

Strong Mayor Powers: The Promise of Efficiency, The Threat to Democracy

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Abstract

This research paper aimed to assess the outcomes and impacts of Strong Mayor powers and their role in advancing Province of Ontario priorities. Over the past few years, 46 of Ontario's largest and fastest-growing municipalities have adopted these powers, granting mayors increased authority to implement provincial priorities, manage administration, and oversee budgets. The primary goal of these enhanced powers is to address the housing crisis. This paper contends that although Strong Mayor powers may help advance provincial housing priorities by streamlining decision-making, they also lead to long-term negative effects, including diminished public trust, strained council relationships, and a loss of professional expertise among municipal staff, challenging the balance between effective governance and fair, transparent decision-making. To support this thesis, a mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative data on the relationship between Strong Mayor powers, housing target achievements, and reduced development approval timelines, alongside a qualitative case study analysis examining three different applications of Strong Mayor powers. The findings revealed a positive relationship between Strong Mayor powers and the advancement of provincial housing priorities; however, this correlation does not imply causation, and other influencing factors may be contributing to the observed relationship. The case studies identified that in the short term, these powers lead to more efficient decision-making that could help advance housing development. However, the long-term effects may include reduced public confidence, weakened relationships with the council, and the erosion of professional expertise among municipal staff. From the results, several limitations were identified, including concerns about data validity, the impact of confounding variables, and the short timeframe since Strong Mayor powers were implemented. Further research, particularly longer-term studies, is recommended to address these limitations.

Background

The central question for this research paper is: *What are the outcomes and impacts of Strong Mayor powers, and will they advance provincial priorities?* This question stems from a controversial policy change introduced in Ontario by Premier Doug Ford in 2022 through the *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act*. This policy change was implemented in response to the ongoing affordability and housing crisis. Over the past decade, housing prices in Ontario have nearly tripled, far outpacing income growth (Housing Affordability Task Force, 2022). The shortage of housing supply and rising affordability challenges have made homeownership and renting increasingly difficult for many Ontarians (Housing Affordability Task Force, 2022).

In December 2021, the Ontario government established the Housing Affordability Task Force to propose solutions for improving housing supply and affordability. By February 2022, the Task Force released a report containing 55 recommendations, including the ambitious goal of building 1.5 million homes by 2031 (Housing Affordability Task Force, 2022). To help achieve this target, the province assigned housing goals to larger municipalities and introduced the Strong Mayor powers legislation, granting greater authority to heads of council to meet these objectives (Government of Ontario, 2022). This legislation has sparked debate about its potential implications for municipal governance and has faced criticism, with some Ontario mayors rejecting Strong Mayor powers due to concerns over the government-imposed housing targets or fears that these powers could lead to authoritarian governance (CBC News, 2023).

Given the novelty of Strong Mayor powers in Ontario, there is limited research on their potential impacts, presenting an opportunity to contribute to the field. This paper aims to evaluate both the early intended and unintended outcomes and impacts of this legislation. As a recent development, the effects of Strong Mayor powers on advancing provincial priorities and on the relationships between the administration and council members remain uncertain. This topic is particularly relevant due to the significant changes it introduces to municipal governance structures. The intended outcomes of this policy include reducing bureaucratic red tape and increasing the efficiency of local governments to support provincial priorities. However, critics have raised concerns

about unintended consequences or impacts, such as undermining democratic principles like accountability and transparency, as well as challenges in balancing political authority with professional neutrality. This research paper explores the outcomes and impacts of Strong Mayor powers, aiming to assess whether they can advance provincial priorities while ensuring fair, transparent, and effective governance. For the purposes of this paper, "outcomes" refer to the immediate or short-term results that arise directly from specific actions or policies. These are the direct, tangible effects of implementing Strong Mayor powers. "Impacts," on the other hand, refer to the broader, longer-term effects that result from those outcomes. These include deeper societal, economic, or political changes. The central question investigates how these powers influence governance efficiency and decision-making, and whether they lead to broader, long-term societal, political, and economic changes. This paper argues that while Strong Mayor powers positively impact the advancement of provincial housing priorities by improving decision-making efficiency, they also lead to long-term negative effects, including diminished public trust, strained council relationships, and a loss of professional expertise among municipal staff, challenging the balance between effective governance and fair, transparent decision-making.

Strong Mayor Power Legislation

The Strong Mayor powers set out in *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022* came into effect on November 23, 2022. This legislation gave the Mayors of Toronto and Ottawa enhanced powers and additional tools to reduce red tape and speed up provincial priorities including housing, transit, and infrastructure in their respective municipalities (Government of Ontario, 2022). This resulted in the approval of Bill 39, *Better Municipal Governance Act, 2022*, which amended the *City of Toronto Act, 2006*, and the *Municipal Act, 2001* to provide the mayor of the City of Toronto and mayors of other "designated municipalities" the authority to propose by-laws to advance a prescribed provincial priority and require council to pass the by-law if more than one-third of the members of council vote in favour of the by-law (Hicks Morley Hamilton Stewart Storie LLP, 2022).

On July 1, 2023, Strong Mayor powers expanded to an additional 26 mayors in single or lower-tier municipalities with a population over 100,000 (or growing to 100,000 by 2031) and who committed to achieving their housing pledge as set by the Provincial government (Government of Ontario, 2023b). On October 31, 2023, the Ontario government expanded the list of municipalities with Strong Mayor powers by adding 18 more, all projected to have populations exceeding 50,000 by 2031 (Government of Ontario, 2023c). To qualify for these powers, the municipalities must set their homebuilding targets for 2031 and develop a housing pledge (Open Council, 2024b). This brings the total number of municipalities in Ontario with Strong Mayor powers to 46, focusing on the larger municipalities that commit to prioritizing residential growth. The balance of the 444 municipalities in Ontario continue to operate under the “weak mayors” model where mayors are the “first among equals” as members of municipal councils (Fenn & Siegel, 2017). On April 9, 2025, the Provincial government announced plans to extend Strong Mayor powers, effective May 1, 2025, to an additional 169 single- and lower-tier municipalities with councils consisting of six or more members (Government of Ontario, 2025).

The provisions in the *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022* fall into three main categories including provincial priorities, mayor and council’s relationship with administration and mayor’s relationship with council.

Provincial Priorities

The mayor can bring forward matters directly to the council that in their opinion relate to a provincial priority, as prescribed in the regulations of the legislation. This legislation currently focuses on housing, to construct 1.5 million residential units by 2031. Additionally, they emphasize building and maintaining infrastructure to support the increased housing supply, including transit, roads, utilities, and services (Provincial Priorities, 2022). These priorities may be subject to change or updates at the discretion of the provincial government.

Mayor and Council's Relationship with the Administration

Numerous municipal administrative powers, once shared collectively by the council, have now been transferred to the mayor. These powers include appointing the Chief Administrative Officer, reorganizing the administrative structure, hiring and dismissing division heads or heads of other organizational units (with some exceptions), appointing chairs and vice-chairs to local boards and committees, directing municipal employees to conduct research, and providing advice on municipal policies and programs, and overseeing their implementation.

Mayor's Relationship with the Council

The mayor now holds the responsibility for proposing the municipal budget, which, although open to council amendments, remains under the control of mayoral override. Additionally, mayors are granted the authority to veto bylaws that conflict with provincial priorities with a two-thirds council override and can present and pass bylaws to the council that align with and advance those priorities with a one-third majority (Mullaly, 2023).

Of 444 municipalities in Ontario, 46 currently operate under a “strong mayor system” and the balance of 398 operate under a “weak mayor system”. The weak mayor system in Ontario is criticized by the provincial government for inhibiting effective decision-making, particularly in areas like housing development (Taylor et al., 2022). In this system, the mayor acts more as a ceremonial figurehead, with the real power resting in the hands of all council members (Fenn & Siegel, 2017). This can create a bureaucratic structure where decisions are slowed down by the need for consensus among multiple council members, leading to delays in important initiatives such as housing development. The lack of a strong central authority can make it challenging to streamline processes, including those to address housing shortages. This can reduce the ability of municipalities to respond swiftly and effectively to growing demands for housing, as bureaucratic red tape and divided decision-making can stifle progress and delay much-needed development (Housing Affordability Task Force, 2022). This highlights the potential of the legislation to advance provincial priorities and streamline

decision-making, yet the possibility of undermining the democratic framework of municipal governance requires further examination.

Literature Review

Intended Outcomes: Accelerating Provincial Priorities through the Reduction of Bureaucratic Barriers

The intended outcome of the Strong Mayor power legislation is to accelerate the delivery of provincial priorities. The Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act was designed to empower mayors of large municipalities to bypass procedural delays and expedite crucial decisions in the construction of 1.5 million homes by 2031 (Government of Ontario, 2022). Premier Doug Ford argued that traditional municipal governance structures, which often slowed progress, needed reform to address these inefficiencies (CBC News, 2022). By streamlining decision-making and minimizing bureaucratic obstacles, the Strong Mayor powers aim to expedite project approvals and implementation (Government of Ontario, 2023a). Ford's administration framed the reforms as essential for cutting red tape and overcoming council gridlock, which is frequently viewed as a barrier to effective governance (Taylor et al., 2022). The *Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force* (2022), reports it can take up to 10 years for housing projects to receive all necessary approvals, from rezoning and permits to final construction approvals. These delays are primarily due to lengthy public consultations, council deliberations, and administrative hurdles (Housing Affordability Task Force, 2022).

The Ontario government's introduction of Strong Mayor powers aims to remove administrative burden and accelerate housing and infrastructure projects by granting strong mayors several authorities (Government of Ontario, 2023d). The Government of Ontario website (Government of Ontario, 2023d) outlining Strong Mayor powers and duties identifies the following authorities. The ability to appoint the municipality's chief administrative officer, hire certain municipal department heads, and establish or reorganize departments. Strong mayors are also empowered to create committees of council, assign their functions, and appoint the chairs and vice-chairs of these

committees. Additionally, they have the authority to propose the municipal budget, which is subject to council amendments as well as a separate head of council veto and council override process. They can veto certain by-laws if the head of council believes that all or part of the by-law may interfere with a provincial priority. Finally, the head of council can bring forward matters for council consideration if they believe doing so could help advance a provincial priority (Government of Ontario, 2023d). While these duties prioritize efficiency and expedience, they also raise questions about their broader implications and the potential unintended consequences for municipal governance and democratic integrity.

Unintended Impacts: Risking Democracy, Accountability & Transparency

Canadian democratic values are founded on principles of fairness, inclusivity, and transparency, ensuring that all citizens have a voice in government decisions (Sancton & Young, 2009). These values are traditionally upheld through collaborative governance structures, where decision-making power is shared among councils and other municipal actors. The Strong Mayor model, however, represents a shift towards centralizing authority in the hands of a single executive, raising concerns about the erosion of democratic accountability (Taylor et al., 2022). This research emphasizes unintended long-term consequences of this legislation, specifically its potential to jeopardize democracy, accountability, and transparency in local governance.

Accountability vs. Efficiency

Accountability, a cornerstone of democracy, requires leaders to justify their actions to stakeholders, while transparency ensures public scrutiny (Bozeman, 1993). Verheul and Schaap (2010) highlight the risks of undermining these principles when decision-making becomes concentrated. Their study on governance systems in England and the Netherlands emphasizes the importance of shared leadership and inclusive decision-making for maintaining democratic integrity.

Efficiency, one of the intended impacts of the Strong Mayor powers, may come at the cost of diminished accountability. Svava and Watson (2010) caution against reforms that prioritize efficiency over inclusivity, as these can lead to ethical lapses and

diminished oversight. Their research on U.S. governance systems highlights the risks associated with concentrated power, such as corruption and reduced transparency. Similarly, Kaufman (1956) underscores the tension between representativeness, executive leadership, and neutral competence in public administration. While consolidating authority may enhance executive efficiency, it risks diminishing the collective voice of councils and weakening democratic participation. The concentration of decision-making power through Strong Mayor powers, while improving efficiency, risks diminishing accountability, transparency, and democratic participation, ultimately challenging the balance between effective governance and the ethical principles of shared leadership and oversight.

