

The background of the cover is a complex, abstract geometric design. It consists of various overlapping shapes, lines, and patterns in shades of orange, green, blue, and grey. Some areas have fine grid lines, while others have larger, more irregular shapes. The overall effect is a modern, urban-inspired aesthetic.

MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

2017 RESULTS

Supported by





MAYORS, PERHAPS NOW MORE THAN EVER, are being called to serve as agents of both local and global change. They have a greater role in forming and promulgating important social and economic policies than at any other time in modern American history.

The job of mayor is not for the faint of heart. We continue to marvel at the incredible breadth of responsibilities that mayors must bear. In a single day, they may be called upon to administer, manage, counsel, cajole, mourn, and celebrate. We remain in awe of their capacity to move fluidly through these roles.

This year's Menino Survey of Mayors, based on 115 interviews held during the summer of 2017, explores mayoral views on issues of both local and global import — from housing the young and the old, the rich and the poor, to mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change through direct actions. The Survey, now in its fourth year, provides insight into their priorities, challenges, and solutions.

With each passing year, our gratitude to participating mayors only grows. Their candor and willingness to devote time to this project is what makes it all possible.

We are grateful for the continued support of Citi, who was an early and eager advocate for this project. We are also immensely thankful for the new role that The Rockefeller Foundation chose to play in supporting the 2017 Survey. Both Citi and The Rockefeller Foundation share our passion for America's urban leaders, and it is a true pleasure to collaborate with them to elevate these voices.

Last, we express our thanks to the entire team of faculty and staff for their dedication and the intellectual rigor they bring to this endeavor. To Katie, David, Max, Conor, Stacy, and Patricia — how lucky we are to have you as our partners to help carry on this legacy.



Graham Wilson
Director
Boston University
Initiative on Cities



Katharine Lusk
Executive Director
Boston University
Initiative on Cities

Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Initiative on Cities at Boston University seeks to research, promote, and advance the adaptive urban leadership strategies and policies necessary to support cities as dynamic centers of inclusive economic growth and positive development in the twenty-first century. Founded by a proven urban leader, the late Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, and a highly regarded academic, Professor Graham Wilson, the Initiative serves as a bridge between world-class academic research and the real-life practice of city governance.

Initiative on Cities

Boston University
75 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215

bu.edu/ioc
@BUonCities
617-358-8080
IOC@bu.edu

Director, Professor Graham Wilson

Authors

Katherine Levine Einstein
Assistant Professor, Political Science
Boston University
kleinst@bu.edu

David M. Glick
Assistant Professor, Political Science
Boston University
dmglick@bu.edu

Maxwell Palmer
Assistant Professor, Political Science
Boston University
mbpalmer@bu.edu

Contributor

Conor LeBlanc
Boston University Initiative on Cities
(former)



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FOREWORD

The late Mayor Tom Menino of Boston — for whom this survey is named — often remarked that being mayor was the best job in politics. This sentiment, echoed by us and by many of our peers, is a result of the direct and immediate impact our work has in the communities we serve, as well as the far-reaching influence cities have at national and global levels.

Being mayor requires that we take action every day to ensure the well-being of our constituents — we repair roads, we pick up trash, we balance budgets. Daily, we make a few dozen decisions that affect the lives of our residents before many have their first cup of coffee. While this intense focus on the day-to-day essentials is necessary for the city to function, mayors must simultaneously plan and implement their long-term vision for a more prosperous, resilient, and livable city.

Today, the majority of Americans live in cities — and as our urban population continues to increase, so too does the demand for infrastructure and services. This survey serves as a platform to share our contemporary struggles and our sources of inspiration with a national audience. It gives mayors a voice to make our needs heard and highlights the importance we place on the physical, fiscal, and social infrastructure of our cities.

The 2017 Menino Survey continues to reflect our growing consensus on top priorities. This consensus is irrespective of city size, wealth, or political leanings, and shows that mayors are facing similar challenges with affordable housing, sustainability, and funding shortfalls. How do we build and preserve affordable units with rents that won't burden our families and seniors? How do we revitalize communities using sustainable and smart practices that create a better future for our children? And how do we accomplish such goals with growing federal and state cutbacks? The survey findings reflect that our peers are ready and willing to collaborate with all levels of government, and the private sector, to tackle these matters.

We have worked during our tenures to build relationships with fellow mayors — both those down the road from us and those across the country. At a time when the national conversation is divisive, cities offer a sense of hope and shared identity. Cities are best positioned to be a model for action and leadership. We must continue to build coalitions, to plan for the future, and to get the job done today.



Mayor Eric Garcetti
D - Los Angeles, California



Mayor Betsy Price
R - Fort Worth, Texas

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY:

Across the country, mayors of all types of cities are concerned about housing affordability and access.

According to mayors, housing costs are the most common reason that people move out of their cities, followed closely by jobs and schools. Thirty-five percent of mayors also said that zoning and development issues had the biggest impact on voters' approval ratings, placing these issues at the top of a list of constituent priorities alongside policing. Mayors were split, however, on whether to prioritize addressing problems in the rental or homeownership markets.

HOUSING REFORM:

There is no one-size-fits-all solution that would remedy the housing challenges that mayors are facing.

Few mayors felt their cities' housing stock fit their residents' needs well. Only 13 percent said the housing stock fit "very well" or "extremely well." Concerns about housing stock were consistent across the country. They were most pronounced in the western United States, where an even larger proportion of mayors expressed concerns. Mayors of cities with vastly different median housing prices also expressed similar levels of concern about the fit of their housing stock, but there was less agreement on what changes were most needed. Popular, but not universal, aspirations for changes to housing stock included more affordable multibedroom units, increased home ownership, and upgrades to older housing. Other mayors cited priorities such as rental stability at one end of the spectrum and more high-end units at the other. The most commonly cited obstacles to improving housing access included a lack of government funding (especially for low-income residents); the challenges residents face obtaining bank financing or a lease; and the costs of upgrading older housing stock.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

A majority of mayors are committed to local action on climate change, but the issue is politicized even at the local level. Two-thirds of mayors said that cities should take action on climate change even if doing so requires financial costs. These responses were highly polarized by political party similar to national views on climate issues. Democrats were almost universally supportive of this trade-off. Only 24 percent of Republicans agreed or strongly agreed. The number of Republicans agreeing with this trade-off declined significantly from a similar query three years ago, leading to an increase in partisan polarization on this question. Mayors cited a range of top climate/sustainability priorities: reducing the number of vehicles on the road, upgrading city buildings and vehicles, and sourcing greener energy. They also saw a number of city-level policies — ranging from increasing residential density to updating building codes — as integral parts of any serious effort to address climate change, but pushed back on the need to institute new costly regulations on the private sector.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENTS:

Mayors, often across party lines, are concerned about their relationships with state and federal government.

Mayors consistently expressed concern about the level of financial support they receive from state and federal government. Very few mayors believe they receive above-average support, and many report receiving much less than average. Mayors are also very concerned about preemption, especially from state government. Fifty-seven percent report much less or less than average autonomy from their state governments, up 10 percentage points from two years ago. Notably, all of these responses are consistent, irrespective of the mayors' party affiliations. Mayors were more divided, by both party and issue, concerning their ability to thwart disfavored actions from the Trump administration. Mayors were optimistic that they could do "a lot" in response to federal level actions on environmental and police policy. They were less sanguine about their ability to counteract the administration on issues such as education and immigration. On some issues, such as the environment, Democrats believed they could do more than Republicans did, but on other issues, partisan differences were muted.

MITIGATING FEDERAL FISCAL SHORTFALLS:

Facing federal cutbacks, mayors are looking to a variety of alternative funding sources, particularly own source revenues.

Mayors most often cited the potential for state resources to make up for federal funding shortfalls in areas such as education and vehicle infrastructure. In contrast, they cite local resources as the most promising way to counteract limited federal funding for water infrastructure, and bike and pedestrian investments. They saw little, if any, promise for nonprofits or privatization to help fill federal funding gaps across a range of issues. On the other hand, they did see promise for public private partnerships to help with housing affordability. In a few instances, mayors reported that federal budget shortfalls are "not an issue," though many did say that there was no way to compensate for a lack of federal resources in areas such as mass transit and affordable housing.

CITY-TO-CITY NETWORKS:

Mayors generally, though not universally, value city-to-city policy networks as tools to signal priorities and influence national and global issues.

Two-thirds of mayors gave positive and/or optimistic reasons for cities participating in policy networks and compacts. Of these two-thirds, about 65 percent saw political or signaling value (e.g., strength in numbers) as a benefit of such commitments. Forty-five percent emphasized more tangible resources and/or benefits of collaborating around shared interests and goals. Some mayors were more skeptical of the value of such compacts and tended to see joining them as primarily political rather than substantive.

DATA AND POLICY EVALUATION:

Mayors use a wide variety of data to evaluate key policy arenas, and the amount of consensus about how to evaluate performance varies considerably by issue.

To assess education policy, mayors largely rely on graduation rates. When evaluating police department performance and public safety, they use crime rates. For constituent views, mayors highlight surveys. Neighborhood contacts, citizen complaints, and gleaning constituent views from media coverage also rated as important. In contrast, there were no universal metrics for evaluating housing, economic performance, and equity.

2. METHODOLOGY: 115 SURVEY-INTERVIEWS

The 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors explores a mix of issues and challenges and combines closed and open-ended questions. This year, the mayors discussed everything from performance metrics to housing development to sustainability. To generate a systematic sample, we invited all mayors of cities with 75,000 or more residents to participate. Each mayor received an email invitation from the Boston University team at their official account, and follow-up phone calls. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in person or by phone.

This systematic sampling and recruitment effort yielded a representative sample of American cities. One hundred and fifteen mayors completed the Survey, which equates to a 25 percent response rate. This is very strong for a survey of busy elites. Moreover, the 115 participating cities nicely match the target population of cities over 75,000 residents (see Table 1). Participating cities were virtually identical to the national population of cities on population, racial demographics, housing prices, and geographic breakdown.

