BOSTON UNIVERSITY

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, POVERTY & WELL-BEING

2022 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

SUPPORTED BY

The Rockefeller Foundation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Authors

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

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

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

Contributors

Stacy Fox
Associate Director, Initiative on Cities
Boston University
sfox@bu.edu

Katharine Lusk
Co-Director, Initiative on Cities
Boston University
klusk@bu.edu

Erin Tatz
PhD Candidate, Political Science
Boston University

Initiative on Cities

Boston University
75 Bay State Road
Boston, MA 02215

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

INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, American cities have been at the forefront of a wide array of economic and social challenges. The cost of living crisis brought soaring prices across a variety of consumer goods, including food and energy.[1] The housing market was super-charged, with cities across the country experiencing explosive housing price growth.[2] Rising violent crime became a hot-button political issue, though data are more mixed as to whether violent crime actually increased over the last year.[3] Poverty remained stubbornly high in many communities.

Local leaders pursued a variety of policies to combat these challenges. They transformed local zoning in an effort to build more housing and bring down local housing costs. They emphasized job training programs and economic development programs to attract more living-wage jobs. They also felt, in many cases, constrained by broader systemic forces that generate these economic and social problems.

The 2022 Menino Survey of Mayors "Economic Opportunity, Poverty, and Well-Being" report explores how mayors view and approach these important issues by reporting their responses, collected during the summer of 2022, to a wide-ranging series of questions. It analyzes mayors' views on key economic challenges, and tools they can use at the local level. It also investigates what mayors perceive to be the main public health and public safety challenges in their community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Soaring housing costs remain a national challenge. An overwhelming majority of mayors (81 percent) selected housing costs as one of the top two economic challenges in their city. Mayors' concerns about housing dwarfed other issues: the next most chosen economic challenge was the rising cost of living, selected by 44 percent of mayors followed by poverty at 37 percent.

A strong majority of mayors believe they are held accountable for housing costs in their cities, but most feel they have little to no control over them. Seventy percent of mayors believe that their constituents hold them at least moderately accountable for housing costs; there is no other area — including home energy costs, inflation, and wage growth — where a majority of mayors think their constituents hold them accountable. Across the board, mayors do not see themselves as wielding a great deal of control over cost of living challenges. Forty-two percent see themselves as holding at least a moderate amount of control over housing costs and another 37 percent think they hold at least moderate control over low-wage growth. Almost none say they have a lot of control over any economic challenge.

Almost half of mayors cite some type of housing policy as the best thing their city can do to help residents facing the rising cost of living. Housing policies tended to fall into two buckets: increasing the housing supply (27 percent of mayors) and increasing affordable housing funding (21 percent).

1   Ha, Jongrim, M.A. Kose, and F. Ohnsorge. "Today's Global Economy is Eerily Similar to the 1970s, but Governments Can Still Escape a Stagflation Episode." Brookings (Jul. 1, 2022) via https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2022/07/01/todays-global-economy-is-eerily-similar-to-the-1970s-but-governments-can-still-escape-a-stagflation-episode/.

2   Joint Center for Housing Studies. "The State of the Nation's Housing 2022." Harvard University (Jun. 22, 2022) via https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/state-nations-housing-2022.

3   Gramlich, John. "Violent Crime is a Key Midterm Voting Issue, but What Does the Data Say" Pew Research Center (Oct. 31, 2022) via https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/10/31/violent-crime-is-a-key-midterm-voting-issue-but-what-does-the-data-say/.

Mayors prefer allocating resources for housing to alleviate poverty. When asked what two programs or types of spending they would prioritize if given a large grant for poverty alleviation, 58 percent selected rental assistance programs and 56 percent chose homeownership programs. The next answer — direct cash transfers to adults — was 24 percentage points less popular.

Mayors are divided on treating poverty as a distinctive issue vs. focusing on the economy in general. A slim majority (56 percent) believe that, to make the most progress in reducing poverty in the short term, urban policy should focus on poverty as a distinctive issue; the rest support focusing on the economy more broadly. Republican and Democratic mayors differ sharply, though, in their responses: 63 percent of Democratic mayors favor focusing on poverty as a distinct issue, compared with only 30 percent of Republicans. A majority of mayors (69 percent) also believe that poverty results mostly from systemic factors, as opposed to individual decisions, with a parallel partisan split.

Mayors largely support race-targeted policy programs as part of their anti-poverty initiatives. A majority of mayors believe that some resources in their city should be reserved for minority-owned small businesses (83 percent) and homeownership programs for Black residents (61 percent). A majority (67 percent) also support undocumented immigrants having access to local public benefits programs.

Mayors perceive a large number of threats to their residents' health and safety. They highlighted a variety of concerns, including the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, crime, gun violence, poverty, and the environment; however, there was no consensus. Crime was the most frequent answer, cited by 14 percent of mayors, and another 13 percent highlighted gun violence. Several lamented the political obstacles to reducing the availability of illegal guns in their community.

Traffic crashes, gun violence, and Covid-19 top the list of health and safety concerns for which the overwhelming majority of mayors feel they are held accountable. Slimmer majorities think they are held accountable for mental health, hunger, and substance abuse issues. Notable, however, is that mayors see themselves as being held more accountable in all these categories since the same question was last asked in 2018. Mayoral accountability for gun violence and resident mental health, in particular, dramatically increased over the last four years.

Automated traffic enforcement technology was generally embraced by mayors as a useful tool for regulating unsafe drivers. Sixty-seven percent would use it to regulate speed, while 62 percent would use it to monitor red lights. Other uses, such as noise (31 percent) and stop signs (29 percent) are not as popular. Only a small minority of mayors (11 percent) see no use for automated traffic enforcement. Democratic mayors are somewhat more enthusiastic about automated enforcement, in general, than Republican mayors.

Mayors strongly support additional gun control. Seventy-five percent of mayors agree that civilians should be unable to acquire assault rifles under any circumstances. Mirroring national partisan polarization, Democrats and Republicans were divided: 88 percent of Democratic mayors supported an assault rifle ban, compared with only 40 percent of Republican mayors.

A large majority of mayors believe that their police departments are helpful partners in reducing gun violence. Eighty-two percent of mayors agree that police presence in public places, like schools, parks, and mass transit stations, reduces the likelihood of gun violence in those locations. Mayors of both parties agreed with this sentiment, with 95 percent of Republicans and 78 percent of Democrats believing that police presence makes public spaces safer. Additionally, 84 percent of mayors believe that their police officers would strongly enforce an assault rifle ban if one were implemented. Democratic mayors (92 percent) were significantly more likely than Republican mayors (32 percent) to trust their police to enforce such a ban.

Despite recognizing racial disparities in local policing practices, mayors believe their police departments do a good job of attracting individuals well-suited to the job. Fifty-six percent of mayors believe that Black people are treated worse by the police compared with white people and 34 percent believe that Black residents in their city do not trust the police. Yet, 83 percent of mayors believe their police departments do a good job of attracting candidates well-suited to being police officers.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND THE CRUSHING COST OF HOUSING

Cities are facing a myriad of economic challenges. We asked mayors about their economic priorities for their cities. An overwhelming majority (81 percent) selected housing costs as one of their top two challenges. This is in keeping with multiple prior years of Menino Survey findings, which revealed that soaring housing costs are a national challenge — not an issue isolated to a select number of high-cost coastal cities.[4] Mayors' concerns about housing dwarfed other issues: the next most chosen economic challenge was the rising cost of living, selected by 44 percent of mayors. Another 37 percent of mayors prioritized poverty. Mayors of cities with expensive and cheaper housing were equally concerned about housing costs in their communities. The salience of housing costs relative to rising cost of living is especially striking given the timing of the survey, which was fielded in summer 2022 during the peak of inflationary pressures.

"Mayors' concerns about housing dwarfed other issues: the next most chosen economic challenge was the rising cost of living ..."

Figure 1. Top Economic Challenges in City
Which TWO of the following economic challenges are the top priorities for your city?
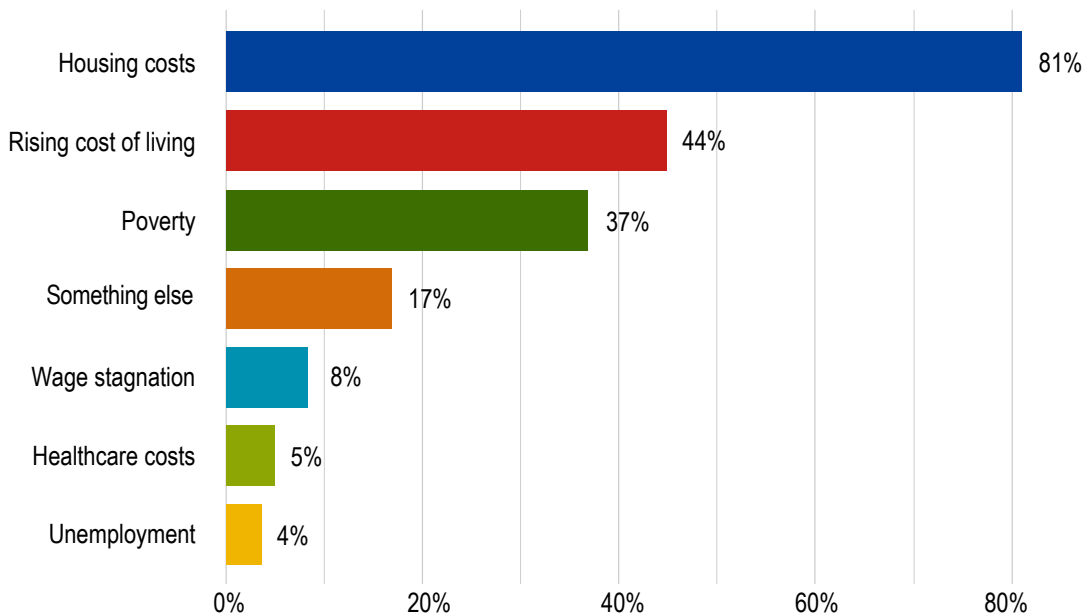
Mayors answering = 118