Democratic Power Imbalance

The Ontario's Strong Mayor legislation attempts to address some concerns, related to accountability, by incorporating checks and balances, such as allowing councils to override mayoral vetoes with a two-thirds majority vote (Government of Ontario, 2023a). While this provision aims to preserve a degree of democracy, it still grants significant power to mayors, effectively diminishing the democratic principle of majority rule.

Historically, Canadian mayors have relied on informal leadership to foster public trust and community engagement (Graham, 2018). This approach contrasts with the Strong Mayor model, which formalizes executive powers and may reduce collaboration between councils and mayors. The mayoral veto, coupled with a two-thirds majority vote, does not promote a model that encourages community or council engagement or fosters trust. As Verheul and Schaap (2010) argue, governance systems that prioritize centralized authority risk eroding public trust and democratic engagement by sidelining diverse voices in decision-making processes. The power imbalances created by Ontario's Strong Mayor legislation, despite attempts to include checks and balances, shift governance towards centralized authority, which may undermine democratic principles and erode public trust by limiting collaboration and sidelining diverse voices in decision-making processes, ultimately challenging the integrity of local governance systems.

Systems of Governance: Mayor-Council vs Council-Manager

The efforts of Premier Doug Ford's administration to "cut red tape" through the enactment of Strong Mayors powers fails to distinguish the importance of certain processes. Bozeman's (1993) distinction between "rule inception" and "rule evolved" red tape is valuable for identifying bureaucratic processes to reform, but his study, based on data from the 1970s and 1980s, may not fully address modern governance challenges, especially considering technological advances and shifting public expectations. Additionally, while Bozeman (1993) emphasizes minimizing inefficiency, this approach conflicts with findings by Svara and Watson (2010), who suggest that council-manager systems (similar to weak mayor systems) are retained for their efficiency in U.S. cities. This discrepancy highlights the importance of distinguishing between procedural inefficiencies and regulations necessary for ethical governance.

Comparative studies of governance systems provide valuable insights into the potential consequences of Strong Mayor powers. In the U.S., the transition from mayor-council to council-manager systems was often driven by concerns about corruption in centralized governance leading to a lack of transparency (Svara & Watson, 2010). Council-manager systems, which emphasize collaborative decision-making, have been praised for their transparency and ethical governance (Choi et al., 2013). However, the perceived inefficiency of these systems can also lead to calls for stronger executive authority, as seen in Ontario.

While Strong Mayor powers may streamline decision-making related to provincial priorities, they also raise critical questions about accountability and transparency. The research underscores the need to carefully balance efficiency with inclusivity and representation to avoid unintended consequences. As Ontario grapples with complex urban challenges, it is essential to uphold the democratic values that have long defined its municipal systems.

Governance of Systems: Politicizing Administrative Roles

Ammons (2008) provides a valuable comparison between city managers in mayor-council systems and city administrators in council-manager systems in the United States. In mayor-council systems, the mayor holds significant executive

authority, similar to Strong Mayor powers. In contrast, council-manager systems, or weak mayor systems, tend to separate political and administrative roles, with a city manager responsible for executing council decisions and maintaining administrative neutrality. Ammons 2008 study finds that while both roles share functional similarities, key differences emerge in areas such as budget management and human resource oversight. In mayor-council systems, the authority over budget and personnel matters is typically transferred to the mayor, politicizing the role of the city administrator and diminishing its professionalism. This finding aligns with the implications of Strong Mayor powers in Ontario, where mayors are granted greater control over budget decisions and senior leadership appointments (Government of Ontario, 2023a). The shift in power under the Strong Mayor model suggests a similar politicization of the CAO's role, diminishing the independence that is characteristic of council-manager systems (Ammons, 2008). This finding resonates with both Bozeman's (1993) and Ammons' (2008) research that highlights how shifting control to a central authority can reduce the professionalism and impartiality of the administrative role of the CAO. This comparison highlights both the advantages and drawbacks of Strong Mayor powers; while they may streamline decision-making and enhance executive control over critical areas like budget and personnel, they also risk politicizing administrative roles, undermining the professionalism and impartiality that are essential for fair and effective governance, thus complicating the balance between efficiency and democratic accountability in municipal systems.

Unintended Consequences: Compromising Professional Neutrality

Another potential unintended consequence of the introduction of Strong Mayor powers in Ontario is the politicization of the role of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). The CAO role in Ontario's municipal government was introduced in the 1990s as part of governance reforms aimed at enhancing professionalism and the ability to manage more complex municipal issues (Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators, 2023). The CAO role was established to implement council policies, oversee municipal operations, and manage staff, ensuring a clear separation between political leadership and administrative functions (Government of Ontario, 2022).

However, the introduction of Strong Mayor powers has raised concerns about potential shifts in the balance of authority between the CAO, the mayor, and council (Taylor et al., 2022).

Lessons from the United States

Although the implementation of Strong Mayor Powers in Ontario is still in its early stages, there is an opportunity to draw lessons from the United States' experiences, both their successes and challenges, in adopting similar systems. Choi et al. (2013) analyzes the transition from mayor-council to council-manager governance in 191 U.S. cities over 75 years, identifying a shift towards more professional, less politicized governance. This change, particularly after 1930 due to economic conditions, led to a decline in the mayor-council system, with fewer than a third of U.S. cities maintaining it by 2005 (Choi et al., 2013). Council-manager systems, emphasizing professional administration over political influence, were seen as more business-like and efficient. Choi et al. (2013) conclude that political and social factors, including the need for non-partisan administration, drove this shift, highlighting the importance of safeguarding the professionalism of CAOs.

Frederickson et al. (2003) highlight the evolving nature of mayor-CAO relationships, noting that many cities have adopted hybrid systems where mayors delegate operational authority to CAOs, balancing executive power with professional administration. This hybridization, which allows mayors to retain authority while relying on professional administrators for day-to-day operations, is particularly relevant in Ontario's Strong Mayor model. The delegation of mayoral authority to the CAO in Ontario reflects this continuum of power, where the mayor can transfer specific responsibilities, such as appointing the CAO or altering the municipality's organizational structure (Government of Ontario, 2023d). This comparison underscores the potential risks and benefits of Ontario's Strong Mayor Powers, as drawing on U.S. experiences with shifting governance models reveals the importance of balancing executive authority with professional administration to avoid politicizing administrative roles, a key concern highlighted in the thesis regarding the long-term impacts on transparency, public trust, and municipal staff expertise.

“Chief Administrative Officer”: By Name Only

Siegel (2010) examines the CAO's role in a weak mayor system, where the CAO bridges the council and municipal staff, navigating a divided council. Under a Strong Mayor system, the CAO becomes more aligned with the mayor's agenda, which may enhance efficiency but politicizes the role, undermining impartiality and the public service's neutrality (Siegel, 2015). Fenn and Siegel (2017) contend that politicizing the CAO decreases professionalism, thereby weakening the principle of neutral competence, which is essential for effective governance.

Siegel (2015) highlights the CAO's management of critical relationships with the council, staff, and community, warning that under a Strong Mayor system, the CAO's impartiality is further compromised. This shift could concentrate power in the mayor's office, diminishing the CAO's ability to provide objective advice and undermining their leadership role the administration of the municipality. The politicization of the CAO diminishes the effectiveness of the safeguards inherent in the council-manager model, a concern highlighted by Kaufman (1956), who emphasizes the need to balance executive leadership with representativeness and neutral competence.

Fenn and Siegel (2017) examine the relationship between elected officials and professional staff, focusing on the CAO's intermediary role. In a council/CAO or weak mayor system, the CAO benefits from some insulation from political influence, maintaining professional autonomy. However, in a strong mayor system, this insulation weakens as the CAO becomes more directly accountable to the mayor, politicizing the position. This aligns with Siegel's (2010) and Fenn and Siegel's (2017) observations that the CAO's neutrality is compromised under a Strong Mayor model. While this shift may enhance decision-making efficiency, it also poses a risk to accountability and undermines the council's role as an essential check on executive power, which aligns with the thesis regarding the long-term negative effects of Strong Mayor powers on democratic governance.

The 2023 Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators' (CAMA) white paper on Strong Mayor Legislation further explores the implications of Strong Mayor powers for municipal governance, particularly the evolving role of the CAO in Ontario. CAMA reinforces Siegel (2010 & 2015) and Fenn & Siegel's (2017) conclusions flagging that

the introduction of these powers raises critical questions about the relationship between the mayor, the CAO, and the broader governance structure. While the policy is designed to give mayors the authority to make more decisive executive decisions, the paper highlights the risk that this shift could reduce the independence of the CAO and weaken the checks and balances traditionally present in a council-manager system. The CAMA white paper stresses the need for clear guidelines to ensure that the CAO's role remains impartial and that the mayor's increased powers do not lead to the erosion of democratic oversight or the professionalism of municipal administration.

Together, these studies and the white paper expose the potential challenges of politicizing the CAO's role and undermining the value of neutral professional advice and leadership within the municipal governance model. Ammons (2008), Fenn and Siegel (2017), Siegel (2010, 2015), and the CAMA white paper (2023) all point to the potential negative unintended consequences of this shift, including the erosion of professional neutrality, the politicization of the CAO's role, and a weakening of the council's oversight function. These studies and reports underscore the risks associated with politicizing the CAO role under Strong Mayor powers, highlighting how this shift, while improving decision-making efficiency, compromises professional neutrality, weakens the council's oversight function, and diminishes democratic accountability—aligning with the thesis on the long-term negative impacts of Strong Mayor powers on municipal governance.

Methods

This research on Strong Mayor powers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with a qualitative analysis of case studies to evaluate potential outcomes and impacts. The analysis focused on municipalities granted Strong Mayor powers, using specific inclusion criteria to guide the selection. Relationships between variables, such as the number of Strong Mayor power decisions, housing target achievements, and development application timelines, were analyzed to assess if these powers influence the advancement of provincial priorities. Additionally, municipalities that have implemented Strong Mayor powers in unique contexts, within the three key provisions (provincial priorities, administrative powers, and mayor-council relationships), were selected for case studies. The potential consequences of strong

mayor powers, as discussed and highlighted in the literature review, will serve as a framework for analyzing the case studies. By applying these theoretical insights, the impact of strong mayor powers on local governance and decision-making can be examined. The case studies provide real-world examples that allow for a deeper understanding of the practical implications of these powers, offering both empirical evidence and theoretical context to assess their effectiveness and any challenges they might present. This method of case study analysis helps measure the thesis by providing concrete, real-world examples that illustrate both the immediate benefits and the long-term consequences of Strong Mayor powers, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of how these powers influence the balance between efficient governance and the principles of fairness, transparency, and public trust in municipal decision-making.

Data Collection

The quantitative information used to measure the relationship between the use of Strong Mayor powers and advancing provincial priorities included the identification of the forty-six municipalities granted Strong Mayor powers and the four that were offered and declined. These were identified through Open Council (Open Council, 2024b) which is a non-partisan, independent, non-governmental site that collects encyclopedic information about municipalities, election candidates, and elected officials in the pursuit of democratizing knowledge. They achieve this by publishing data acquired through Freedom of Information requests, with the goals of improving municipal transparency, accountability, and civic engagement. This source was used as a starting point to identify the number of Strong Mayor decisions made by municipalities, however this site only collected data until March 7, 2024, and further research into each municipalities' website listing of Strong Mayor power decisions was required to collect data on the number of Strong Mayor power decisions and directives up to December 31, 2024.

Quantitative data was also collected on the 50 municipalities offered Strong Mayor powers related to their progress in achieving their provincially mandated housing targets. These were identified through the Ontario Housing Tracker (Government of Ontario, 2024). This is the Government of Ontario's *Tracking Housing Supply Progress* webpage providing up-to-date information on the province's efforts to increase housing

supply. It offers key metrics, including municipalities' 10-year housing targets set by the province and their progress in achieving these targets. This source was used to identify the progress of each municipality in achieving their 2024 housing targets.