The sample of participating mayors captures the breadth of America's city leaders (see Figure 1). Twenty-six percent are female and 85 percent are white. Sixty-five percent are Democrats. All three of these figures are consistent with the traits of the mayors in last year's Menino Survey. The partisan distribution also closely aligns with a rigorous political science study of mayoral partisanship. As Figure 1 shows, as a group, the mayors have a mix of educational and professional backgrounds. Twenty-four percent of the mayors have law degrees and 23 percent have legal career experience. This compares with nearly 40 percent of members of Congress (Swanson, *The Washington Post*, 1/19/16).¹

Table 1. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All United States Cities with Population >75,000²

	Survey	All Cities
Number of Cities	115	467
Average Population	233,086	224,762
Average Percent White	55%	50%
Average Percent Black	16%	14%
Average Percent Hispanic	19%	25%
Average Median Housing Price	\$238,719	\$245,783
Region	% of Sample	% of Cities
Northeast	9%	10%
Midwest	25%	16%
South	27%	33%
West	39%	40%

Figure 1. Demographics of Surveyed Mayors

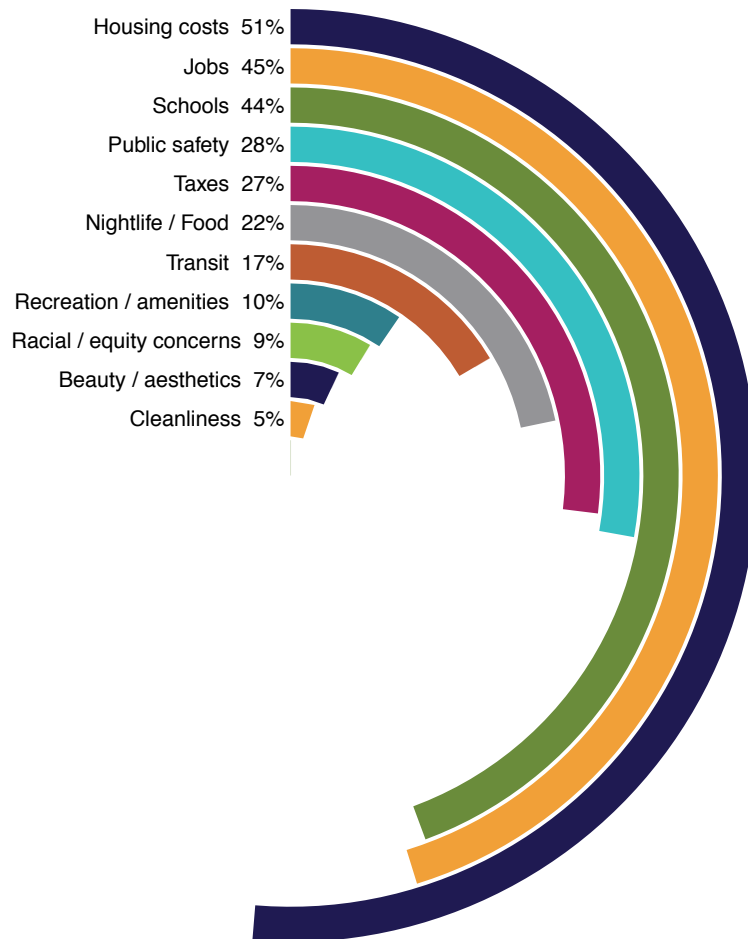


3. HOUSING IN THE CITY

Mayors nationwide are challenged by rising housing costs. As leaders of their cities, one of mayors' chief priorities is constituent satisfaction. Mayors consider a wide variety of constituent concerns, including housing costs, schools, and nightlife/food (i.e., people want more). Chief among them, however, is housing costs. Over one-half of mayors highlighted housing costs as one of the top three factors that drive residents to move away from their cities. Housing costs outpaced other prominent issues such as jobs, schools, and public safety (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Voting with Their Feet: Why Residents Move Away

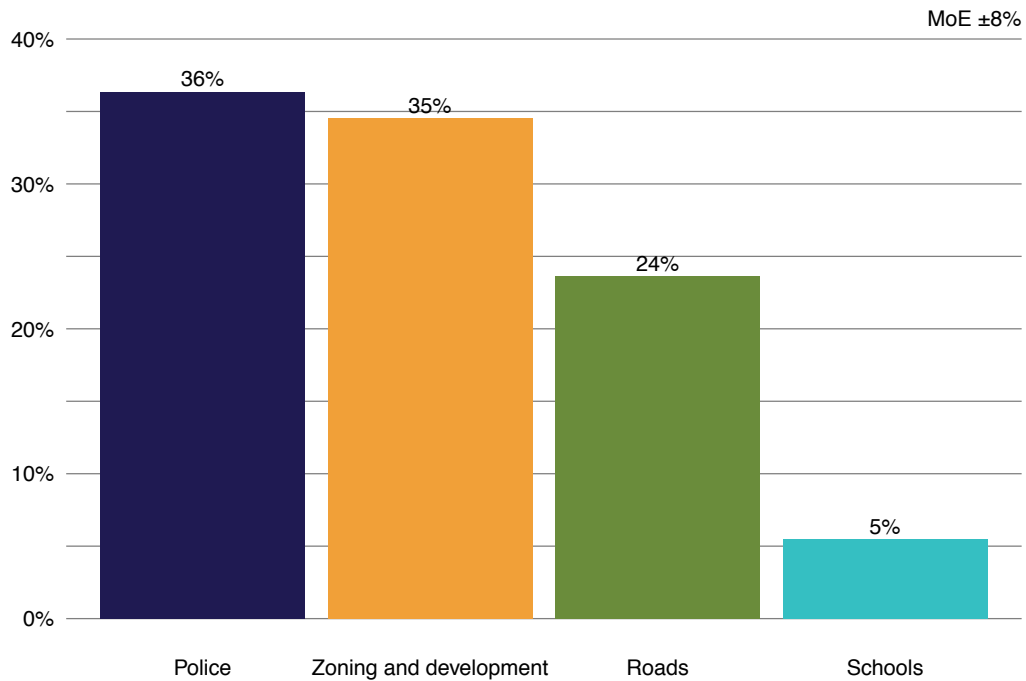
What are the top three factors that prompt people to move away from your city to somewhere else? These may be things that your city is struggling with and/or are better elsewhere.



Mayors believe land use and zoning issues are key drivers of constituent approval. Given their beliefs about residents' concerns in relation to housing costs, mayors unsurprisingly rated zoning and development as critical to voter approval: 35 percent of mayors selected it as the factor that had the biggest impact on voters' ratings of mayoral performance. The only other arena that mayors believed to be as important to voters was the police (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Constituent Approval

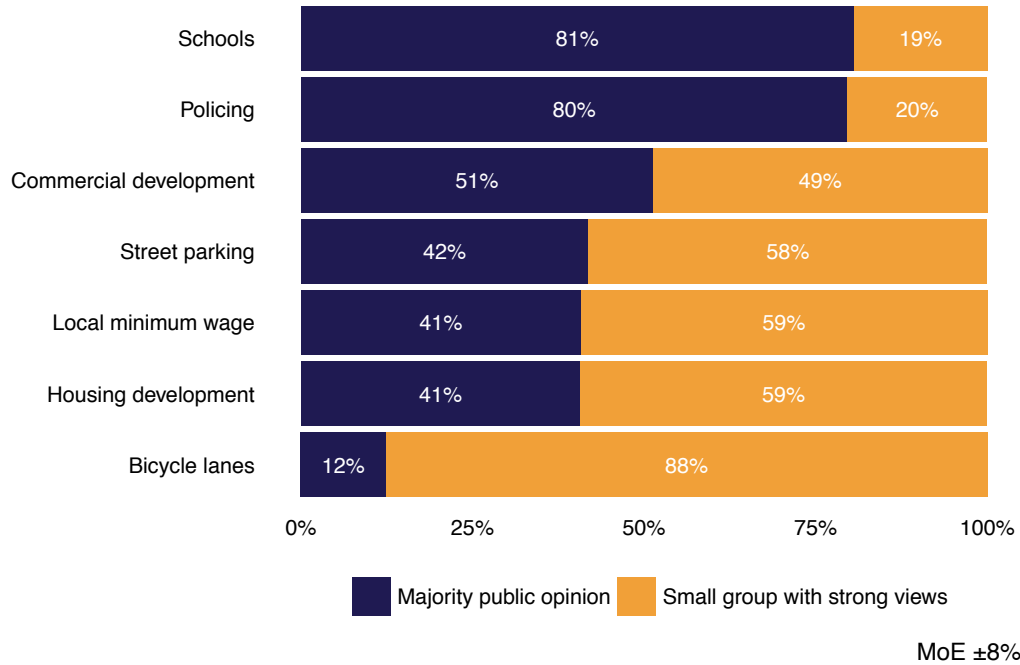
Which issue do you think has the biggest impact on voters' approval of your performance?



Vocal minorities are highly influential across a range of local issues, including housing development, the minimum wage, and transportation issues such as bike lanes and on-street parking. While mayors believed policies related to housing development were significant to voters, they thought that it was one of the policy arenas that was dominated by a "small group with strong" views (see Figure 4). Only 41 percent of mayors felt that "majority opinion" had more influence on housing policy than did a small group with strong views. Of the seven policy arenas examined, bicycling infrastructure (88 percent) is the only issue besides housing that more mayors say is dominated by a small group. At the other end of the spectrum, mayors widely see education and policing as areas in which policy is more responsive to majority preferences.

Figure 4. Constituent Influence: Majority Views vs Influential Minority

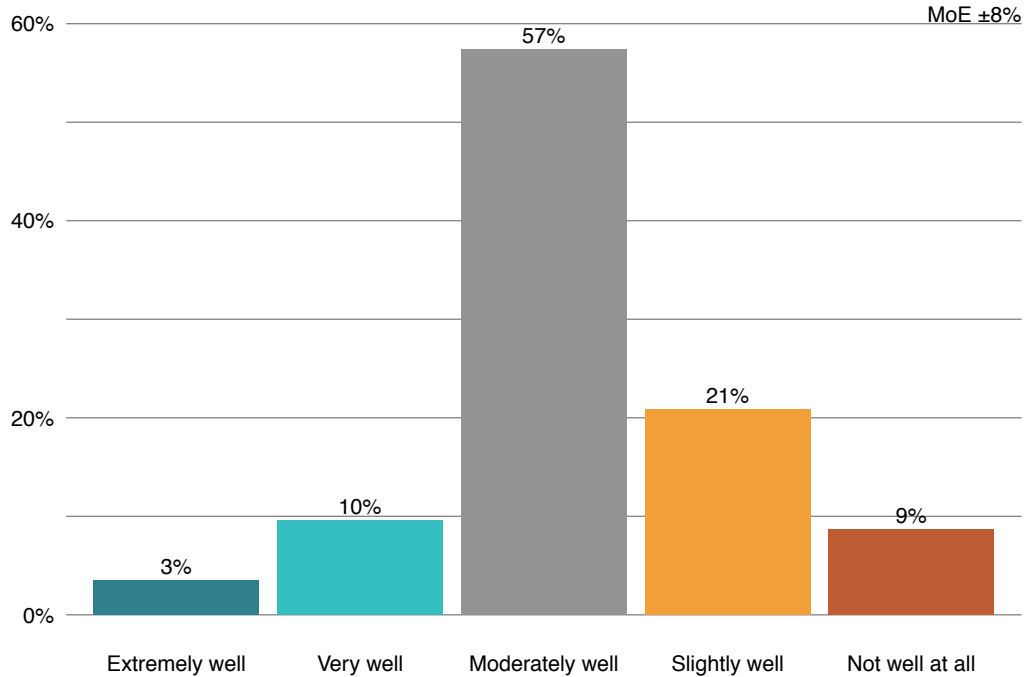
Some policies reflect the views of the majority of citizens, while others are influenced by a small group with strong views. For each of the following policy areas, can you tell us whether you think a majority of constituents or a small group has the greatest policy impact?



Mayors believe that housing is a top constituent concern, and only a very small share think that the current housing stock effectively meets the needs of their cities. As shown in Figure 5, a mere 13 percent of mayors describe their housing stock as matching constituent needs “Extremely well” or “Very well.” The bulk view their housing stock as adequate, with 57 percent selecting the middle (“Moderately well”) category. A sizable minority — 30 percent — view their housing stock negatively. The vast majority of mayors see significant room for improvement in their cities’ housing stock.

Figure 5. Housing Stock

Overall, how well does the current housing stock in your city match the needs of your population?



