another question from the same 2002 MORI survey a staggering 86% answered that they knew “Not very much,” “Nothing at all” or “Don’t know” when asked “How much, if anything would you say you know about what the London Assembly is doing for London?”

**Table 4: Public Scepticism about GLA Devolution**

Q1: Do you think that London's new Mayor SHOULD or SHOULD NOT have power to...		
Q2: Do you think that London's new Mayor WILL or Will NOT in actual fact have the power to ...		
Topic	Q	Yes %
...run London's schools?	1	42
	2	24
	1-2	-24
...run London's Hospitals?	1	48
	2	25
	1-2	-23
...decide whether fares on London's tubes or and buses should go up or not?	1	74
	2	62
	1-2	-12
...decide whether motorists should pay to drive in the city center?	1	64
	2	59
	1-2	-10
...raise or lower significantly the amount of council tax that Londoners pay?	1	53
	2	41
	1-2	-12
Source: ICM/Evening Standard Mayor Poll, March 2000. Telephone sample of 1,005 London adults.		

An ICM/Evening Standard pre-election poll helps explain the origins of this public disaffection. Over 1,000 Londoners were asked questions pertaining to what powers they thought the mayor *should* be endowed and what powers they thought he *would* be endowed. Although a majority of those polled thought that the mayor should control transit fares, congestion charges and tax rates, fewer people believed that central government would actually devolve these powers. As shown in Table 4, this skepticism about decentralizing control prevails in all

categories, suggesting that the reason Londoners may be less than fully embracing the new institutions is because they do not feel that the central government will give the GLA the power it needs to do its job.

The recent tussle over how to finance improvements to London underground demonstrates that Londoners were perhaps correct to be skeptical of Blair's commitment to decentralization. Although management of the London underground was transferred to Livingstone and his Transport for London Commissioner Bob Kiley on July 15, 2003, the New Labour central government delayed the handover in order to sign a number of long-term private-public partnerships. Livingstone had fought a long legal battle against the partial privatization, claiming that splintering the management of London's underground services was unsafe and would not provide the public value for money. But Blair went ahead and new contracts with Metronet and Tubelines that will see £16 billion in new investment in the underground over the next 15 years. Despite his vehement opposition to the scheme, Livingstone is now forced to honor these agreements. So although Livingstone now has complete managerial control over London's transportation network, it is under conditions he opposes yet cannot alter.

In sum, that the Greater London Assembly passes 88% of its motions demonstrate that local parties and officials have bought into the GLA experiment. Blair's "Big Tent" approach of accommodating the demands of various factions and incorporating them into the new institution deserves at least some credit for building this cohesion. While evident, budget-day derision between the mayor and the Assembly should not be seen as this revolt against the new institutions but rather as the Assembly exercising its only significant power. However, from the public perspective Blair's "Big Tent" approach failed to win the average Londoner's heart and mind. The vast majority of local residents did not participate in the local referendum or the first GLA elections and have no knowledge about the workings of the Greater London Assembly. And only a bare majority has an opinion about the workings of the now highly visible mayor's office. Part of this disconnect may be due to the fact that Londoners do not believe that the GLA will have the power it needs to address their woes. While Blair's "Big Tent" might have been a successful elite brokering exercise, it largely failed at the grassroots because of New Labour's

reluctance to release its grip and adequately devolve policy-making power.

## Governing Metropolitan Toronto

By the 1950s, Greater Toronto began to exhibit all symptoms usually associated with metropolitanism. To provide regional solutions to health, transport and planning dilemmas for a region of over one million inhabitants, in 1953 the Ontario Provincial Government brought in "Metro" – a new metropolitan level governing body that assumed control over major land-use planning decisions and the main transportation and sewage routes. This indirectly elected upper-tier governmental body was composed of representatives chosen from the councils of the then 13 lower-tier governments of various sizes ranging from the village of Swansea (population 9,628) to the City of Toronto (population 672,407) (Filion, 1999: 428).

