

SDIPR-CERC Barometer: Charter Review

San Diego City Survey, September 07

(n=505 adult San Diego City residents) RDD

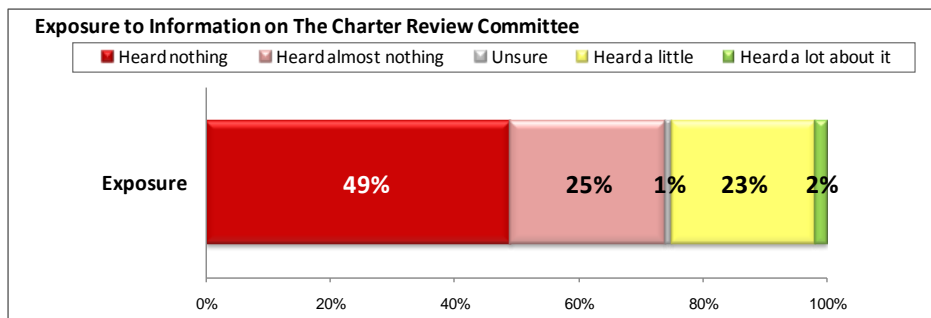
Weighted on Voter Registration, Age, Gender

Field dates: September 4-9

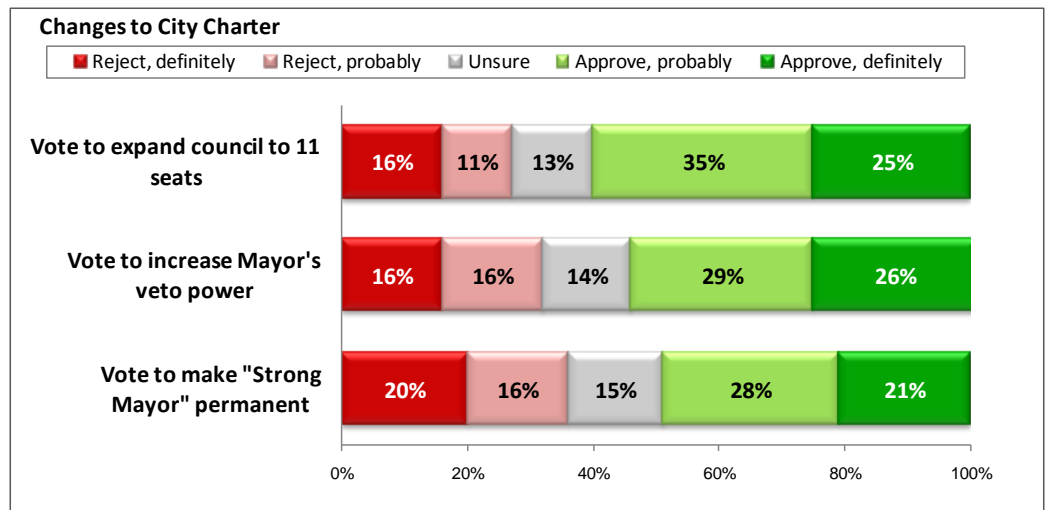
Analysis by John E. Nienstedt, CERC President

Less than Strong Support for Below the Radar Effort to Re-Mold City Charter

Most San Diegans are in the dark about what the Charter Review Committee is doing. Only 2% report having heard “a lot” about the effort and more than three-quarters have heard nothing or next to nothing about the Committee. Interestingly, however, the amount of knowledge one has about the committee itself, does not significantly impact the amount of support or opposition the proposals themselves are getting.



There is initial ballot box support for making the “strong Mayor” system permanent, but that support is not solid. While 50% would vote for the proposal, only 21% express *definite* support. Similarly, there is soft initial support for a proposal to expand the number of City Council Districts to 11. But the Barometer’s results show that opponents of both those proposals could make significant inroads in that support by pointing to what they see as flaws. The proposal to increase the Mayor’s veto power also receives majority support, though, again, support is more soft than strong. However, the argument against this proposal is not strong, so this measure appears to have staying power.



What Charter Review Committee?

Residents have clearly not seen, read or heard much about the Committee. Even for groups we would assume are more plugged in to what is going on at City Hall, awareness of the Charter Review Committee does not change too much. For instance, though exposure to information regarding the Committee is slightly higher for registered voters, only 2% have heard a lot about the Committee and 72% report hearing nothing or almost nothing about it.

“How much, if anything, have you seen, read or heard about the city of San Diego’s Charter Review Committee. Have you . . .”