Mayors in all regions of the US believe there is a mismatch between their current housing stock and the needs of their city. As seen in Table 2, these figures are fairly similar across all parts of the country, with nearly a majority of mayors, or more, in all regions of the country describing their housing as matching constituent needs “Moderately well.” One outlier is the West, where 45 percent of mayors selected one of the two negative categories (“Slightly well” or “Not well at all”) to describe their housing. Given the well-documented housing crisis in parts of the Western US, it is unsurprising that mayors from this region were particularly concerned. In contrast, mayors from the Northeast seemed slightly more inclined to rate their housing positively, with almost one-third indicating that their housing met the needs of constituents “Very well.”

Table 2. Housing Stock Match, by Region

Region	Extremely well	Very well	Moderately well	Slightly well	Not well at all
Northeast	0%	30%	70%	0%	0%
Midwest	3%	17%	55%	24%	0%
South	6%	3%	68%	16%	6%
West	2%	4%	49%	27%	18%

Notably, mayors who governed expensive and inexpensive cities expressed largely similar views about housing stock. Unsurprisingly, mayors of the cities with the highest housing costs — those in the top one-third of the national housing price distribution (median housing price) — were most concerned about their housing stock. One-half of these mayors rated their housing stock negatively. In contrast, only 29 percent of the mid-priced cities and 13 percent of the most inexpensive cities expressed stark concerns (see Table 3). Where we see more similarity is in the unwillingness of mayors of all cities to rate their city’s housing stock positively. Even in the least expensive cities — those in the bottom one-third of the housing price distribution — only 18 percent of mayors believed their housing served constituents “Extremely well” or “Very well.” Moreover, across all three housing price categories, a plurality of mayors opted for the middle category; their housing served their constituents only “Moderately well.”

Table 3. Housing Stock Match, by Median Housing Price

Median Housing Price	Extremely well	Very well	Moderately well	Slightly well	Not well at all
Bottom 1/3	3%	15%	69%	13%	0%
Middle 1/3	5%	7%	60%	19%	10%
Top 1/3	3%	6%	41%	32%	18%

Mayors highlighted a wide array of housing problems when discussing this mismatch. One midwestern mayor said simply, “Affordable housing is a beast” that his city was struggling with as it “grow[s] so rapidly.” One southern mayor worried that there was “not enough stock for sale” as a consequence of residual foreclosures after the 2008 housing crisis. A western mayor highlighted political obstacles, observing a “paradox” in his community in which “People are concerned about [the] cost of housing, but nobody wants to see new housing built.”

More systematically, the plurality (40 percent) prioritize increasing the availability of affordable units with more than one bedroom, with another 35 percent emphasizing increasing homeownership rates (see Figure 6).

Modernizing and/or replacing older housing stock was also popular, with 29 percent of mayors citing it as one of the top two changes they would like to see in their city.

Moreover, mayors’ preferences for changes to their housing stock were essentially non-partisan. As Table 4 shows, the proportions of Democrats and Republicans highlighting the need for the most commonly cited changes, such as more “affordable units” (40 vs 32 percent), increased “home ownership” (35 vs 40 percent), and “modernize” older stock (31 vs 32 percent), were the same. The most

notable difference was that the Democrats were more likely to focus on improving “stability for renters” (24 vs 4 percent) and availability of “subsidized housing” (15 vs 4 percent).

“Over the years, the city has done well with jobs, not enough with housing. We have quantity issues everywhere.”

— A MIDSIZE WESTERN CITY MAYOR

Figure 6. City Housing: Desired Improvements

What are the top two ways you would like to see housing in your city change?

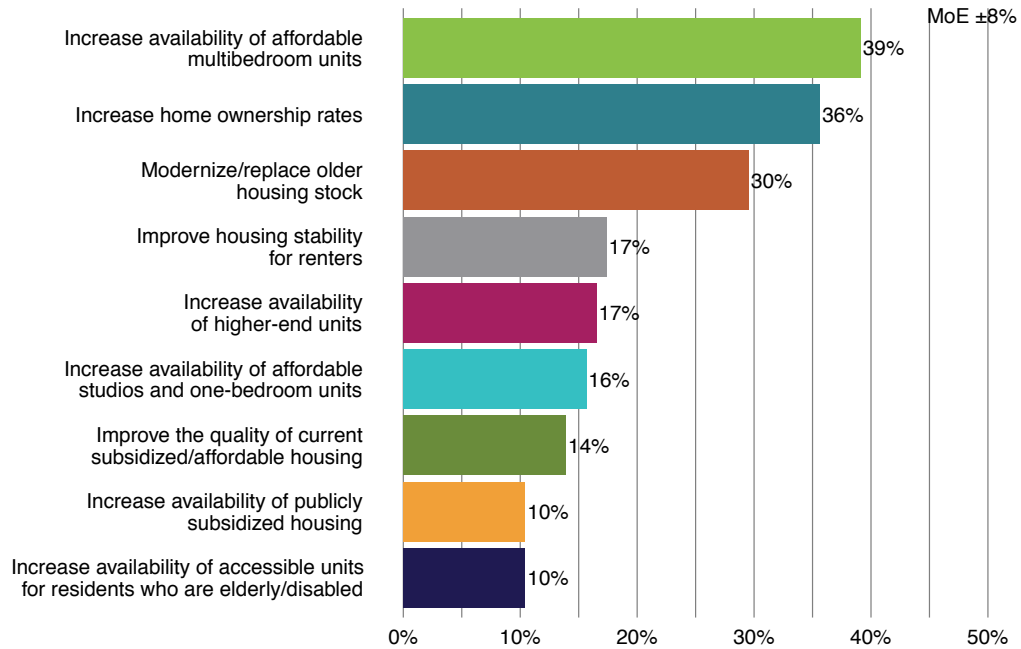


Table 4. Top Two Ways to Change Housing, by Party

	Democrats	Republicans
Improve housing stability for renters	24%	4%
Improve the quality of current subsidized/affordable housing	13%	12%
Increase availability of accessible units for residents who are elderly/disabled	7%	16%
Increase availability of affordable multibedroom units	40%	32%
Increase availability of affordable studios and one-bedroom units	16%	16%
Increase availability of higher-end units	13%	16%
Increase availability of publicly subsidized housing	15%	4%
Increase home ownership rates	35%	40%
Modernize/replace older housing stock	31%	32%

Among mayors, there is little consensus about whether to focus on the rental market or homeownership.

In response to an open-ended question about the metrics they look at to measure housing affordability (see Section 7. Leveraging Data in Decision-Making), roughly equal portions of mayors explicitly mentioned a metric linked to the rental or buying markets (33 percent to 27 percent, respectively). That is, mayors were equally likely to name something such as “average rent” as they were “median sales price.”

While mayors across the country expressed similar concerns about their housing stock, they differed about the ways they would most like to see their cities' housing change. This is unsurprising, given that levels of sprawl, age of housing, availability of different sizes of units, and resident demographics all vary depending upon the region of the country. As shown in Table 5, mayors in the Northeast and Midwest were especially focused on modernizing/replacing older housing stock. In contrast, in the South and West — where housing is much newer — mayors were comparatively less concerned about age and upgrades. Two areas were priorities for at least 20 percent of mayors from all four regions: increasing the availability of multibedroom units and increasing homeownership rates.

Table 5. Top Two Ways to Change Housing, by Region

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Improve housing stability for renters	20%	14%	13%	22%
Improve the quality of current subsidized/affordable housing	0%	24%	23%	4%
Increase availability of accessible units for residents who are elderly/disabled	10%	10%	6%	13%
Increase availability of affordable multibedroom units	40%	34%	29%	49%
Increase availability of affordable studios and one-bedroom units	20%	14%	16%	16%
Increase availability of higher-end units	20%	24%	16%	11%
Increase availability of publicly subsidized housing	0%	3%	6%	20%
Increase home ownership rates	40%	24%	42%	38%
Modernize/replace older housing stock	40%	41%	32%	18%

Table 6. Top Two Ways to Change Housing, by Median Housing Price³

	Bottom 1/3	Middle 1/3	Top 1/3
Improve housing stability for renters	15%	10%	29%
Improve the quality of current subsidized/affordable housing	18%	19%	3%
Increase availability of accessible units for residents who are elderly/disabled	8%	10%	15%
Increase availability of affordable multibedroom units	21%	57%	38%
Increase availability of affordable studios and one-bedroom units	10%	14%	24%
Increase availability of higher-end units	26%	17%	6%
Increase availability of publicly subsidized housing	3%	14%	15%
Increase home ownership rates	46%	29%	32%
Modernize/replace older housing stock	46%	19%	24%



Affordable multibedroom units and homeownership rates are top priorities for American mayors, regardless of the affluence of their city. More than 20 percent of mayors of inexpensive, mid-priced, and expensive cities highlighted these two policy areas. Given the naturally differing needs of expensive and inexpensive cities, there

Affordable multibedroom units and homeownership rates are top priorities for American mayors, regardless of the affluence of their city.

are important differences in policy priorities between mayors of these cities: while over one-quarter of mayors of inexpensive cities listed increasing the availability of higher-end units as one of the top ways they would like to change their housing stock, only 6 percent of mayors of expensive cities felt the same (see Table 6). Similarly, only one-quarter of mayors of expensive cities prioritized modernizing or replacing older housing stock, compared with less than one-half of mayors of inexpensive cities.

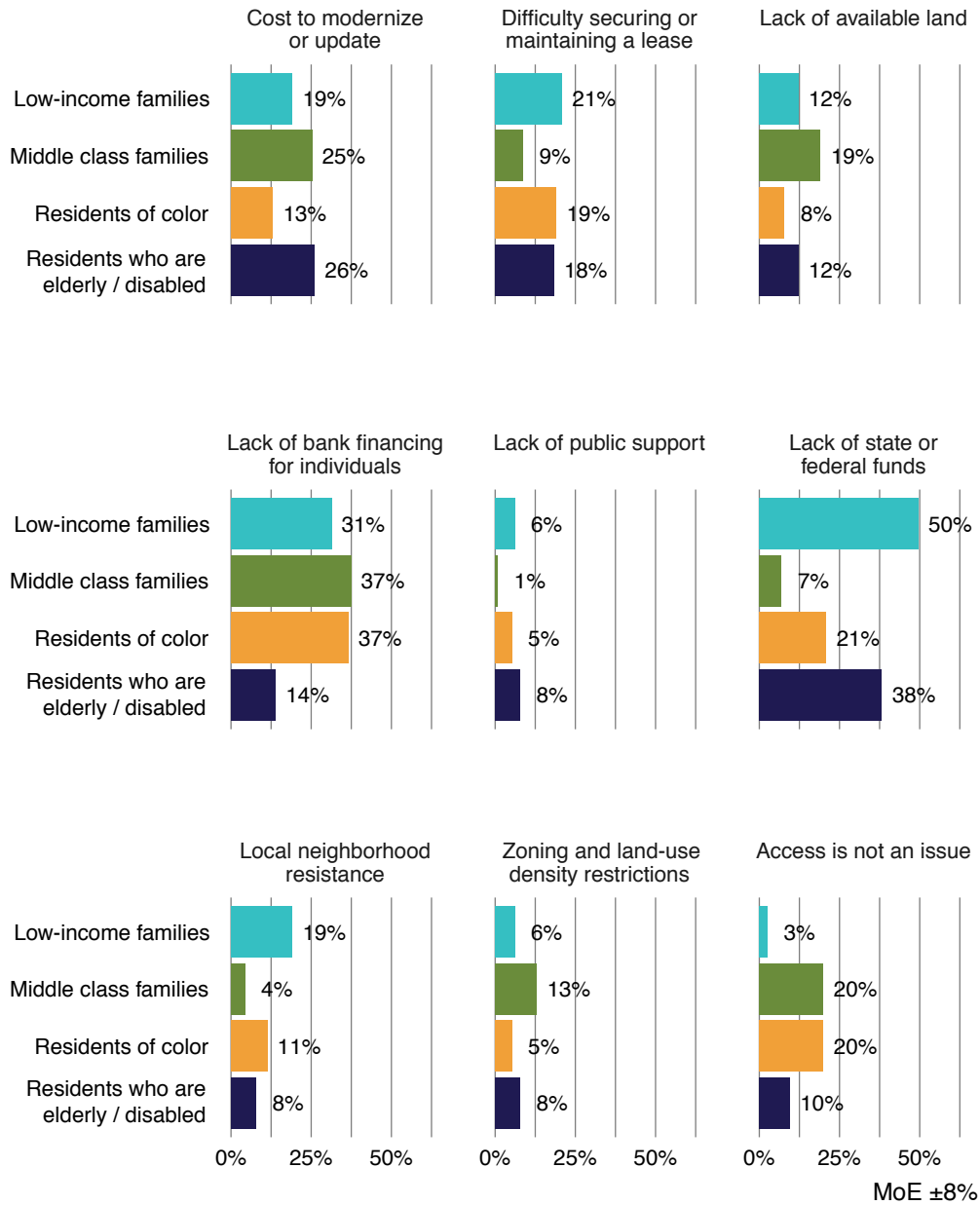
Taken together, mayors governing cities across the country and at all housing price levels would like to see significant changes to their existing housing stock. Some of these changes are common across city types, with mayors of a variety of cities highlighting the importance of increased homeownership and availability of affordable multibedroom units. Other policies are more localized, suggesting a mix of national programming and customized local approaches would be most appropriate for addressing mayoral housing priorities.