Finally, the last quantitative data source was the Greater Toronto Area Municipal Benchmarking Study (Building Industry and Land Development Association, 2024) which provided the average time for residential development application approvals in 2022 (pre-Strong Mayor powers) and 2024 (post-Strong Mayor powers). The 2024 GTA Municipal Benchmarking Study is published by BILD GTA (Building Industry and Land Development Association, 2024). This report assesses and compares the performance of 15 municipalities across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in key areas related to housing development. The study provides insights into how municipalities perform in facilitating housing development and highlights best practices or challenges. It is commonly used by policymakers, developers, and stakeholders to identify barriers and opportunities for improving housing supply and affordability.

Three analyses were conducted using these sources of information. The first analysis assessed whether there is a statistical difference in housing target progress between municipalities with Strong Mayor powers and those under the weak mayor system. The second analysis explored the relationship between housing target progress and the number of Strong Mayor decisions made in each municipality. The final analysis investigated the relationship between the implementation of Strong Mayor powers and average approval timelines for residential development applications.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis was conducted on three case studies, drawing from various secondary sources such as council reports and local media coverage related to the decisions. Each case study focused on one of the three categories of the Strong Mayor Power provisions: provincial priorities related to housing, the roles and relationships within municipal administration, and the roles and relationships between the mayor and council. The selected case studies include [Mississauga Mayoral Decision 02-2023](#), [Caledon Mayoral Decision 2023-03](#) and

[Aurora Mayor Decision 2023-02](#). For each case study, a summary of the decision, along with an analysis of perceived outcomes and impacts, was provided, supported by relevant quotes to offer a qualitative content analysis.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Statistical Comparison of Housing Target Progress: Strong Mayor Systems vs. Weak Mayor Systems

The following analysis focuses on testing the difference in the mean percentage of housing targets achieved in 2024 between two groups: municipalities that have adopted Strong Mayor powers and those that have declined them. The housing targets have been assigned to each municipality and accepting them was a requirement to receive Strong Mayor powers. The null hypothesis (H_0) is that the means of the two groups are equal, suggesting that there is no significant difference in housing target progress between municipalities using Strong Mayor powers and those that are not. In contrast, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) asserts that the means of the two groups are not equal, indicating the presence of a significant difference in housing target progress. By testing these hypotheses, the analysis aims to determine whether the adoption of Strong Mayor powers has a statistically significant impact on housing target progress, or if any observed differences are simply due to random variation.

Using data from the Government of Ontario's *Tracking Housing Supply Progress* webpage (Government of Ontario, 2024) a Welch's t-test was used to compare the means of two groups related to their housing target progress in 2024. To calculate this the following data was used.

Table 1

Statistical Comparison of Housing Target Progress: Strong Mayor vs. Weak Mayor System

	Strong Mayor	Weak Mayor
Sample Size	46	4
Mean % (2024 Housing Target Achievement)	69.68%	30.54%
Average Variance	142.43	31.62

Note: Data is from Government of Ontario, 2024

Welch's t-test was used since the two groups have unequal variances and unequal sample sizes (West, 2021). The results of the calculations can be found in Appendix A. A full listing of the data set can be found in Appendix B. The results of the Welch's t-test demonstrate that the difference in housing target progress between municipalities using Strong Mayor powers and those operating under the weak mayor system is statistically significant. With a t-statistic of approximately 11.78 and degrees of freedom of 5.75¹, the p-value associated with this t-statistic is extremely small (less than 0.001), much less than the typical significance level of 0.05. Since the p-value is far below 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that there is a significant difference in housing target progress between the two groups and that those with

¹ In this analysis, degrees of freedom are expressed as a fraction due to the use of Welch's t-test, which is employed to compare the means of two independent samples with unequal variances and unequal sample sizes. Unlike the traditional t-test, which assumes equal variances between groups, Welch's t-test adjusts the degrees of freedom to account for both the unequal variances and the differing sample sizes. This adjustment results in non-integer degrees of freedom, as it provides a more accurate estimate of variability and allows for a more robust comparison between the two groups. The formula for these degrees of freedom is based on the sample variances and sizes, leading to fractional values that better reflect the underlying data structure.

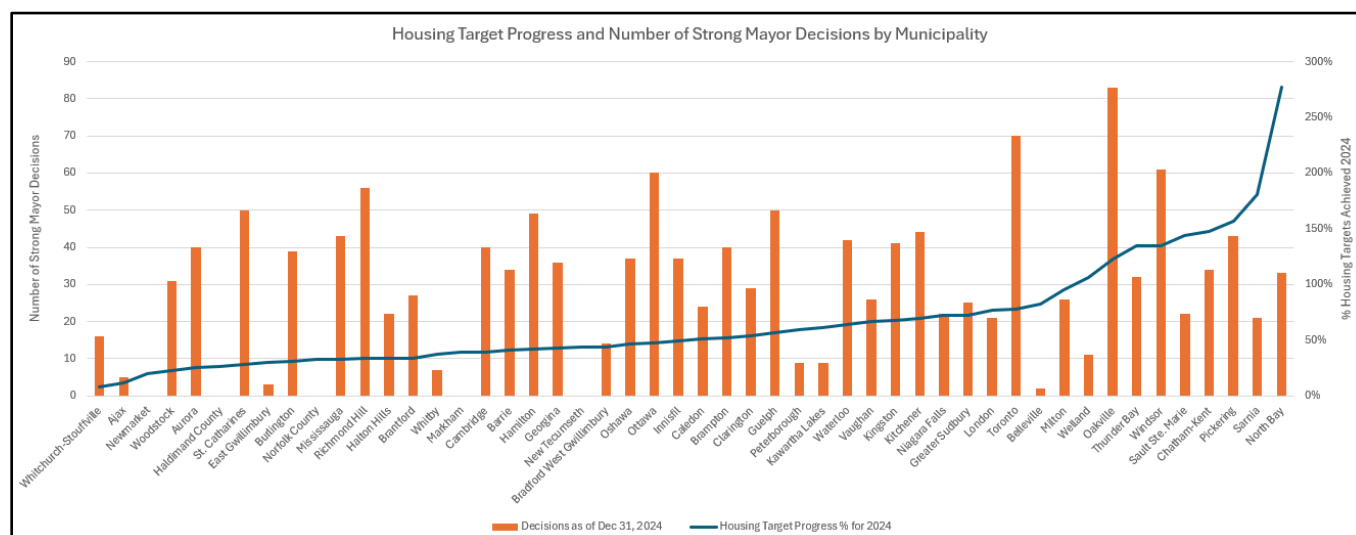
Strong Mayor powers have achieved higher progress of their housing targets than those not using Strong Mayor powers.

Relationship Between Housing Target Progress and Number of Strong Mayor Decisions

Another quantitative analysis involves examining the relationship between the number of Strong Mayor power decisions made by each mayor and the progress toward achieving housing targets. This analysis aims to determine whether Mayors who make more use of their powers are more likely to advance provincial priorities, as indicated by their success in meeting housing targets. Figure 1 depicts the 50 municipalities that were assigned housing targets and lists them in order of their percent housing target achieved in 2024. This value is shown with the blue line with the lowest percent achieved being 7.75% by Whitchurch-Stouffville and the highest being 277.11% achieved by North Bay. Also depicted on the graph (orange columns) is the number of Strong Mayor decisions or directives made by each municipality from the inception of their Strong Mayor powers up to December 31, 2024. This value varies from zero by Markham and the four municipalities that declined Strong Mayor powers (Haldimand County, New Tecumseth, Newmarket, and Norfolk County) to 83 by Oakville. The purpose of this graph is to illustrate the number of decisions made by Strong Mayors, indicating how frequently they are using the legislated powers and the progress towards achieving housing targets. A larger version of Figure 1 can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 1

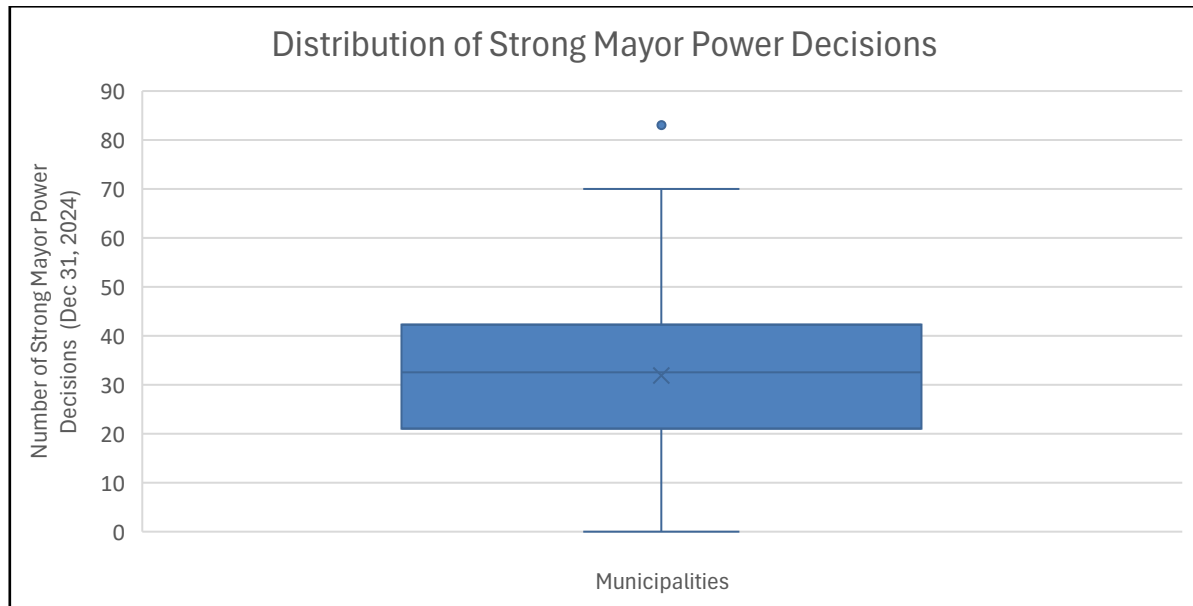
Housing Target Progress (2024) and Number of Strong Mayor Decisions by Municipality



Note: Data is from Government of Ontario, 2024 and Open Council, 2024b

To ensure the statistical validity of the relationship between the number of Strong Mayor decisions and progress toward housing targets, it is important to examine the distribution of the data and identify any outliers. A normal distribution supports the use of common statistical tests, while non-normal distributions may require alternative methods. Outliers must also be assessed, as they can distort results and lead to inaccurate conclusions. Identifying and appropriately addressing these factors helps ensure the reliability of the analysis and the strength of any observed correlations.

To assess this, the data has been analyzed to identify any irregularities in distribution and to detect the presence of outliers. Figure 2 is a box plot for number of Strong Mayor decisions demonstrating one outlier, which is Oakville with 83 Strong Mayor decisions.