Initial response from most municipal units was negative, but Metropolitan Toronto eventually gained wide praise for its contribution to solving regional problems. A subsequent Goldenberg Commission in the 1960s (which reduced the number of municipal units to 6) and a Robarts Commission in the late 1970s (which recommended additional democratic reforms leading to direct election of metropolitan Toronto councillors) completed the governmental restructuring (Ontario, 1965; Ontario, 1977). Between 1961 and 1991 the population of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) grew to 4.2 million - of which just 54% fell under the jurisdiction of Metro. Reducing the number of lower-tier Metro municipalities from 13 to 6 in 1967 did not aid in managing extra-jurisdictional growth, nor did changing from indirect to direct elections in 1988 (Filion, 1999: 432). In 1995 a provincially appointed "Task Force on the Future of Greater Toronto" was launched under the direction of Dr. Anne Golden to once again tackle what were perceived as regional coordination problems. Completed in 1995, but not publicly released until January 16, 1996, the Golden Report recommended that the five existing regional governments (see map below) be merged into a single, Greater Toronto regional governance body and that the number of local municipalities be reduced for an estimated annual savings of approximately \$1 billion (Ontario, 1965; Golden, 1999).

However, a change in provincial governments late in 1996 preempted these recommendations and marked a shift in views as to how regional government in Toronto should be structured.

Defeating an urban-friendly New Democratic Party government on June 8, 1995, Conservative Premier Mike Harris's more suburban and rural electoral focus abruptly altered the flow of the regional governance debate. On May 30, 1996 Harris appointed David Crombie – a former Toronto mayor and federal cabinet minister – to head the "Who Does What" advisory panel. With a mandate to make policy recommendations on property tax assessment, transportation, utilities and municipal administration issues, Crombie's focus fell squarely on municipal government. Working throughout the summer, the panel rapidly delivered a large number of recommendations to the Harris cabinet. Perhaps of most importance, on December 6, 1996, Crombie made three broad recommendations concerning the existing governance structure including:

- replacing the five upper-tier (regional) municipalities with a Greater Toronto Services Board (GTSB);
- consolidating member (lower-tier) municipalities into strong cities;
- consolidating Metro Toronto to create a strong urban core for the GTA (Ontario, 1996a).

Before the Crombie recommendations were even tabled, Harris had set his restructuring plan in motion. On November 25, 1996 – almost two weeks before Crombie tabled his report – Harris paid Klynveld, Peat, Marwick and Goerdeler (KPMG) to estimate what savings would be gained from amalgamating the six lower tier municipalities – East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, Toronto, and York – as well as Metro regional council into a single region-wide government (Ontario, 1996b). Released on December 10 – a mere ten days after the Crombie report – KPMG announced that a merger would reduce the number of staff required to run municipal services and save taxpayers up to \$865 million in the first year and \$300 million per year every year thereafter. KPMG argued that many of the potential savings were not at all attributable to the amalgamation, but rather up to two-thirds were to come from "efficiency enhancements," possible even without radical organizational change (Milroy et. al., 1999: 163). When later