Addressing these housing challenges naturally comes with a number of significant obstacles. Mayors worried in particular about a lack of state or federal funds and inadequate bank financing for individuals. As illustrated in Figure 7, the salience of these challenges differed, however, depending upon which group mayors considered. While mayors did not believe mortgage financing was a major problem for residents who are elderly/disabled, one-third of mayors cited it as a potent obstacle for low-income and middle class families and for residents of color. Similarly, according to mayors, the diminishing availability of state and federal funds is particularly problematic for low-income families (49 percent of mayors) and residents who are elderly/disabled (38 percent of mayors).

Mayors also expressed concerns about the cost to modernize or update housing and the difficulty in securing or maintaining a lease. At least one-fifth of mayors mentioned outdated housing stock as a major concern for all groups except residents of color. Similarly, one-fifth of mayors highlighted lease difficulties for all groups except middle class families. Interestingly, only a small number of mayors cited zoning and land-use regulations as significant obstacles despite their prominence in national media accounts about the national affordable housing crisis. In addition, while mayors broadly are concerned about housing access in their communities, one-fifth of them did not believe that housing access was an issue for middle class families or residents of color.

Figure 7. Improving Housing Access: Top Two Obstacles

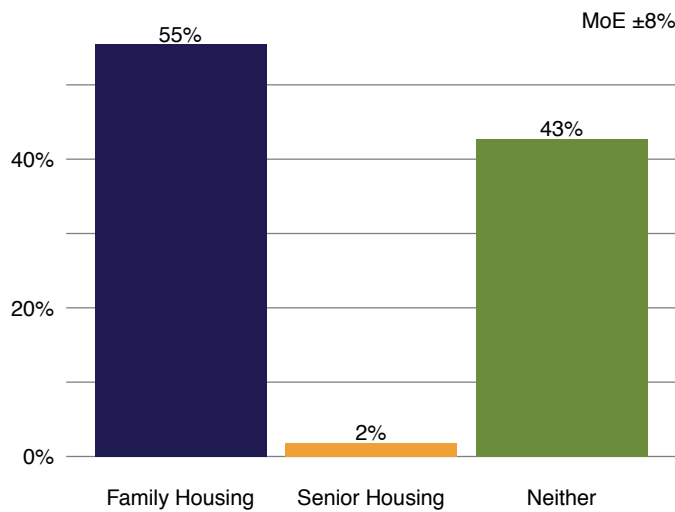
What are two biggest obstacles to improving access to housing for _____?



Potential political controversy surrounding affordable housing development also did not appear to be a top concern for mayors across most groups. One notable exception centers on low-income families: 20 percent of mayors suggested that local neighborhood resistance posed an important obstacle to housing access for that group. Similarly, when asked more explicitly about the types of housing that engender political controversy, 55 percent of mayors highlighted housing for families as more likely to spur conflict, with only 2 percent selecting housing for seniors (see Figure 8). As one mayor told us, there is a “greater acceptance of seniors that need help, [and] more of an understanding of their situation. For families, people are worried about the impact on schools.” Another mayor explained that housing developments for families are easier to oppose because “environmental impact studies would show more congestion and transportation issues for housing for families compared to housing for seniors.” Strikingly, 43 percent of mayors did not believe that either type of housing would generate political controversy in their communities.

Figure 8. Affordable Housing: Controversy over Types

Imagine you have received a grant to construct a new affordable housing development. Which type of project would generate more political controversy: senior housing or family housing? Or would neither generate controversy?



4. SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: LEADERSHIP, PARTISANSHIP, AND PRIORITIES

Mayors overwhelmingly agreed that climate change is due to human activities.

Eighty-four percent of mayors attributed increases in Earth’s temperature to human activities rather than natural changes (see Figure 9). This is a considerably greater proportion than in the mass public. According to 2017 Gallup data, only 68 percent of the public believes that climate change is a result of pollution from human activities.⁴

We notice important regional and partisan differences (see Table 7). Midwestern mayors were 27 percentage points more likely than their southern counterparts to agree that climate change was a result of human activities. Generally, midwestern and northeastern mayors — in line with their general political liberalism — were more likely to attribute climate change to human activities relative to leaders of southern and western cities.

Figure 9. Climate Change Causes: Human Activity vs Natural Causes

From what you have heard or read, do you believe increases in the Earth’s temperature over the last century are due more to the effects of pollution from human activities or natural changes in the environment that are not due to human activities?

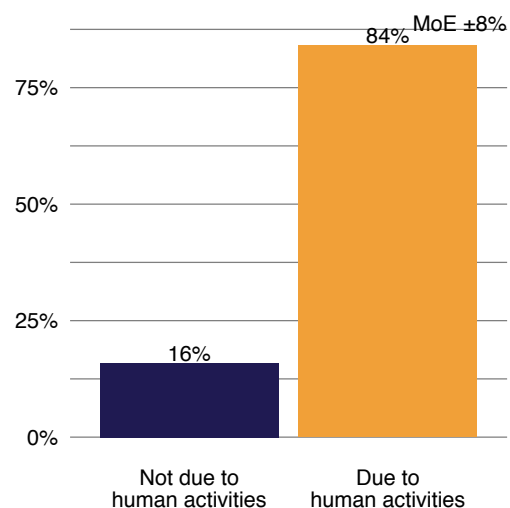


Table 7. Belief in Causes of Climate Change, by Region

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Human Activities	90%	97%	70%	83%
Natural Changes	10%	3%	30%	17%

In keeping with the national political divide on the facts surrounding climate change, Democratic and Republican mayors strongly disagreed on the root causes of climate change (see Table 8). Democratic mayors virtually unanimously agreed that climate change stems from human activities. In contrast, Republican mayors were evenly split on the question. These views largely mirror those of the mass public, where only 40 percent of Republicans believe that human activities are responsible for climate change.⁵

Table 8. Belief in Causes of Climate Change, by Party

	Democrats	Republicans	Others
Human Activities	95%	50%	79%
Natural Changes	5%	50%	21%

Consistent with their strong belief in human-driven climate change, mayors largely agree that governments should take action to address the effects of rises in Earth's temperature. A striking 68 percent of mayors agree that cities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenues or increasing expenditures (see Figure 10). This is a slight increase from the 60 percent who agreed with this trade-off three years ago.

Figure 10. Trade-offs: Mitigating Climate Change

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: *Cities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenues and/or expending financial resources.*

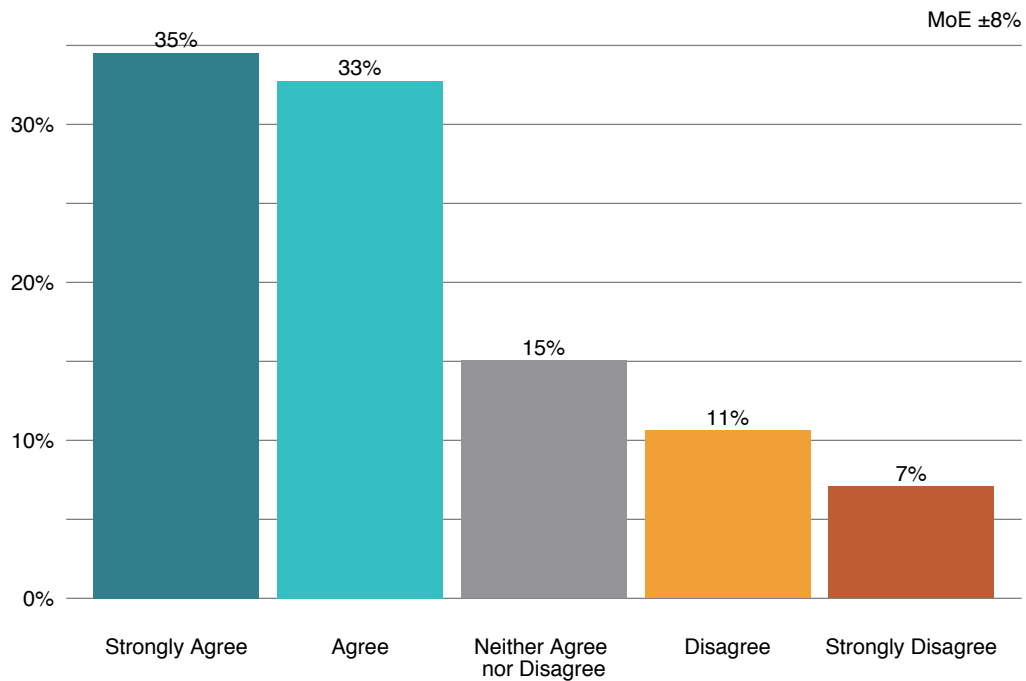
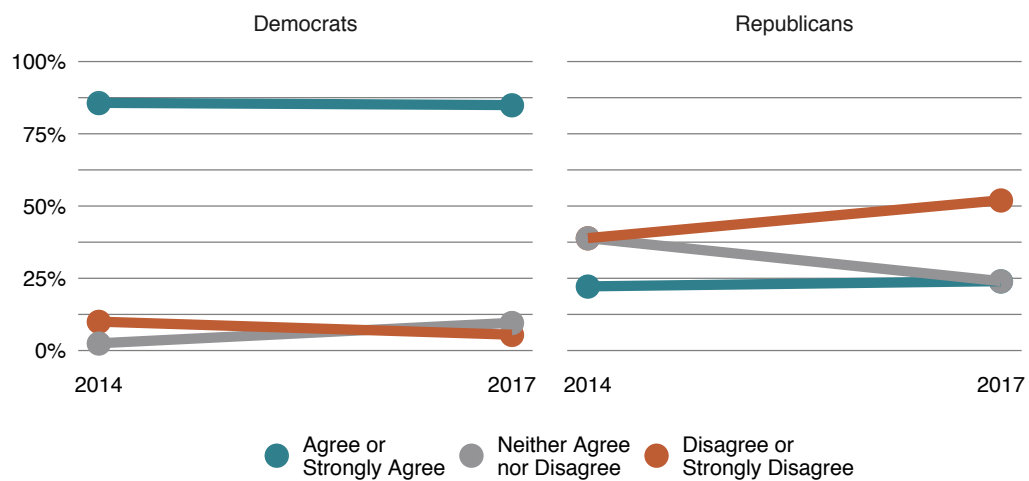


Figure 11. Mitigating Climate Change, by Party, 2014 to 2017⁶



Nationally, opinions on climate change are highly polarized along geographic and partisan lines (see Tables 9 and 10). Mayors in the South and West are more likely to oppose making fiscal sacrifices to address climate change relative to their counterparts in the Northeast and Midwest. The highest level of support for aggressive action on climate change was among midwestern mayors: 89 percent of them agreed that cities should reduce the effects of climate change even if it comes at the expense of city financial resources. This figure is almost 20 percentage points higher than any other region.

