

Mayoral Views on Racism and Discrimination

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The National League of Cities (NLC) is the nation's leading advocacy organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. Through its membership and partnerships with state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource and advocate for more than 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans. NLC's Center for City Solutions provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to the future of cities. It also provides creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in overcoming tough issues and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities. NLC's Race, Equity and Leadership Initiative (REAL) equips local officials with the skills to examine local systems, identify issues, craft policies, and lead challenging discussions on race and equity by offering training, technical assistance, network building opportunities and sharing best practices.

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About The Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Boston University Initiative on Cities (IOC) was co-founded in 2014 by the City of Boston's longest-serving mayor, Tom Menino, and Boston University (BU) Professor of Political Science, Graham Wilson. The IOC operates as a cross-university research initiative bridging the divide between urban scholarly research and local governance, both domestically and internationally. It seeks to understand and advance the transformative urban leadership strategies and policies necessary to support cities as dynamic, inclusive centers of economic growth and positive development. To fulfill this mission, the IOC leads the only scientifically-rigorous survey of American mayors, convenes multi-stakeholder conferences on pressing urban issues, and supports early-stage urban research in the social, natural, computational, political and health sciences. The IOC also provides fellowship opportunities that embed Boston University (BU) graduate students in mayors' offices in the U.S. and abroad, and leads executive leadership programs on urban governance and power.

Learn more at www.bu.edu/ioc.

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Mayoral Views on Racism and Discrimination

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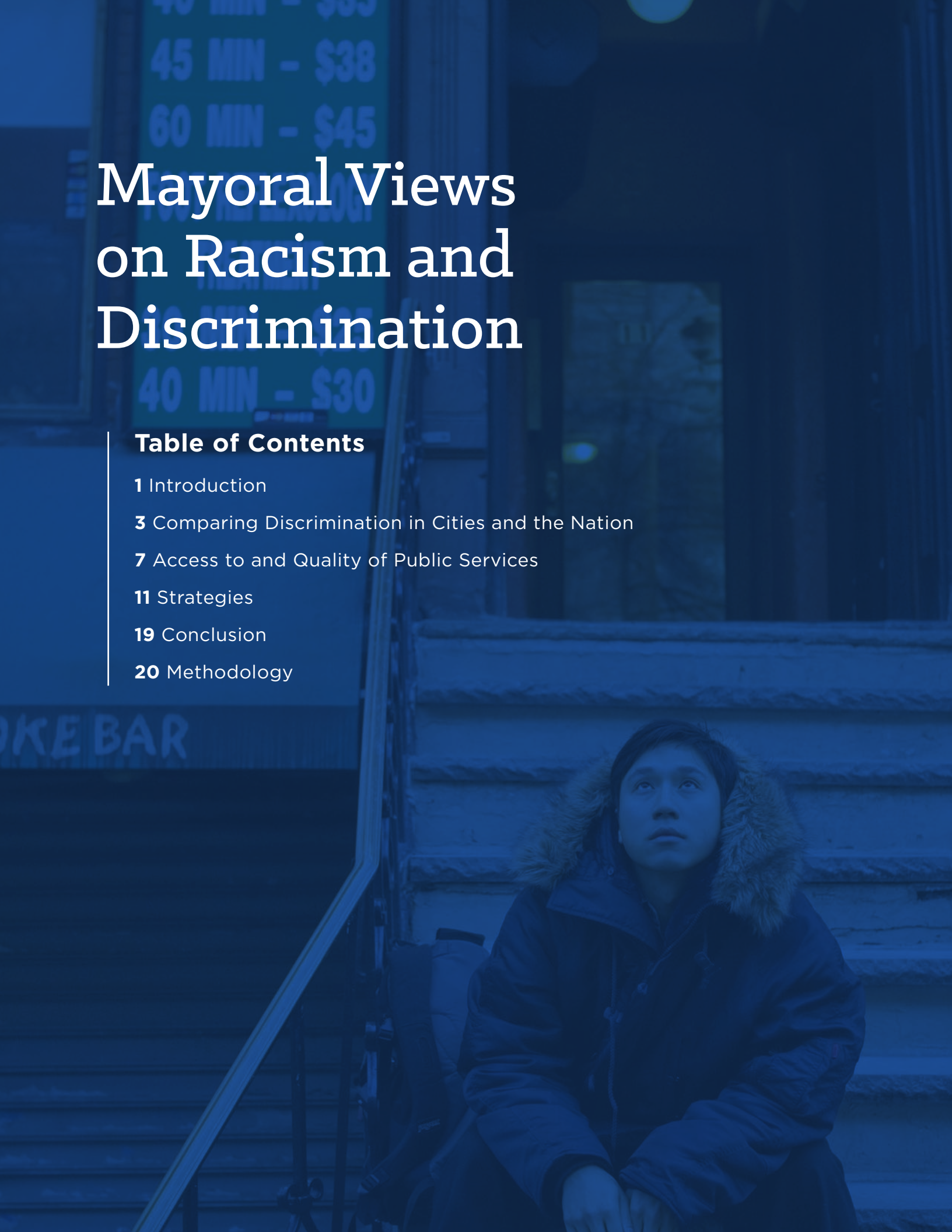
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Introduction