	All Adults	Awareness of SD County Request For Voluntary Water Conservation				Age			Registered to Vote	
		Heard nothing	Heard almost nothing	Heard a little	Heard a lot	18-34	35-64	65+	No	Yes
Heard nothing	50%	65%	43%	41%	41%	58%	47%	41%	54%	48%
Heard almost nothing	25	20	28	30	26	27	26	21	28	24
Heard a little	23	15	26	28	30	15	25	34	17	26
Heard a lot	2	1	3	1	3	0	2	4	1	2

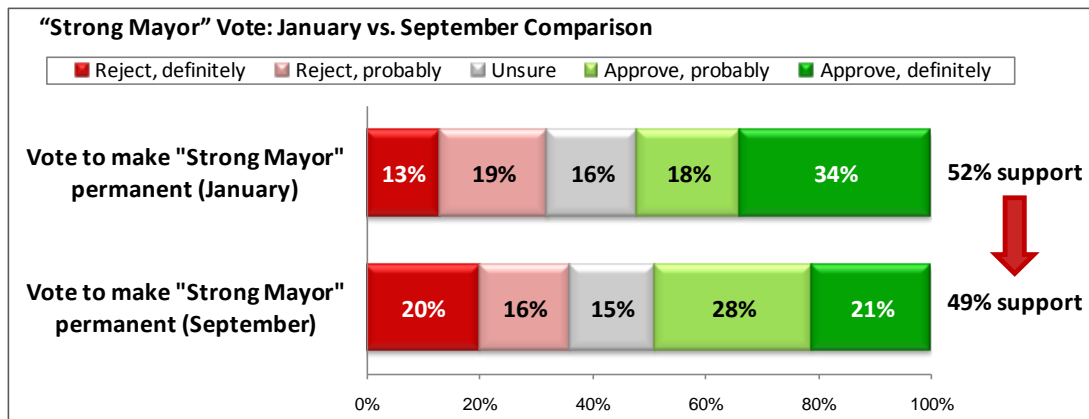
The table above shows that there is somewhat higher awareness among those who are more attuned to media. That is suggested by the finding that those who are more aware of the San Diego County Water Authority’s 20-gallon challenge are also more likely to know about the Committee. But it is clear that even those who have seen the most on the County’s water conservation campaign are not well-versed on what the Charter Review Committee is up to, as 68% of them have heard nothing or almost nothing about it. The table also shows that older residents are more likely to report exposure to information on the Charter Review Committee. This is not surprising since those over 65 tend to vote more frequently and pay closer attention to local news. However, even among seniors, 62% say they have not even heard a little about the Committee.

Mayor’s Image Drives Support for “Strong Mayor”

Among registered voters 49% would vote for a proposal to make the strong Mayor form of government permanent, but only 23% are firmly for it and 22% are firmly opposed. Overall, 36% oppose the proposal.

This issue is basically tied to Mayor Jerry Sanders’ popularity. Those who approve of the job the Mayor is doing generally heartily approve of making the move to strong Mayor permanent. On the other hand, those who disapprove of the Mayor’s handling of things even more heartily would vote to reject the proposal. As the Mayor’s fortunes go, so goes this measure. Note that this is the main reason we are seeing less support now than we did in January when we first tested a vote on this issue. As the Mayor’s

popularity has ebbed, support for making the strong Mayor form of government has softened.



The survey also shows that non-Democrats, older folks and long-time residents are more inclined to favor the proposal, suggesting low voter turnout would boost its prospects. Turnout in San Diego's June 2008 election is likely to be low.

Respondents were given a pair arguments that supporters and opponents of the strong Mayor proposal are likely to make. The arguments were rotated so as to avoid biasing the results.

The past year shows that the change to a strong-Mayor form of government is working. The Mayor and City bureaucrats are now much more accountable to the public. Making the system permanent will ensure that we don't go back to the old strong-manager system which got us into the mess we're in now.

When the strong-Mayor measure was approved, voters were told it would be a five year experiment. It has only been 18 months and that's not enough time to tell if the experiment is a success. Rather than rush to renew the strong-Mayor system in 2008, we should wait until 2010 before deciding whether to make the change permanent.

Most people buy the argument made by opponents over those made by proponents. This partially results from the measure's soft initial support. More educated residents, African-Americans and those who believe the city is on the wrong track are more inclined to agree with the opponents' argument. Among voters, 63% side with the opponents' argument against the strong Mayor proposal.