4   Another four percent of mayors highlighted homelessness when choosing the category "something else," again underscoring the salience of housing costs to many mayors.
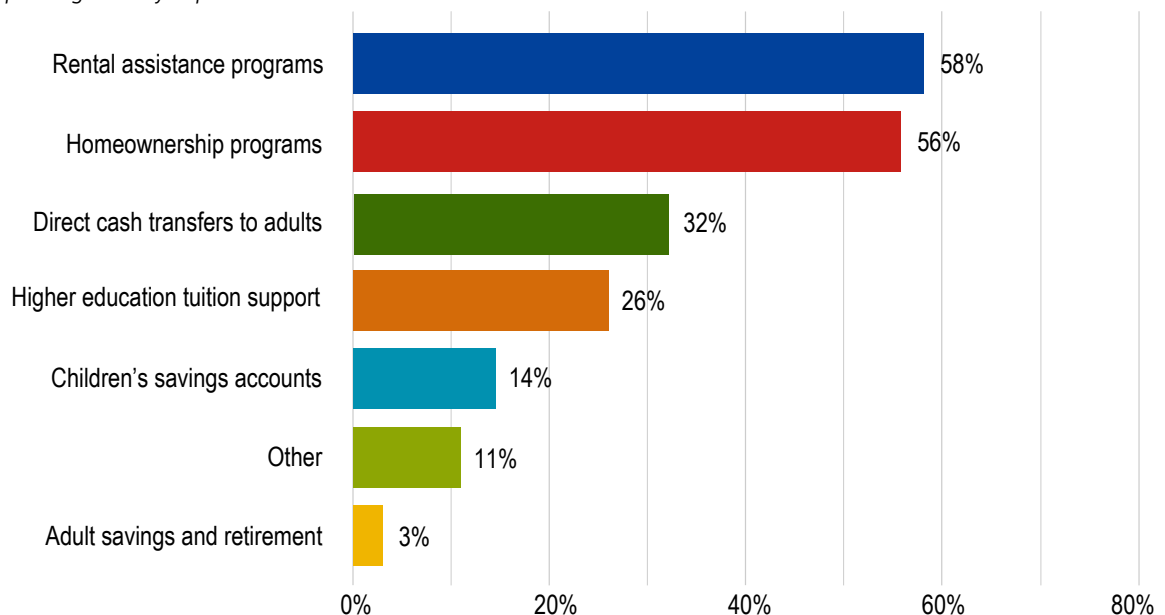
Reflecting the prominence of rising housing costs in most cities, almost half of mayors (47 percent) cited some type of housing policy as the best thing their city can do to help residents facing the rising cost of living. They did so in response to an open-ended question in which they could have highlighted any policy area of their choosing. Housing policies tended to fall into two buckets: increasing the housing supply (27 percent of mayors) and increasing affordable housing funding (21 percent).

Multiple mayors deployed American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds to support their cities' affordable housing stock. One southern mayor told us that their city used *"federal funds for affordable housing. [We] also have a number of direct financial support programs through the Office of Human Services."* To address their cities' housing supply, mayors focused on reforming their cities' zoning codes to allow for the construction of more dense housing. One midwestern mayor described zoning reform as the strongest policy lever cities can wield against the ongoing housing and cost of living crisis: *"We don't control everything [...] What do we control? We control zoning [...] We will be using an affordable housing millage to build on city parcels anywhere between 1,000 to 1,500 units of new permanent affordable housing throughout the city [...] We're also upzoning transit corridors with abandon [...] Because supply and demand is real, we believe that over time this will improve affordability, but it will not change the fact that people want to live here. That is a very real blessing and a soft curse."* Other mayors cited policy programs like job training, increasing the number of living-wage jobs, and reducing the costs of city services when asked about the single best thing they could do to help residents dealing with the rising cost of living.

Given prominent concerns about housing costs, it is unsurprising that a strong majority of mayors want to target anti-poverty resources to housing. We asked mayors what two programs or spending they would prioritize if they were given a large grant to spend on poverty alleviation via direct transfer. Fifty-eight percent selected rental assistance programs and 56 percent chose homeownership programs. The next answer — direct cash transfers to adults — was 24 percentage points less popular.

Figure 2. Poverty Alleviation Programs
If you were given a large grant to spend on poverty alleviation via direct transfer, which TWO types of programs or spending would you prioritize?

| Program	Percent
Rental assistance programs	58%
Homeownership programs	56%
Direct cash transfers to adults	32%
Higher education tuition support	26%
Children's savings accounts	14%
Other	11%
Adult savings and retirement	3%

Mayors answering = 117

Within the broader category of housing, we asked mayors to consider which groups should be most highly prioritized for scarce publicly subsidized housing. Over 60 percent of mayors believe that seniors, families with children, veterans, homeless people, and victims of domestic violence should receive high priority for subsidized housing. In contrast, fewer than 35 percent believe that formerly incarcerated people, current city residents, people with a history of eviction, and refugees should receive high priority. These proposed prioritization schemes create some contradictions: for example, a large share of unhoused people have histories of eviction,[5] making it hard to separate the two groups. Moreover, these preferences do not always align with what is happening on the ground: for example, preferences for seniors and local residents are quite prevalent.[6]

Figure 3. Preferences for Publicly Subsidized Housing
Publicly subsidized housing in many cities is oversubscribed. Regardless of your city's current preference system, who should be prioritized for publicly subsidized housing?

Legend: Should receive high priority | Should receive some priority | Should not receive priority | N/A
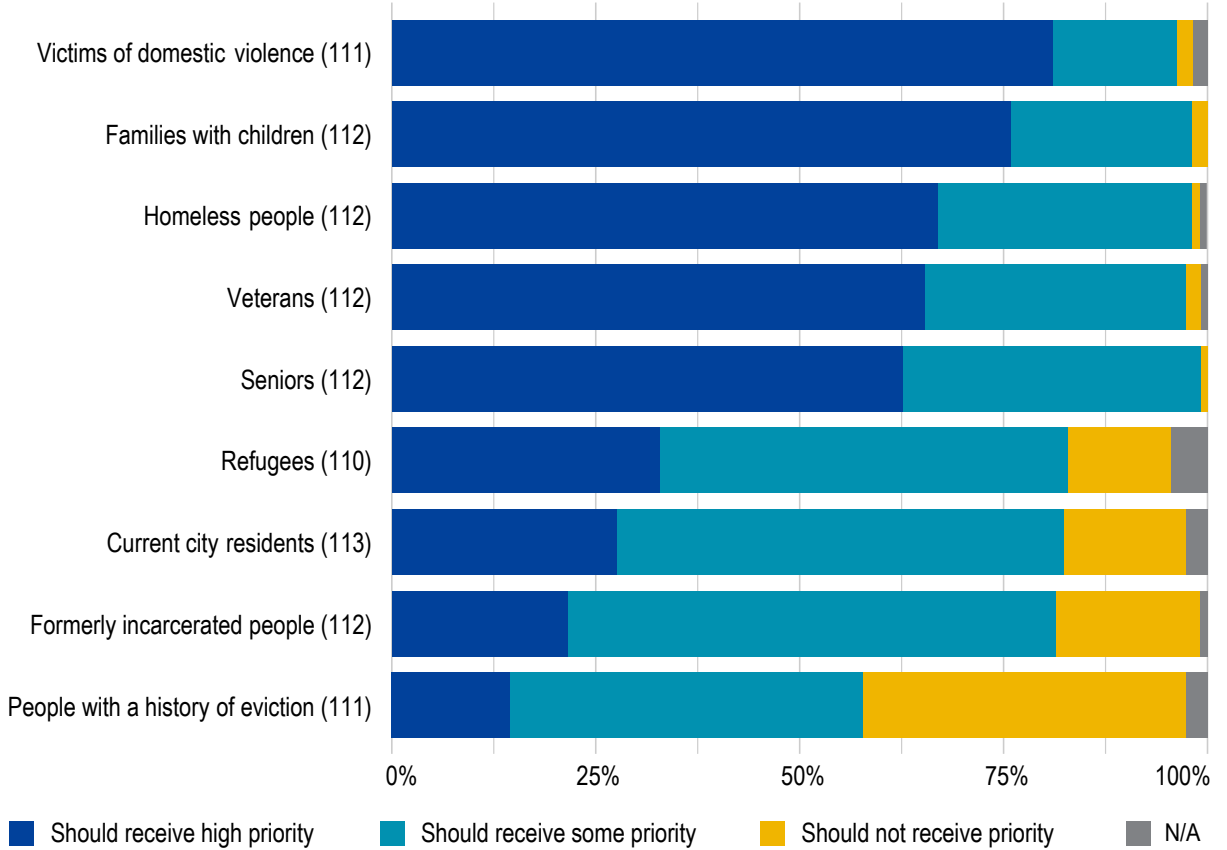
When we asked mayors whether they are held accountable for cost of living challenges, housing costs once again stood out. Seventy percent of mayors believe that their constituents hold them at least moderately accountable for housing costs. There is no other area — including home energy costs, inflation, and wage growth — where a majority of mayors think their constituents hold them accountable.

5   Collinson, R., J. Humphries, N. Mader, D. Reed, D. Tannenbaum, and W. van Dijk. 2022. "Eviction and Poverty in American Cities." NBER Working Paper 30382 via https://www.nber.org/papers/w30382.

6   Calef, A., P. Ciurczak, L. Schuster, K. Einstein, and M. Palmer. "2022 Greater Boston Housing Report Card." The Boston Foundation (Oct. 26, 2022) via https://www.tbf.org/news-and-insights/reports/2022/october/2022-greater-boston-housing-report-card.