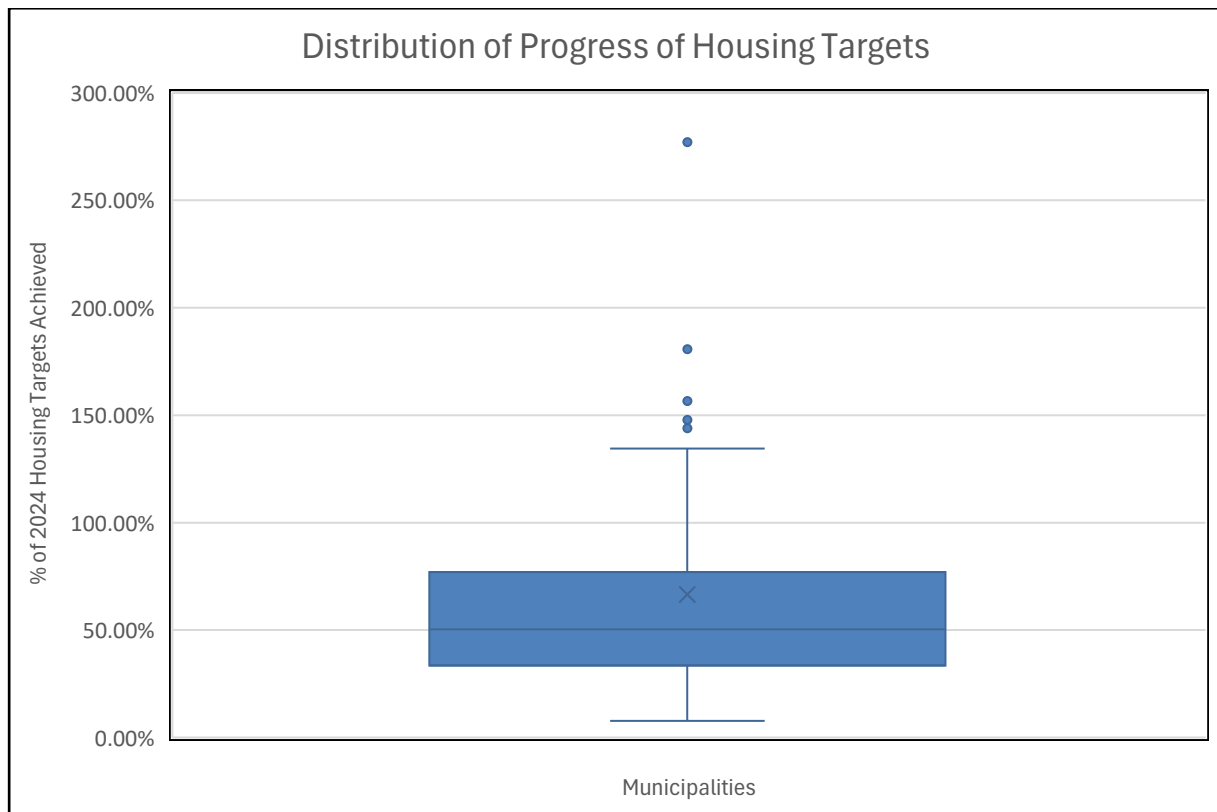
Figure 2*Box Plot of Distribution of Strong Mayor Power Decisions*

Note: Data is from Open Council, 2024b

Figure 3 is a box plot for Housing Target Progress demonstrating that Sault Ste. Marie, Chatham-Kent, Pickering, Sarnia, and North Bay are all outliers with ranges of housing targets achieved between 144% to 277%.

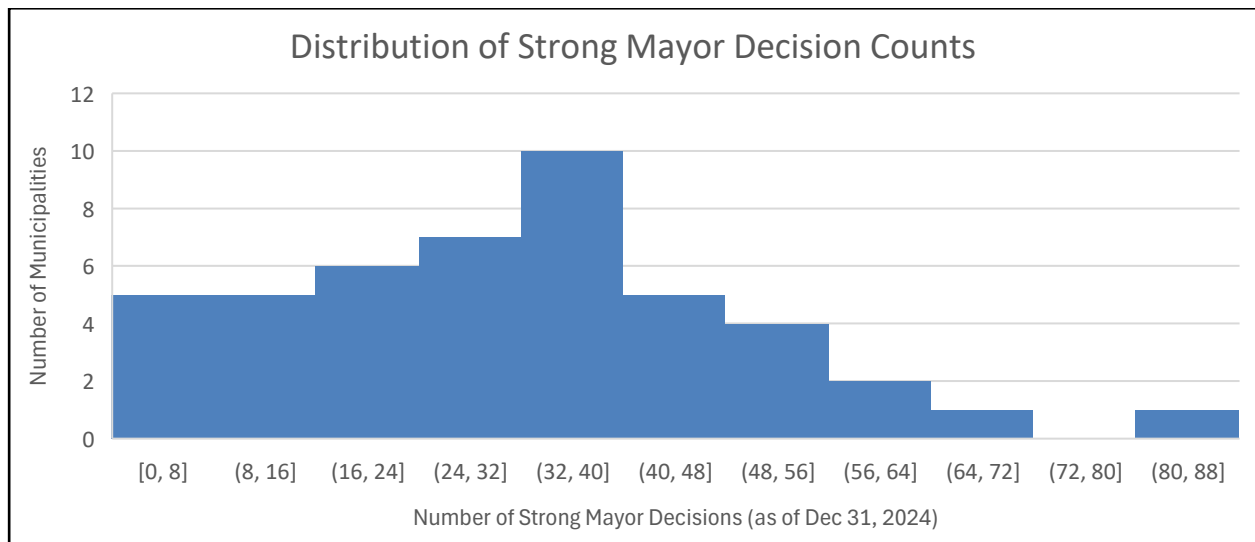
Figure 3

Box Plot of Distribution of Progress of % of 2024 Housing Targets Achieved

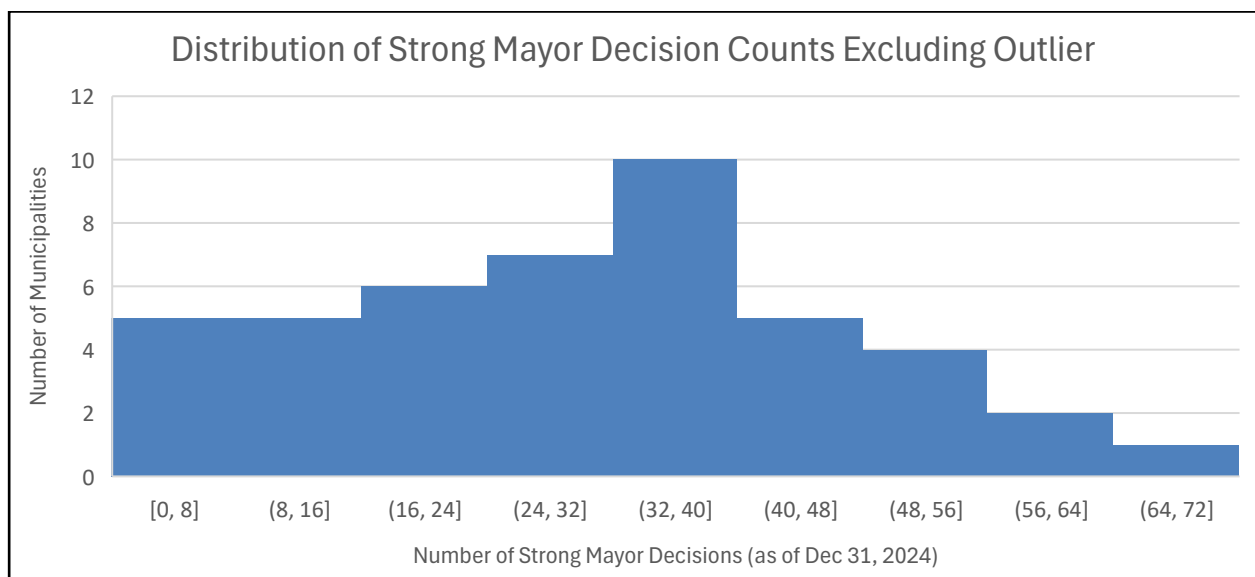


Note: Data is from Government of Ontario, 2024

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the Strong Mayor decisions with the outlier and Figure 5 demonstrates the Strong Mayor decisions excluding Oakville, which was identified as the outlier.

Figure 4*Histogram of Strong Mayor Decision Counts*

Note: Data is from Open Council, 2024b

Figure 5*Histogram of Strong Mayor Decision Counts Excluding Outlier*

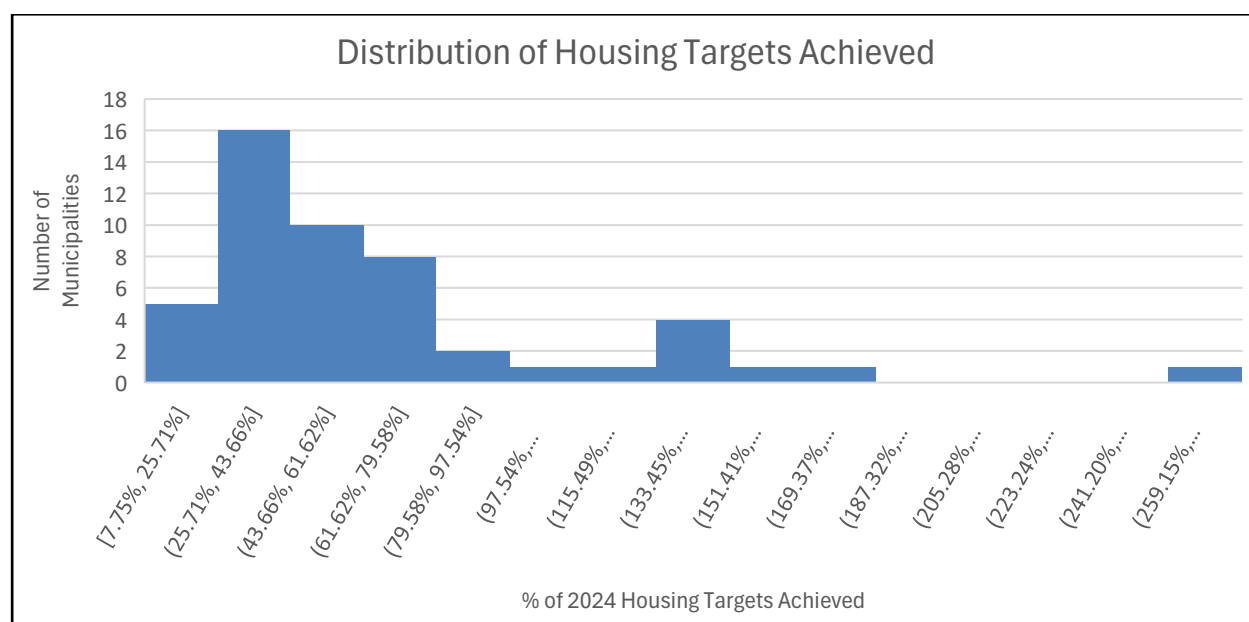
Note: Data is from Open Council, 2024b

Figures 4 and 5 closely resemble a normal distribution, and therefore a correlation coefficient between the number of Strong Mayor power decisions and the percent of housing targets achieved can be calculated. However, since the distribution is not a perfect bell curve, it is important to proceed with caution when interpreting the results. The slight skewness suggests that standard statistical methods assuming normality may not be fully reliable.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the percentage of 2024 housing targets achieved across all municipalities included in the dataset, while Figure 7 presents the distribution with the five outliers removed.

Figure 6

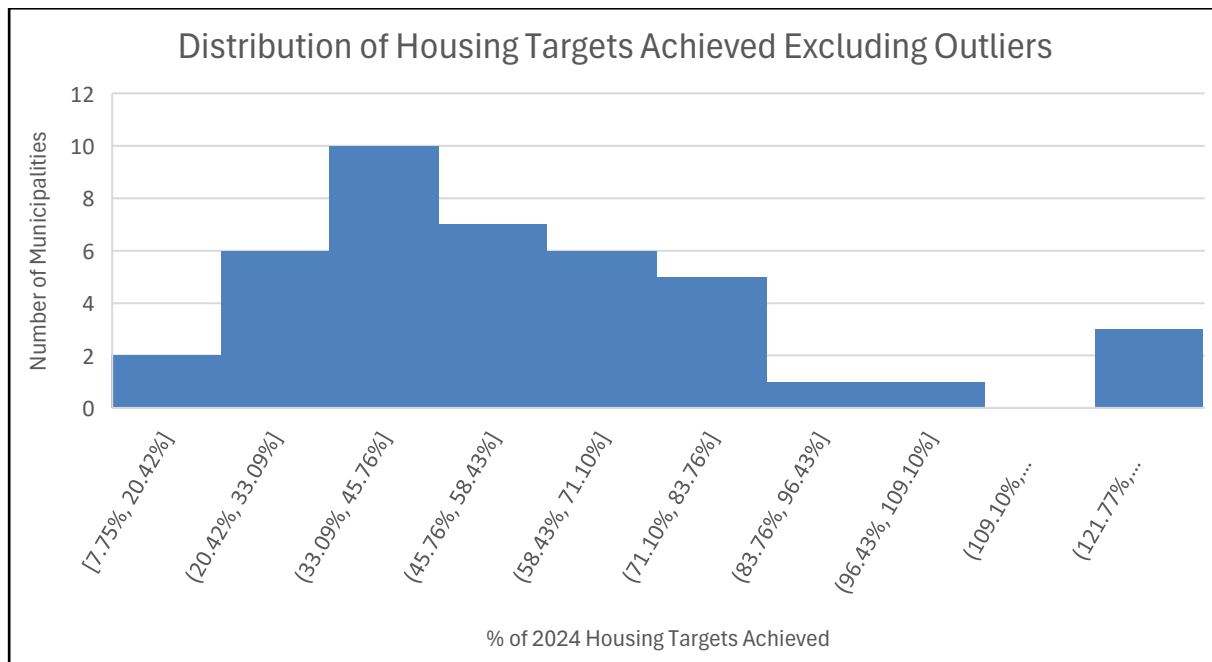
Histogram of Percent of 2024 Housing Targets Achieved