Table 9. Cities Should Play a Strong Role in Reducing Climate Change, by Region

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Strongly Agree	10%	48%	34%	31%
Agree	60%	41%	21%	29%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20%	7%	17%	18%
Disagree	10%	0%	10%	18%
Strongly Disagree	0%	3%	17%	4%

Partisan divides regarding local action on climate change are even starker and in line with national party stances on climate change. While 84 percent of Democratic mayors agree that cities should address climate change even if it means fiscal sacrifice, only 24 percent of Republican mayors feel the same. Compared to three years ago, Republicans are 20 percentage points more likely to oppose the trade-off, rendering responses more polarized along party lines. Changes among Democrats were comparatively smaller; they were slightly less likely to disagree with the trade-off and more inclined to adopt a neutral stance.

Table 10. Cities Should Play a Strong Role in Reducing Climate Change, by Party

	Democrats	Republicans	Others
Strongly Agree	42%	8%	40%
Agree	42%	16%	13%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	10%	24%	27%
Disagree	4%	24%	20%
Strongly Disagree	1%	28%	0%

Mayors highlight a number of promising environmental policy programs that their cities are interested in pursuing. Specifically, over one-third of mayors (35 percent) prioritize reducing the number of vehicles on the road and making city assets more energy efficient. Other popular environmental programs include green/alternative energy sourcing, flood mitigation, incentives for energy efficiency in private buildings, and smart traffic lights (see Figure 12). While mayors were asked about wish list sustainability programs, many of them indicated that these two prioritized initiatives were, in fact, already being implemented in their cities. These top sustainability priorities do vary by partisan affiliation (Table 11). In particular, Democrats were more likely to opt for alternative energy-related options such as “efficiency upgrades to city assets” and “alternative energy sourcing,” while Republicans much more frequently cited “smart traffic lights to reduce congestion.” Notably, the proportions citing options such as “flood mitigation” and “reducing the number of vehicles” on the road did not vary by party.

Figure 12. Sustainability Investment: Top Two Priorities

Thinking about the environment and sustainability in and around your city, what are the top two areas you would prioritize if you could allocate a significant amount of new money?

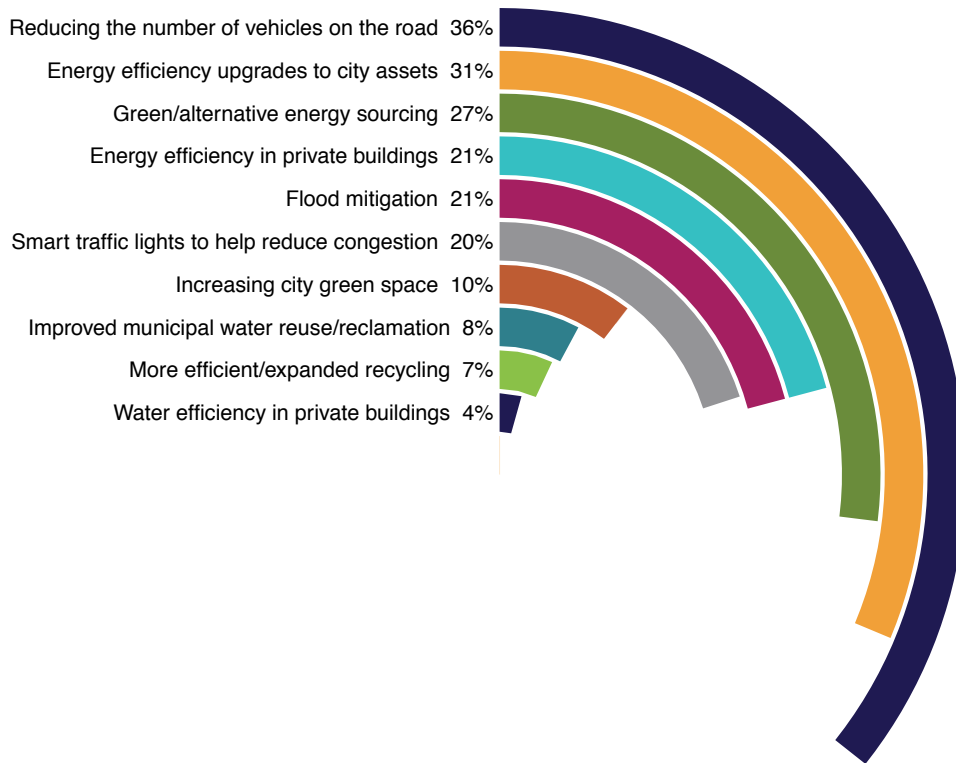


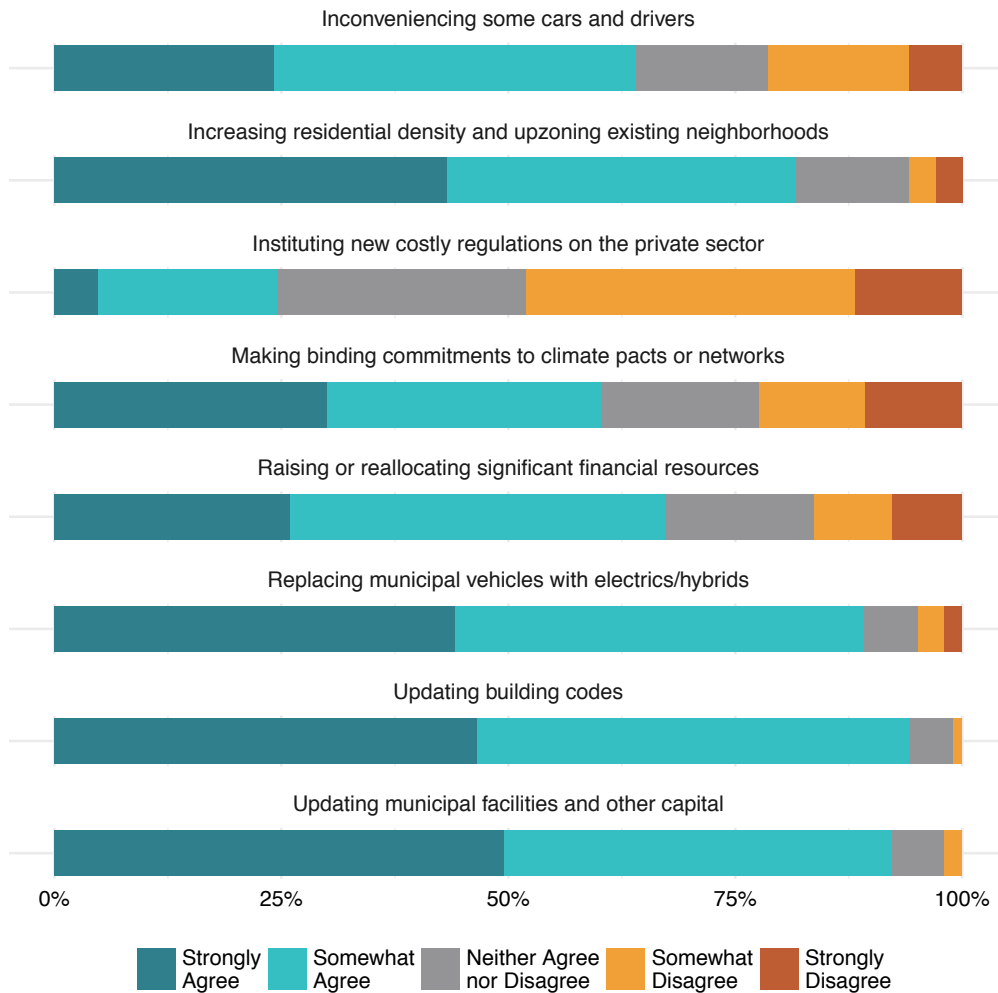
Table 11. Sustainability Investment: Top Two Priorities, by Party

	Democrats	Republicans
Energy efficiency in private buildings	21%	16%
Energy efficiency upgrades to city assets	35%	24%
Flood mitigation	20%	24%
Green/alternative energy sourcing	33%	12%
Improved municipal water reuse/reclamation	7%	12%
Increasing city green space	8%	12%
More efficient/expanded recycling	7%	4%
Reducing the number of vehicles on the road	35%	32%
Smart traffic lights to help reduce congestion	15%	40%
Water efficiency in private buildings	4%	4%

A strong majority of mayors agree that a serious effort toward locally combatting climate change requires increasing residential density, updating building codes, updating municipal facilities and other capital, and replacing municipal vehicles with electrics/hybrids (see Figure 13). Just over one-half endorsed raising significant financial resources, making binding commitments to climate pacts, and inconveniencing some cars and drivers as integral to mitigating the impact of climate change. Importantly, mayors largely did not believe that fighting climate change locally necessitates costly new regulations on the private sector; only 25 percent agreed that such programs were necessary to have a local impact.

Figure 13. Fighting Climate Change: Impactful Policies

In recent years, many mayors have pledged to fight climate change at the municipal level. A serious and sustained effort to make a meaningful impact in my city would require . . .



Democrats and Republicans shared some of the most commonly endorsed items on this list. For instance, 96 and 89 percent, respectively, agreed on “Updating municipal facilities;” 96 and 84 percent agreed on “Updating building codes;” and 84 and 79 percent agreed on “Increasing residential density.” On the other hand, there were also some strong partisan divides on the steps to be taken as part of a serious effort to address climate change locally. In particular, Democrats were 38 percentage points more likely to agree or disagree with “Inconveniencing some cars and drivers;” 46 points more likely to agree with “Making binding commitments to climate pacts;” and 21 points more likely to agree with “Instituting costly regulations on the private sector.”