Figure 4. Accountability for Cost of Living Challenges in City

How much do your constituents hold you accountable for each of the following cost of living challenges in your city?
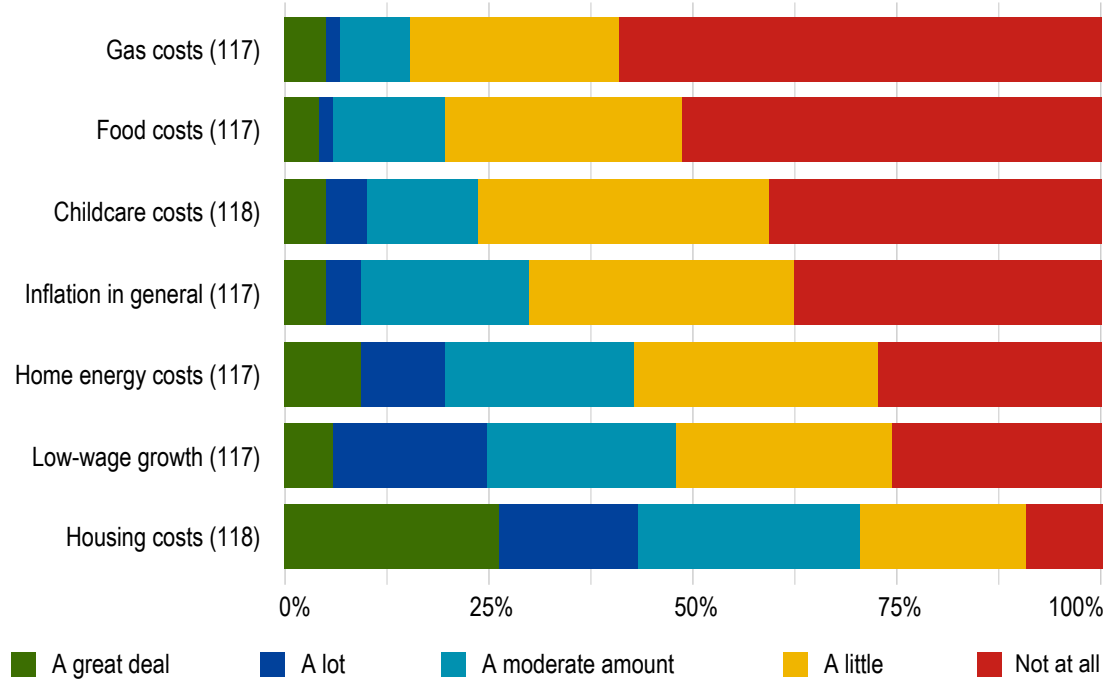

Gas costs (117)
Food costs (117)
Childcare costs (118)
Inflation in general (117)
Home energy costs (117)
Low-wage growth (117)
Housing costs (118)

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

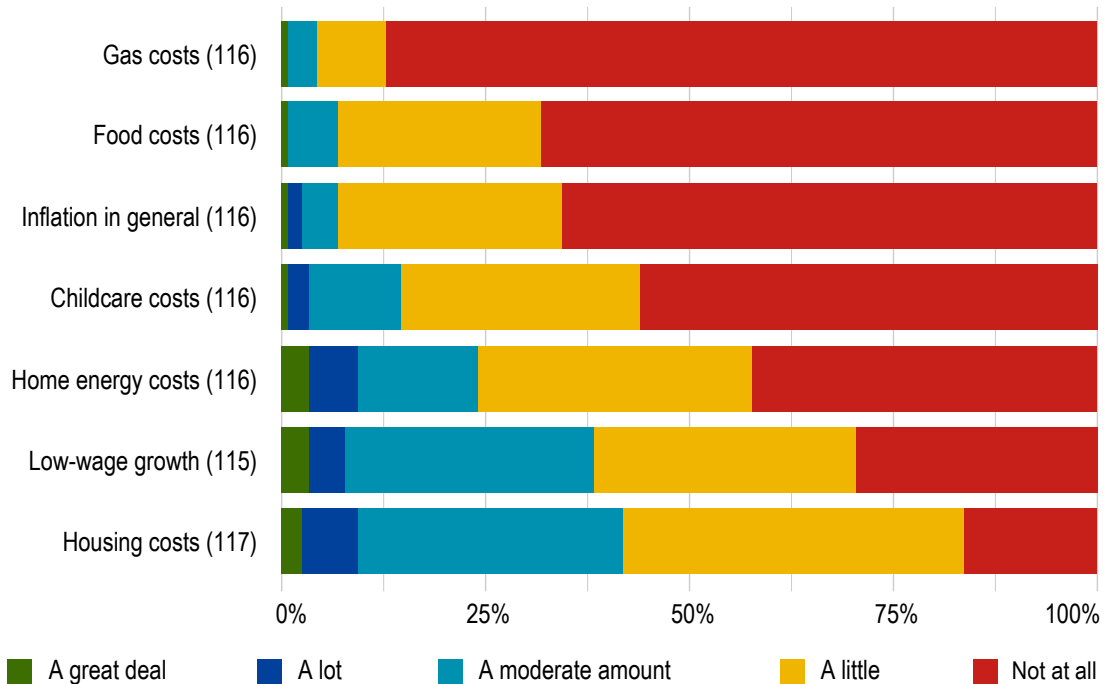■ A great deal ■ A lot ■ A moderate amount ■ A little ■ Not at all

Figure 5. Control Over Cost of Living Challenges in City

How much control do you have over each of the following cost of living challenges in your city?

Gas costs (116)
Food costs (116)
Inflation in general (116)
Childcare costs (116)
Home energy costs (116)
Low-wage growth (115)
Housing costs (117)

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

■ A great deal ■ A lot ■ A moderate amount ■ A little ■ Not at all

Across the board, mayors do not see themselves as wielding a great deal of control over cost of living challenges. Forty-two percent see themselves as holding at least a moderate amount of control over housing costs; another 37 percent think they hold at least moderate control over low-wage growth. Instead, they perceive themselves as buffeted by broader economic forces over which they have, at best, modest control. Housing costs stand out as the issue on which mayors perceive the biggest gap between accountability and control.

Figure 6. Cost of Living Challenges in City, Accountability vs. Control
[Note: Figure summarizes whether each mayor gave a higher score to "accountability" or "control" or whether they gave the same rating to each, for the various economic challenges we queried. For example, the blue bars indicate the percentage of mayors who believe they are held more accountable for a challenge (e.g., "a lot") than they have control over it (e.g., "a little").]
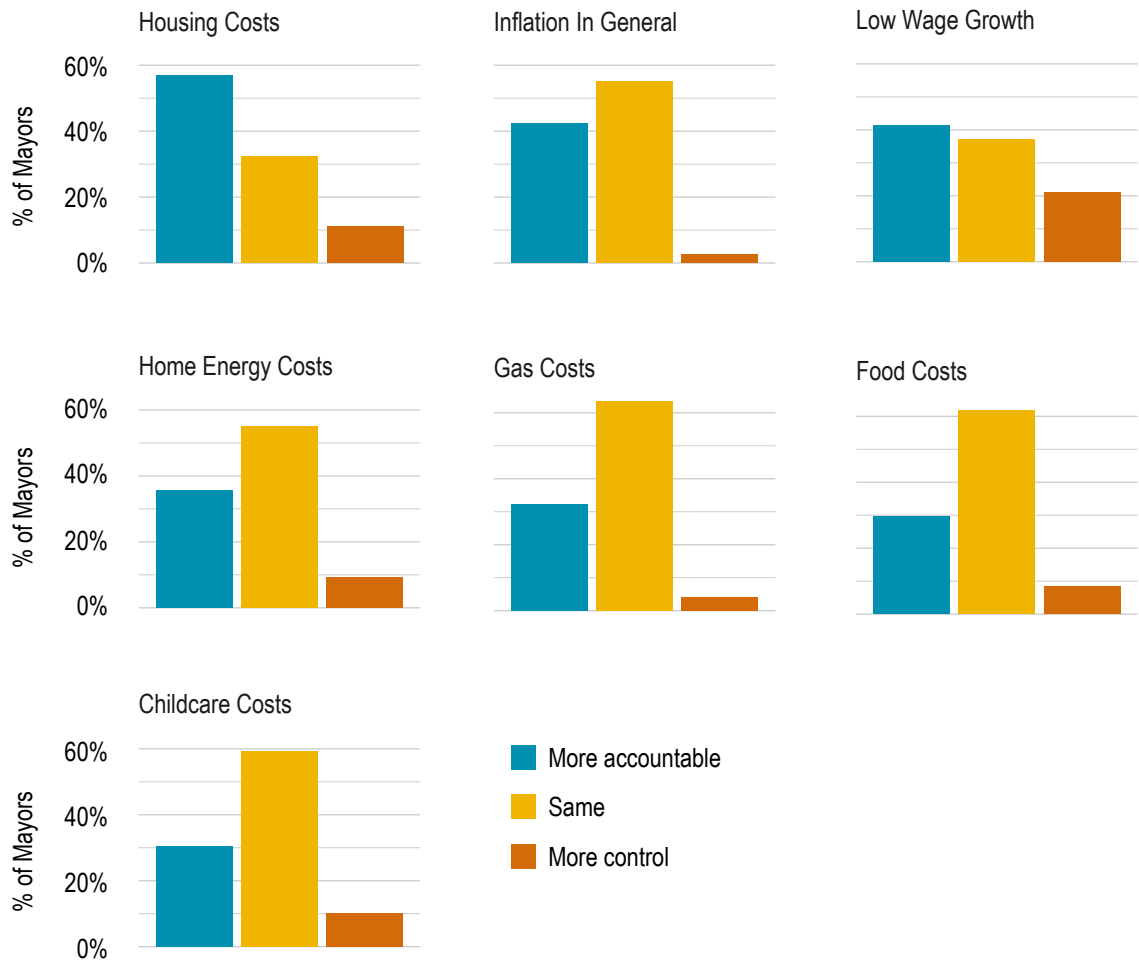
MAYORS AND POVERTY

Zooming in on poverty, mayors largely see poverty as an inability to provide for basic needs. We asked mayors to provide an "intuitive or conceptual definition" of what it means to be living in poverty. While a few mayors mentioned quantitative measures, such as the percent of individuals with incomes below the area median income, most focused on the types of goods poverty made inaccessible. One northeastern mayor described poverty as *"not being able to afford a place to live or food to eat — the necessities of life."* A midwestern mayor was even more expansive, defining poverty as *"when you're unable to have access to a life of hope and opportunity."*

Figure 7. Making Progress on Poverty in Short-Term

In your city, how do you make the most progress reducing poverty in the short-term?

Mayors answering = 114
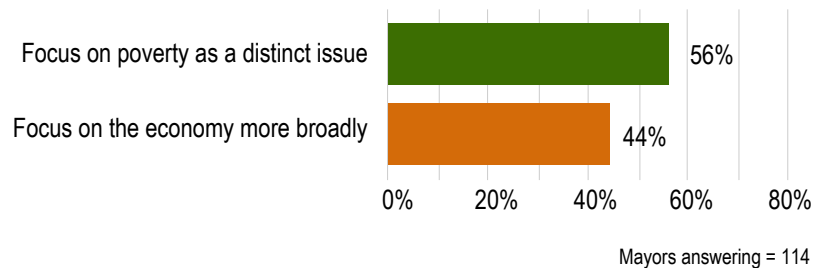
A slim majority of mayors (56 percent) believe that, to make the most progress in reducing poverty in the short term, urban policy should focus on poverty as a distinctive issue. The rest support focusing on the economy more broadly. Republican and Democratic mayors differ sharply, though, in their responses: 63 percent of Democratic mayors favor focusing on poverty as a distinct issue, compared with only 30 percent of Republicans. In short, there appears to be little consensus in how mayors think about poverty and its solutions. Mayors of cities with higher poverty rates (higher percentage below the poverty line than the median city) also tend toward focusing on poverty as a distinct issue versus focusing on the economy more broadly (62 to 38 percent, respectively). Mayors of cities with lower poverty rates prefer focusing on the economy more broadly (55 percent) to focusing on poverty (45 percent).