Note: Data is from Government of Ontario, 2024

Figure 7

Histogram of Percent of 2024 Housing Targets Achieved Excluding Outliers



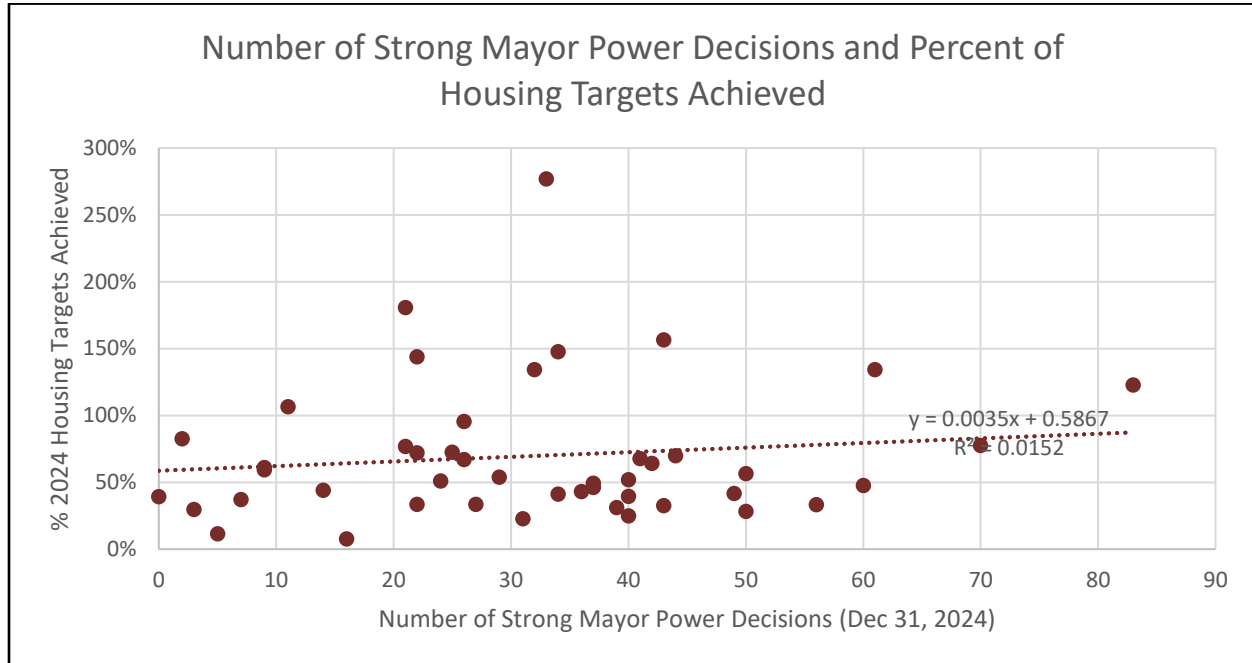
Note: Data is from Government of Ontario, 2024

Figure 6 shows that a normal distribution is not present when the outliers are included. However, Figure 7 demonstrates that the distribution becomes more regular once the outliers are removed from the analysis. Although outliers have been identified in both datasets, there is still a valid rationale for including them, as they all fall within the scope of municipalities with Strong Mayor powers. Given the presence of non-excludable outliers, the relationship with and without the outliers has been analyzed both visually, through a scatterplot and trendline, and quantitatively, by calculating the correlation coefficient between the number of Strong Mayor decisions up to December 31, 2024 and the percent of 2024 housing targets achieved.

Figure 8 shows the number of Strong Mayor power decisions made by each mayor up to December 31, 2024, along with the percentage of their respective 2024 housing targets achieved for all municipalities included in the study.

Figure 8

Scatterplot of Number of Strong Mayor Power Decisions vs. Percentage of 2024 Housing Targets Achieved



Note: Data is from Open Council, 2024b and Government of Ontario, 2024

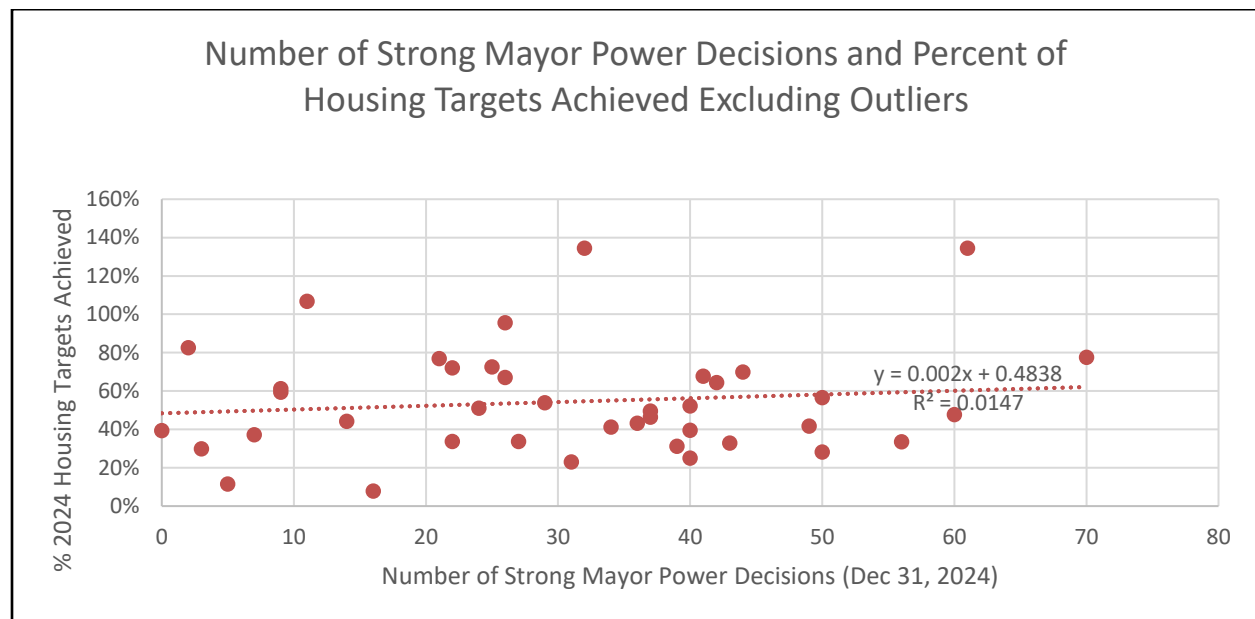
The trendline equation, $y = 0.0035x + 0.5867$, with an R^2 value of 0.0152, indicates a very weak positive relationship between decisions and housing targets. The slope of 0.0035 suggests that for each increase unit increase in decisions, targets increase by only 0.0035 units, reflecting a minimal change. However, the low R^2 value of 0.0152 shows that only 1.52% of the variation in targets can be explained by decisions, meaning that the relationship between the two variables is weak and the trendline provides little predictive value. This suggests that number of decisions does not significantly influence the percent of housing targets achieved, and other factors may be contributing to the variation in advancing housing.

Figure 9 shows the number of Strong Mayor power decisions made by each mayor up to December 31, 2024, along with the percentage of their respective 2024

housing targets achieved for all municipalities excluding the outliers identified above (Oakville, Sault Ste. Marie, Chatham-Kent, Pickering, Sarnia, and North Bay).

Figure 9

Scatterplot of Number of Strong Mayor Power Decisions vs. Percentage of 2024 Housing Targets Achieved Excluding Outliers



Note: Data is from Open Council, 2024b and Government of Ontario, 2024

Even with the outliers removed, the equation $y = 0.002x + 0.4838$, with an R^2 value of 0.0147, suggests a very weak positive relationship between number of Strong Mayor power decisions and percent of housing target progress achieved. When comparing the two equations, $y = 0.0035x + 0.5867$ (with an R^2 value of 0.0152) and $y = 0.002x + 0.4838$ (with an R^2 value of 0.0147), removing the outliers slightly reduced the slope and the R^2 value. The R^2 values are both low, with only a small change between the two equations, suggesting that the relationship remains weak regardless of the presence of outliers.

When examining the relationship between the number of Strong Mayor decisions and the percentage of housing targets achieved, the correlation coefficient was found to be 0.079 when outliers were excluded, indicating a very weak positive relationship. This suggests that there is minimal association between the two variables, with little indication that an increase in the number of Strong Mayor decisions leads to a corresponding increase in the percentage of housing targets achieved. However, when outliers were included in the analysis, the correlation coefficient between the number of Strong Mayor power decisions and percent of housing targets achieved increased to 0.123, signaling a slightly stronger, though still weak, positive relationship. This slight increase in correlation suggests that outliers may have had some influence on the data, enhancing the apparent strength of the relationship between the two variables. Both the scatterplot analysis with trendline and the calculation of the correlation coefficient, both with and without the inclusion of outliers, show that the relationship remains weak overall. This suggests that the number of Strong Mayor decisions does not have a significant or clear impact on the achievement of housing targets.

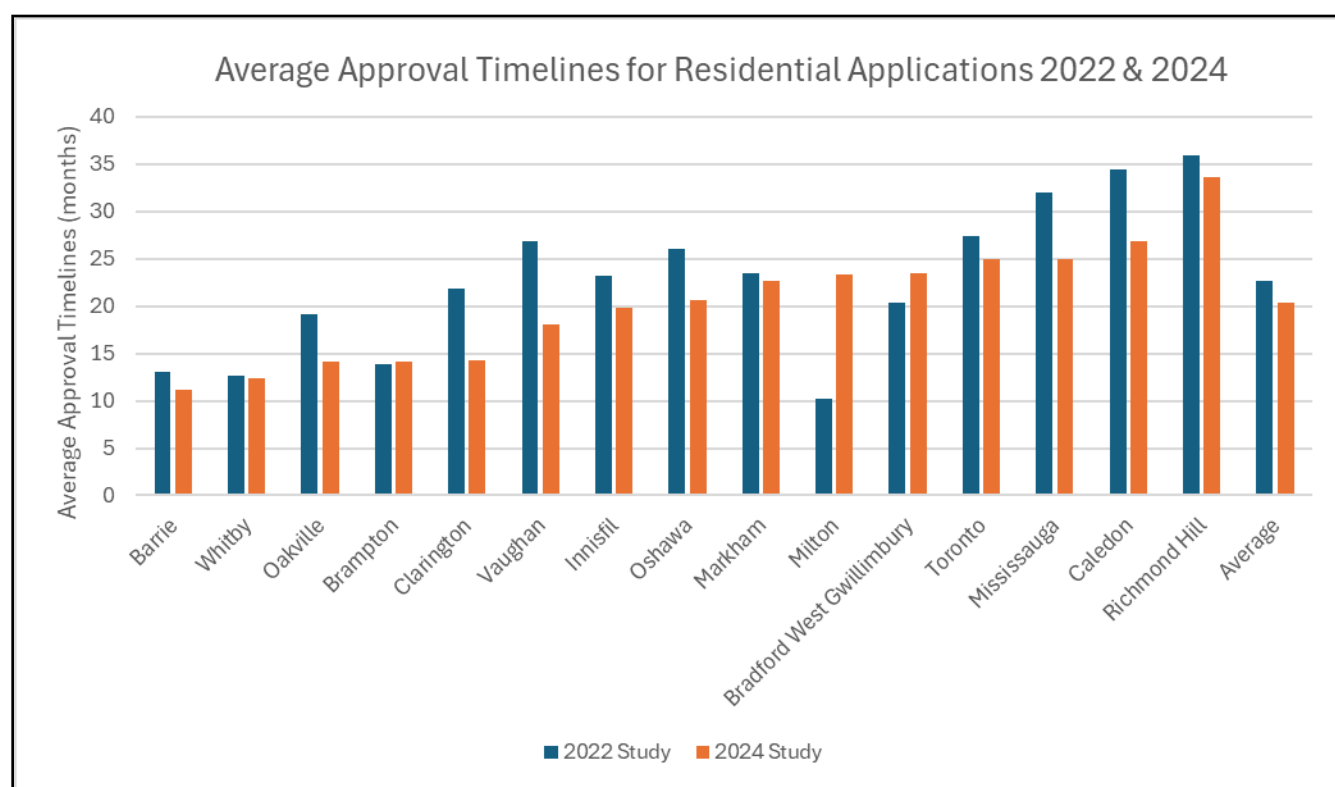
Impact of Strong Mayor Powers on Average Approval Timelines

