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2018 Menino Survey of Mayors

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MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

2018 RESULTS



Supported by







NOW IN ITS FIFTH YEAR, the goals of the Menino Survey of Mayors endure: to help amplify the voices and priorities of America's mayors, illuminate mayoral leadership, and focus attention on timely issues affecting cities.

Since we launched the survey, mayors receive even greater attention and face higher expectations. At a time of deadlock and bitter partisan conflict in Washington, mayors are being asked to pick up the slack and take action to advance our nation's economy, lift up marginalized groups, mitigate climate change, and maintain aging infrastructure. In an increasingly urbanized world, cities — and the mayors who lead them — are critical decision makers on the pressing issues of today.

This year's Menino Survey of Mayors, based on 110 interviews held during the summer of 2018, explores mayoral views on issues ranging from economic development — including corporate recruitment and financial incentives — to pressing urban health challenges and policy-related interventions.

We are immensely grateful to the participating mayors whose candor and willingness to make themselves available for live interviews are what make this project successful.

We are also very fortunate to have the continued support of Citi Community Development and The Rockefeller Foundation, two organizations that share our passion for America's urban leaders. Their support is critical and has had a transformative impact in helping us elevate the survey results.

Finally, to the entire team of faculty and staff who commit so much skill, time, and energy to the annual survey — thank you for helping this legacy live on.

Graham Wilson
Director
Boston University
Initiative on Cities

Katharine Lusk
Executive Director
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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 sustainable development in the 21st 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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Methodology: 110 Survey Interviews	6
3. Economic Development: Social Mobility, Incentives, and Partnerships	8
4. Sharing Economy: Ride Share to Home Share	16
5. Health: Community Challenges and Priorities	18
6. Housing: Desired Growth	23
7. City Councils: Intergovernmental Collaboration	27
8. Poll: Political Hot Buttons	30
9. Conclusion	35



FOREWORD

The Menino Survey of Mayors, created five years ago by Boston University, exists to reveal the challenges, perceptions, and relationships of mayors across the country as we seek to build vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive communities. This year's Survey covers what we know personally to be pressing issues for our cities: the rising costs of housing, the health challenges facing our residents, and the complex dynamics of economic growth and job creation.

What mayors think and prioritize should be of great importance to policymakers in all levels of government, as we are the leaders closest to the people. The benefit of having the most personal job in politics is that we talk to and work closely with people in the neighborhoods and institutions that we serve. They drive our priorities every day. We learn firsthand about the hopes and aspirations that our citizens have for their community, and also the apprehension some feel in the face of change.

As this year's Survey reveals, we are all seeking to achieve or to manage growth and use many tools to do so. We know the goal is to make our cities better, not just bigger. Mayors work hard to ensure that growth produces more local jobs, more opportunities for high-quality education and training, and more housing options for everyone.

As mayors, we are executives, spearheading programs and directing services for the greater good. At the same time, we are a community unto ourselves, eager to work with and learn from one another. Mayors are always interested in understanding how our experiences and perspectives compare to those of our colleagues. This Survey yields insights into our collective priorities, while also respecting the diversity of our viewpoints. We know our colleagues will appreciate reviewing the results, and we urge all policymakers to pay attention to the findings.

Mayor Steve Adler
Austin, Texas

Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson
Gary, Indiana



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SOCIAL MOBILITY

Mayors view housing costs and a lack of living-wage jobs as key obstacles to social mobility.

According to the 110 U.S. mayors surveyed in 2018, the top two obstacles to social mobility are insufficient living-wage jobs and high housing costs. One-quarter of both Democratic and Republican mayors cited housing costs as the greatest hindrance to social mobility. Democratic mayors, however, were significantly more likely to name a lack of living-wage jobs as a major hindrance. Mayors of high cost-of-living cities were substantially more likely to underscore housing costs, while mayors of lower-cost cities were more apt to cite insufficient living-wage jobs as deterrents to social mobility.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mayors almost uniformly view financial incentives for economic development as “good policy,” but are divided on support for living-wage ordinances.

An overwhelming majority of mayors said that recruiting economic investments with financial incentives is good for the city. They are evenly split, however, on whether such incentives are popular with their constituents. The mayors are starkly divided on support for living-wage ordinances. Sixty percent of Democratic mayors believe that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances, even if it causes some companies to move away or reduce jobs. In contrast, no Republican mayor agreed with this trade-off. This divide represents the largest partisan gap we have seen in five years of the Menino Survey of Mayors.

RECRUITMENT COMPETITION

Mayors generally emphasize workforce skills and quality of life when recruiting new businesses, but they believe that Amazon’s search for a second headquarters centered more on tax breaks and incentives. They broadly wish that “other cities” would refrain from using financial incentives to attract new investment.

Mayors overwhelmingly selected their communities’ 1) workforce skills and composition, and 2) quality of life as the top two factors they are most likely to emphasize when meeting with business leaders about economic development opportunities. They saw the recent competition for Amazon’s second headquarters, in contrast, as relatively more focused on tax incentives. Whether thinking about corporate recruitment in general, or the Amazon case in particular, mayors said that workforce skills and composition are the most important enticements. However, when thinking about Amazon, they tended to select tax breaks and financial incentives, rather than quality of life as the second most important factor. The majority of mayors generally think that recruiting with incentives can be good for the city, but that other cities offer too many economic development incentives. They also wish that other cities would make a commitment to refrain from using these incentives, but overwhelmingly see widespread reduction in their use as an unattainable aspiration.

THE SHARING ECONOMY

Mayors say that the sharing economy has had a largely positive impact on their cities, though some have reservations about home sharing services such as Airbnb.

Mayors almost universally report the effects of ride- and bike-sharing services as positive. However, home-sharing services like Airbnb elicited the most concerns, though a plurality of mayors still view their impact as positive. Interestingly, few mayors have concerns that the sharing economy may have disparate benefits across income and racial groups; a majority of mayors believe that the sharing economy has a positive effect across all income levels, for residents of color, and for the business community.