Figure 8. Making Progress on Poverty in Short-Term, By Party
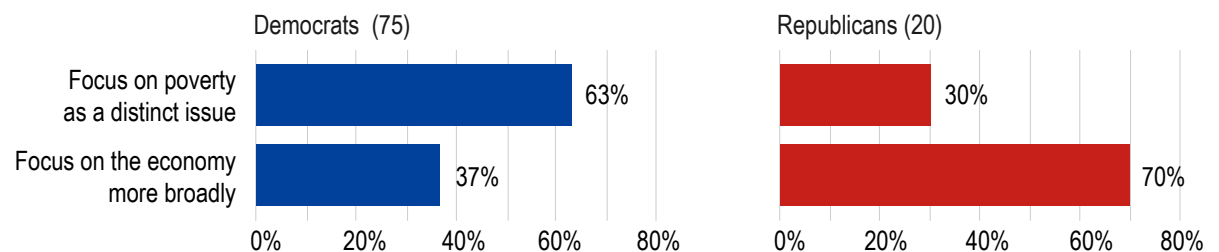
Democratic and Republican mayors also see the root causes of poverty quite differently. Overall, a majority of mayors (69 percent) believe that poverty results mostly from systemic factors, as opposed to individual decisions. Only 21 percent of Democratic mayors see individual factors and decisions as the primary drivers of poverty, compared with 58 percent of Republican mayors. According to a study by Pew Research, 71 percent of Americans believe those living in poverty have "experienced more obstacles in life than other people," suggesting most agree that poverty is driven by systemic challenges not personal failing.[7] Fifty-five percent of Republican or Republican leaning adults felt this way, compared to 86 percent of Democrats or those who lean Democratic.

Figure 9. Root Causes of Poverty in City

Which of the following is closest to your position on the causes of poverty in your city?
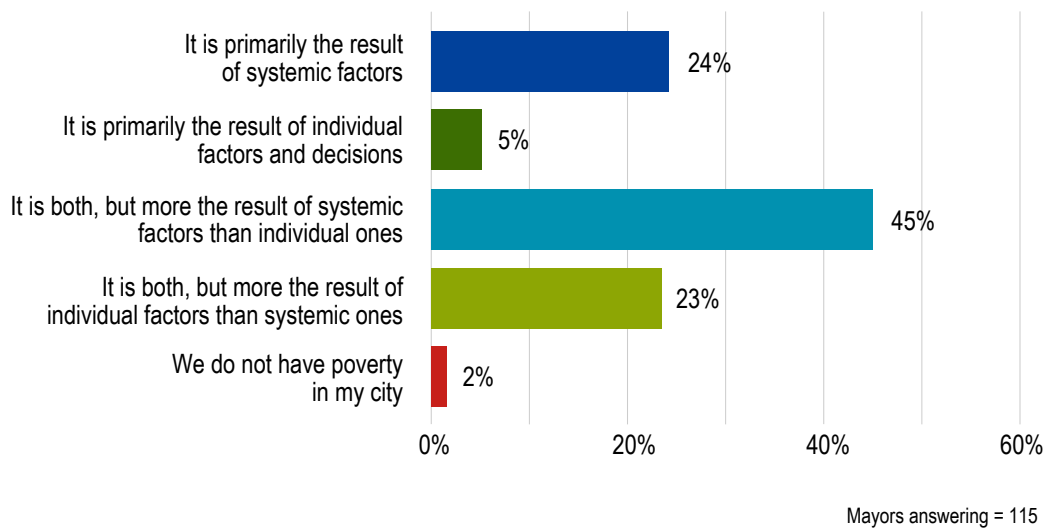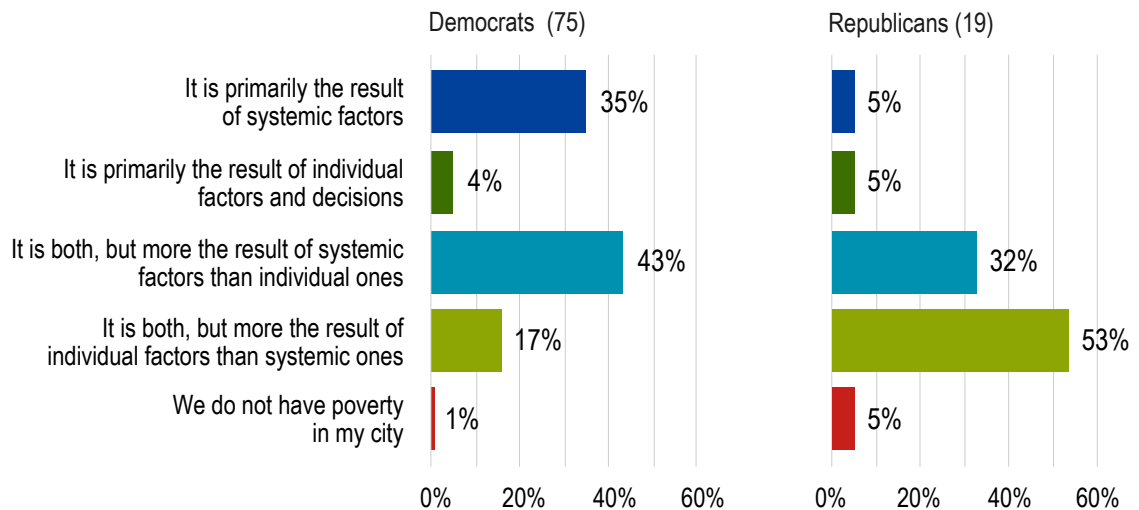

Mayors answering = 115

Figure 10. Root Causes of Poverty in City, by Party

Which of the following is closest to your position on the causes of poverty in your city?

7   Pew Research Center. "Most Americans Point to Circumstances, Not Work Ethic, for Why People Are Rich or Poor." Mar. 2, 2020 via https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/03/02/most-americans-point-to-circumstances-not-work-ethic-as-reasons-people-are-rich-or-poor/.

Most mayors (53 percent) do not believe that direct cash transfers should be a primary anti-poverty tool. Once again, the partisan divide is substantial: 36 percent of Democrats support the use of cash transfers, even if it means less money is available to address poverty in other ways; no Republican mayors agreed.

Figure 11. Addressing Poverty via Direct Cash Transfer
Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: Local government should fight poverty by directly transferring money into the pockets of people in need even if it means less money is available to address poverty in other ways.
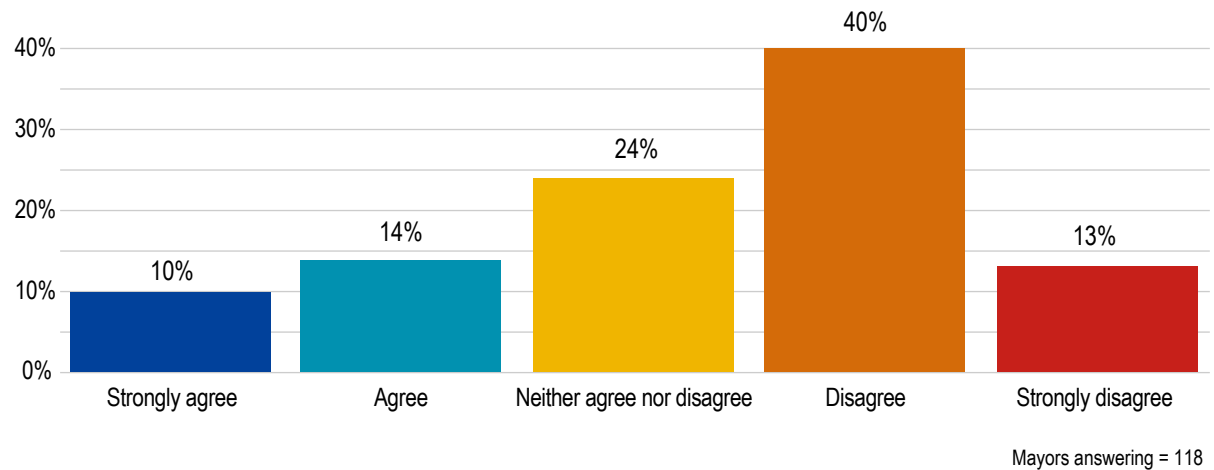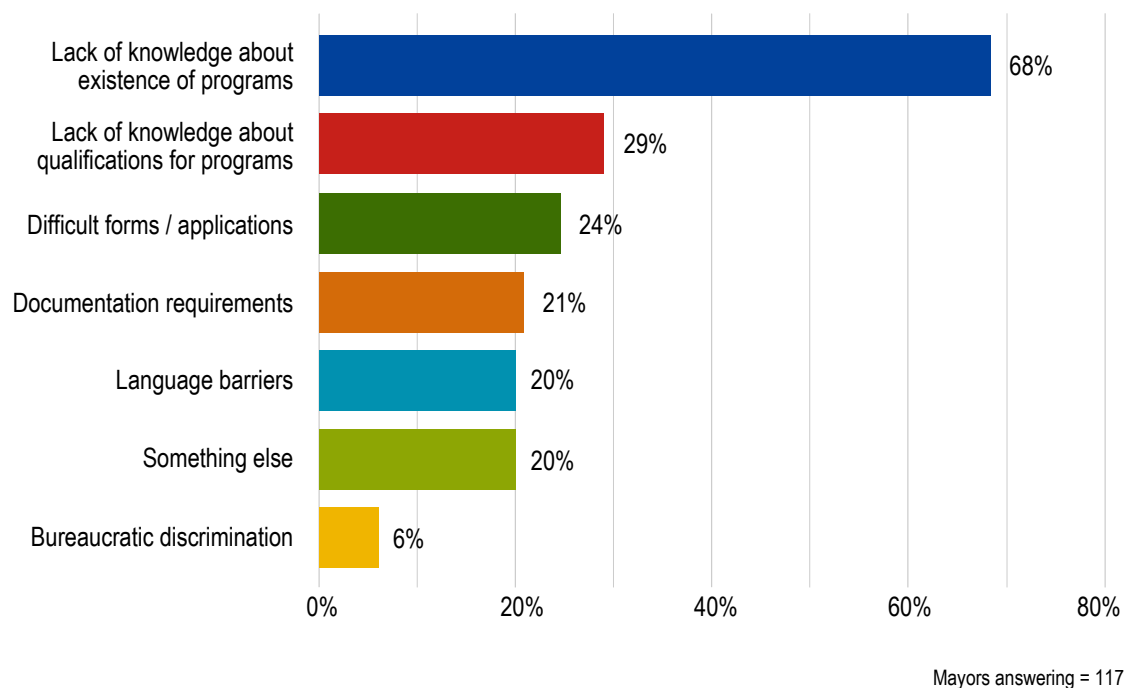