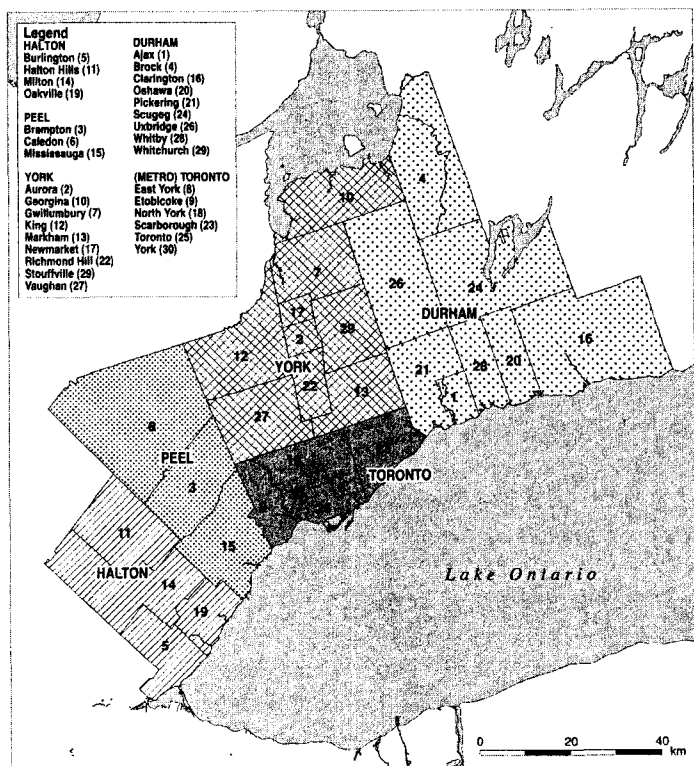


Figure 2: Greater Toronto Area (Pre-1997 Amalgamation)  
 Source: School of Applied Geography, Ryerson Polytechnic University

pressed the company admitted that “it’s possible that the amalgamation could produce significantly lower savings than we have talked about or even a negative result, a net increase in expenditures.” However, this additional information did not enter into the debate as the report was issued one day prior to the tabling of Bill 103 (ibid.).

On December 17, days before the legislature was to rise for the winter holidays, Municipal Affairs Minister Al Leach tabled the *City of Toronto Act, 1996*. The Bill proposed replacing the seven existing municipal governments of Metropolitan Toronto with a new single-tier on January 1, 1998. The first city council was to consist of a mayor and one member from 44 wards elected in 1997, but would not take office until early 1998. A board of trustees was to oversee the financial affairs

of the seven existing municipal/regional governments while a transition team managed and planned the changeover. In introducing the Bill, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Al Leach stated that the goals of the merger were to “save money, remove barriers to growth and investment and help create jobs.” Savings were to come from eliminating duplication of services and were estimated at \$208 million annually (Boudreau, 1999: 772; see also Wendell Cox Consultancy, 1997). According to Milroy et al. (1999), the original goals were to: “create a competitive, efficient city government; to keep some services local; and to protect existing neighborhoods.” Milroy et al. continue that “the second and third (rationales) were periodically restated, but not developed”.

*The City of Toronto Act, 1997* passed on April 27, 1997. Immediately following, the provincial government appointed a six-member transition team to carry out certain pre-amalgamation tasks. According to Roda McInnis Contractor – Amalgamation Office Director of the new City of Toronto – the nine months given to ready the city to go “on-line” on January 1, 1998 was inadequate and at least two years were needed to properly address the tasks at hand. While the transition team did not draw up a plan as to how the amalgamation was to take place, they did appoint a number of key senior executives, including a new Chief Administrative Officer, City Clerk, Chief Financial Officer, Head of Human Resources and Fire Chief among others (Contractor, 2000).<sup>7</sup> Elections were also held during the transition period. North York Mayor Mel Lastman – a once vocal opponent of the amalgamation – beat out Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall – another merger opponent – to become Megacity Toronto’s first mayor in November 1997.

7 In further reflections on the transition process, Contractor goes on to state: In amalgamating Toronto, the provincial government raised great expectations as to how much money would be saved through consolidation. The new administration found that while a significant amount of money could be saved, including staff reductions, it was unrealistic to expect, in the short-term, the exceptionally high savings predicted by the provincial government. Unfortunately, once the province’s numbers were public, they became a political mantra that the new administration had to continuously address...

## Assessing pre- and post-change support in Metropolitan Toronto

This section evaluates support for the Toronto metropolitan reform process both before and after changes were effected. In this case pre-change evidence relates to levels of elite and public participation in the change process. Post-change support is measured by assessing legislative cohesion and public opinion. The purpose of this assessment is not only to test for continuity within Metropolitan Toronto but also to generate data to compare with that collected from the Greater London experience.