HEALTH PRIORITIES

Mayors observe an incredibly wide range of health challenges confronting their communities, with obesity/diabetes/heart disease and addiction/opioids as two areas cited most often. They do not perceive any simple solutions to community level health concerns and often noted — unprompted — that they are not responsible for health services. Relatedly, mayors overwhelmingly believe that other levels of government are the “ideal level” for health policy decisions. Yet, there are some public health challenges for which a majority of mayors believe constituents hold them strongly accountable, including traffic accidents, gun violence, and exposure to toxins like lead. Hunger, opioid addiction and other forms of substance abuse, and mental health are areas where mayors perceive less local accountability, but still believe a majority of residents hold them at least a little accountable.

OPIOID CRISIS

Mayors would allocate money to fight opioids across a wide array of policies.

When asked how they would allocate new funding to tackle the opioid crisis, mayors, on average, allocated the largest share of their money (about one-third) to treatment, followed by demand reduction, supply reduction, and harm reduction. These average allocations were relatively similar to those of 30 experts, including health policy specialists, politicians, and law enforcement, surveyed by the *New York Times* in 2018.

HOUSING

While mayors generally want to increase the amount of housing in their cities, their desired increases are relatively modest. They hope that a majority of these new units would be owner-occupied and that nearly one-third would be single-family homes.

Half of the mayors surveyed prefer to increase the number of housing units in their cities by up to 10 percent, while the other half aim for more substantial growth. Mayors of high-cost cities appear more eager to add to their housing stock relative to mayors of cities with lower costs of living. Mayors of smaller cities with more room to grow also favor greater housing stock growth relative to their peers who govern larger cities. When asked to allocate (in an ideal world) these housing units by type, mayors preferred that a majority be owner-occupied and that a plurality of these units be single-family homes.

CITY COUNCIL

Mayors describe their relationships with their city councils as cooperative, and believe they wield at least some influence over their councils. They also identify some groups whose interests are over- or under-represented by their city councils.

A strong majority of mayors report that their relationships with their city councils are cooperative, that they share ideological leanings with their councils, and hold at least a moderate amount of influence over them. Mayors believe that some groups, including high- and middle-income residents, and senior citizens, are well-represented by their councils. They highlighted many groups, including Asian Americans, Hispanics, low-income residents, renters, and immigrants, as underrepresented. Mayors viewed very few groups as overrepresented on their councils; one-quarter of mayors described Democrats and senior citizens as overrepresented, the highest numbers across any grouping.

POLICY TRADE-OFFS

Reflecting national political divides, Republican and Democratic mayors disagree on a number of salient local policy issues, though they find some common ground on others.

Democratic and Republican mayors sharply disagree on multiple significant local policy issues, including promoting housing density, allocating local government services to immigrants irrespective of their legal status, regulating the sharing economy, and marijuana legalization. Mayors across party lines see racial problems in the United States as widespread. Despite their concerns about housing affordability, majorities of mayors across party lines disagree with the proposition that it would better for their cities if local housing prices declined.



METHODOLOGY: 110 SURVEY INTERVIEWS

The 2018 Menino Survey of Mayors uses a combination of open- and closed-ended questions to explore myriad, salient local issues and policy priorities. This year, 110 mayors discussed everything from health policy to economic development to their relationships with their city councils. 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 Menino Survey of Mayors team at their official email account, and follow-up phone calls. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in person or over the phone. **This systematic sampling and recruitment effort yielded a representative sample of mayors of American cities with populations over 75,000.**

Table 1 compares the demographics of participating cities to all cities with over 75,000 residents.

Table 1. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All U.S. Cities with Populations >75,000¹

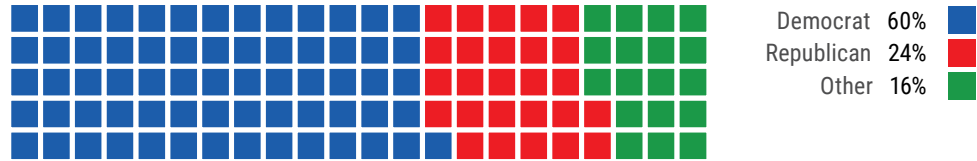
	Survey	All Cities
Number of Cities	110	472
Average Population	231,923	225,087
Average Percent White	56%	49%
Average Percent Black	14%	14%
Average Percent Hispanic	19%	25%
Average Median Housing Price	\$237,795	\$257,345
Region	% of Sample	% of Cities
Northeast	9%	10%
Midwest	22%	16%
South	33%	33%
West	36%	40%

The sample comprises 110 mayors from a wide variety of personal and professional backgrounds. Sixty percent are Democrats and 24 percent are Republicans — coinciding with national-level figures. Of this sample, 28 percent are female, and 83 percent are white; 27 percent hail from business backgrounds, while 23 percent worked in the legal field prior to becoming mayor; 84 percent hold a bachelor's or advanced degree.