Mayors answering = 118

Figure 12. Barriers to Accessing Anti-Poverty Programs
What, if anything, makes accessing anti-poverty programs difficult for residents of your city? Please choose the top two.
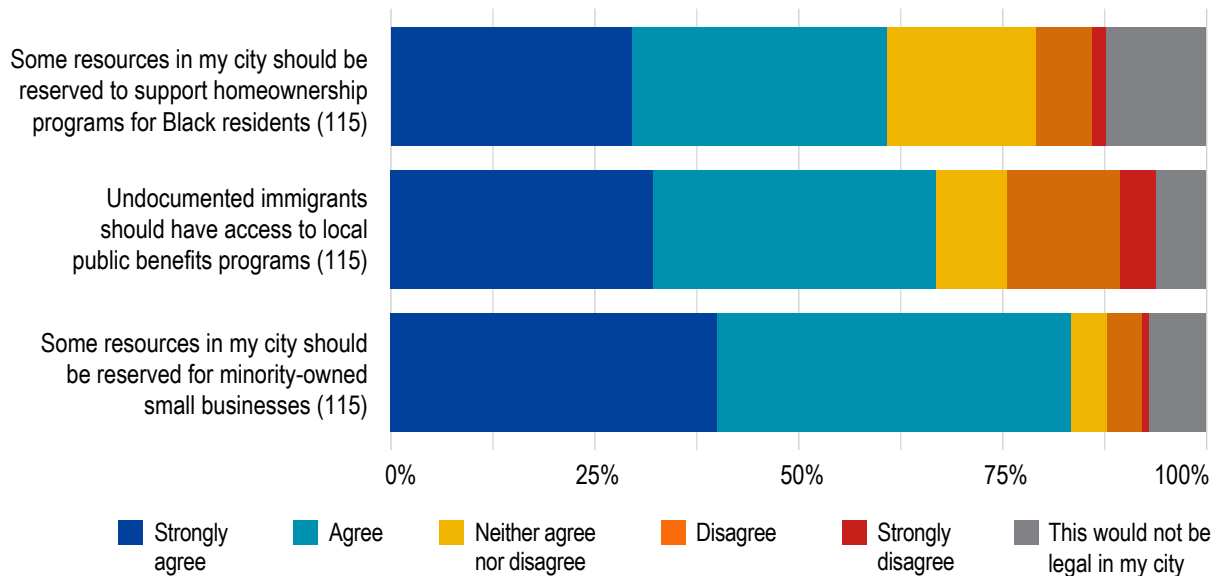

Mayors answering = 117

A wide array of policy research has identified administrative burdens, such as difficult paperwork and application processes, as an important obstacle to program uptake.[8] When we asked about such burdens, mayors focused more on information than issues in program implementation or delivery. They overwhelmingly see a lack of information about program availability as the biggest barrier to accessing anti-poverty programs. Sixty-eight percent of mayors selected a lack of knowledge about the existence of programs as one of the top two obstacles to accessing anti-poverty programs — far and away the most frequently selected option. Only 29 percent of mayors chose a lack of knowledge about qualifications for programs and 24 percent selected difficult forms and applications. In short, mayors see information obstacles as the most salient barrier to accessing anti-poverty programs rather than challenges within programs and processes themselves.

Mayors largely support race-targeted policy programs as part of their anti-poverty initiatives. A majority of mayors believe that some resources in their city should be reserved for minority-owned small businesses (83 percent) and homeownership programs for Black residents (61 percent). A majority of mayors (67 percent) also support undocumented immigrants having access to local public benefits programs.

Majorities of mayors in both parties, though more Democrats than Republicans, support prioritizing some local resources for minority-owned small businesses. Eighty-nine percent of Democratic mayors and 65 percent of Republican mayors agree that some resources in their cities should be reserved for minority-owned small businesses. The gap between Democrats and Republicans is similar for targeted homeownership programs, but mayors across party lines support them less than they do small business ones. Sixty-eight percent of Democratic mayors support reserving some resources in their city for homeownership programs for Black residents, compared with only 35 percent of Republican mayors. The biggest partisan gap is over benefits for undocumented immigrants: 80 percent of Democratic mayors think that undocumented immigrants should have access to local benefits programs, compared with 35 percent of Republicans.

Figure 13. Race-Targeted Policy Programs
Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with each statement.

Legend: Strongly agree · Agree · Neither agree nor disagree · Disagree · Strongly disagree · This would not be legal in my city

---

8   E.g., Herd, P. and D. Moynihan. 2019. *Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means.* RSF Press.

Female-led households are disproportionately likely to face poverty.[9] Consequently, we asked each mayor what their administration does, if anything, to specifically help female-led households escape or avoid poverty. Thirty-eight percent of mayors did not cite programs targeted to this population.

Among mayors who cited targeted programs for women, they tended to emphasize ones that benefit women generally or women with varying degrees of economic security, not ones expressly related to women living in poverty. Some mayors emphasized childcare programs. One western mayor said, *"one of the things we've recently done is we're licensing more daycare centers and reducing the fees for those licenses, so there will be more of them available."* A midwestern mayor highlighted political empowerment: *"So I appoint probably about 125 people to different boards and commissions, and I also have my department heads or cabinet, and now I've increased the number of women on those boards and commissions by nearly 60 percent. Now, for probably the first time in my city's history, my leadership team is majority women, and I think it's important to have women in leadership roles because obviously they understand issues that I may not fully understand or appreciate. So making sure that they're in leadership roles so that they can impact every decision that we're making."* Several mayors also outlined grants they provided for women, especially women-owned businesses. One western mayor described several programs in his city: *"We provide grants and some of these grants are targeted to female-owned businesses. We also provide scholarships for our community college and again with that target of women, people of color, and first gen students. Also in terms of grants, we put up millions of dollars in business grants during the pandemic and we targeted women and minority-owned businesses. So that's an example of the grants."*

PUBLIC HEALTH, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND CRIME

Mayors see a large number of threats to their residents' health and safety. When we asked them an open-ended question about the greatest threat to their residents' health and safety, mayors highlighted a variety of concerns, including the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, crime, gun violence, poverty, and the environment. There was no consensus. Crime was the most frequent answer, cited by 14 percent of mayors. Several mayors explicitly called out youth crime waves in their communities. Another 13 percent of mayors highlighted gun violence. Several lamented the political obstacles to reducing the availability of illegal guns in their community. One eastern mayor said, *"it affects everyone, and living in a blue city in a red state, it is difficult to get regulations and rules passed to keep people safe."* Nine percent of mayors described poverty as the biggest threat to their residents' health and safety.

Several (mayors) lamented the political obstacles to reducing the availability of illegal guns in their community.

Mayors broadly believe that they are held accountable for a wide array of public health challenges. Large majorities of mayors believe that they are held at least somewhat accountable for traffic crashes (82 percent), gun violence (81 percent), and Covid-19 (70 percent). Slimmer majorities think they are held accountable for mental health (57 percent), hunger (57 percent), and substance abuse issues (51 percent). In contrast, few mayors believe they are held accountable for health challenges like asthma (17 percent) and obesity (14 percent).

---

9   Creamer, J., E. Shrider, K. Burns, and F. Chen. "Poverty in the United States: 2021." United States Census Bureau (Sept. 13, 2022) via https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/demo/p60-277.html.

When compared to 2018, the last time this same question was posed, mayors see themselves as being held more accountable in nearly all categories. Unfortunately, we cannot parse whether this ostensible shift is the result of a general increase in the salience of public health connected to the pandemic, to more issue specific changes such as increases in both gun-related homicides and traffic fatalities, or some combination of factors.

Figure 14. Accountability and Health Challenges
How much do your constituents hold you accountable for each of the following health challenges in your city?
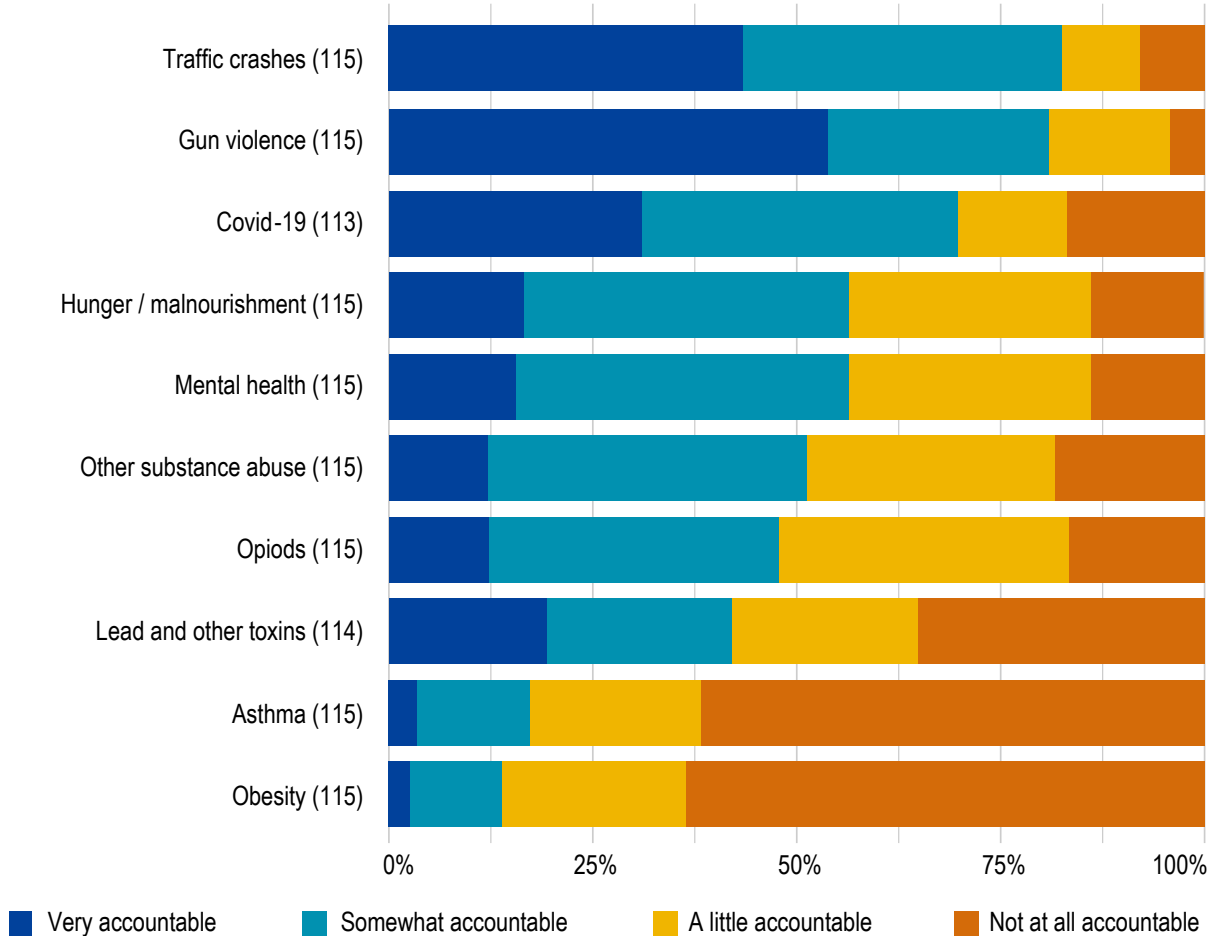
Legend: Very accountable | Somewhat accountable | A little accountable | Not at all accountable

"The most common concern, cited by just over half of mayors, was mental health and trauma, outstripping even potential economic concerns..."