Table 12. Fighting Climate Change: Agree or Strongly Agree, by Party

	Democrats	Republicans
Inconveniencing some cars and drivers	71%	33%
Increasing residential density and upzoning existing neighborhoods	84%	79%
Instituting new costly regulations on the private sector	26%	5%
Making binding commitments to climate pacts or networks	72%	26%
Raising or reallocating significant financial resources	74%	63%
Replacing municipal vehicles with electrics/hybrids	93%	89%
Updating building codes	96%	84%
Updating municipal facilities and other capital	96%	89%

5. BUDGETS AND FEDERALISM

Confronted with mounting federal and state budget cuts, mayors continue to examine new ways to fund basic city services and capital needs. Mayors are concerned about the level of financial support they receive from superior governments, particularly given the critical role that government transfers play in municipal fiscal health. Mayors regularly cited a lack of state and federal funds as the primary obstacle to expanding housing access at the local level (see Figure 7). Mayors are confident that, on average, they can meet just 52 percent of their city's infrastructure needs over the next five years.

As they were two years ago, mayors are pessimistic about the financial support they are receiving from other levels of government. If anything, they are more pessimistic today. When asked how much support their cities receive from federal or state government, more than one-half feel they get “less than average” relative to their peers. Only 7 and 10 percent, respectively, feel they get “above-average” support (see Figure 14). In actuality, unless the distribution of funding is very strange, more participating cities receive above-average support than they believe they do. The responses are likely capturing the general sense that cities are not getting what they need. The most severe pessimism concerns state government. Mayors much more frequently placed their cities in the most extreme negative category of “much less” support from their respective state governments.

Mayors are also expressing more pessimism than they did two years ago. While roughly the same portion of mayors believe they get either “less” or “much” less than average support from their state governments, about 10 percent of mayors have moved into the “much less” category making it the most common response in 2017 (Figure 15). More notably, about one-half as many mayors (9 percent in total) say they receive above-average support from the federal government than they did two years ago, when approximately 20 percent were on the optimistic end of this scale. As the figure shows, the proportion indicating “more support” from the federal government declined notably between the 2015 and 2017 Surveys.

Mayors' responses to an analogous question about autonomy and preemption varied considerably more based on which level of government they were describing. As one would expect, since federal law is essentially common to all cities, mayors tended to say that federal laws give their city an “average” level of autonomy compared to other cities (see Figure 16). In contrast, many mayors provided very negative answers regarding their state governments. “Much less” autonomy than average was the most common response, followed by “less than average.”

Mayors are feeling even more unfairly treated by their states when it comes to their own autonomy, relative to just two years ago. The general reality of mayors lamenting limitations on their autonomy was unchanged. In both 2015 and 2017, the “less than average” options were the most commonly used. However, the proportion of responses falling into both the “less” and “much less” options increased in 2017, while those reporting “average” and “more” autonomy decreased (Figure 17). Similarly, the number of mayors who responded that their city had average levels of autonomy from the federal government declined by 10 percentage points, while those responding “much less” and “less” autonomy increased.

Republican and Democratic mayors are feeling similarly — if poorly — treated by higher levels of government. Mayors' perceptions of fiscal support and autonomy are independent of their partisan affiliations and, presumably, their policy positions (see Table 13). The average Democrat and the average Republican fall into the “less than average” category for financial support and autonomy at both levels of government. It is not the case, for example, that Democrats are complaining more about funding because they want to spend more, or that Republicans feel less constrained by the federal government due to unified party control. The biggest difference between Democrats and Republicans on any of these questions was a mere .2 on a five-point scale.

Table 13. Mean Financial Support and Autonomy, by Mayor's Party

	Democrats	Republicans	Others
Financial Support: State	2.3	2.2	1.9
Financial Support: Federal	2.5	2.3	1.9
Autonomy: State	2.2	2.3	2.4
Autonomy: Federal	2.8	2.8	2.7

Figure 14. Financial Support

Compared to an average city nationwide, how much financial support do you expect your city to receive from each of the following other governments in the next year?

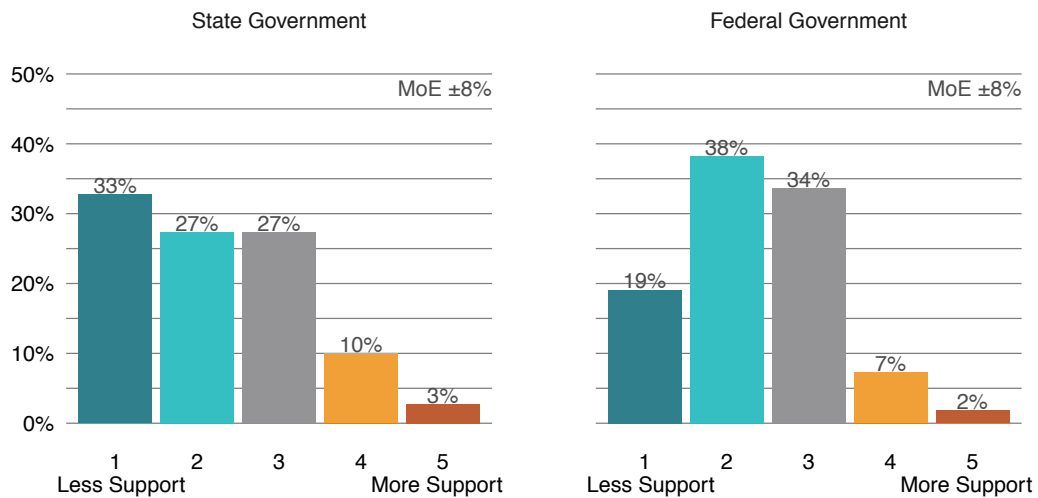


Figure 15. Financial Support over Time⁷

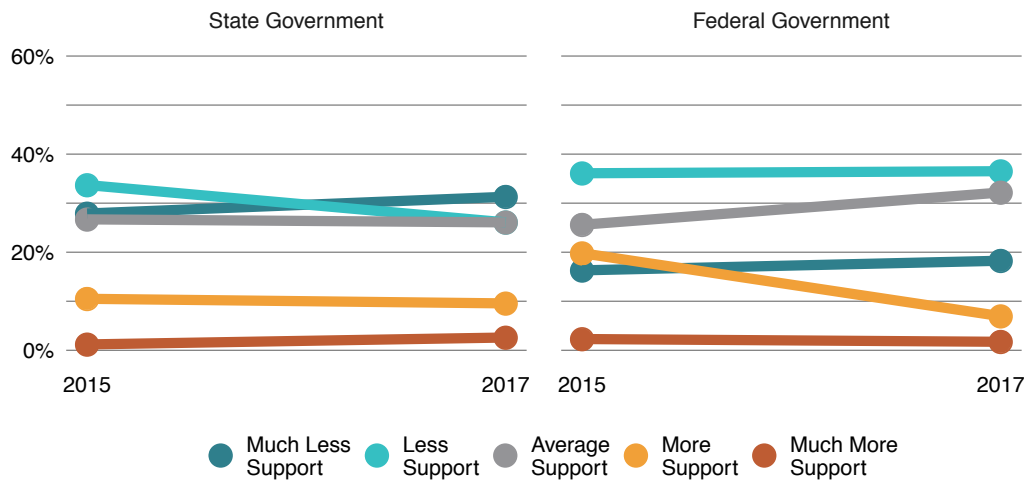


Figure 16. Policy Autonomy

Compared to an average city nationwide, how much do you expect laws and regulations (existing and new) from each of the following other governments to limit your city's policy-making autonomy and flexibility?

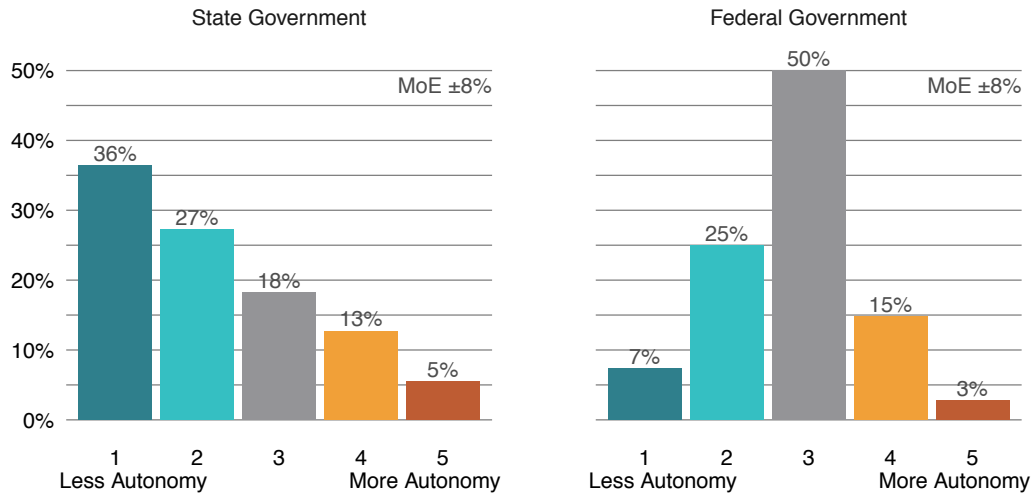
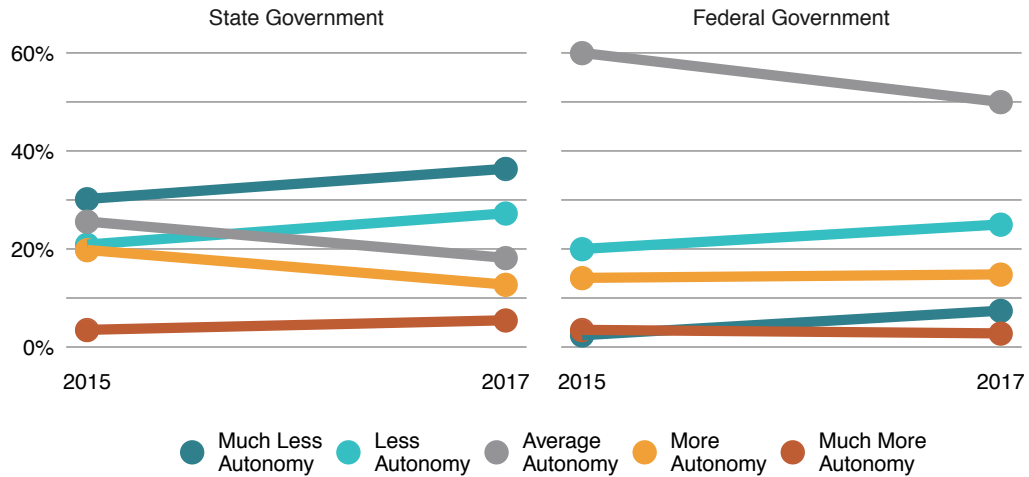


Figure 17. Policy Autonomy over Time⁸



5.1 Lobbying Federal and State Governments

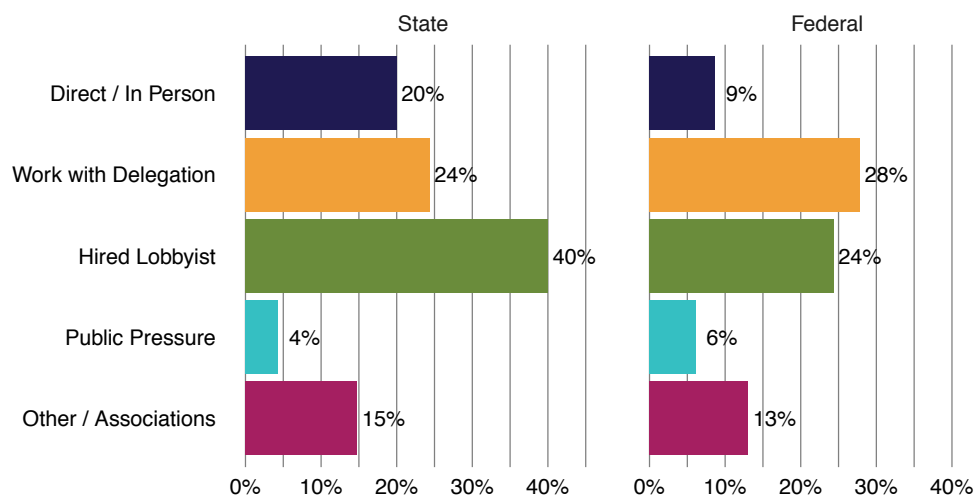
Mayors and their cities rely on a mix of tactics to influence policy-making at higher levels of government.