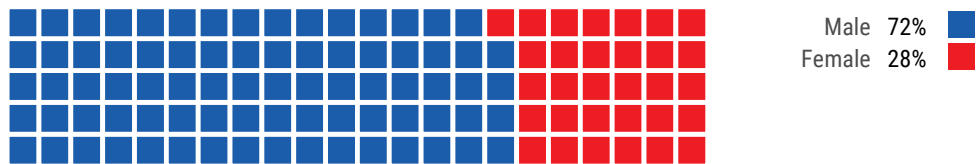


Figure 1: Demographics of Surveyed Mayors

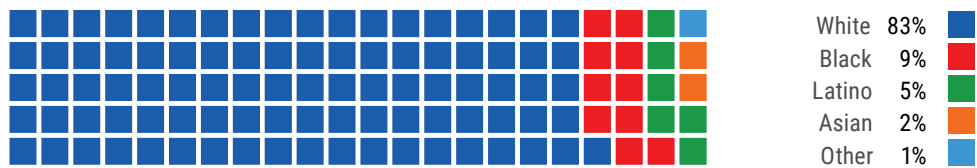
Party



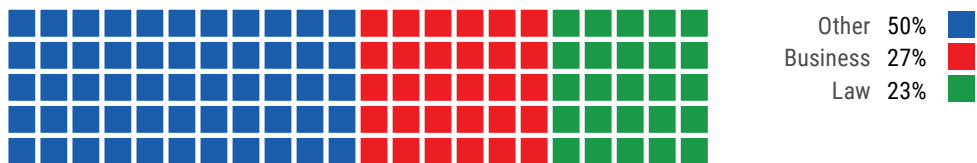
Gender



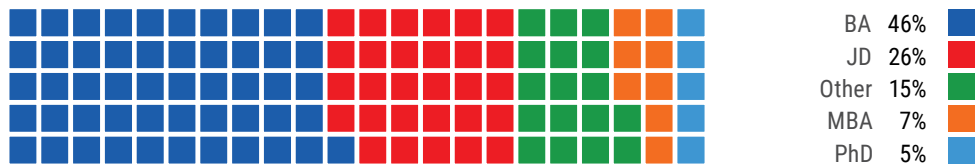
Race



Professional Background



Highest Degree





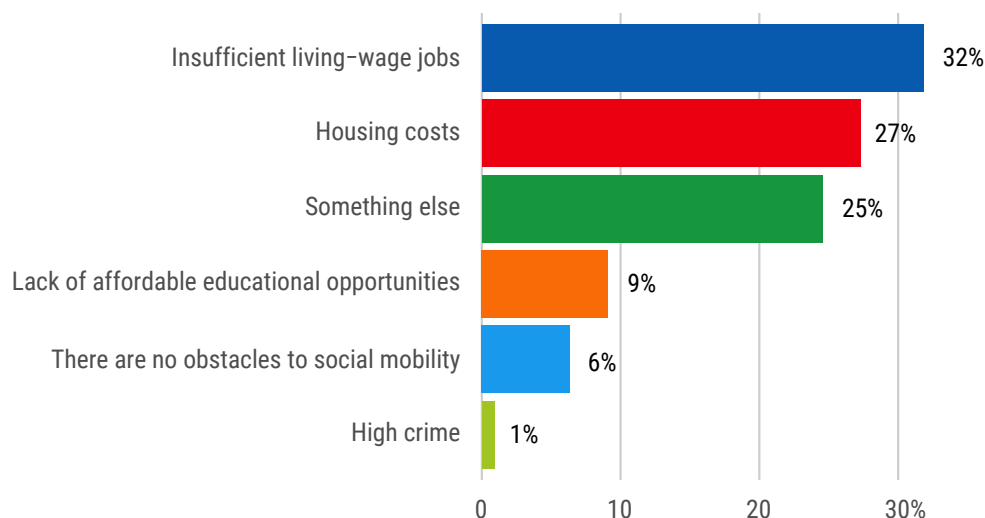
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: SOCIAL MOBILITY, INCENTIVES, AND PARTNERSHIPS

Regardless of their formal powers, mayors are called on to act as economic ambassadors for their communities. Amazon's decision to create a highly publicized national competition for its second headquarters, while not emblematic of the typical location/relocation dynamics, brought to light the range of ways that cities might lure new enterprises. This year's Menino Survey features a series of detailed questions on local economic development to elicit mayors' views on everything from infrastructure financing to corporate recruitment. This section delves into the roles that mayors play in promoting economic development, supporting workers, and making their communities attractive to businesses.

Mayors see housing costs and a lack of living-wage jobs as key obstacles to social mobility. A lack of social mobility is a critical policy issue facing many American cities. In previous years of the Menino Survey, mayors highlighted issues related to socioeconomic inequality as one of their top policy priorities. This year's survey reveals that mayors believe that insufficient living-wage jobs (32 percent) and high housing costs (27 percent) are the top two obstacles to achieving social mobility for residents.

Figure 2: Obstacles to Social Mobility

Which of the following, if any, is the biggest obstacle to social mobility in your city?



Similar percentages of Democratic and Republican mayors (26 and 27 percent, respectively) state that housing costs are the biggest obstacle to social mobility. In contrast, Democratic and Republican mayors differ starkly as to whether they see insufficient living-wage jobs as a significant obstacle, with Democrats 30 percentage points more likely to cite living-wage jobs than their Republican counterparts. Perhaps most notably, Republican mayors are markedly more likely — by a margin of 17 percentage points — to believe that there are no obstacles to social mobility in their cities. The top cited challenges to social mobility vary, in ways consistent with housing prices. Mayors of cities with high housing prices (those above the national median for cities with populations over



75,000) are more likely to say housing costs stymie social mobility, while those in less competitive real estate markets more often say the “lack of living-wage jobs” prevent social mobility. Notably, the percentage who said “no obstacles” is similar irrespective of housing prices.

Figure 3: Obstacles to Social Mobility by Party

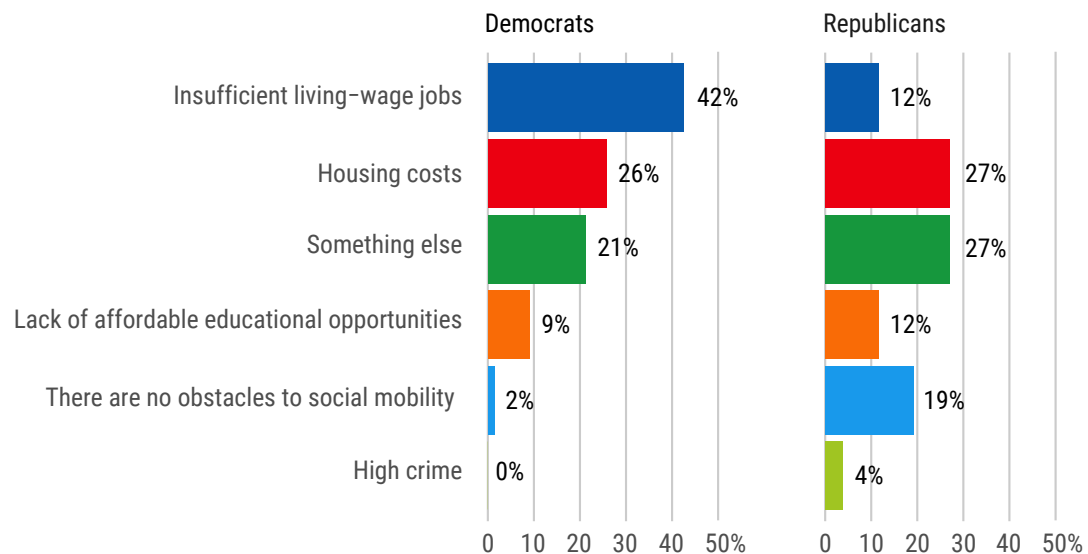
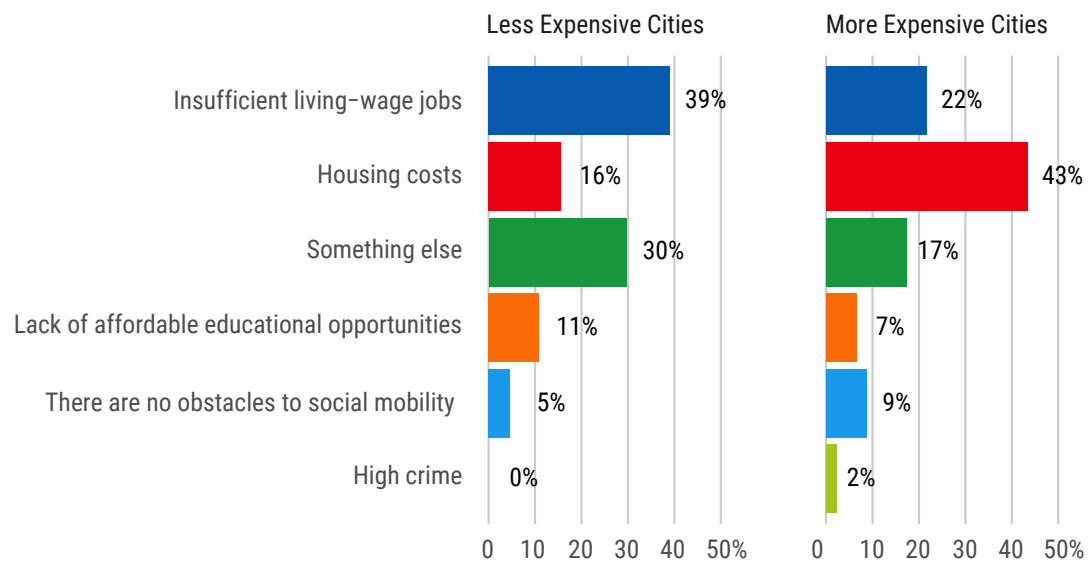