Mayors were 26 percentage points more likely to feel accountable for their resident's mental health than they were in 2018 [Table 1]. This shift may also be at least partially attributable to the pandemic. Last year, we asked mayors about the long-term implications of the pandemic that most concerned them. The most common concern, cited by just over half of mayors, was mental health and trauma, outstripping even potential economic concerns like the loss of small businesses, financial insecurity, or the shift to remote work.[10]

10   Glick, D., K. Einstein, and M. Palmer. "2021 Menino Survey of Mayors: Building Back Better." Boston University Initiative on Cities (Nov. 22, 2021) via https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2021/11/2021-Menino-Survey-BBB-Report.pdf.

The increase in perceptions of accountability for traffic crashes, which were already high in 2018, come during a period of rising traffic fatalities on America's roadways, with the highest numbers of deaths recorded since 2007.[11] The spike has prompted a renewed call by federal agencies for state and local officials to improve safety for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists.[12]

Table 1. Accountability and Health Challenges, Longitudinal from 2018-2022

	Percent "very" or "somewhat" accountable		Change 2022-2018
	2022	**2018**	
Gun violence	81%	53%	28%
Mental health	57%	31%	26%
Other substance abuse	51%	36%	15%
Opioids	48%	35%	13%
Traffic crashes	83%	70%	13%
Hunger / malnourishment	57%	46%	11%
Asthma	17%	13%	4%
Obesity	14%	9%	5%
Lead and other toxins	42%	50%	–8%

Past Menino Survey reports have delved into mayoral priorities with regard to cycling and pedestrian infrastructure[13], and effective mechanisms to improve safety[14]. This year the Survey fielded questions on a specific type of intervention that comes with potential political risks: automated traffic enforcement technology. Perhaps reflecting the salience of traffic crashes to their governing responsibilities, mayors see a wide variety of uses for automated traffic enforcement technology in their cities. Sixty-seven percent would use them to regulate speed, while 62 percent would use them to monitor red lights. Other uses, such as noise (31 percent) and stop signs (29 percent) are not as popular, though at least a handful of mayors noted they were unaware automated noise enforcement existed. Only a small minority of mayors (11 percent) see no use for automated traffic enforcement.

11   National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. "Newly Released Estimates Show Traffic Fatalities Reached a 16-Year High in 2021." US Department of Transportation (May 17, 2022) via https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/early-estimate-2021-traffic-fatalities.

12   US Department of Transportation. "As Part of Major Push to Bring Down Traffic Deaths, USDOT Launches Roadway Safety Call to Action." Feb. 3, 2023 via https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/part-major-push-bring-down-traffic-deaths-usdot-launches-roadway-safety-call-action; US Department of Transportation. "Our Nation's Roadway Safety Crisis." Feb. 2, 2023 via https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9e0e6b7397734c1387172bbc0001f29b.

13   Einstein, K., D. Glick, M. Palmer, and S. Fox. "2019 Menino Survey of Mayors." Boston University Initiative on Cities (Jan. 21, 2020) via https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2020/12/Menino-Survey-of-Mayors-2019-Final-Report.pdf.

14   Godinez Puig, L., K. Lusk, and M. Wang. "Mayors and the Health of Cities." Boston University Initiative on Cities (Jun. 4, 2019) via https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2020/12/Mayors-and-the-Health-of-Cities-Report.pdf.

Democrats are somewhat more enthusiastic about automated enforcement in general. While speed and red lights are the two most popular uses among Democrats and Republicans, Democrats favor each by a substantial margin relative to Republicans. Seventy-three percent of Democrats support use for speed enforcement compared to 48 percent of Republicans. For red light enforcement the split was 65 percent vs. 52 percent.

Figure 15. Automated Traffic Enforcement in City
Irrespective of any state limitations on your city, what would be your ideal use(s) of automated traffic enforcement technology in your city? Pick all that apply.

Mayors answering = 116
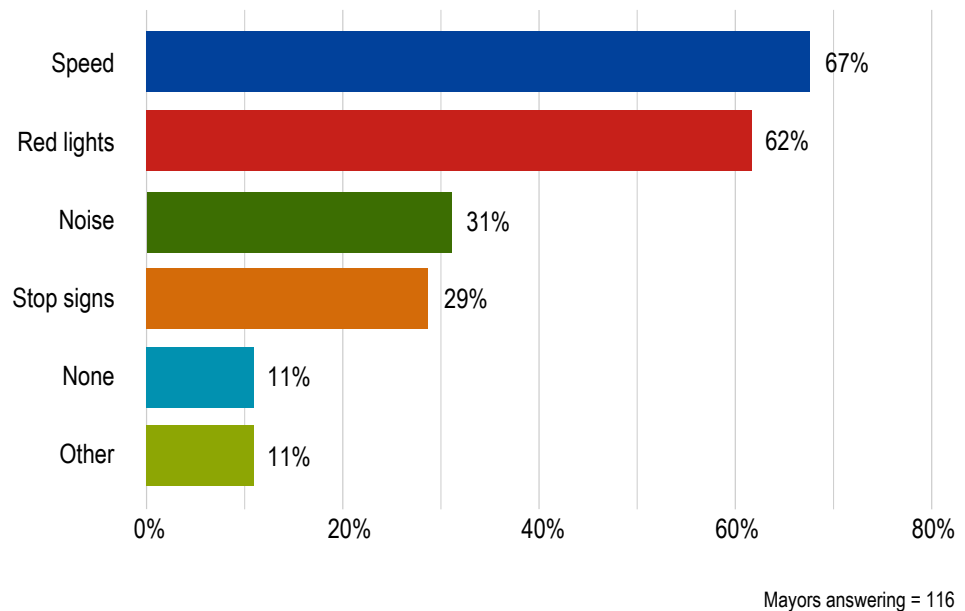
Mayors cite a variety of benefits of automated enforcement in response to an open-ended question about the single biggest benefit and drawback of the technology. A substantial plurality (38 percent) focus on safety, deterrence, and changing driving behavior. As one said bluntly, *"no drawbacks. It reduces accidents."* Another said *"the benefit is that it's a deterrent. You see the signs and think 'Ooh, I could get a ticket anytime'."* A third explained, *"we would see an improvement in people's behavior regarding speeding, and people would feel safer on the streets."*

"…the benefit is it allows officers to go and attack violent crime issues instead of dealing with traffic safety issues that now technology can handle, and handle it, quite frankly, more fairly than in the past."

Another 20 percent each touted a) the better use of resources and b) the ability to enforce the law more. One said, focusing on optimizing resources, *"the benefit is it allows officers to go and attack violent crime issues instead of dealing with traffic safety issues that now technology can handle, and handle it, quite frankly, more fairly than in the past."* Similarly, another said *"we don't have to have police sitting on the street measuring traffic speed and giving tickets c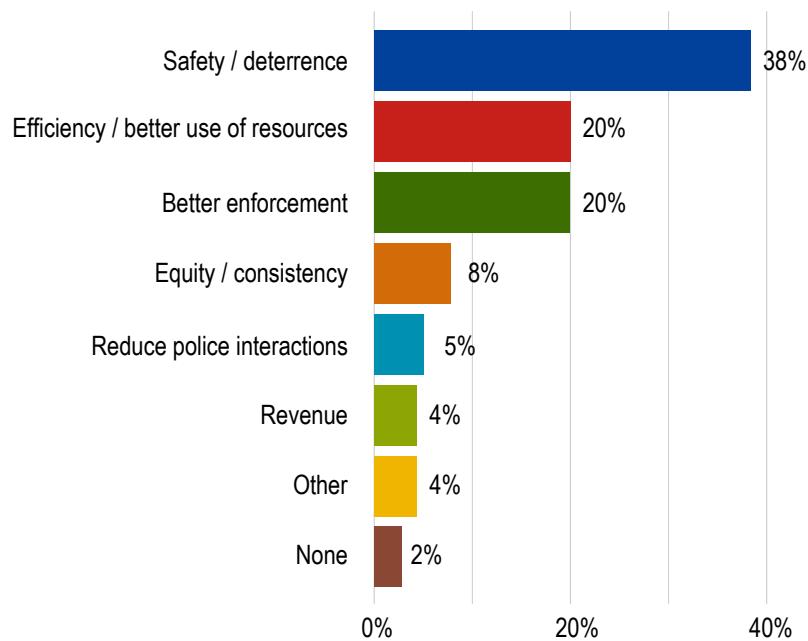onstantly."* Those who emphasized enforcement spoke of expanding *"the reach of law enforcement,"* identifying *"a significant number of people breaking the law,"* and the ability to *"catch people speeding or going through some red lights."*

Of course, some, like the mayor above who talked about efficiency and fairness, provided responses that combined reasons. One celebrated the *"effectiveness in improving driver behavior without adding more officers."* Another said *"[it] allows for enforcement of critical safety regulations at scale and without the risks/drawbacks of police interactions."* Notably, this mayor was one of the few who focused on reducing problematic police interactions as the primary benefit. Only five percent of responses fell into this category.