### *Pre-change support for Megacity: Harris's "Big Stick"*

In contrast to Blair's "Big Tent" approach, Premier Harris and his ministers used a "Big Stick" to drive through their Greater Toronto reforms. The first prong of this strategy was to gain approval for the changes from traditional supporters by developing a clear and coherent message. Harris had relied on a less government, lower taxes, a "Common Sense Revolution" platform to gain office during the 1995 election and continued with this message through the Metropolitan reform period – not only in Toronto, but in other centers like Ottawa, Hamilton, Kingston and Sudbury (Ontario, 1999). Support came from traditional right of center organizations such as the Metropolitan Board of Trade, the Urban Development Institute and the Greater Toronto Homebuilders Association (Boudreau, 1999: 773). Harris was also successful in gaining support from the chair of the soon-to-be abolished Metropolitan Toronto Council and future appointed head of the Greater Toronto Services Board, Alan Tonks.<sup>8</sup> In a pre-appointment period speech to the provincial Standing Committee on Government during the few public hearings on the amalgamation, Tonks stated:

I support the concept of a united city.... It will be less top-heavy, less bureaucratic and more efficient. Amalgamation doesn't mean bigger government; it means leaner government. Amalgamation won't just make our government more efficient to run; it will make it easier to understand. People will know who

<sup>8</sup> Alan Tonks was subsequently elected a Toronto area MP.

to turn to when they need help and they will know who to hold accountable when they are unable to get it.<sup>9</sup>

The second prong of the "Big Stick" was rapidity. The speed with which the reforms were pushed from Bill to Act indicates a deliberate attempt to choke oppositional cries. That Bill 103 was tabled 11 days after the Crombie recommendations and a day after the KMPG report initially limited opposition to legislative opponents. Liberal and New Democratic members of the provincial legislature were firmly against Bill 103 and in tandem the two parties managed to orchestrate a 10-day filibuster during the passing of the legislation (Boudreau, 1999: 775). However, even as the Bill progressed through its brisk readings, grassroots opposition began to form. Led by former Mayor John Sewell, the Citizens for Local Democracy organized public opposition to the Conservative reforms, as did local mayors – including Barbara Hall from the City of Toronto, and academics – including Andrew Sancton from the University of Western Ontario. Public forums and well-attended demonstrations were held throughout the legislative process until the Bill was passed on April 27, 1997.

**Table 5: 1997 Merger Referendum Results**

Question: Are you in favor of eliminating [your municipality] and all other existing municipalities in Metropolitan Toronto and amalgamating them into a megacity?			
City	Yes (%)	No (%)	Turnout (%)
Toronto	27	74	36
York	35	65	39
East York	19	82	42
North York	21	79	40
Etobicoke	30	70	19
Scarborough	22	78	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>25</b>

Source: *Globe and Mail* Tuesday, March 4, 1997, p. A1.

The most formal evidence of public opposition to Bill 103 can be found from the results of referendums organized by the lower-tier

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from presentation to Standing Committee on General Government, 36th Parliament, Session 1, Monday, February 3, 1997, 1:50 am. Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services, Toronto: Office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

municipalities. Upon the refusal of the provincial government to consult the public on these changes until after Bill 103 had passed, the six lower-tier municipal governments within the Metro area asked citizens the following question: "Are you in favor of eliminating [Area Municipality] and all other existing municipalities in Metropolitan Toronto and amalgamating them into a Megacity?" As shown in Table 5, 76% of the eligible voters casting ballots answered "No" to the question. At first glance the turnout rate of 25% might indicate that citizens did not mobilize in force to stop the merger – especially when compared to the 1997 City of Toronto election turnout rate of 49%. However, it should be noted that the referendum was organized in haste by the lower-tier municipalities, thus it was under-funded and under-organized. Although it is impossible to say with any certainty, as with other public marketing ventures more time and money may have raised participation rates. Beth Moore Milroy captures the spirit of the times with her summary of the hostility toward Bill 103:

Opposition took many forms: dozens of meetings were held in all six cities (on one hectic Wednesday there were 23 Bill 103-related meetings scheduled in the six cities), six city umbrella organizations coordinated responses to the Bill, letters were sent to the newspapers, experts on the relationship between amalgamation and costs of government were hired, deputations were made to a legislative committee. There were marches, parades, posterings, leafleting, speeches by the politicians in the opposition parties, filibustering in the legislature, threats of legal challenges by all the cities and by citizens, and referendums in each of the six cities. Five of the six mayors were solidly opposed to amalgamation, including the man who would subsequently be elected the first mayor of the megacity. One mayor and the chair of Metro were either equivocal or in favor. John Sewell, a former mayor of Toronto and its most active defender against Bill 103, started a network called Citizens for Local Democracy.... It was remarkable for several reasons, one being that its meetings attracted around 1,200 people every Monday night for almost three months and several hundred for most of the rest of 1997. (Milroy, 2002: 161–162).

*Post-change support for Metropolitan Toronto*

This preceding summary of events shows that the Conservatives planned the amalgamation reforms in secret, built consensus among traditional supporters by claiming the changes would bring massive savings and lower taxes and used blitzkrieg tactics to bypass public input and elite opposition to the changes. Although savvy challengers were able to make uncomfortable the passage of Bill 103, in the end the merger took place on schedule. While successful on paper, Harris's "Big Stick" approach contravened the insulation strategy and created new institutions vulnerable to future attack. As a result, elite challenge and public opposition would be expected to continue in the post-change period. As with Greater London, this section uses legislative voting patterns and election and opinion poll results to test whether post-change Toronto is loathed by its citizens.

**Table 6: Legislative cohesion within the City of Toronto (2001)**

Date	Total Motions	Motions Passed	%	Votes Recorded	%
12/05/00	101	89	88	31	31
01/30/01	216	199	92	49	23
06/03/01	241	202	84	80	33
04/24/01	459	371	81	209	46
05/30/01	276	256	93	65	24
06/26/01	235	213	91	67	29
07/24/01	347	327	94	85	24
02/10/01	305	279	91	88	29
06/11/01	287	268	93	78	27
04/12/01	322	296	92	70	22
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2789</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>822</b>	<b>29</b>

Where non-partisan members elected from former lower-tier municipalities might be expected to be disgruntled and non-cooperative after the forced merger, Table 6 demonstrates remarkable cohesion

within the Toronto's new city council.<sup>10</sup> Of the motions tabled in the 2001 legislative session, 90% (2,500 of 2,789) were passed by the council. The number of officially recorded votes also provides further evidence of widespread cooperation. The names of those casting yeas and nays are recorded in a very few procedural instances, but mostly upon the request of a councillor. A fractured legislative body would be expected to produce a high percentage of recorded votes, as these records are the only public method by which to identify a member's voting record. However, of the 2,789 motions tabled, only 822 (about one-third) were recorded. This small number of recorded votes indicates a low level of fragmentation and more evidence that the new institutions are widely accepted by local elite.

**Table 7: Megacity - Better or Worse Government?**

Amalgamation of the six former municipalities of Metro Toronto has provided better government than the previous two-tiered system.			
Response	Total	Metro Area	Rest of GTA
Agree	37	35	41
Disagree	29	28	30
No change/ don't know	34	37	29

Source: Toronto Star/Ekos Poll on the Civic Election 2000. Total results valid within +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error increases when the results are sub-divided: +/-4.0 percentage points for Metro area and +/- 4.9 percentage points for Rest of GTA

**Table 8: Megacity: Right or wrong decision?**

Question: Overall, would you say that the amalgamation of the six former municipalities was the right decision or the wrong decision?			
Response	Total	Metro Area	Rest of GTA
Right decision	60	58	64
Wrong decision	27	30	21
Don't know	13	12	15

Source: Toronto Star/Ekos Poll on the Civic Election 2000.