Figure 4: Obstacles to Social Mobility by Housing Cost

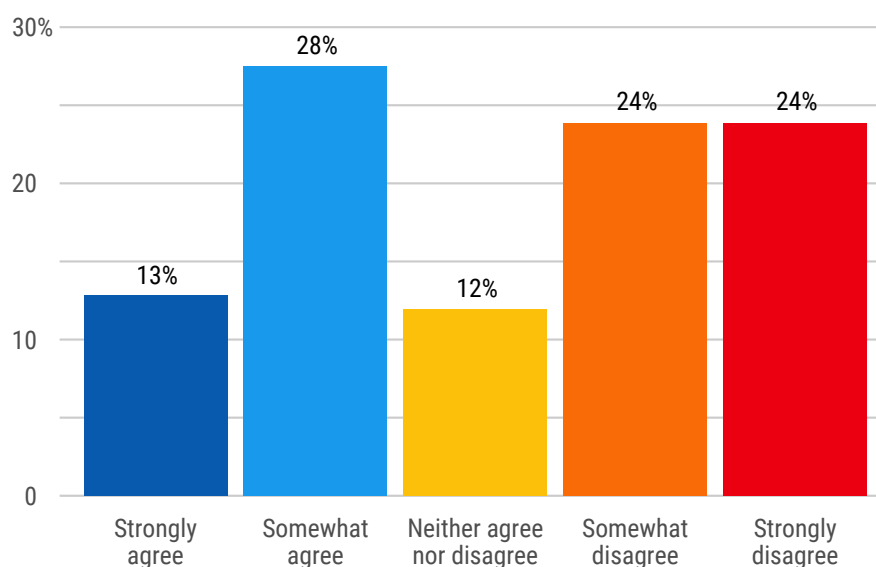




A plurality of mayors do not agree that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances if it means fewer overall jobs. While many mayors view insufficient living-wage jobs as a key obstacle to social mobility, as a group, they do not necessarily think that strong living-wage ordinances at the local level are the best way of addressing the challenge. Forty-one percent of mayors agree that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances, “even if it results in some companies moving away or fewer jobs”; 48 percent disagreed with this proposed trade-off. Thus, to the extent there is a trade-off between local wage policy and jobs/economic development, there is no consensus among mayors on this policy intervention.

Figure 5: Living-Wage Ordinances

Cities should have strong living-wage ordinances, even if it means that some businesses may locate elsewhere or hire fewer people.



The partisan divide in responses is stark. No Republican mayors agree that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances when coupled with a potential loss of economic activity and jobs. In contrast, 60 percent of the Democratic mayors surveyed agree that cities should have strong living-wage ordinances, even if it could result in fewer jobs and some companies relocating elsewhere. This 60 percentage point gap — the biggest partisan gap in the five years of Menino Survey reports — reveals that Democratic and Republican mayors are highly polarized on wage policies.

While mayors are divided on their support for living-wage ordinances, and whether or not access to living-wage jobs are an obstacle to social mobility, they agree on the importance of attracting new businesses to their communities.

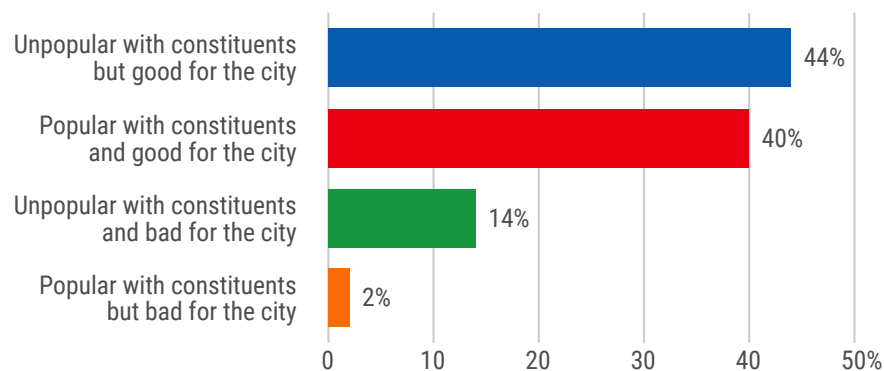


Nearly all mayors view using financial incentives for economic development as “good policy,” but they do not agree on whether it is also good politics. Eighty-four percent of mayors say that recruiting economic investments with financial incentives is good policy for their cities. Among these 84 percent, 52 percent (44 percent of all mayors) feel that such incentives are good for the city, but unpopular with constituents. The remaining 48 percent (40 percent of all mayors) believe that financial incentives as part of the recruitment process are both popular and beneficial. Mayors consistently link their own support for incentives and/or popular support for using them directly to job creation. As one Midwestern mayor says, “No one is thrilled about tax breaks [to corporations], but we would do almost anything to get jobs for the city.” Others note that financial incentives are not especially salient. One southern mayor states, “I don’t hear complaints about incentives, I hear complaints about growth,” and another Midwestern mayor notes, “It’s not that it’s unpopular with constituents, it’s more that they don’t care [about incentives].”