Figure 16. Top Benefit of Automated Enforcement

Briefly, what do you see as the one biggest benefit of automated enforcement? [Open-ended]

Category	Percentage
Safety / deterrence	38%
Efficiency / better use of resources	20%
Better enforcement	20%
Equity / consistency	8%
Reduce police interactions	5%
Revenue	4%
Other	4%
None	2%

As with the single biggest benefit, one drawback stands out with a key plurality. Thirty-two percent of mayors cite negative public perceptions as the biggest drawback of automated traffic enforcement. This category captures responses that focus on general opposition. Another four percent focus on backlash and complaints from those who actually get caught. Some of the public perception comments were general. For instance, one mayor simply and colorfully said it *"makes residents pissed."* Others focus on more specific public perception concerns. These include *"public perception that they're there for revenue rather than safety,"* *"perception of government overreach,"* *"mistrust of government,"* and *"political opposition from privacy kooks."* Others pointed to public perception that electronic enforcement is not legitimate. One mayor, who called it *"silly,"* said that residents *"will march against them"* because they *"believe that unless a real-life police officer is out there catching them speeding, it doesn't count."*

Others pointed to public perception that electronic enforcement is not legitimate. ...they "believe that unless a real-life police officer is out there catching them speeding, it doesn't count."

Alongside the 32 percent who focus on public oppositions, sometimes rooted in privacy beliefs, another 15 percent conveyed their own concerns about privacy, record keeping, and a sense of a large surveillance state. For example, a progressive mayor who emphasized the safety benefits also said *"the drawback is plain and obvious: the surveillance state. It has a dystopian ring to it."*
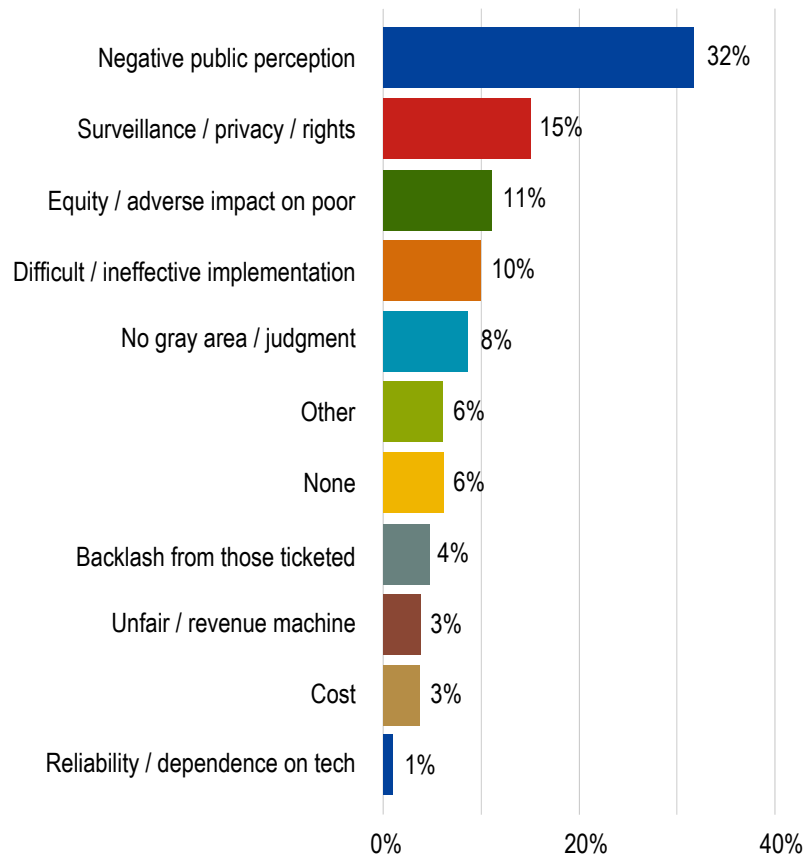
Other drawbacks that multiple mayors raised include a disproportionate burden on the poor, various implementation challenges, and the lack of discretion or gray area. One said, *"the drawback is you don't get to argue with the ticketing officer at the time."*

Mayors' views on the top benefit of automated enforcement did not vary by party.

Figure 17. Top Drawback of Automated Enforcement
Briefly, what do you see as the one biggest drawback of automated enforcement? [Open-ended]

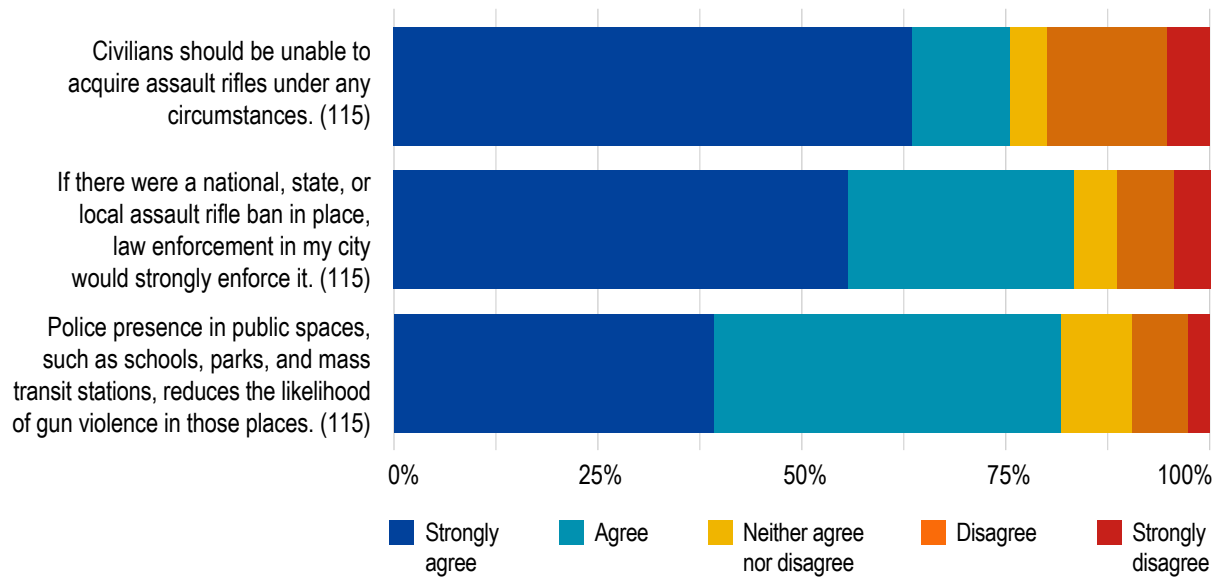| Category	Percentage
Negative public perception	32%
Surveillance / privacy / rights	15%
Equity / adverse impact on poor	11%
Difficult / ineffective implementation	10%
No gray area / judgment	8%
Other	6%
None	6%
Backlash from those ticketed	4%
Unfair / revenue machine	3%
Cost	3%
Reliability / dependence on tech	1%

Gun violence is the second most cited public health concern for which mayors are held accountable. While they already have limited — and in some cases diminishing — authority to regulate guns in their communities, mayors strongly support additional gun control. Seventy-five percent of mayors agree that civilians should be unable to acquire assault rifles under any circumstances. Mirroring national partisan polarization, Democrats and Republicans were divided: 88 percent of Democratic mayors support an assault rifle ban, compared with only 40 percent of Republican mayors. An even larger proportion of mayors (84 percent) believe that their police officers would strongly enforce an assault rifle ban if one were implemented. Intriguingly, Democrats (92 percent) were significantly more likely than Republicans (32 percent) to trust their police to enforce such a ban.

The majority of mayors believe that their police departments are helpful partners in reducing gun violence. A strong majority of mayors (82 percent) agree that police presence in public places, like schools, parks, and mass transit stations, reduces the likelihood of gun violence in those locations. Mayors of both parties agreed with this sentiment, with 95 percent of Republicans and 78 percent of Democrats believing that police presence makes public spaces safer.

Figure 18. Gun Control Measures
Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with each statement.

Legend: Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Rows:
- Civilians should be unable to acquire assault rifles under any circumstances. (115)
- If there were a national, state, or local assault rifle ban in place, law enforcement in my city would strongly enforce it. (115)
- Police presence in public spaces, such as schools, parks, and mass transit stations, reduces the likelihood of gun violence in those places. (115)

Turning to perceptions of the police more generally, 34 percent of mayors believe that Black residents in their city do not trust the police. This figure is slightly lower than in 2020, when 44 percent of mayors felt similarly. The 10 percentage point shift suggests that mayors were slightly less concerned about racial disparities in policing in the summer of 2022, when this survey was fielded, than they were in the summer of 2020 during a period of prolonged, high-profile protests against police violence. There is little difference between Democratic and Republican mayors in their views on the relationship between Black residents and the police. Mayors of both parties appear fairly united in their perceptions of their police's effect on public safety.

Figure 19. Trust in Police

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: Black residents in my city trust the police.
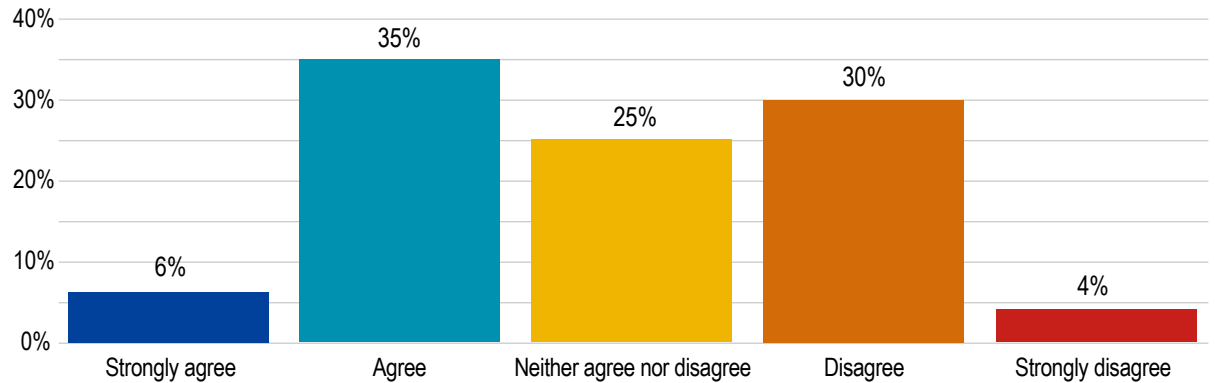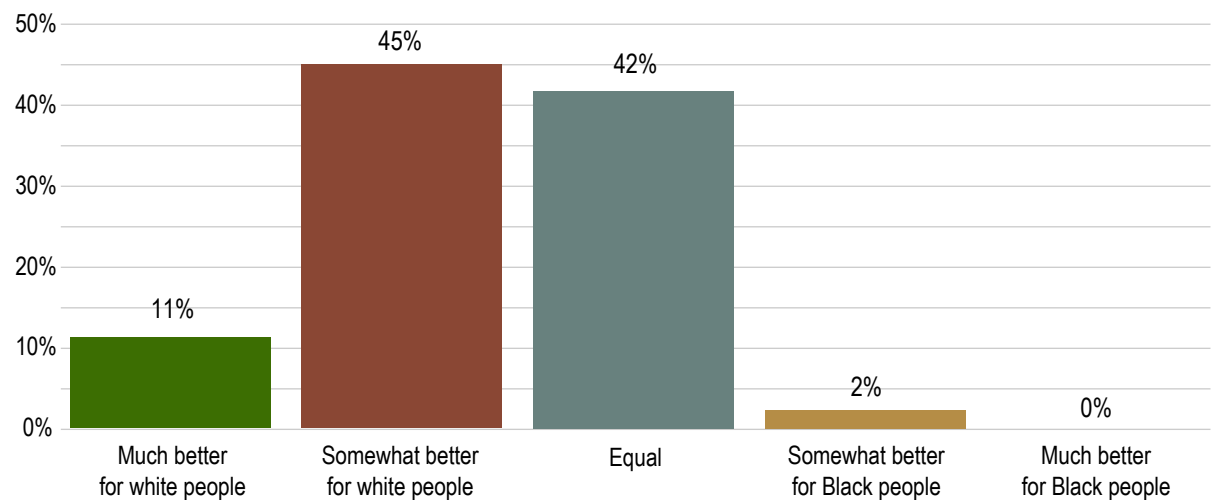