	All Adults	Education					Registered	
		Less than high school diploma	High school	Some college	College degree	Advanced degree	No	Yes
Anti-making strong Mayor permanent, strongly	28%	18%	18%	32%	30%	35%	23%	32%
Anti-making strong Mayor permanent, somewhat	30	20	35	30	31	27	28	31
Unsure	7	17	3	8	6	4	5	8
Pro-making strong Mayor permanent, somewhat	20	24	29	18	21	10	30	14
Pro-making strong Mayor permanent, strongly	15	21	15	12	12	24	14	15

Enhancing the Mayor’s Veto Power

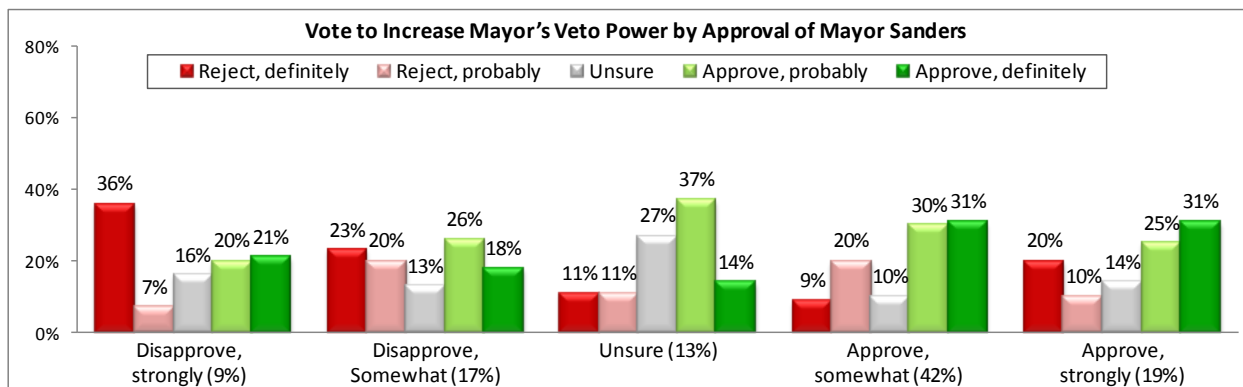
Among voters, support is at 55% and opposition is at 32% and that makes this measure more palatable than the strong Mayor proposal. There results mirror the results for the general population.

Newer residents are wildly in favor of this idea to expand the Mayor’s veto power, but support dips below 50% among residents who have been in the area more than two decades. This suggests that such a measure will have a tougher time making it over that magic 50% plus one mark in a low turnout election. Whites also tend to support the proposal more so than non-whites.

“If an election were held today, would you vote to approve or vote to reject a measure to increase the number of votes it takes to override the Mayor’s veto?”

	All Adults	Length of Residency					Ethnicity		Registered to Vote	
		<3 yrs	3-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	11-20 yrs	>20 yrs	Other	White	No	Yes
Reject, definitely	16%	3%	7%	11%	16%	22%	18%	14%	14%	17%
Reject, probably	16	3	4	12	22	18	17	15	18	15
Unsure	14	15	22	19	10	12	15	13	14	14
Approve, probably	29	24	37	26	30	28	28	30	30	28
Approve, definitely	26	54	30	33	21	21	22	29	24	27

Support and opposition to this proposal is also tied to Sanders’ image, though not as tightly as the strong Mayor proposal. As the chart shows, Sanders’ supporters generally favor, and his detractors generally oppose the measure, but consensus is not strong in either camp.

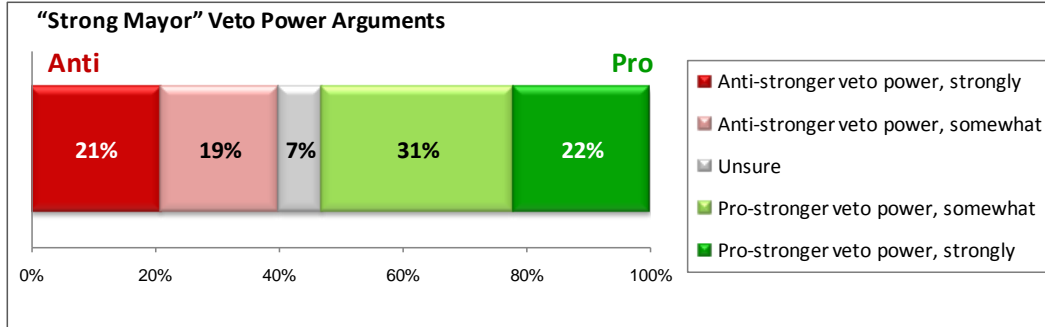


Respondents were given a pair arguments that supporters and opponents of the veto power proposal are likely to make. The arguments were rotated so as to avoid biasing the results.