Despite rarely naming tax breaks and financial incentives as something they emphasize in recruiting new businesses (see Figure 10), nearly all mayors see using them as beneficial for their cities. Perhaps not surprisingly, the vast majority of mayors see their own cities as effective at using financial incentives to pursue development even while seeing the strategy as generally problematic (see Figures 6 and 8). While they agree on the policy benefits, about half of mayors see pursuing economic development as a case in which they work against public opinion to pursue good policy. The other half see the use of financial incentives as a place where politics and policy align. A few (though a minority) did say that nearly all cities collectively misuse incentives. One southern mayor bluntly states, “We have [incentives] and use them, but in most cases they’re ‘me-toos’ not ‘differences makers.’” This mayor went on to say, on the politics, “It’s a place where we all cower.”

Figure 6: Recruiting Investments with Financial Incentives

In general, recruiting jobs and investment to your city with financial inducements is:

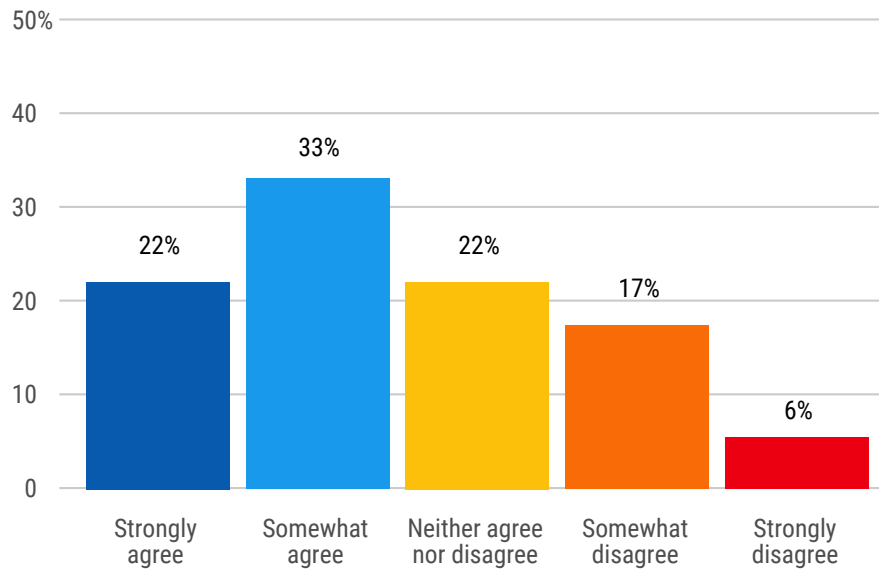


A majority of mayors believe that cities reap long-term benefits from winning competitions to bring new enterprises to their communities. Fifty-five percent of mayors agree that the city that wins a competition to recruit a company or facility sees net benefits in the long run. This is consistent with their views that the use of financial incentives in economic development is a good policy. A sizable minority (23 percent), though, disagree, suggesting that at least some mayors are more skeptical of the value of offering firms financial incentives in exchange for economic investments.



Figure 7: Recruitment Competition Benefits the City That Wins It

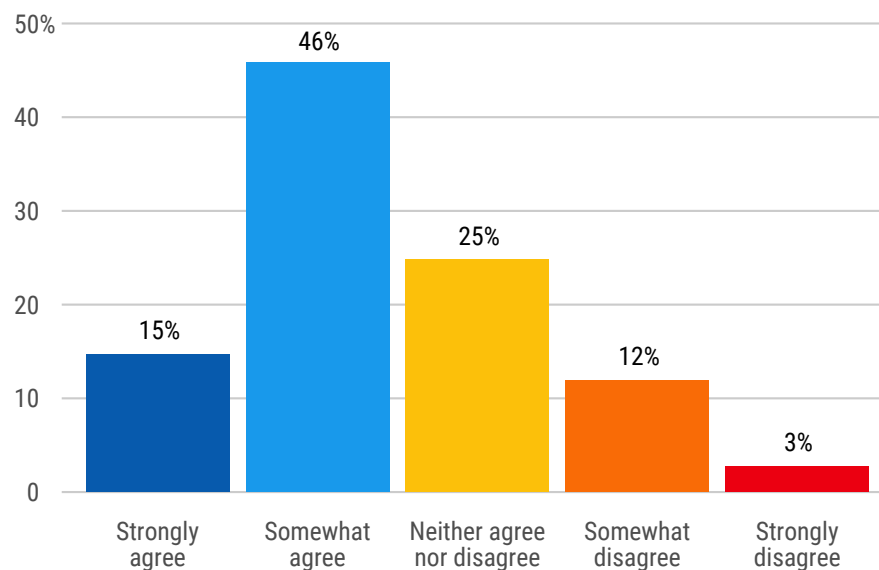
When multiple cities compete to recruit a large company or facility, the city that wins the competition sees clear net benefits from the new investment in the long run.



Mayors also believe that other cities overuse incentives. While mayors generally think that economic development incentives are “good policy,” they also believe that their counterparts overuse these incentives. Sixty-one percent of mayors agree that other cities “offer too many incentives.” As one says quite candidly, “Some [cities] would give away their firstborn.” Mayors are largely supportive of financial incentives for economic development; however, they also clearly see downsides to unfettered competition between local governments over limited development opportunities. Essentially, most mayors see their own cities’ use of incentives as measured and effective, while also seeing others’ use as excessive.

Figure 8: Other Cities Offer Too Many Financial Incentives

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Other cities tend to offer too many tax breaks and other incentives to companies in pursuit of economic development.