Given their need for fiscal support, worries about autonomy, and concerns about policy choices, it is not surprising that cities and mayors, like other special interests, lobby and attempt to shape other governments' actions. However, the mayors' responses to an open-ended prompt about influencing policy suggests there is no one dominant tactic for pursuing the city's policy priorities in the state capital and in Washington, DC.

When it comes to influencing policy at both the state and national levels, the two most commonly cited approaches are utilizing paid lobbyists and working with one's legislative delegation (see Figure 18). Forty percent of mayors cited hired lobbyists at the state level compared to only 24 percent at the federal level. At 40 percent, this was the closest thing to a consensus tactic in response to the question. Working with the legislative delegation was the most commonly cited tactic for influencing federal policy. The other notable difference between the two levels of government was that mayors more frequently cited in-person attempts at influencing state policy (e.g., face-to-face meetings at the capital or testifying in the legislature) relative to federal policy. This difference makes sense: relative to the federal government, the size and proximity of state government increases a given mayor's ability to personally influence an agency choice or legislative committee markup.

Figure 18. Mayoral Approaches to Lobbying

Please describe your current plans and efforts to influence policy at the state and national levels. How, if at all, have your strategies changed since the 2016 election?

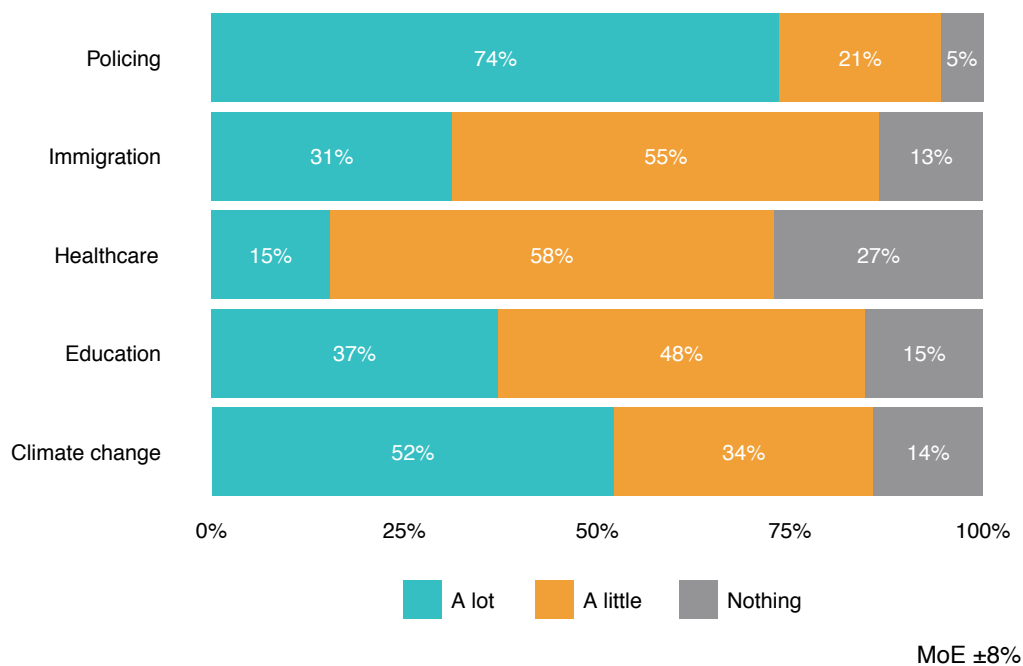


5.2 Responding to the Trump Administration

In the first months of the Trump administration, some cities and mayors very publicly challenged the president's agenda and promised to take steps to oppose it. In general, mayors recognize limitations on cities' ability to thwart federal policies with which they disagree. As shown in Figure 19, the area in which mayors reported having the most ability to counteract the president's agenda was policing, which is also an area that mayors tend to have direct institutional prerogatives over. Nearly three-quarters of mayors said they could do "a lot" to counteract the administration in this area, and only five percent said they could do "nothing." The second issue over which mayors claimed "a lot" of influence was climate change. This is an area in which cities' coordinated opposition has been highly visible. As important are the areas in which mayors said they could do nothing. Healthcare, in which cities play a limited role, was the issue for which mayors most often said they can do nothing. Perhaps more surprisingly, 15 percent said they could do "nothing" about education policy, and only one-third said "a lot," despite education being an area in which the federal government provides relatively little money and has relatively little direct control.

Figure 19. Areas in Which Mayors Believe They Can Counteract Federal Policy

Many mayors have publicly stated they would take actions to counteract President Trump's policies. Regardless of whether you agree with these mayors, for each of the following policy areas, how much can mayors do to counteract the administration's policies?



While there are naturally partisan differences on a question such as this, there are also places where Democrats and Republicans gave similar answers. The area with the most divergence is climate change. Sixty-three percent of Democrats, many of whom were in the process of responding to the administration’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, said that cities can do “a lot,” compared to 24 percent of Republicans. The other area with some partisan divergence is policing, where 79 percent of Democrats said they could do “a lot” to counteract the administration, compared with 62 percent of Republicans. On the other hand, mayors’ responses were relatively similar about the potential for thwarting the administration in education and especially immigration. Finally, it is notable that across the board, Democrats were less likely, and, in all but healthcare, extremely unlikely, to say there was “nothing” they could do.

Table 14. Counteracting the Administration, by Party

	Democrats			Republicans		
	A lot	A little	Nothing	A lot	A little	Nothing
Climate change	63%	33%	4%	24%	48%	28%
Education	39%	52%	9%	33%	38%	29%
Healthcare	21%	56%	24%	4%	62%	33%
Immigration	36%	53%	11%	29%	58%	12%
Policing	79%	18%	3%	62%	21%	17%

5.3 Mitigating Budget Cuts

The mayors' responses to other questions (see Section 5. Budgets and Federalism) point to serious concerns about funding in important policy areas and infrastructure priorities. Their evaluations of alternative sources of funding speak to the potential, or lack thereof, of mitigating the effects of federal shortfalls in key policy areas. In general, new taxes and resources at the state and/or local level were seen as the most promising ways to plug fiscal gaps (see Figure 20). Mayors especially cited state taxes as the funding sources they were most likely to pursue to make up for diminished federal resources for education and maintenance of roads and bridges, while citing local taxes in areas such as bike and pedestrian friendliness and water infrastructure. Mayors almost never saw nonprofits or privatization as plausible fiscal gap fillers in any issue area, though a few (roughly 10 percent) saw potential for these options in affordable housing provision.

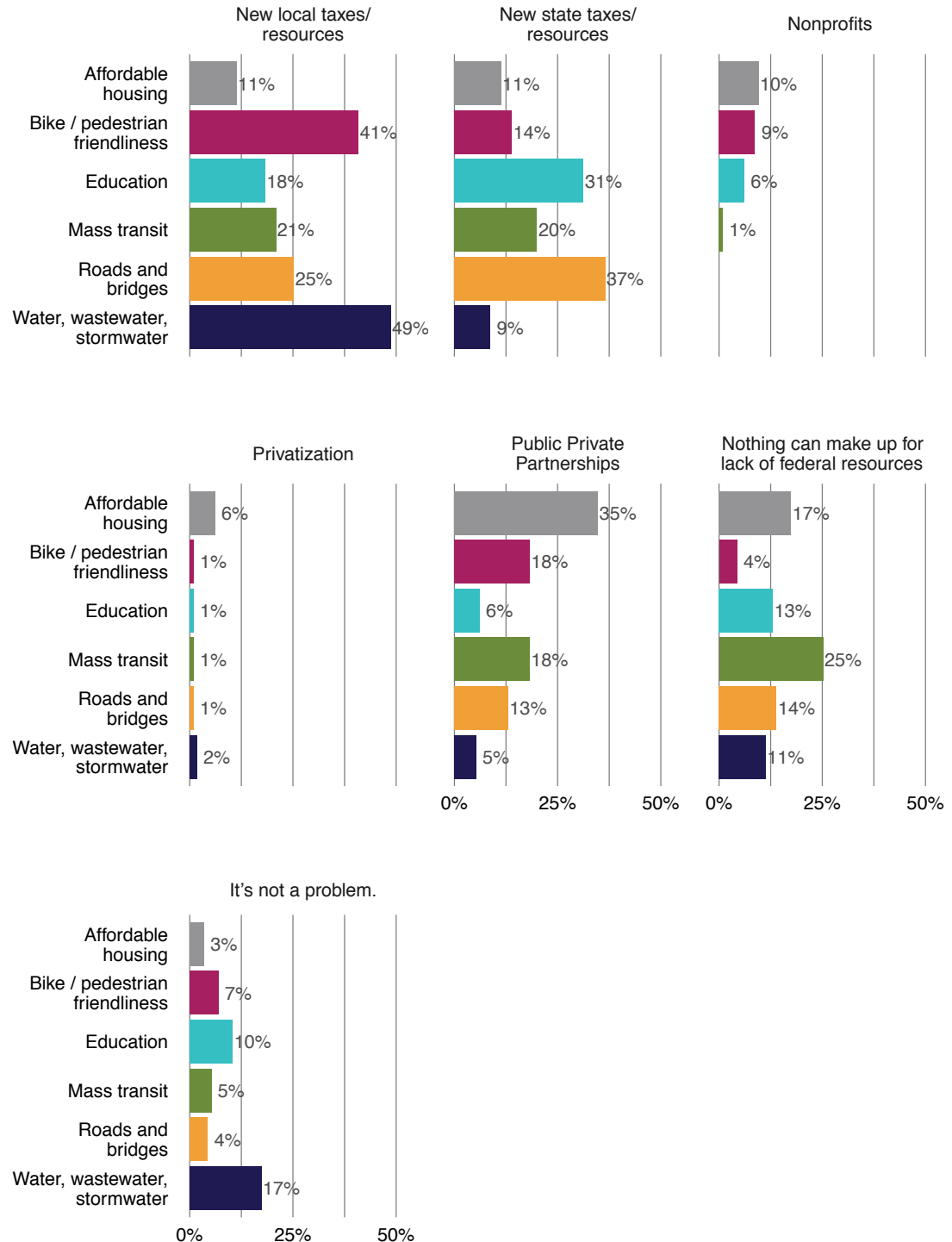
According to the mayors, the more promising nongovernment option for filling gaps in housing funding is public private partnerships. With 35 percent of mayors choosing this response, public private partnerships were the most commonly cited pathway (i.e., more than relying on government alone) to meet funding shortfalls related to affordable housing. At the same time as public private partnerships were seen as the best option for housing, housing was seen as the most promising application of public private partnerships. Eighteen percent of mayors also saw strong potential for such partnerships in both public transit and bike infrastructure.