Figure 10 displays the average approval timelines for all residential development application types in 2022 (before the implementation of Strong Mayor powers) and in 2024 (after the implementation of Strong Mayor powers). All 15 municipalities in the study were operating under a Strong Mayor system in 2024. The data reveals that 10 municipalities reported shorter timelines compared to 2022, three maintained the same timelines, and three saw longer timelines. On average, approval timelines improved by approximately 10% or 2.4 months, decreasing from 22.7 months in 2022 to 20.3 months in 2024. There is considerable variation in approval times, with Barrie reporting the shortest timeline at 11.2 months and Richmond Hill the longest at 33.6 months. This shows that the quickest municipalities are taking just under one year to approve applications, while the slowest are taking nearly three years. Vaughan experienced the largest improvement, reducing its timeline by 8.8 months, while Milton saw the greatest deterioration, with an increase of 13.1 months. The increase in Milton's timeline can be partly explained by its low appeal rate, suggesting a different approach to processing

applications. The quantitative analysis confirms a significant positive impact of Strong Mayor powers on housing target progress, as municipalities with these powers achieved better outcomes in 2024, aligning with the thesis that Strong Mayor systems improve decision-making efficiency. However, as the analysis also highlights variations in approval timelines and target progress, it sets the stage for a deeper qualitative exploration of how these powers affect governance dynamics, particularly in terms of accountability, transparency, and the professional roles within municipal administration.

Figure 10

Average Approval Timelines for Residential Applications 2022 & 2024



Note: Data is from Building Industry and Land Development Association, 2024

Qualitative Analysis: Case Studies

The following is a summary of the case study analysis, which includes an overview of the Strong Mayor decision along with an examination of the outcomes and impacts. Outcomes refer to the immediate, direct results of the decision, while impacts represent the broader, long-term changes that stem from those outcomes. Relevant quotes are provided to support the qualitative content analysis of these outcomes and impacts. The case study analysis provides a detailed examination of the immediate outcomes and long-term impacts of Strong Mayor decisions, illustrating how the efficiency gains in decision-making align with the thesis by highlighting both the positive advancements in housing priorities and the potential negative effects, such as diminished accountability and strained council relationships, which challenge the balance between effective governance and democratic transparency.

Case Study 1: Provincial Priorities Related to Housing

[Mississauga Mayoral Decision 02-2023](#) To direct the Planning & Building Department to prepare an official plan amendment and zoning by-law amendment that would permit “as-of-right” development for up to four residential units on low-rise residential lots in neighbourhoods city-wide.

Summary of Decision

In response to the ongoing housing crisis, on October 20, 2023, Mayor Bonnie Crombie invoked Strong Mayor powers to override a city council vote that had rejected the approval of four-plex housing on low-rise residential lots. The motion was originally defeated at council on October 11, 2023, citing concerns over a lack of consultation and apprehensions about rushing the decision to meet requirements to secure \$120 million in federal funding from the Housing Accelerator Fund (City of Mississauga, 2023). The directive mandates the creation of amendments to the city’s official plan and zoning bylaws to permit the development of four-unit residential buildings “as-of-right” on low-rise residential lots (City of Mississauga, 2023).

Context for Use of Strong Mayor Powers

The decision to use Strong Mayor powers was influenced by several factors. One key factor was housing affordability, leading to the decision to support the development of affordable housing. The mayor's actions were also in response to access grant funding through the federal government's Housing Accelerator Fund, which offered approximately \$120 million to Mississauga contingent upon implementing changes to housing policies, specifically approving four-unit developments (Storeys, 2023). Despite efforts at the council level to approve four-unit residential buildings "as-of-right", a tie vote prevented a decision, prompting the mayor to step in and use her Strong Mayor powers to ensure that Mississauga could access the necessary funding and move forward with affordable housing development options (The Pointer, 2023).

Outcomes

The immediate outcomes of the mayor's decision include the planned amendments to the official plan and zoning bylaws, which allowed the development of four-unit buildings on residential lots throughout the city. These changes are expected to expedite the approval process for new housing developments and provide more affordable housing. Furthermore, the city's action allowed Mississauga to secure a \$112.9 million grant in December 2023 from the Housing Accelerator Fund, which is being used to support infrastructure and housing development projects (Storeys, 2023).

Impacts

In the longer term, the decision to implement "as-of-right" four-plex housing will significantly impact Mississauga's housing landscape. By increasing the supply of affordable housing, property prices and rent costs may decrease, easing the affordability crisis. However, there may also be negative consequences, such as increased density and potential strain on local infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and public services. The move could shift the political environment, enhancing the mayor's role in housing policy and potentially centralizing authority, which could reduce input from other stakeholders or the community. Additionally, the decision could attract investment and speed up housing development, but it may also lead to extensive

densification in some neighbourhoods, creating tension and dissatisfaction with long-time residents (The Pointer, 2023).

Quotes

Given the scale and urgency of the housing crisis, it is critical that leadership at all levels of government work together. Issuing this directive will ensure that Mississauga continues to be eligible for \$120 million in important federal funding for housing and community infrastructure while allowing for much-needed housing to be built in our neighbourhoods for the next generation. Bonne Crombie, Mississauga Mayor (The Pointer, 2023)

Case Study 2: Relationship and Roles of Administration

[Caledon Mayoral Decision 2023-03](#) To direct the Director, People Services of the Town of Caledon to implement the mayor's powers as they relate to the revocation and appointment of the Chief Administrative Officer of the Town.

Summary of Decision

In August 2023, the Mayor of Caledon directed the Director of People Services to utilize the mayor's powers to terminate the existing Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and appoint and hire a new CAO for the Town of Caledon. This decision came amidst significant shifts in senior staffing and restructuring within the town's administration (Caledon Citizen, 2023). The mayor's decision to exercise Strong Mayor powers allowed for the swift implementation of leadership changes, which the mayor viewed as necessary to ensure the town's operational stability and responsiveness to its evolving needs.

Context for Use of Strong Mayor Powers

The decision to invoke Strong Mayor powers in Caledon was driven by multiple factors. Caledon was undergoing administrative restructuring and was required to accommodate thousands of new residents and infrastructure demands amidst the dissolution of the Region of Peel (Caledon Citizen, 2023). The mayor's use of Strong

Mayor powers was a response to these pressures, aiming to stabilize the town's governance and appoint a CAO, selected by the mayor, to steer the municipality through this challenging period of growth and reorganization.

Outcomes

The decision to invoke Strong Mayor powers in Caledon and fire the CAO, led to significant administrative upheaval and a growing exodus of senior staff members. The mayor used Strong Mayor powers to terminate the former CAO, and when the new CAO was brought in, they proceeded to terminate multiple senior staff, including the Director of Corporate Services and Town Clerk, Town Solicitor, Chief Planner, Assistant Chief Building Official, Manager of Recreational Facilities and Director of Corporate Strategy & Innovation (Just Say in Caledon, 2023). Within a few months, many more senior staff resigned on their own accord. While the restructuring was intended to streamline governance and improve efficiency, it led to increased uncertainty, with some questioning the financial costs of severances, potential legal actions, and the replacement of key staff (Just Say In Caledon, 2023). Additionally, tensions between the mayor and council have emerged, as seen with the failure of a motion to maintain Caledon's municipal boundaries post-dissolution, which was opposed by the mayor and several councillors, highlighting a broader rift within local governance (Just Say in Caledon, 2023). The upheaval in Caledon, triggered by the mayor's use of Strong Mayor powers to fire the CAO and restructure senior staff, exemplifies the challenges discussed in the literature review regarding Mayor-Council and Council-Manager dynamics. This case highlights the tension between the mayor's increased authority and the erosion of professional expertise, strained council relationships, and diminished public trust which are key concerns outlined in the thesis, ultimately demonstrating how Strong Mayor powers can disrupt both administrative stability and the balance between effective governance and democratic oversight.

Impacts

In the longer term, the impact of the decision to terminate the CAO could significantly affect the political landscape in Caledon. By asserting strong mayoral powers to execute leadership changes, the mayor shifted the balance of power between

the elected council and the administration creating tension between the mayor and council (Caledon Citizen, 2023). The broader societal impact could include changes in how the public perceives the role of the mayor and council in local governance, as well as potential shifts in public trust depending on how effectively the new leadership addresses ongoing issues, such as affordable housing and development challenges. Additionally, the long-term effects on staff morale and organizational culture in Caledon are significant. With numerous senior staff members exiting, there may be lasting implications for the town's ability to attract and retain skilled employees, especially in key areas such as planning and legal affairs (The Pointer, 2024). These changes could impact the town's capacity to manage its rapid growth and implement effective policies moving forward. The decision to terminate the CAO in Caledon, while aimed at streamlining governance and cutting red tape, may paradoxically increase the administrative burden due to vacant positions and the transition of staff. This shift not only politicizes key positions, as discussed in the literature review, but also risks further diminishing the professionalism and impartiality of municipal administration, ultimately straining the balance between effective governance and democratic accountability. These developments tie back to the thesis by demonstrating how the consolidation of mayoral power, intended to enhance efficiency, could instead lead to long-term challenges such as reduced staff morale, weakened professional capacity, and diminished public trust, undermining the effectiveness and transparency of governance.

Quotes

To lose senior staff with experience and then watch as their teams crumble below them, leaves Caledon increasingly vulnerable during an already rocky time.

Granting strong mayoral powers to a newbie at the helm during a time of massive change adds to the mayhem and has placed a stranglehold on our Councillors – you know – the ones elected to represent OUR interests at town hall. Sheralyn Roman, Caledon Citizen Reporter (Caledon Citizen, 2023)

If the new CAO brings in his own new people to head departments, as has happened in Caledon, the citizen-funded payouts just keep snowballing. It's a recipe for toxic volatility that will bring the same level of incivility and infighting

seen in senior government legislatures to local councils, which have avoided it largely because the mayor needs to be a consensus-builder to get things done when he/she has only one vote on council. John Stewart, Mississauga News Columnist (Mississauga News, 2024)

Case Study 3: Relationship and Roles of Council

[Aurora Mayor Decision 2023-02](#) To direct the Chief Administrative Officer and Director of Finance to present the mayor's 2024-2026 multi-year budget to members of council and Aurora residents in accordance with the schedule approved as part of Report CS23-074 – Mayor's Budget 2024-2026 - Budget Timelines and Process.

Summary of Decision

In November 2023, the Mayor of Aurora utilized Strong Mayor powers to veto key aspects of the 2024-2026 multi-year budget, challenging the typical council-driven budgeting process. The mayor exercised this power by directing the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and the Director of Finance to present the budget to the council and Aurora residents according to an approved schedule. This decision significantly altered the usual procedure, with the mayor assuming a central role in shaping the budget and effectively overriding the council's influence.

This move was part of a broader strategy to expedite financial decisions and align the municipality's budget with provincial guidelines. While it was aimed at streamlining the process, it ignited a wave of controversy, particularly due to the mayor's expanded authority to veto council-approved budget proposals. Critics argued that this concentrated too much decision-making power in the mayor's hands, sidelining the role of council and diminishing democratic accountability (Weese, 2024).

Context for Use of Strong Mayor Powers

The decision to invoke Strong Mayor powers was partly driven by the need to manage the municipality's growing demands, including housing development, infrastructure needs, and alignment with provincial goals. The mayor's desire to

exercise control over the budget was in part a response to these pressures, enabling quicker decision-making, especially regarding key financial priorities. Under the province's framework, Strong Mayor powers are designed to facilitate such changes, particularly in municipalities like Aurora, where rapid growth and development are priorities (Newmarket Today, 2024).