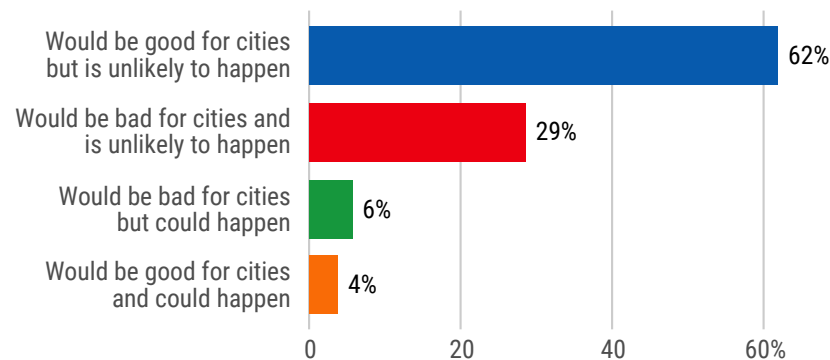


Collective action to refrain from an ‘incentives arms race’ will not likely happen, though many mayors believe it would be good if it did.

Reflecting their concerns over competition for economic development, 62 percent of mayors say it would be good if cities could commit to refraining from offering incentives, but that doing so is “unlikely to happen.” Some explicitly mention the challenge of collective action. Others say that there is no one right approach with regard to incentives for all cities. According to one western mayor, “I don’t know how you would tell [struggling cities] not to give incentives to improve their city. They will do what they think they need for economic development.” Another 29 percent agree that collective action is, fortunately, unlikely because agreeing to refrain from incentives would be bad policy. Only 10 percent of mayors said such a collective agreement could happen. Indeed, with the creation of new employment opportunities a top priority for mayors, giving up potential opportunities to attract job creators and investment represents an extraordinarily unattractive political option.

Figure 9: A Commitment to Refrain from Incentives for Investment

Some have suggested that mayors commit to refrain from using tax breaks and other financial incentives to compete for employers and investment. In your opinion, refraining from this type of competition:



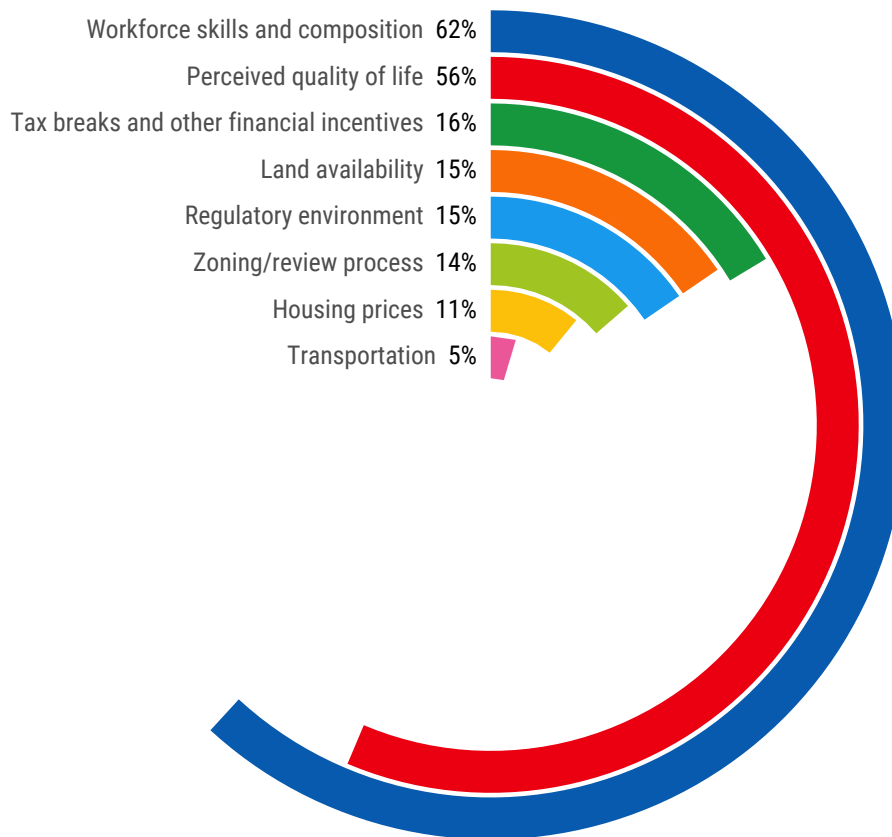
When pursuing economic growth opportunities, mayors emphasize workforce skills and quality of life.

Mayors were asked which two factors they are most likely to highlight when meeting with business leaders considering relocating or opening major new facilities in their cities. Sixty-two percent selected workforce skills and composition and 56 percent chose perceived quality of life (see Figure 10). Mayors are much more likely to highlight factors related to jobs and workforce skills rather than to the business regulatory climate. Indeed, only 16 percent of mayors say that they emphasize tax breaks and financial incentives. Similarly, 15 percent highlight land availability and the regulatory environment in these meetings. While they state that financial incentives are important and effective public policies, they say that they more often discuss factors related to employee caliber and quality of life with prospective business and industry leaders.



Figure 10: Factors in Economic Recruiting

When you engage with companies, which two of the following factors do you primarily emphasize?



Mayors perceived the competition for Amazon’s second HQ as abnormally focused on tax incentives, although a talented workforce still topped the list of perceived consequential factors.