From the tragedies of Ferguson, Mo. to Charlottesville, Va., Staten Island, N.Y. and beyond, issues of race and racial equity have once again become a national conversation. Over the last several years, these events have demanded acknowledgment and brought attention to the ways that race and identity impact every facet of society. In many ways, the nation's cities and their leaders have been at the epicenter of this national conversation on race, discrimination and equity.

Mayors play a critical role in the work of combating discrimination. In addition to setting budget and policy priorities for local governments, a mayor's leadership, actions and words influence the attitudes of the community. As one mayor stated during

an interview for the 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors, "It is important to make clear our expectations for the community, and to create a positive normative environment against discrimination."

Psychologist and *New Yorker* contributing writer Maria Konnikova underscored this point, explaining that, "The voice of authority speaks not for the one but for the many; authority figures have a strong and rapid effect on social norms in part because they change our assumptions about what other people think."¹ Mayors' judgments influence the perceptions of community members, and their beliefs help set the trajectory of equity in their cities.

In short, mayors' views on racism and discrimination, and their responses to it, matter.

This report examines mayoral views on racism and discrimination. There are three key takeaways:

- 1** Mayors believe that the four groups most discriminated against in their cities and across the country are immigrants, transgender individuals, black people and Muslims. In relation to these groups and others, mayors perceive far more discrimination in the country as a whole than in their own communities.
- 2** Mayors believe that access to public services is significantly better for white people than for people of color, except for subsidized housing. More than half of all mayors report that white people have better access to jobs, educational opportunities, housing and healthcare, and are treated better by police and the courts.
- 3** While mayors see disparities in access to services, they overwhelmingly believe that the quality of services is largely equal across different groups of people, except for educational services, which they think is worse for people of color.

This research was made possible through a collaboration between the Boston University Initiative on Cities (IOC) and the National League of Cities (NLC), supported by Citi Community Development and The Rockefeller Foundation. The IOC interviewed 115 sitting U.S. mayors from cities with populations greater than 75,000 on a wide range of questions related to city leadership. A portion of these questions were about racism and discrimination in their cities and

on a national level, as well as access to and the quality of services for people of color as compared to white people.

This report details these findings and offers strategies for city leaders to address discrimination in their communities. NLC developed these strategies through on-the-ground efforts helping city leaders and city staff working to address institutional and structural racism.



A large crowd of people walking down a city street, overlaid with a blue tint. The text "Comparing Discrimination in Cities and the Nation" is written in white serif font on the right side of the image.

Comparing Discrimination in Cities and the Nation

In the survey, mayors indicate that immigrants, transgender individuals, black people and Muslims experience the most significant levels of discrimination. These observations remained consistent regardless of whether the mayors were asked about their own cities or the nation as a whole.

However, mayors perceive significantly more discrimination in the nation as a whole than in their own cities. For example, nearly one in four mayors (23%) report that transgender people face a lot of discrimination in their city, but when asked about discrimination in the country, more than six in 10 mayors (63%) report that transgender people face a lot of discrimination.

The starkest city versus country differences among mayors are found in perceptions of discrimination against sexual orientation and religion. Significantly more mayors perceive gay and lesbian (53 percentage points), Jewish (44 percentage points) and Muslim people (41 percentage points) as experiencing some or a lot of discrimination in the nation as a whole.

All mayors believe that immigrants, transgender individuals, black people and Muslims, as well as gay and lesbians, experience some level of discrimination, even if only a little, in the country. Additionally, 60 percent of mayors perceive black people face at least some local discrimination, while only 11 percent of mayors indicate that black people do not experience any discrimination in their city.

Mayors perceive significantly more discrimination
in the nation as a whole
than they do in their cities.