However, the use of Strong Mayor powers by the Mayor of Aurora led to significant controversy, particularly when the mayor vetoed council-approved amendments to the proposed budget. For instance, council members voted to delay the hiring of certain staff, but the mayor exercised his veto power, overriding the decision (Weese, 2024). Similarly, an amendment to reduce funding for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame was also vetoed by the mayor, despite it being approved by a majority of council members. These vetoes raised concerns about the concentration of power in the mayor's office and sparked debates about the role of the mayor versus the role of council in local governance. Critics argued that the mayor's actions undermined democratic processes, reducing the influence of elected council members and ignoring their responsibility to represent their constituents' interests (Weese, 2024). This controversy highlighted tensions between the mayor and council members, with some feeling that the mayor was disregarding their input in favour of more centralized decision-making.

Outcomes

The immediate outcomes of the mayor's decision included a more centralized budgetary process, where key decisions were controlled by the mayor rather than the broader council. In this particular case, these powers enabled the staffing and funding of a community group to move forward, leading to higher costs for taxpayers. This led to faster resolution of budgetary issues but also created friction within the council, as some of their amendments were overruled. The vetoes demonstrated how Strong Mayor powers could streamline decision-making but also sparked dissatisfaction among those who felt their democratic role was undermined (Weese, 2024). The immediate outcomes of the mayor's decision to centralize the budgetary process align with the thesis by illustrating how Strong Mayor powers can enhance decision-making efficiency while

also generating tensions within the council and diminishing democratic participation. Although the mayor was able to expedite budgetary resolutions, this concentration of power undermined the council's role and sparked dissatisfaction, highlighting the long-term risks of weakened transparency, accountability, and collaboration in local governance, as discussed in the broader implications of the thesis.

Impacts

The long-term impacts of the mayor's use of Strong Mayor powers in Aurora could significantly alter the town's political and governance landscape. On the one hand, the centralized decision-making process may allow for faster implementation of key budget priorities. However, the controversy over the mayor's veto power could erode public trust in local institutions and the democratic process. If residents and council members feel that the mayor is overriding their voices too frequently, this could lead to dissatisfaction with local governance and potentially alienate voters. Moreover, the political landscape in Aurora could shift, with future decisions likely influenced by the precedent set by the mayor's actions. The concentration of power in the mayor's office may alter how future budget processes unfold, possibly reducing the role of council members in critical financial decisions and further consolidating authority in the mayor's hands.

Quotes

In my opinion, the two amendments to the budget – delaying hires for Town Square and reducing the funding for ASHOF – they do nothing more than undermine the Town's ability to succeed and build our town in a positive manner. That is why I have exercised the rights of the Mayor's office, under the relevant Act, and have vetoed these two amendments. Tom Mrakas, Aurora Mayor (Mrakas, 2023).

Finally, and there will be much more on budget items coming, but the 2025 Aurora budget is the 'Mayor's Budget' because of Strong Mayor powers, so if you think it is the right to have one person in charge of the budget, then please don't

question expenditures or the tax levy to your Ward Councillor. It is the 'Mayor's Budget'. I think it is WRONG. Ron Weese, Aurora Councillor (Weese, 2024).

Discussion

This paper set out to investigate the outcomes and impacts of Strong Mayor powers in municipalities across Ontario, with a specific focus on whether these powers advanced provincial priorities. The quantitative analysis results suggest that municipalities with Strong Mayor powers have made significant strides in achieving their housing targets compared to those governed by a weak mayor system. Using Welch's t-test for statistical analysis, the findings revealed a highly significant difference between the two groups, with municipalities utilizing Strong Mayor powers meeting a higher mean percentage of their housing targets in 2024. This supports the thesis that Strong Mayor powers contribute to more effective governance, enabling municipalities to better meet provincial priorities, specifically housing targets.

When analyzing the relationship between the number of Strong Mayor power decisions and the advancement of provincial priorities, particularly in relation to housing targets achieved, the data suggests a weak connection. Both with and without outliers, the relationship remains minimal, as indicated by the low R^2 values (0.0152 and 0.0147) and low correlation coefficients (0.123 and 0.079). This implies that the number of Strong Mayor power decisions does not significantly predict the progress made toward meeting housing targets. The weak association suggests that other factors beyond the use of Strong Mayor powers are likely influencing the achievement of housing goals, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the impact of these powers on advancing provincial priorities related to housing. Additionally, many of these Strong Mayor decisions may not have been related to advancing housing development at all. As such, any correlation observed, even a weak one, cannot establish that the frequency of Strong Mayor decisions directly causes improvement in housing target achievement.

The study also explored approval timelines for residential development applications before and after the adoption of Strong Mayor powers, as shown in Figure 10. The data indicates a modest improvement in approval timelines, with an average reduction of 2.4 months. This suggests that Strong Mayor powers may expedite the development process to some extent. However, the wide variation in approval timelines across municipalities highlights the complexity of the approval system. While some municipalities, such as Vaughan, saw significant reductions in approval times, others, such as Milton, experienced delays. These discrepancies point to the influence of local administrative practices and structural factors, such as appeal rates, which may significantly impact approval timelines, in addition to the adoption of Strong Mayor powers.

While the preliminary qualitative results suggest that Strong Mayor powers have the potential to accelerate provincial priorities, other factors, such as market conditions, available land, development pipelines, and local governance structures, also play a critical role in advancing housing. The long-term effects of Strong Mayor powers, particularly in relation to housing development and approval timelines, may take several years to fully materialize, as development processes are inherently slow and subject to a range of external variables.

Although it appears that the provision Strong Mayor powers support the advancement of provincial priorities, as evidenced by the analysis of housing targets in this paper, the case studies analyzed in this paper reveal the mixed outcomes and impacts of these powers. While they can expedite decision-making and potentially align with provincial goals, they also raise concerns about the concentration of power, the undermining of democratic processes, and the long-term consequences for local governance.

One key theme identified from the case studies is the centralization of decision-making in the mayor's office. In Mississauga, the mayor's decision to override council opposition and approve zoning changes for four-plex housing facilitated access to federal funding, advancing affordable housing (The Pointer, 2023). However, it sidelined council input, raising concerns about a lack of consultation (Storeys, 2023). Similarly, in

Caledon, the mayor's unilateral firing of an established CAO and appointment of a new CAO of their choosing created instability, resulting in staff turnover and eroding public trust (Caledon Citizen, 2023). In Aurora, the mayor's veto of council-approved budget amendments exemplified the tensions caused by concentrated power, leading to dissatisfaction among council members and residents (New Market Today, 2023). These cases highlight the potential drawbacks of a system where mayors hold substantial executive power, which may undermine collaborative decision-making and democratic processes.

Another key theme is the balancing of the immediate benefit and the long-term risk. The immediate benefits of using Strong Mayor powers include securing funding for housing development and streamlining administrative decisions, such as in Mississauga's \$112.9 million housing grant (The Pointer, 2023). However, these benefits come with long-term risks. In both Mississauga and Aurora, the concentration of power could reduce the council's role in shaping policies, leading to disenfranchised residents and council members. In Caledon, the administrative upheaval has led to instability and potential difficulties in managing growth. This may foster resentment and reduce cooperation among elected officials, creating a more authoritarian political environment. The use of veto power could further consolidate mayoral authority, weakening accountability, and democratic checks and balances. These long-term risks emphasize the need to strike a balance between strong leadership and maintaining democratic engagement and stakeholder involvement. The results of the mixed methods analysis have identified that while Strong Mayor powers may enable swift action on housing and provincial priorities, they also carry significant potential drawbacks, such as undermining democratic processes, fostering political instability, and centralizing power. These negative impacts must be carefully weighed to ensure that governance remains balanced, transparent, and inclusive in the long term.

Limitations

The methods used for the analysis in this paper have several limitations that must be considered. First, as it relates to the housing data, the unequal sample sizes between Strong Mayor (46 municipalities) and weak mayor groups (4 municipalities)

could introduce bias, potentially skewing the results in favour of Strong Mayor municipalities. This imbalance limits the generalizability of the findings, and future research should ideally aim for a more balanced sample to ensure robust conclusions. Second, the use of a single year of data (2024) fails to account for temporal variations such as economic conditions, and housing market fluctuations. In addition, the accuracy of how the housing data is being recorded is questionable as discrepancies between Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation data and internal counts have been reported by several municipalities (Open Council, 2024a).

For the analysis of the relationship between the number of Strong Mayor decisions and progress toward housing targets, outliers were identified highlighting limitations regarding the validity and reliability of the analysis. In addition to the concerns about the validity of the housing target numbers mentioned earlier, it's important to note that not all Strong Mayor decisions are related to decisions about advancing housing development. Some decisions are linked to other matters of an administrative nature, which may impact the consistency and relevance of the analysis.

Finally, for the analysis of development application timelines, all 15 municipalities that were benchmarked operate under the Strong Mayor system, meaning there is no control group for comparison. Without a control group of municipalities using a weak mayor system, it is not possible to conclusively determine whether the reduction in development application timelines is due to the Strong Mayor powers or other contributing factors. Some of these contributing factors may be other legislative measures and financial incentives. Since 2022, in addition to Strong Mayor powers, the provincial government has introduced a series of legislative measures designed to expedite housing development, such as Bills 109, 23, and 185 (Building Industry and Land Development Association, 2024). These changes create a regulatory environment that encourage faster approvals, potentially influencing the speed at which development applications are processed. In addition to these legislative changes, the Ontario government has implemented financial incentives to further accelerate housing development. Through the new Building Faster Fund, municipalities that meet provincial housing targets can access a significant portion of a \$1.2 billion program over three

years (Government of Ontario, 2023a). This funding provides municipalities with the resources to support faster housing development, which could also contribute to the reduction in application timelines. As such, it is essential to recognize that the reduction in development application timelines may result from a combination of these factors, rather than solely from the implementation of Strong Mayor powers.

As mentioned, correlation does not equal causation, and many other factors may impact housing progress in municipalities. Some of these external factors that have not been measured in this study include the cost to build, market conditions, availability of land, and the status of applications already in the pipeline. The cost of construction is a major factor in housing development. Rising costs due to labour shortages, material price increases, and confounding variables such as tariffs and inflation can delay or hinder projects, even with fast-tracked permits. In Ontario, these rising costs make it harder for developers to meet affordable housing targets (Ontario Big City Mayors, 2023). Despite expedited approvals through Strong Mayor powers, financial constraints can still pose significant challenges in meeting development timelines. Market conditions also play a crucial role in housing development. Fluctuating real estate markets, immigration rules, and foreign ownership policies can either encourage or slow development. In times of high demand, developers are more likely to proceed with projects, while during downturns, they may scale back or delay plans due to uncertain demand. Even with quicker decision-making, unfavorable market conditions may still impede construction. Land availability is another critical factor. In urban centers, suitable land for new housing is often limited, especially in high-demand areas with stringent zoning and environmental regulations. While Strong Mayor powers may expedite zoning changes, land scarcity can still limit development. Additionally, municipalities with existing backlogs of housing applications may face delays in progressing through stages of approval, such as environmental reviews or public consultations, further hindering the impact of expedited decisions (Ontario Big City Mayor, 2023). Therefore, an observed linear relationship between the advancement of provincial priorities and the use of Strong Mayor powers may not prove causation. Future research should incorporate multivariate analyses to control for these variables.

One more key limitation in assessing the impact of Strong Mayor powers is that they have been in effect for less than two years, providing limited time to fully evaluate their long-term impacts. This short timeframe, combined with the extended period required to approve and complete development applications, makes it challenging to measure their true effects. Housing development is a lengthy process, and the real benefits of expedited decision-making, such as faster zoning approvals and development plans, may not be immediately visible. Construction projects often take several years to complete, and even with faster decision-making, factors such as land availability, construction costs, and economic conditions can significantly influence the pace of development. As a result, while Strong Mayor powers may expedite certain decisions in the short term, their broader impact on housing supply and affordability may not be fully realized until projects initiated under these powers come to fruition.