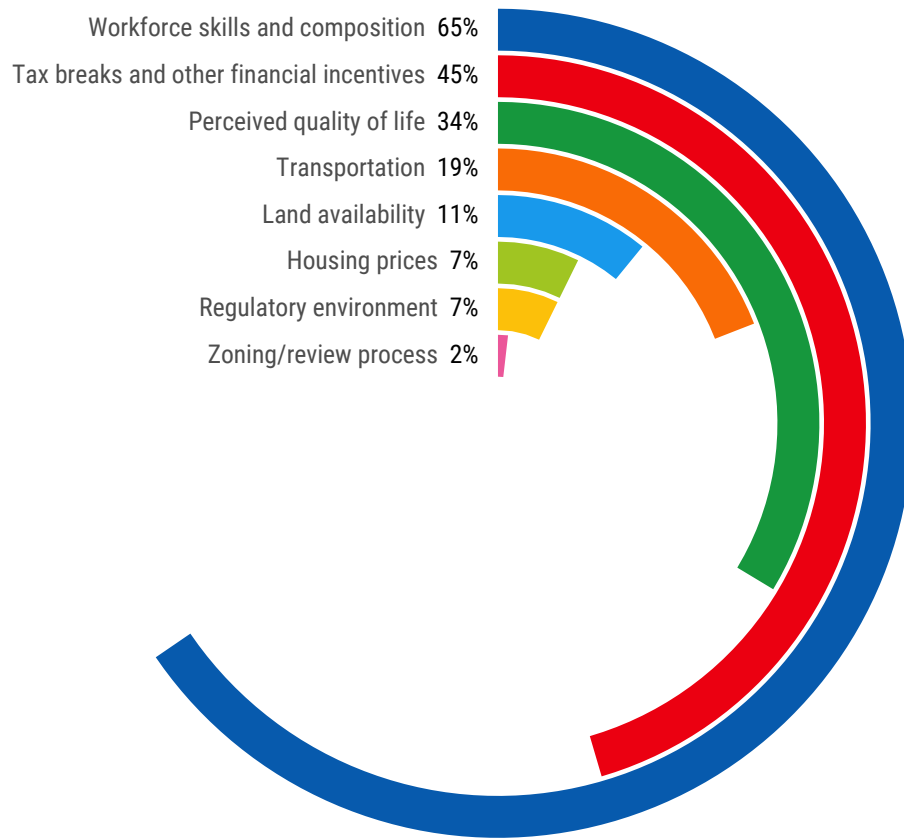
Not surprisingly, given the size and skills of the workforce that Amazon requires, workforce skills and composition was the most frequently cited factor in Amazon’s decision-making. Beyond an emphasis on workforce skills, gaps emerge between mayors’ answers when thinking about the Amazon case and corporate recruitment more generally. Forty-five percent of mayors say that “tax breaks and other financial incentives” was one of the top two factors influencing Amazon’s location decision. This contrasts with just 16 percent of mayors who said they emphasize tax incentives when recruiting companies generally. Quality of life was lower on the perceived priority list for Amazon, with 34 percent of mayors expressing the view that it was a key consideration for Amazon compared to 56 percent of companies generally. Once again, regulatory issues and housing were infrequently mentioned as priorities, with seven percent of mayors selecting each.

There are a number of reasons mayors may view Amazon’s priorities as differing from those of other firms. First, they may simply be reacting to the proposals put forth by fellow mayors in response to Amazon’s request for bids. A second possibility is that the specific example of Amazon elicits more frank assessments than the more abstract question about companies in general. A third possibility is that the Amazon case is an actual outlier and thus not representative of typical economic development interactions and policy. To the extent that this is true, here and elsewhere, analysts should cautiously generalize from it. The fact that so many mayors emphasized workforce traits, and often explicitly noted the very large number of technically skilled people that Amazon would need, at least suggests they were thinking about the specifics of this very salient example.



Figure 11: Factors Important for Recruiting Amazon's HQ2

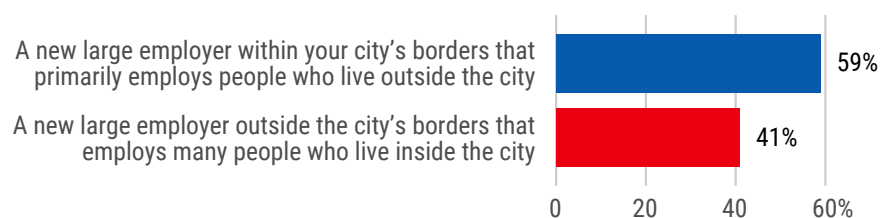
Last year, Amazon solicited bids from cities as part of their process for selecting a location for their second headquarters. Which two factors do you think will have the biggest impact on Amazon's decision?



Mayors are divided between prioritizing jobs or tax base. While mayors highlighted a dearth of job opportunities as an obstacle to social mobility, there was little consensus as to whether to prioritize jobs for their residents or to enhance the tax base. We asked mayors to choose whether they would prefer a new large business that is located inside their cities but “primarily employs people who live outside the city” or a business that “employs a large number of city residents, but is located outside of the city.” Fifty-nine percent of mayors say that they would choose a new large employer located inside their cities that primarily provides jobs for non-city residents. When weighing an enhanced tax base — and the fiscal flexibility that comes with it — against new jobs for their residents, a majority of mayors prioritized the tax base. Still, a sizable minority — 41 percent — chose a business that “employs a large number of city residents, but is located outside the city”.

Figure 12: Prioritizing Jobs or Tax Base

In general, which of the following would you prefer:





SHARING ECONOMY: RIDE SHARE TO HOME SHARE

The previous questions explored mayors' perceived capacity to influence economic development through their relationships and partnerships with business leaders. They also can impact their city's economy via regulation. The sharing economy is one rapidly evolving arena in which cities are employing a variety of regulatory responses.

Mayors say the sharing economy has been positive for their cities, though some worry about home-sharing services such as Airbnb. Mayors almost universally report that ride- and bike-sharing services have had positive impacts on their cities. Fewer have assessments of car-sharing services, in part because they were less prevalent across cities or had a smaller presence. For all three services, very few mayors say the impact is negative. Home-sharing services like Airbnb receive the fewest positive assessments and raise the most concerns. While about 45 percent of mayors say the impact of home-sharing services is positive, about 20 percent say the impact is negative or very negative. The sentiment that home-sharing is more worrisome to constituents than ride-sharing was common. Indicative of this idea, and of the need to discuss them separately, one southern mayor, referring to high-income residents, says, "they probably use Uber all the time, but also probably have an Airbnb near them that they hate."

Table 2: Effect of Sharing Economy Services

Have each of the following "sharing economy" services had a positive or negative effect on your city?

(Table Note: Excludes mayors who responded that the service is not available in their city.)