Mayoral Views on Racism and Discrimination

Mayors generally agree on who faces the most discrimination, but view all groups as worse off in the nation relative to their cities. What, then, accounts for these differences in perception of discrimination in their cities versus the country? Mayors' perceptions of discrimination are informed by the unique history of discrimination in their cities, as well as by data and day-to-day interactions with residents. Other influences include key stakeholders, as well as widespread local and national public opinion of present-day acts of discrimination.³

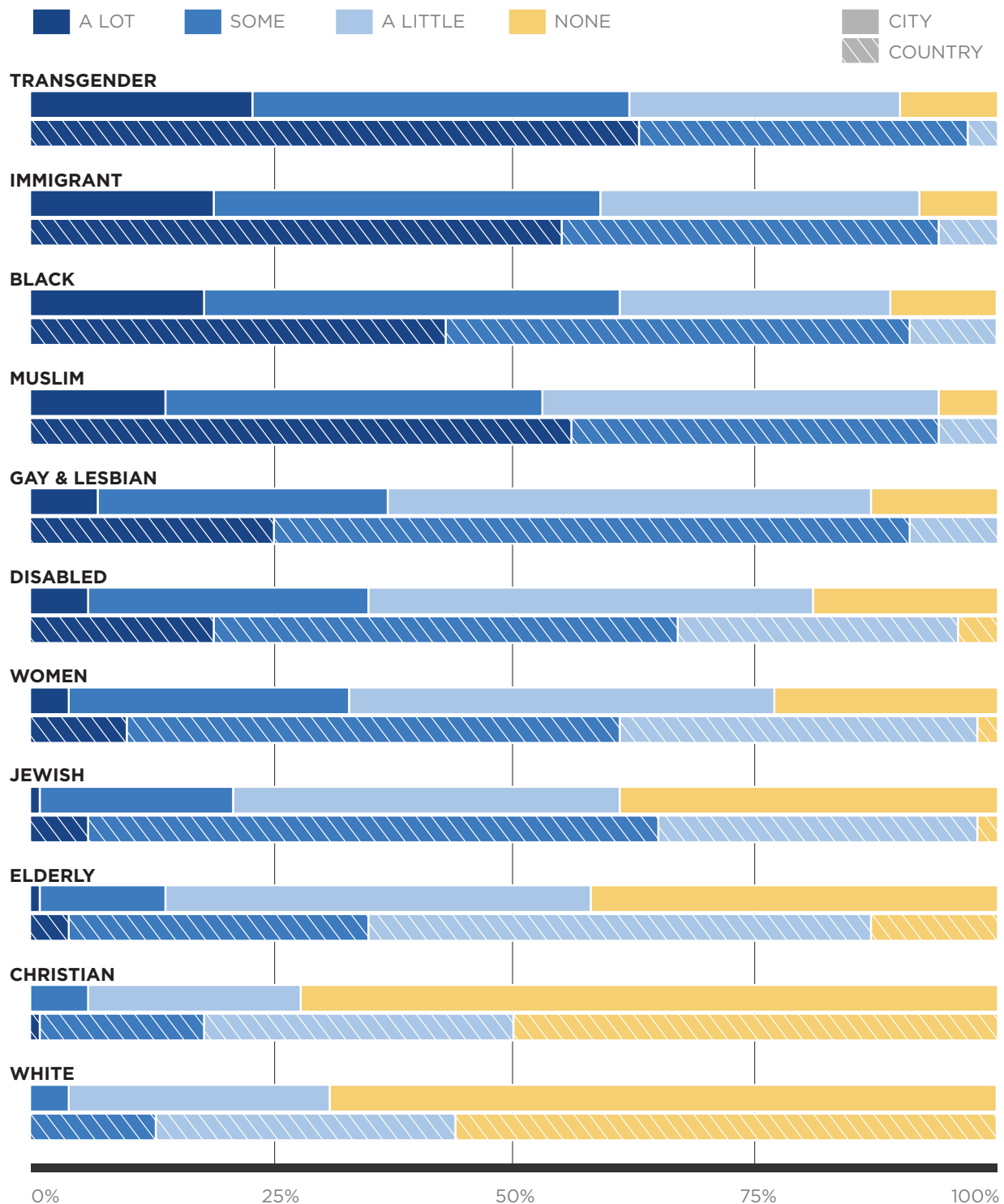
Mayors have the opportunity to address

racism and discrimination locally and some are taking action. For example, when interviewed for the Menino Survey, one mayor noted, "Transgender people experience the most discrimination. We have a transgender liaison in our police department. As mayor, I try to include gender identity as a thing that is valued. We have a policy of nondiscrimination for public facilities like bathrooms, for example." Another said, "For immigrants, we have put in public funding, matched by private funding, to create a 24/7 rapid response deportation network to train people about their rights and provide legal representation to immigrants."