10 Section 41.2.1 of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 states that "Only the names of certified candidates shall appear on the ballot." See Ontario, 1996c. For evidence that removing such as clause results in the development of local parties, see Smith and Stewart, 1998.

More surprising than the elite cooperation is the radical shift of public opinion toward the new institutions. As shown in Table 7, according to a November 2000 Toronto Star/Ekos poll a mere 28% of local residents disagreed that the amalgamated city has provided better government than the previous two-tiered system. When asked if the merger was the "right decision," 58% of those living in the merger area responded in the affirmative. When contrasted to the pre-change referendum results in which 76% of those polled were against the merger only three years earlier, it is clear that something had happened to change the minds of local citizens.

**Table 9: Satisfaction with Individual Services in Metro (2000)**

Question: How would you rate the impact of amalgamation of the six former municipalities of Metropolitan Toronto into the current megacity on the following?					
Topic	Positive	Negative	Difference	No change	Don't know
Response time by fire departments	34	10	24	40	16
Municipal taxes on individuals	24	19	5	43	15
Crime in the streets	24	18	4	51	6
Municipal taxes on business	20	16	4	42	27
Garbage collection	24	21	3	49	6
Availability of Toronto's recreation facilities	27	30	-3	34	9
Public access to City Council Members	19	23	-4	42	16

Source: Toronto Star/Ekos Poll on the Civic Election 2000 (Results from Metro Area only)

The Toronto Star/Ekos poll also probed citizen satisfaction with post-merger service delivery. Arranged from positive to negative impact in Table 9, citizens reported that the new structure has helped improve fire service and garbage collection, reduce crime, and lower individual

and business tax rates. Only questions about accessing local councillors and availability of recreation facilities elicited primarily negative responses. What is also striking is the number of people who state that the amalgamation has had no impact on their lives in relation to these services. One would think that a spiteful citizenry would undoubtedly express their feelings more vehemently.

In sum, where citizens and political elites were strongly opposed to the Conservative's plans for Ontario's largest urban center, voting patterns within the legislature and poll data demonstrate both these groups have reversed the opinion. The public now expresses support for the changes while elected members of Toronto City Council show remarkable cohesion. So despite the top-down, exclusionary method by which the changes were introduced, those elite wishing to survive in the local political scene adapted to the new institutions, where the once angry public was brought inside by what they perceive to be better institutional arrangements.

## Conclusions

According to the insulation strategy, post-change support for new institutions grows from attempts to build elite consensus and popular consent before reforms are made. As such, the Greater London Authority should have retained its popularity as it was constructed through elite accommodation and devolved citizen control where Megacity Toronto should remain unpopular because of the dictatorial tactics used to abolish long-standing local institutions. Initial evidence in this chapter suggests that pre-change processes have little effect on later popularity. Even elected officials who vehemently opposed reforms now cooperate within both new institutions – implying that local elites will always reverse evenly strongly-held opinions to survive. In terms of the general public, where heavily courted Londoners now seem indifferent to their new mayor and assembly, once outraged Torontonians appear largely satisfied with Megacity – suggesting pre-change public involvement is unnecessary. However, other evidence demonstrates that Londoners' lack of enthusiasm for the GLA is due to New Labour's failure to devolve necessary powers to the mayor and the Assembly. Thus, it is not the "Big Tent" approach

that should be viewed as a failure, but rather Tony Blair's reluctance to back his words with deeds. It would also appear that Mike Harris guessed right when he rammed through his then unpopular legislation, as Torontonians now believe themselves to be better off in a megacity. This victory is something about which the Ontario Conservatives can ponder as they sit on the opposition benches watching a new Liberal Provincial Government put forward its new metropolitan visions.

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