Mayors answering = 115

Mayors show a similar magnitude of opinion shift when asked about perceptions of equitable treatment by the police. Forty-two percent of mayors believe that Black and white people receive equal treatment by the police, compared with only 32 percent in 2020. The partisan gap in perceptions is sizable: 79 percent of Republican mayors believe Black and white people receive equal treatment by the police in their city, compared with only 31 percent of Democrats.

Figure 20. Treatment by Police

How equitable is treatment by police for white people compared with Black people in your city?
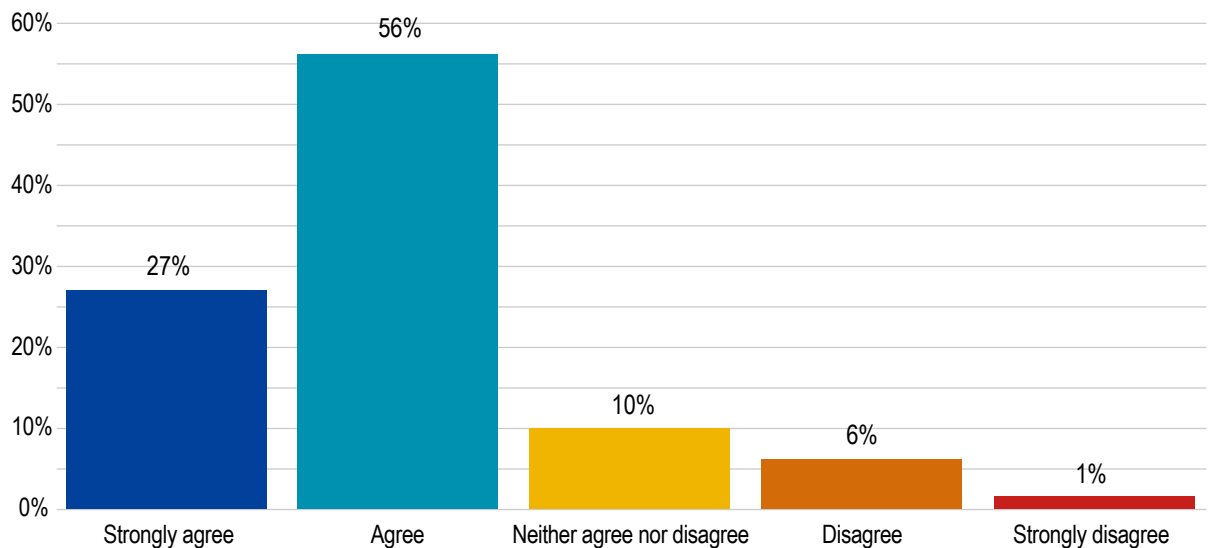

Mayors answering = 114

An overwhelming (and bipartisan) majority of mayors (83 percent) believe that their police department does a good job of attracting individuals well-suited to being police officers. A virtually identical 80 percent of mayors felt similarly in 2020.

Figure 21. Police Recruitment in City

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: The police department in my city does a good job of attracting individuals well-suited to being police officers.

Mayors answering = 115

CONCLUSION

When it comes to the economic challenges of their communities, mayors are deeply concerned about rising housing costs and believe they are held accountable for those rising costs. They are pursuing a variety of policies, including land use reform and additional funding for direct assistance programs, to redress their local housing crises. Mayors are also worried about poverty in their communities, though they differ along partisan lines on the root causes of poverty as well as the policies best suited to reducing it.

Mayors are held accountable for a wide range of public health and safety concerns that impact the day to day lives of the constituents they are elected to serve. They feel most accountable for traffic crashes in their communities, and largely support automated traffic enforcement as a means of regulating speeds and reducing local crashes. They also largely support gun control, seeking remedies to the toll of gun violence, though here, again, their views differ along partisan lines. Finally, mayors across party lines believe their police departments make their communities safer.

METHODOLOGY

We invited mayors of all cities over 75,000 residents to participate in the Menino Survey of Mayors. Each mayor received an invitation at their official email account, as well as follow-up phone calls. We spoke with 118 mayors between June and August 2022 about a variety of topics including climate and energy, poverty, public engagement, and health and safety. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in person or over the phone. Mayors' responses and participation remain anonymous, to ensure they can speak freely about a wide range of issues. As Table 2 shows, the sample of participating cities closely mirrors the broader population on traits including size, racial demographics, housing prices, and geographic distribution.

Table 2. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All US Cities with Populations >75,000

	Surveyed Cities	**All Cities**
Number of Cities	118	501
Average Population	212,121	222,955
Average Percent White	51.2%	47.6%
Average Percent Black	16.5%	14.4%
Average Percent Hispanic	20.0%	25.6%
Average Percent Asian	7.6%	8.2%
Average Median Housing Price	$396,675	$333,929
Region	**% of Sample**	**% of Cities**
Midwest	17.8%	15.8%
Northeast	11.9%	9.8%
South	34.7%	35.1%
West	35.6%	39.9%

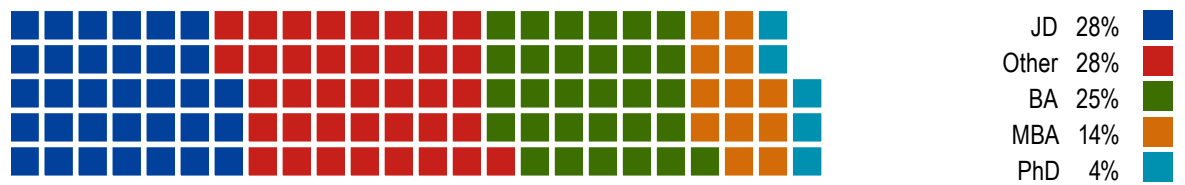Source: 2020 American Community Survey (ACS), published by the US Census Bureau.
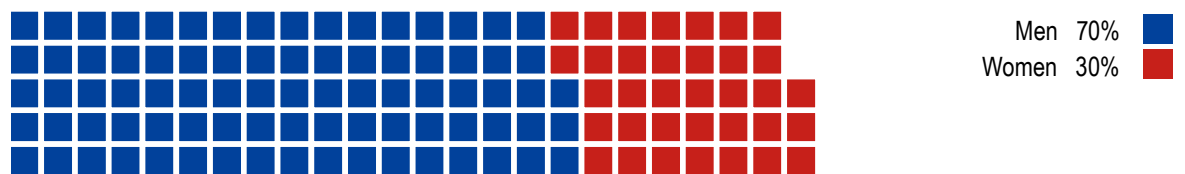
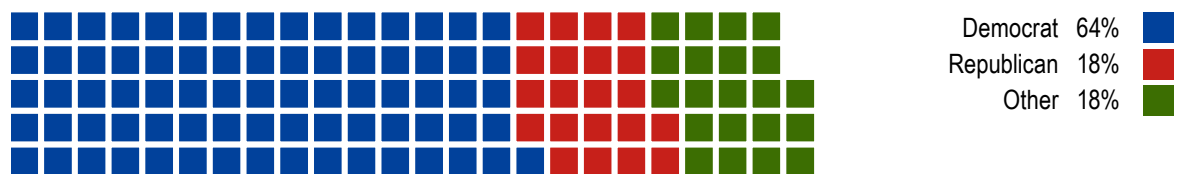**Figure 22. Demographics of Surveyed Mayors**

Professional background

Other	55%
Law	23%
Business	22%

Highest degree

JD	28%
Other	28%
BA	25%
MBA	14%
PhD	4%

Gender

| Men | 70% |
| Women | 30% |

Party

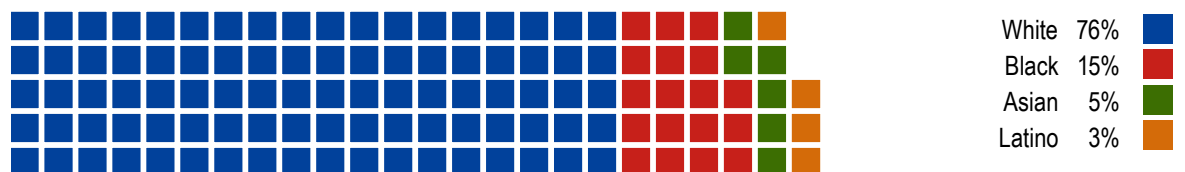| Democrat | 64% |
| Republican | 18% |
| Other | 18% |

Race

White	76%
Black	15%
Asian	5%
Latino	3%

Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Boston University Initiative on Cities leads research in, on, and with cities in pursuit of sustainable, just, and inclusive urban transformation. We marshal the talents and resources of wide-ranging disciplines across Boston University spanning the social, natural, computational, and health sciences. The Menino Survey is named for the late Mayor Tom Menino, who co-founded the Initiative on Cities in 2014 following 20 years as mayor of Boston.

bu.edu/ioc

To learn more about the Menino Survey of Mayors, visit **surveyofmayors.com**