FIGURE 1:

How much discrimination do each of the following groups experience in your city and in the country? (% of mayors)





Access to and Quality of Public Services

Mayors were asked to assess both the access to and quality of services for people of color compared with white people. In terms of access to services, the most common response among mayors across service areas is that white people have better access than people of color.

This is particularly the case for job opportunities, in which 68 percent of mayors indicate better access for white people. Access to affordable healthcare (60%), primary and secondary education (59%) and safe and affordable housing (58%) are also widely viewed as favoring white people.

Mayors acknowledge that services are closely intertwined and that prioritizing one area of service may yield positive benefits in other areas. As one mayor shared, “We don’t control the schools, so our efforts are focused on ensuring all neighborhoods are accessible to all residents which increases the likelihood that people can access the best performing schools. We are working to ensure access to affordable housing throughout the city.” A mayor of a large city in the south said, “There is discrimination in jobs, policing, in the courts...we’ve put a focus on diversity in hiring. We have lots of other programs in the pipeline to address

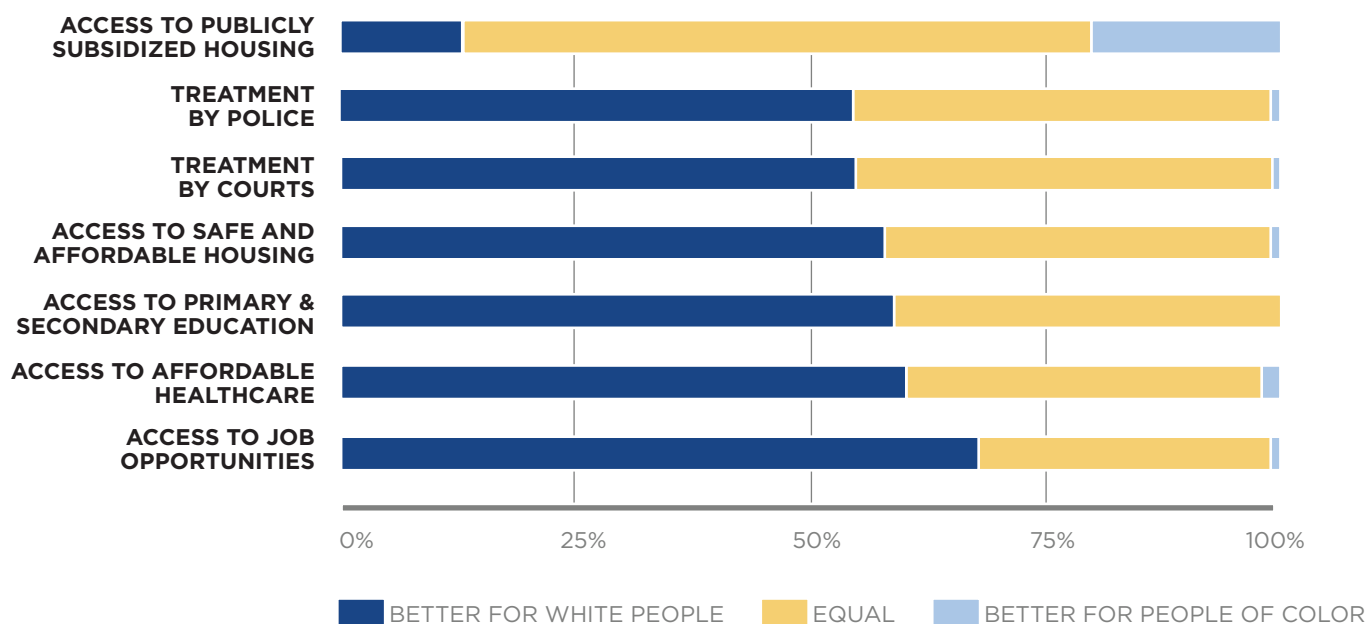
equity, including a focus on police data, looking at things like the number of traffic stops and how they impact neighborhoods and a community’s trust of police.”

Publicly subsidized housing is most widely seen by mayors as “equally” accessible to white people and people of color. It is also the only area in which more mayors (20%) indicate that access is better for people of color than white people. While there are some state and locally funded housing subsidy programs, the majority of these programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). An analysis of HUD data indicates that their programs are accessed more by people of color. However, it is important to clarify that this is not necessarily evidence of better access, but rather a demonstration of higher need. Indeed, while 64 percent of HUD program participants are people of color, 89 percent of households with incomes at or below the poverty rate are non-white.²

Despite concerns about access, an overwhelming majority of mayors believe that, except for education, the quality of key aspects of urban infrastructure is generally equitable between white people and people of color.