It should take a large majority of Council Members to override a veto. Otherwise the Mayor doesn't really have veto power and we don't really have a strong Mayor. By ensuring that it takes more than a simple majority to override the Mayor's veto, it is a good check on the City Council and will help the Mayor enact reforms.

Because the Mayor's veto will be so hard to override this puts too much power in the hands of the Mayor. Checks and balances are important in a democracy and this proposal, because it makes the City Council weaker, will end up hurting neighborhoods at the expense of the establishment.

Residents tend to side with the supporters' argument, with Sanders' supporters and wealthier individuals showing much more agreement with the supporters' argument. Since, of the three proposals, this is the one where the arguments did not produce a large shift away from support, it appears that this proposal would have more campaign staying power.



Expanding the Council to 11 Seats

Most residents would vote to approve a proposal to expand the number of City Council Districts to 11. Again, support is more soft than strong, but 60% overall favor Council expansion. However, among registered voters, the results are less dramatic, as only 55% support it and 32% express opposition. Support significantly varies based upon income – less affluent residents are more supportive; age – younger residents are more supportive; political ideology – liberals are more supportive; and length of residency – newcomers are more supportive than long time residents. The fall-off in support among older and long time residents suggests this measure could be vulnerable in a low turnout election.

“If an election were held today, would you vote to approve or vote to reject a measure to expand the number of Council seats to 11?”

	All Adults	Income			Age			Ideology		Registered to Vote		
		<\$40K	\$40-80K	>\$80K	18-34	35-64	65+	Liberal	In between/ Unsure	Conservative	No	Yes
Reject, definitely	16%	12%	12%	19%	10%	17%	28%	12%	14%	21%	9%	20%
Reject, probably	11	7	13	12	5	15	10	13	9	9	9	12
Unsure	13	18	7	14	14	12	13	13	22	11	12	13
Approve, probably	35	42	36	32	44	31	25	32	39	38	46	28
Approve, definitely	25	21	32	22	26	25	24	31	17	22	24	26

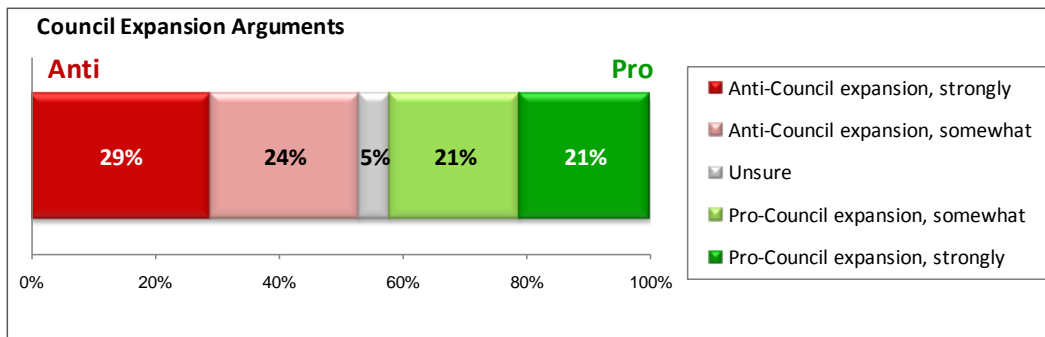
Unlike the proposed Charter changes related to the Mayor which are strongly tied to Sanders’ performance, opinions on City Council expansion have nothing to do with how a person perceives the Council to be performing.

Respondents were given a pair arguments that supporters and opponents of the Council expansion proposal are likely to make. The arguments were rotated so as to avoid biasing the results.

We need an odd number of council seats to break ties. Expanding the City Council to 11 seats would also create smaller districts so Council members could get to know their constituents better and more accurately reflect the needs of individual communities.

The last thing that San Diego needs is three more full-time politicians. And between office space and staff salaries, the proposal would cost between 3 million and 4 million dollars a year. To avoid tie votes we could just add a single seat to make the total 9.

Most residents side with the opposition when these arguments are read.



Upper income voters, in particular, are much more likely than lower income residents to agree with the oppositions’ argument.