Furthermore, the full effects of Strong Mayor powers are still unfolding, and their long-term impact on governance, democracy, and the advancement of provincial priorities remains to be seen. Considering the variables identified that influence housing development, additional time and long-term studies are required to evaluate the lasting effects and effectiveness of Strong Mayor powers in shaping housing development and achieving provincial housing objectives.

While the analysis for this paper provides valuable insights, several limitations must be considered. These include unequal sample sizes, reliance on a single year of data, and the inability to account for potential confounding factors, all of which could undermine the validity of the findings by weakening causal conclusions and limiting generalizability. Additionally, the short timeframe since the implementation of Strong Mayor powers makes it difficult to fully capture their long-term impacts, particularly given the lengthy development timelines for housing projects. Although provincial legislative measures and financial incentives aim to accelerate housing development, external factors such as market conditions, land availability, and construction costs continue to influence the pace of development. To better understand the long-term effects of Strong Mayor powers on housing and municipal governance, more comprehensive and longer-term studies are needed.

Conclusion

The introduction of Strong Mayor powers in Ontario has sparked significant debate about balancing the intended goal of improving efficiency with the unintended risks of undermining democracy, accountability, and transparency, as well as politicizing local governance. Proponents argue that stronger mayors can address urgent issues like housing and infrastructure, aligning with provincial priorities (Ford & Ford, 2016; Government of Ontario, 2023d). However, critics warn that consolidating power could erode democratic principles, neutrality, and professional competence (Bozeman, 1993; Kaufman, 1956; Fenn & Siegel, 2017). Comparative studies of U.S. governance systems (Choi et al., 2013; Svara & Watson, 2010) highlight the risks of political corruption, reduced accountability, and weakened collaboration in a Strong Mayor system. Concerns about the politicization of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) role and the erosion of checks and balances are also raised by scholars like Ammons (2008), Siegel (2010, 2015), and the CAMA white paper (2023), pointing to potential threats to impartiality and oversight.

While the Strong Mayor powers aim to foster decisive leadership, they raise fundamental questions about the balance between executive authority and democratic governance. As a relatively new policy shift, there are notable gaps in understanding its long-term impacts, stressing the need for further research. Early literature suggests and the findings of this study concluded that while the Strong Mayor model may advance provincial priorities in the short term, its broader implications on democracy, transparency, and accountability are still uncertain. Ongoing scrutiny is crucial to maintain the balance between executive efficiency and ethical governance, minimizing risks to public trust and institutional integrity.

This research paper explored the outcomes and impacts of Strong Mayor powers, particularly regarding their potential to advance provincial housing priorities. The results suggest that municipalities with Strong Mayor powers are more successful in meeting their housing targets, with a statistically significant difference compared to those under a weak mayor system. This study identified a very weak correlation between the number of Strong Mayor power decisions made and the percentage of

progress toward achieving housing targets. However, benchmarking data indicates that municipalities that utilized Strong Mayor powers observed a shortening of development approval timelines from 2022 to 2024, suggesting that Strong Mayor powers may, to some extent, expedite the development process. While Strong Mayor powers seem to play a role in achieving these goals, other factors, such as political dynamics, market conditions, and land availability, also influence the results. Case studies reveal mixed outcomes, with some municipalities benefiting from expedited decisions, while others face challenges like political instability and reduced democratic input. Furthermore, while the adoption of Strong Mayor powers may accelerate housing development, approval timelines remain impacted by complex external factors. Despite the positive trends, the short timeframe of these powers and the ongoing development processes mean the long-term effects are still uncertain.

Therefore, future research, particularly long-term studies, is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the potential trade-offs between efficiency and the preservation of democratic governance. It is important to assess whether Strong Mayor powers genuinely deliver on their promise of efficiency or if they pose a threat to democracy. It is recommended that the impact of Strong Mayor powers on advancing provincial priorities be measured over a five-year period. If, by 2030, statistically significant and causal relationships demonstrating the positive impact of Strong Mayor powers on advancing provincial priorities cannot be established, the government should re-evaluate the legislation to ensure that the intended consequences are being achieved. Furthermore, the unintended consequences, such as weakening the municipal democratic system, undermining the role of the CAO, and eroding public trust, should be carefully considered. If, by 2030, it is determined that the unintended negative consequences outweigh the intended positive outcomes, the legislation should be abandoned to prevent harm to democratic principles, transparency, and public trust. While Strong Mayor powers may improve decision-making efficiency and support provincial priorities in the short term, their long-term effects on these core values must be thoroughly examined. It is crucial to determine whether they can achieve provincial goals without compromising the fairness and effectiveness of local governance, as discussed in this thesis. The question must be asked: can these powers truly achieve

provincial goals without undermining the integrity of local governance? The answer to this question will shape the future of democracy.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Calculation of Statistical Comparison of Housing Target Progress

Data for strong mayor system:

Mean $M_1=69.68$

Sample size $n_1=46$

Variance $S^2_1 = 142.43$ (average of 7.75 and 277.11)

Data for weak mayor system:

Mean $M_2=30.54$

Sample size $n_2= 4$

Variance $S^2_2= 31.62$ (average of 19.9 and 43.34)

Calculating the t-statistic using the Welch's t-test formula:

$$t = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{\sqrt{\frac{S^2_1}{n_1} + \frac{S^2_2}{n_2}}} \quad t = \frac{69.68 - 30.54}{\sqrt{\frac{142.43}{46} + \frac{31.62}{4}}}$$

Strong mayor system:

Weak mayor system:

$$\frac{S^2_1}{n_1} = \frac{142.43}{46} = 3.1$$

$$\frac{S^2_2}{n_2} = \frac{31.62}{4} = 7.905$$

Calculating the denominator:

$$3.1 + 7.905 = 11.005$$

$$\sqrt{11.005} = 3.316$$

Calculating the t-statistic:

$$t = \frac{69.68 - 30.54}{3.316} = \frac{39.14}{3.316} = 11.78$$

Calculating the degrees of freedom:

$$df = \frac{\left(\frac{S_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{S_2^2}{n_2}\right)^2}{\frac{\left(\frac{S_1^2}{n_1}\right)^2}{n_1-1} + \frac{\left(\frac{S_2^2}{n_2}\right)^2}{n_2-1}} \quad df = \frac{(3.1 + 7.905)^2}{\frac{3.1^2}{45} + \frac{7.905^2}{3}}$$

Calculating the numerator:

$$3.1 + 7.905 = 11.005$$

$$(11.005)^2 = 121.11$$

Calculating the denominator:

$$\frac{3.1^2}{45} = \frac{9.61}{45} = 0.2135555556$$

$$\frac{7.905^2}{3} = \frac{62.5}{3} = 20.83333333$$

$$0.2135555556 + 20.83333333 = 21.04688889$$

Therefore, the degrees of freedom is:

$$df = \frac{121.11}{21.04688889} = 5.75$$

Appendix B: Quantitative Data – Strong Mayor Decisions, Housing Progress and Timeline Benchmarking

	Quantitative Analysis										Timeline Benchmarking			
	Open Council		Decisions as of Dec 31, 2024	Ten-year housing target	Target for 2024	Housing Supply Progress		Progress % for Total 2024 housing progress	Housing Target Status	Timeline Benchmarking				
	Effective Date									2022 Study	2024 Study	Difference	Changes	
Ajax	01-Jul-23	5	17000	1417	163	167	11.50%	Not met						
Aurora	31-Oct-23	40	8000	667	25.04%	25.04%	Not met							
Barrie	01-Jul-23	34	23000	1917	791	41.26%	Not met		13.1	11.2	-1.9	Better		
Belleville	31-Oct-23	2	3100	258	213	82.56%	Exceeded							
Bradford West Gwillimbury	31-Oct-23	14	6500	542	239	44.10%	Not met		20.4	23.5	3.1	Worse		
Brampton	01-Jul-23	40	113000	9417	4907	52.11%	Not met		19.1	14.1	-5	Better		
Brantford	01-Jul-23	27	10000	833	280	33.61%	Not met							
Burlington	01-Jul-23	39	29000	2417	754	31.20%	Not met							
Caledon	01-Jul-23	24	13000	1083	553	51.06%	On track		34.4	26.9	-7.5	Better		
Cambridge	01-Jul-23	40	19000	1583	626	39.55%	Not met							
Chatham-Kent	31-Oct-23	34	1100	92	136	147.83%	Not met							
Clarington	01-Jul-23	29	13000	1083	584	53.92%	Not met		21.9	14.3	-7.6	Better		
East Gwillimbury	31-Oct-23	3	4300	358	107	29.89%	Not met							
Georgina	31-Oct-23	36	6200	517	223	43.13%	Not met							
Greater Sudbury	31-Oct-23	25	3800	317	230	72.56%	Exceeded							
Guelph	01-Jul-23	50	18000	1500	849	56.60%	Not met							
Haldimand County	Declined		4200	350	92	26.29%	Not met							
Hatton Hills	31-Oct-23	22	9500	792	266	33.59%	Not met							
Hamilton	01-Jul-23	49	47000	3917	1632	41.66%	Not met							
Innisfil	31-Oct-23	37	6300	525	260	49.52%	Not met		23.2	19.8	-3.4	Better		
Kawartha Lakes	31-Oct-23	9	6500	542	332	61.25%	Not met							
Kingston	01-Jul-23	41	8000	667	452	67.77%	Not met							
Kitchener	01-Jul-23	44	35000	2917	2038	69.87%	Not met							
London	01-Jul-23	21	47000	3917	3012	76.90%	Not met		23.5	22.6	-0.9	Same		
Markham	01-Jul-23	0	44000	3667	1445	39.41%	Not met		10.2	23.3	13.1	Worse		
Milton	01-Jul-23	26	21000	1750	1673	95.60%	Not met		27.4	25	-2.4	Better		
Mississauga	01-Jul-23	43	120000	10000	3277	32.77%	Exceeded							
New Tecumseth	Declined		6400	533	231	43.34%	Not met							
Newmarket	Declined		12000	1000	199	19.90%	Not met							
Niagara Falls	01-Jul-23	22	8000	667	481	72.11%	Not met							
Norfolk County	Declined		5700	475	155	32.63%	Not met							
North Bay	31-Oct-23	33	1000	83	230	277.11%	Not met		13.9	14.1	0.2	Same		
Oakville	01-Jul-23	83	33000	2750	3382	122.96%	Not met		26.1	20.7	-5.4	Better		
Oshawa	01-Jul-23	37	23000	1917	887	46.27%	Not met							
Ottawa	23-Nov-22	60	151000	12583	6007	47.74%	Not met							
Peterborough	31-Oct-23	9	4700	392	233	59.44%	Not met							
Pickering	01-Jul-23	43	13000	1083	1696	156.60%	Not met							
Richmond Hill	01-Jul-23	56	27000	2250	752	33.42%	Not met		35.9	33.6	-2.3	Better		
Sarnia	31-Oct-23	21	1000	83	150	180.72%	Exceeded							
Sault Ste. Marie	31-Oct-23	22	1500	125	180	144.00%	Exceeded							
St. Catharines	01-Jul-23	50	11000	917	259	28.24%	Not met							
Thunder Bay	31-Oct-23	32	2200	183	246	134.43%	Not met							
Toronto	23-Nov-22	70	285000	23750	18422	77.57%	Exceeded		32	25	-7	Better		
Toronto	01-Jul-23	26	42000	3500	2348	67.09%	Exceeded		26.9	18.1	-8.8	Better		
Vaughan	01-Jul-23	42	16000	1333	857	64.29%	Exceeded							
Welland	31-Oct-23	11	4300	358	382	106.70%	Exceeded							
Whitby	01-Jul-23	7	18000	1500	557	37.13%	Not met		12.6	12.4	-0.2	Same		
Whitchurch-Stouffville	31-Oct-23	17	6500	542	42	7.75%	Not met							
Windsor	01-Jul-23	61	13000	1083	1456	134.44%	Not met							
Woodstock	31-Oct-23	31	5500	458	105	22.93%	On track							
Municipalities without targets														
Average All			1172700	14392	8081		56.15%	Not applicable		22.7	20.3	-2.4		
Average - Strong Mayor Powers		31.89					69.68%							
Average - Declined Strong Mayor Powers							30.54%							

Appendix C: Housing Target Progress (2024) and Number of Strong Mayor Decisions by Municipality