Access to affordable healthcare (60%), primary and secondary education (59%) and safe and affordable housing (58%)
are also widely viewed as favoring white people.

FIGURE 2: How equitable is access to the following services for white people compared to people of color?



Mayors were also asked to assess the quality of mass transit, street maintenance, education and parks and recreation services provided to white people compared to people of color. Most mayors report that people of color and white people experience equitable mass transit (87%), street maintenance (86%) and parks and recreation services (86%).

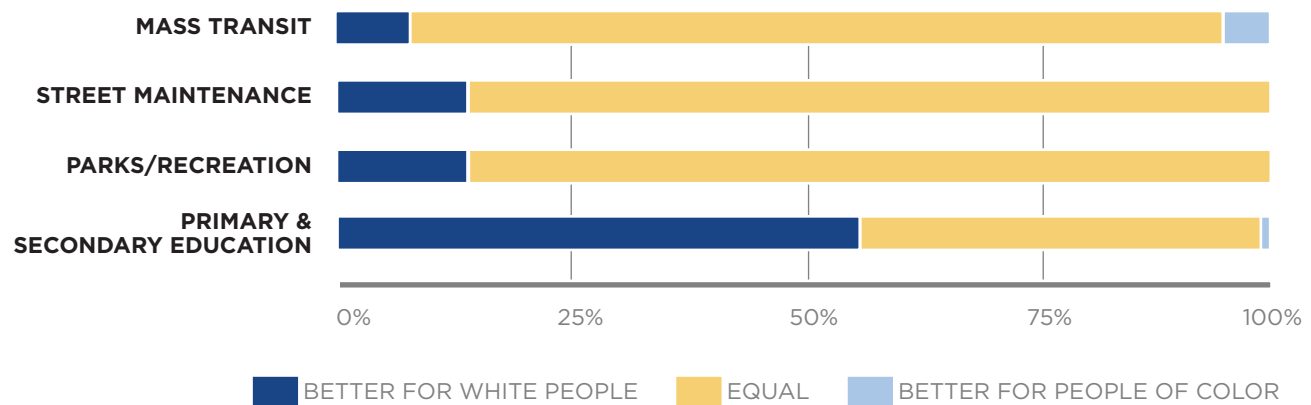
When asked about quality of primary and secondary education, slightly more than half of mayors (56%) perceived that education quality is superior for white people compared with people of color. Disparities in the quality of education have been well-documented, including in the quality of teachers, school building infrastructure and classroom resources.

Taken together, these findings perhaps reflect mayors' perceptions of equity, based on their personal aspirations, intentions

or the current allocation of dollars in their city. For example, a city does not offer explicitly different transit services to white people than people of color, as mass transit systems are designed to serve all users. However, transit access among particular neighborhoods may be inequitable, with some riders having access to reliable, newer light rail while others only have access to buses, which are generally less reliable. Mayors may also be reluctant to acknowledge racial bias in the provision of infrastructure and local services for which they are responsible.

Notwithstanding perceptions, discrimination in service quality remains a challenge. Because of the history of policies like redlining—the practice of lenders refusing loans to residents of certain neighborhoods—that built a legacy of

FIGURE 3: How equitable is the quality of the following services for white people compared to people of color?



residential segregation, city services and the systems that govern them often fail to address the disparate conditions in neighborhoods within the same city. Indeed, the service structure itself may suffer from a long history of institutional racism or bias, and mayors have an opportunity and responsibility to acknowledge and address it.

Some mayors interviewed did note the importance of acknowledging and remedying inequity in the physical environment. As one mid-sized city mayor expressed, a mayor needs to be “super honest on this stuff. Richer areas have nicer roads and parks.” Another noted the importance of intentionally incorporating equity considerations into the planning process: “We just had a parks assessment. The overall grade of our parks was not very good. We are developing a long term strategic park investment plan and a major driver of that investment will be equity.”

The lack of awareness of potential inequities in streets, parks and transit suggests an opportunity for mayors to make use of new,

more rigorous tools to evaluate quality and prioritize capital investments. Many cities, including Philadelphia, have conducted disparities studies. Others, such as Seattle, are building racial equity plans to embed a race-informed focus on equity into city systems. These tools ultimately reduce reliance on complaint-based systems that may perpetuate existing disparities. One small city mayor noted that park quality was inferior in communities of color, and city and citizen action was further perpetuating inequality: “The nicer parks are in neighborhoods with people exercising civic roles and calling the city to complain when parks get dirty. In minority communities, there are fewer complaints and calls.”