Thirty-five percent of mayors cited public private partnerships as promising options for funding affordable housing, compared to only 11 percent of mayors citing local taxes or resources.

While some mayors were optimistic about options such as public private partnerships to make up for limitations on federal funding for affordable housing and transit, these areas were also most frequently cited as those in which “nothing can make up for a lack of federal funding.” Twenty-five percent of mayors selected this option in reference to mass transit, and nearly 20 percent cited it for affordable housing.

Figure 20. Alternate Sources of Funding

Federal budget reductions may make it harder for cities to fund important projects and functions. In the face of continuing or new federal budget reductions, which, if any, of the following are you most likely to pursue to help fill the funding gap? Please select one option for each spending category.



MoE ±8%

6. CITY-TO-CITY NETWORKS AND COMPACTS

In the absence of federal and state government support, one way that mayors might address common policy challenges is by working together through formal city-to-city networks and compacts. These compacts, such as “Global Covenant of Mayors,” “Cities United,” and “Mayors Against Illegal Guns,” vary in terms of their substantive focus (e.g., environment, violence, etc.) and their maturity, as some have relatively long histories while others have recently developed in response to new trends and events. Mayors referenced a number of compacts ranging from international networks of very large cities to regional groups within one US state. As shown in Figure 21, two-thirds of mayors spoke positively and expressed optimism in such compacts while describing the reasons cities participate in them.⁹ For example, the mayor of a midsize city in the Midwest said that “People understand that the success of cities is intertwined.” Similarly, the mayor of a smaller city in the West said, “Collectively, we can have a greater impact than if we acted alone.” On the other hand, a portion of mayors, including policy supporters, were neutral or even cynical about the value of these compacts. For example, one southern mayor said, “Some want to be seen as part of the group.” Others pointed to political reasons underlying participation. The Democratic mayor of a large city noted the ability to “publicly say we support it” saying, “We can’t really say no,” and explaining, “There are constituencies in your community that expect you to be their voice.”

More specifically, mayors see public signaling and coordination, rather than access to resources, as the primary benefits of compacts. Speaking of the reasons mayors join compacts, 44 percent of those who expressed optimism in compacts provided responses that speak to their signaling value (see Figure 22). These benefits included strength in numbers, taking a public stand, and raising issue salience. For example, one midwestern Democrat said that joining can help “Frame out a common goal” and “create a level of accountability.” A southern mayor said that compacts “Increase political voice . . . and give more clout to an issue when mayors unite around common issues.” Twenty-five percent of mayors with positive views of compacts cited reasons related to accessing resources such as shared information and best practices; one mayor observed, “We can share and coordinate activities and information. We can take advantage of economies of scale.” Another

Figure 21. City-to-City Networks: Perceived Value
Many mayors have joined policy-related city-to-city networks or compacts. Why do you think mayors make these types of commitments? (Open-ended comments coded by tone/valence)

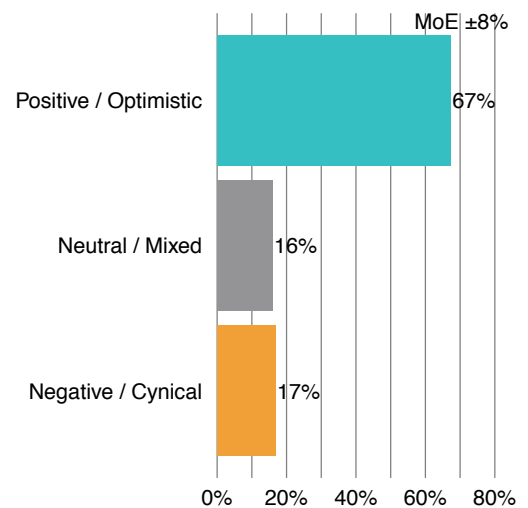
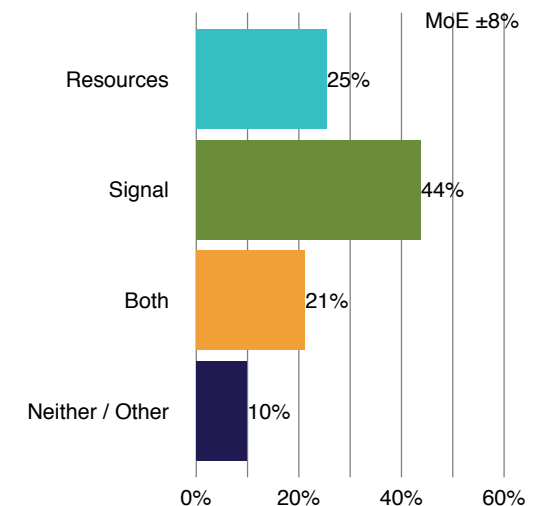


Figure 22. Benefits of Pacts, Among Mayors Viewing Pacts Favorably





21 percent provided responses that included both categories of rationales such that, overall, 65 percent of mayors provided at least one signaling rationale, and 46 percent cited at least one resource-based reason. Most mayors who were more skeptical about compacts spoke of them in terms of signaling and politics rather than resources.

Finally, most mayors do not see compacts as strong constraints on their actions. Seventy-two percent of mayors said that they are not part of any compacts that are “difficult to keep,” while only 21 percent reported being part of at least one pledge that was a challenge to uphold. That is, being part of a compact generally does not have a strong independent effect on prompting cities to take actions that they would prefer not to take. Most mayors

“Mayors are learning that they have to use their collective voice to more strongly influence decisionmakers.”

— A MIDSIZE SOUTHERN CITY MAYOR

said that their cities are thoughtful about the compacts they join and that they get involved in issues that fit their priorities. For example, the mayor of a large eastern city said, “*They’re policies I was interested in anyway.*” Emblematic of the sentiments of many of his colleagues, one southern mayor noted that he is “*reasonable about what he commits to.*” For example, the

mayor did not join Mayors Against Illegal Guns because it was not a good fit for the mayor’s region of the country. Others did, however, note that external changes can make keeping pledges challenging. One mayor mentioned that changes in political leadership make regional water pacts difficult, and another observed that solar subsidies were halved after his city made a specific commitment to expanding their use.

7. LEVERAGING DATA IN DECISION-MAKING

New technologies and an overall emphasis on government efficiency have prompted many mayors to devise data dashboards and integrate these tools into their decision-making processes. Increasingly, mayors require data to evaluate the complicated policy areas and city operations explored throughout this report.

This year, the Menino Survey delved into the types of data mayors look to when they are making decisions about particular policy areas. Some policies, such as education, lend themselves to clear evaluative metrics; mayors homed in on graduation rates when considering how best to evaluate schools. Similarly, when asked about how they evaluated public safety and police department performance, mayors emphasized crime. For constituent views, mayors highlighted surveys, though a variety of other metrics, including email, complaints, neighborhood contacts, and the media, also received frequent mentions (see Figure 23).

In contrast, there is considerably less consensus about how to measure economic performance. While unemployment was the most common mayoral metric, mayors also considered a wide variety of other factors related to income, sales, taxes, and jobs. Even more strikingly, there was virtually no agreement on a set of clear measures of housing affordability and equity. While many mayors say that these issues are top priorities, there is little agreement on how to evaluate whether a city is succeeding in addressing or struggling with these problems.

“Unemployment data are not very reliable. The numbers tend to be regional and don’t tell the story of underemployment. Median income indicates whether we’re seeing real movement.”

— A MIDSIZE NORTHEASTERN CITY MAYOR

The word clouds used to analyze mayors’ responses are particularly revealing when compared to one another. Smaller clouds are an indication of the greater homogeneousness or consistency in responses, while the larger or more diffuse clouds indicate the potential difficulty mayors face in homing in on specific evaluative metrics in these areas.

The lack of responses to some of the other topics posed was also telling. Mayors were asked which data metric or piece of information they rely on to assess how their city is doing with relation to the issue of equity. In most cases, mayors were simply unable to provide a specific answer. While national and local political rhetoric often focuses on the lack of equity and inequality, there appears to be no easy or single mechanism by which a mayor judges how their city is performing.

Figure 23. Data Metrics Mayors Rely on by Policy Area

Data is an increasingly important part of city operations. For each of the following, which one data metric or piece of information do you find most helpful in assessing how your city is doing?

School Performance



Public Safety



Economy



Police Department Performance



Housing Affordability



Constituent Views



8. CONCLUSION

In the first year of the Menino Survey, conducted in 2014, we discovered that mayors are focused on three interrelated priorities: the physical, economic, and human infrastructure of their city. With each year, we have sought to delve deeper into these key themes to identify both the underlying challenges and how mayors are tackling them.

We have come to understand their physical infrastructure priorities as encompassing not just roads and bridges, but also mass transit, bike lanes, water and sewer, and housing.

We have learned that mayors view issues such as public safety, inclusivity, and workforce development as integrally linked to their city's economic vitality and ability to attract businesses, residents, and visitors.

We have also come to recognize mayors' deep concern for and focus on residents who are marginalized and residents who are living in poverty.

Last, we have discerned a great deal about the frequency with which mayors share ideas and best practices with one another, as they seek impact and improvements to quality of life.

The 2017 Survey sought to illuminate mayoral priorities and leadership challenges in two new policy areas — housing and climate change — and to broadly understand how mayors are responding to the rapidly changing federal and state political environment.

Funding cutbacks, from both federal and state sources, are worrying to mayors nationwide as substituting for such resources is often difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, even with less money available, they are deeply apprehensive about housing affordability and focused on identifying policy tools and investments that will help their cities expand options and access. Moreover, in many cases, they are concerned about climate change and taking action to mitigate and adapt to its effects. Active players in the fight for funding, they are using new tools to lobby for the resources their cities need, while pursuing new funding models and expanding own source revenues. They are also, at times, banding together, forming city-to-city networks that allow them to speak with a common voice and to elevate their shared priorities. These findings and others offer insight into how mayors are rallying individually and as a collective to address the many challenges before them, and how they are capitalizing on opportunities where they believe cities can effect positive change.

We hope that this survey proves to be a valuable tool for understanding mayors and guiding those who support their work. We are grateful for having had the opportunity to speak with so many talented public servants, and we look forward to continuing to learn about their dynamic leadership.

Footnotes

1. The 42 percent of respondents from business backgrounds consist of everyone from very small business owners to leaders of large corporations.
2. Source: 2015 American Community Survey (ACS), published by the US Census Bureau.
3. Cities are divided into thirds based on the distribution of median housing prices across cities with at least 75,000 people nationally.
4. "Global Warming Concern at Three-Decade High in US," Gallup News, March 17, 2017.
5. "Democrats Drive Rise in Concern About Global Warming," Gallup News, March 17, 2017.
6. Source: 2014 Menino Survey of Mayors.
7. Source: 2015 Menino Survey of Mayors.
8. Source: 2015 Menino Survey of Mayors.
9. We qualitatively coded the tone of the response and the valence of the reasons they gave.



The background features a large teal chevron shape pointing to the right, set against a white background. In the top right and bottom right corners, there are orange triangular shapes.

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