Similarly, the city of Boston recently recognized it was overly reliant on 311 service calls for prioritizing sidewalk and street improvements, which led to underinvestment in communities of color that were less likely to report problems. City workers conducted a walk audit of every block and are now using that data to prioritize streets and neighborhoods for investment.

A photograph of two men sitting at a table, overlaid with a blue tint. The man on the left has a beard and is gesturing with his hands while speaking. The man on the right is listening attentively. A can of soda is visible on the table in the foreground.

Strategies

Despite varying perspectives on the scope and depth of racism and discrimination in their communities, many local leaders are willing to show their commitment to the values of equity, fairness, inclusion and justice. When publicly declaring their commitment to these values, the words that city leaders use are critical. The National League of Cities partnered with the Government Alliance for Race and Equity to develop statements, including:

“We believe in and stand for values of inclusion, equity and justice. We condemn Islamophobia, racism, sexism and xenophobia in rhetoric or action.”

“We welcome all people and recognize the rights of individuals to live their lives with dignity, free of discrimination based on their faith, race, national origin or immigration status.”

“We will continue our work in making our services and programs accessible and open to all individuals.”

“We believe in the public sector for the public good. Advancing equity and inclusion is critical to the success of our communities and our nation.”

Stating a community’s shared values is only the start. These values must be reflected across a city’s institutions and requires a commitment to looking beyond the individual acts of racism, bigotry and discrimination.

This section highlights examples of cities confronting their past, acknowledging the impacts of that past on the current life of residents and making changes to eliminate discrimination and racism.

STRATEGY:

Facilitate Dialogue on Race and Equity



To address critical issues of racism and discrimination in their communities, mayors must first understand the historical forces that have shaped their communities and their own lives. This history has generated the conditions that lead to discrimination against residents, whether based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, among other marginalized identities.

Mayors have an important platform to address past mistakes, especially those that have promoted injustices. Acknowledging past wrongs creates an opportunity to make time and space to listen to marginalized people and identify areas for improvement.

When mayors ask the right questions and listen to the answers in the context of both history and resident experiences, they position themselves to make positive change.

Two cities, Boston and New Orleans, have taken this history-informed approach to improving racial equity in their communities. Their focus on racism and racial equity are key prongs in their resilience strategies, developed as part of their membership in the 100 Resilient Cities Network, a project of The Rockefeller Foundation.

Boston initiated its first community dialogue, a town hall forum called “Boston Talks About Racism,” in November 2016. Mayor Marty

Walsh hosted the event, which was attended by more than 600 residents. Community and civic leaders, elected officials and young people in the community spoke about their own experiences with racism and bias. They also discussed the actions the city was undertaking to address the issues.

A series of smaller, neighborhood-level discussions facilitated by trained moderators followed the initial town-hall meeting. The idea was to build capacity among local leaders to continue discussing the problems of discrimination and potential solutions. The intention was also to instill a sense of ownership among residents, so that individual neighborhoods could develop their own benchmarks and action plans.

According to Mayor Walsh, these discussions also help meet another goal: overcoming personal inhibitions and easing discomfort residents may feel when discussing race in America. At the second citywide race dialogue, he said, “We can’t be afraid to have a conversation about race and racism in Boston and be afraid to ... acknowledge the fact that we have racism in our city. We have racist acts in our city, and we have to confront those.”⁴

In New Orleans, former Mayor Mitch Landrieu agreed. In 2010, he charted out a path towards racial reconciliation by working with The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation to launch a project that involved creating safe spaces for diverse groups of community stakeholders. Over three years, the city hosted “dialogue circles” in six parts of the city and launched 22 reconciliation projects. By starting these conversations intentionally, the mayor sparked a process that led to the removal of four of the city’s confederate monuments. This created an opportunity for a communal reckoning with the city’s racialized past.

“If you scratch just below the surface like we did, there is hidden from view a very deep cut that goes to the very heart of our nation. Centuries old wounds are still raw, because they never healed right in the first place. There is a difference between remembrance of history, and the reverence of it. Monuments that celebrate a fictional, sanitized confederacy, but ignore the death, the enslavement and the terror that it actually stood for, are an affront to our true history,” Mayor Landrieu said in 2017.⁵

Over three years, [New Orleans] hosted “dialogue circles”
in six parts of the city and launched 22 reconciliation projects.

STRATEGY:

Break Down the Data and Benchmark



The 2017 Menino Survey asked mayors what metrics they employ to evaluate progress in areas like education, the economy, equity and public safety. In most cases, mayors could name important, localized metrics like the rate of unemployment, high school drop out rate or violent crime. But few of the 115 mayors surveyed had a standardized way of measuring equity.

It is not easy to identify metrics to track a city's racial inequities, but strategies do exist to assess residents' experiences. Data disaggregation and benchmarking are at the core of the analysis of inequities in outcomes. Collecting data that identifies race and ethnicity allows city leaders to see how outcomes change across races and neighborhoods.

When analyzing access to services, the disaggregated data provides insight into the question of which services reach racial and ethnic groups differently and if geographic barriers exist.

For instance, the Center for Health Equity (CHE) in Louisville, Kentucky uses a data-driven approach to examine health outcomes by neighborhood.⁵ Periodically, the organization, which is a division of Louisville's Department of Public Health, publishes a health equity report that maps outcomes by "neighborhood area," as opposed to zip codes, making the information more precise. The report also details the concentration of people by race and ethnicity in each segment, allowing city

leaders to zero in on the outcomes by race and geographic code.

Through its health equity report, the CHE aims to “move discussions beyond individual choice-making toward the underlying community environmental factors that perpetuate poor health.” Understanding the conditions of each neighborhood provides a clearer picture for city leaders as they examine access to services. The data collected for the CHE’s report has given the city a basis for addressing their place-based asthma rates and food security issues among communities of color.

Furthermore, to provide specialized services that meet the specific needs of each community, the city of Louisville created an initiative called Neighborhood Place. Its eight centers provide regional services including health, mental health, child welfare, financial and housing assistance, in part based on disaggregated data on the needs of each neighborhood. This model allows Louisville to break down the barriers to providing essential services, and also track changing needs as neighborhoods evolve.

Other cities are also taking a holistic data-driven approach to benchmarking

inequality. In 2017, the cities of Oakland, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Dallas and Tulsa announced plans to develop broad Equality Indicators, adapting a method originally developed by the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance for New York. Based on input from hundreds of community partners, researchers, residents and the City of New York, 95 indicators were identified that span the economy, housing, education, health, justice and city services.

The Mayor of St. Louis, Lyda Krewson, has made the pursuit of racial equity a cornerstone of her administration. St. Louis is partnering with the community organization Forward Through Ferguson and others in adapting the Equality Indicators for the city’s use. “The protests which began in Ferguson marched down the streets of nearly every major American city. As a result, St. Louis now stands at the forefront of the national conversation about equity and the debilitating racial disparities across our communities. What we’ve learned through this conversation is that real equity cannot be defined by merely one indicator, but rather many, and it is something that we have to work toward continuously and with intention.”⁶

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of inequities in outcomes.

STRATEGY:

Establish a “Welcoming City” Initiative



The city of Anaheim, Calif., has taken steps to establish itself as a “Welcoming City” for immigrants and refugees. With foreign-born individuals making up nearly 40 percent of the city’s population, Mayor Tom Tait and Councilman Jose Moreno worked together to identify strategies that would help create a supportive and accessible community for all. To do so, the mayor’s “Welcoming America Task Force” was established. The task force has brought together residents and leaders from the community and the business sector to provide insight on proactive steps to build community engagement and intercultural exchange.

The program is modeled on the national Welcoming America initiative, which has been building a network of inclusive communities across the country since 2009. Welcoming Cities works across sectors to plan for a climate that embraces long-term integration,

communicates messages of shared values and commits institutions to policies and practices that promote inclusive and positive interactions between long-term and new residents.

The Welcoming America Task Force recommendations to the city included adding additional language translations to city publications, creating a “welcome kit” that informs residents of where resources and city services can be found, and providing opportunities for city staff to learn about cultural competency. In addition to employing the voices of the community to inform the initiative’s efforts, Mayor Tait has used his platform to explain the need to protect the rights of immigrant youth. His joint op-ed with Mayor John Giles of Mesa, Ariz., urges Congress to extend the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and confirms the importance of the city’s efforts to welcome residents of all nationalities.

STRATEGY:

Develop a Strategic Communications Plan

After only a few weeks in office, Mayor G. T. Bynum of Tulsa, Okla., formed the Tulsa Commission on Community Policing. The commission, made up of city leaders, law enforcement agents and citizens, was convened to look at community policing holistically, inform current and new policing practices and examine any disparate impacts produced by policing practices. The Commission developed 77 recommendations to strengthen the city's community policing strategy, ranging from trust-building measures and improved data collection to the formation of civilian oversight boards and efforts to eliminate ticketing and arrest quotas.

One recommendation to build community trust is for the police department to partner with the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Centennial Commission. This organization works to memorialize the violent destruction of the then-wealthiest black community in the nation by mobs of white men. In conjunction with the Centennial Commission, the police department is charged with looking at its

own evolution since the 1921 riot. In 2013, the police chief publicly apologized for the department's role in the riot, which ranged from inaction to witness reports of law enforcement's participation in the riots. Since forming the Commission on Community Policing, Mayor Bynum has continued to acknowledge the persistent racial disparities in Tulsa, and the role the city's history has played in creating these disparities.

The city of Tulsa has implemented the recommendations, with Mayor Bynum appointing Citizen Advisory Board and Citizen Action Group members to facilitate dialogue between the police department and residents, a top recommendation of the commission. According to an online community policing dashboard, developed through the Office of Performance Strategy and Innovation to demonstrate transparency, the Tulsa Police Department has implemented a majority of the recommendations of the Commission on Community Policing and is reporting on them quarterly.

Mayor Bynum has continued to acknowledge the persistent racial disparities in Tulsa, and the **role the city's history has played in creating these disparities.**

Conclusion

Mayors are well-positioned to influence local norms and create safe communities where all people can thrive socially, economically, academically and physically. The results of this survey demonstrate that mayors acknowledge that discrimination exists in their cities, primarily against immigrants and people who are black, transgendered and Muslim, but view their communities as more inclusive than the nation as a whole.

The majority of mayors also feel that there are several institutions (i.e., police, courts, schools, healthcare and workforce) that benefit white people more than people of color. Mayoral responses to questions of access signal that local leaders acknowledge the existence of both institutional and structural racism. Interestingly, however, mayors are more optimistic that the *quality* of services and engagement with city government is equitable. Despite these varying mayoral perceptions, national data indicates that communities of color face consistent patterns of inequities.

While working with mayors and city leaders across the country, NLC's Race, Equity and Leadership initiative developed 10 concrete actions mayors can take to not only acknowledge, but address racism and discrimination in their cities:

- 1. Talk about racial equity** and ask colleagues and other stakeholders about the effects of racism and discrimination on all city issues
- 2. Seek out services** and support to advance equity
- 3. Ask questions** about the impacts of racism and discrimination across their community
- 4. Make time and space** to listen to the experiences of people and communities of color in their city
- 5. Lead and participate** in difficult conversations on racism and discrimination
- 6. Openly question** the status quo
- 7. Publicly address** past mistakes and missteps that have promoted injustices
- 8. Identify opportunities** for improvement in their own systems
- 9. Ensure staff** are knowledgeable and taking action on equity
- 10. Identify where data** needs to be collected and disaggregated to reveal inequities in their procedures and practices

By linking a bold commitment to the action needed to make good on these actions, mayors across the country can position themselves to make the changes necessary to build an equitable future.

This research on mayoral views on discrimination sheds light on areas for further inquiry, namely a need to better understand what drives perceptions of racism and discrimination both in terms of differences between cities and the nation, as well as differences between access to and quality of services. Nonetheless, the strategies provided in this report offer practical opportunities for mayors to strengthen their knowledge and leadership capacity. Acknowledging racism and discrimination provides a starting point for mayors as they seek to redress historic wrongs, foster constructive dialogue and advance equity in their cities.

Methodology

The 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors explores a mix of issues and is comprised of both closed and open-ended questions. This year, mayors discussed topics ranging from performance metrics and housing development to sustainability and discrimination. To generate a systematic sample, the Initiative on Cities invited all mayors of cities with 75,000 or more residents to participate. Each mayor received an email invitation from the Boston University team as well as follow-up phone calls. 115 interviews (a strong 25% response rate) were primarily conducted in person or by phone. This systematic sampling and recruitment effort yielded a representative sample of American cities.

Moreover, the 115 participating cities mirrored the target population of cities with more than 75,000 residents. Participating cities were almost identical to the national population of cities in terms of their individual populations, racial demographics, housing prices and geographic breakdown. The sample of participating mayors captures the breadth of America's city leaders. 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.⁷

	SURVEY	ALL CITIES
Number of Cities	115	467
Avg. Population	233,086	224,762
Avg. Pct. White	55%	50%
Avg. Pct. Black	16%	14%
Avg. Pct. Hispanic	19%	25%
Avg. Median home Price	\$236,719	\$245,783

REGION	% OF SAMPLE	% OF CITIES
Northeast	9%	10%
Midwest	25%	16%
South	27%	33%
West	39%	40%

ENDNOTES

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