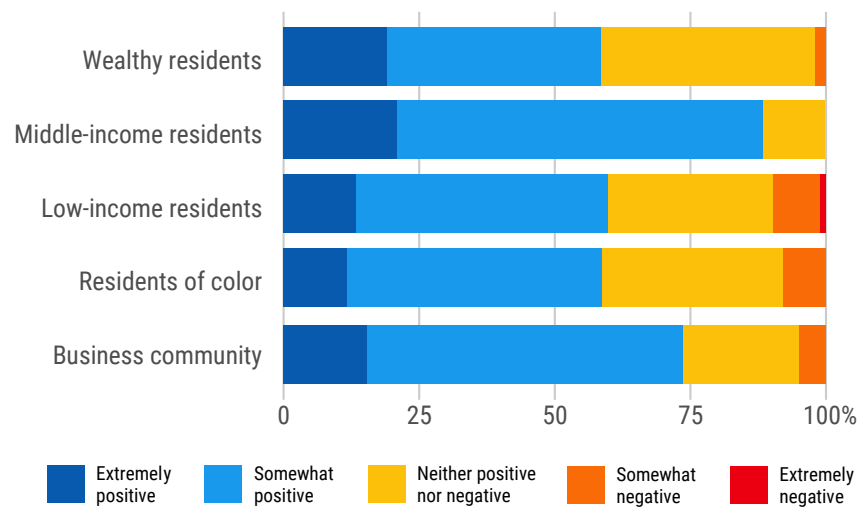
	Ride share (e.g., Uber)	Car share (e.g., Zipcar)	Bike share	Home share (e.g., Airbnb)
Extremely positive	42%	13%	41%	9%
Somewhat positive	47%	42%	38%	36%
Neither positive nor negative	9%	38%	12%	34%
Somewhat negative"	2%	2%	6%	17%
Extremely negative	0%	6%	3%	3%
Number of cities	107	53	68	99



Few mayors indicate concerns about equity and the sharing economy. Mayors said that these positive sharing economy effects are spread across a variety of groups in their cities. A majority believed that the sharing economy had a positive effect across all income levels, for residents of color, and for the business community. A few worried about negative effects on residents of color, and low-income residents. In general, mayors saw the sharing economy as a positive force for groups that are often excluded from other opportunities.

Figure 13: Effect of Sharing Economy Services on Different Groups

How much have “sharing economy” services in your city affected each of the following groups?





HEALTH: COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Cities are increasingly playing new roles in promoting resident health, whether via regulation, service implementation, or in response to emerging health crises. At the same time, longstanding challenges, such as gun violence, are being reframed as community and public health issues. This year's Menino Survey therefore included a series of questions concerning mayors' health priorities and perceptions to better understand how they respond to and promote community-wide well-being.

Mayors observe a wide range of significant health challenges in their communities ranging from obesity to mental health. Mayors identified, in response to an open-ended prompt, the top health challenge facing their cities. The most common (roughly one-fourth) concerns are obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Another quarter of mayors highlight addiction — often opioids. Other common responses include access to healthcare (14 percent), environmental threats (10 percent) and mental health (8 percent).

Table 3. What is the greatest health challenge facing the city?²

Health Priority	Percent of Mayors
Obesity/diabetes/heart disease	25%
Addiction/opioids	24%
Access to/cost of care	14%
Environmental	10%
Mental health	8%
Access to healthy food	4%
Gun violence	4%
Poverty	4%
Aging	3%
Infant mortality	2%
Other	2%

Mayors believe that constituents hold them most accountable for traffic accidents, gun violence, and exposure to toxins, but also believe they are not held accountable for a wide range of other health issues and outcomes.

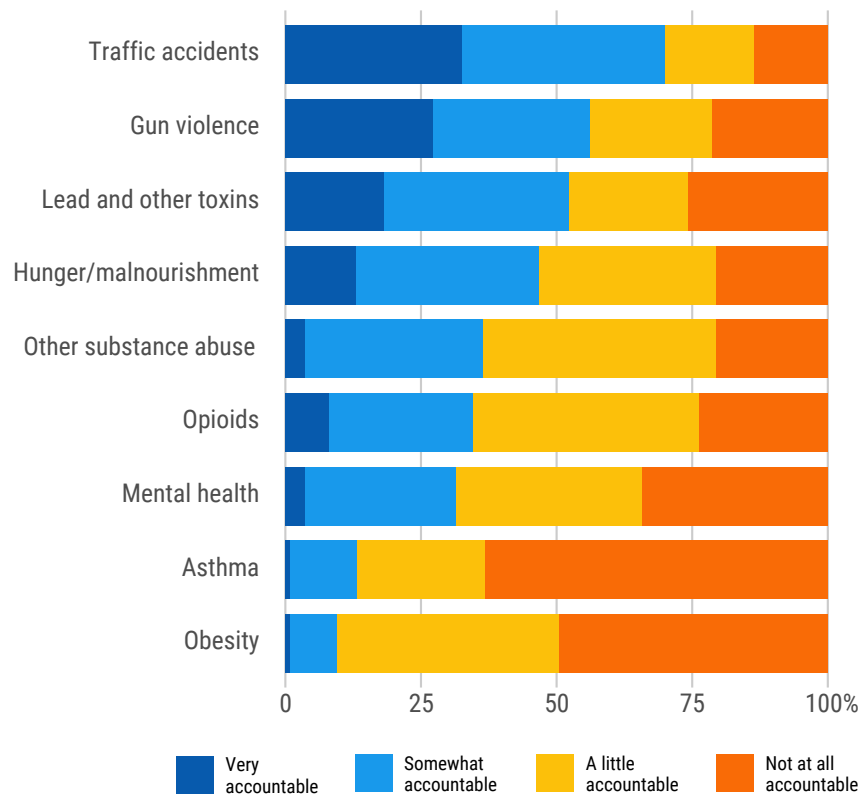
Under 40 percent of mayors believe that they are held accountable for other health challenges featured in the survey, including obesity, mental health, asthma, substance abuse, and opioids. In some cases, like obesity and asthma, fewer than 20 percent of mayors perceived themselves as being held publicly accountable for important health challenges. At least some say that they should be held more accountable. Linking city efforts to reduce car culture, one southern mayor says that *"constituents don't hold me accountable for asthma and obesity, but they should."*



In contrast, mayors believe that some policy areas attract considerably more public attention. Just under 50 percent said they are held accountable for hunger/malnutrition and just over 50 percent say the same for gun violence. Most strikingly, almost 75 percent of mayors say that their constituents hold them accountable for traffic accidents. According to mayors, there is considerable variation in the extent to which the public links health issues with local policy actions. This may make it challenging in some arenas to push for policy change.

Figure 14: Accountability and Health Challenges

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



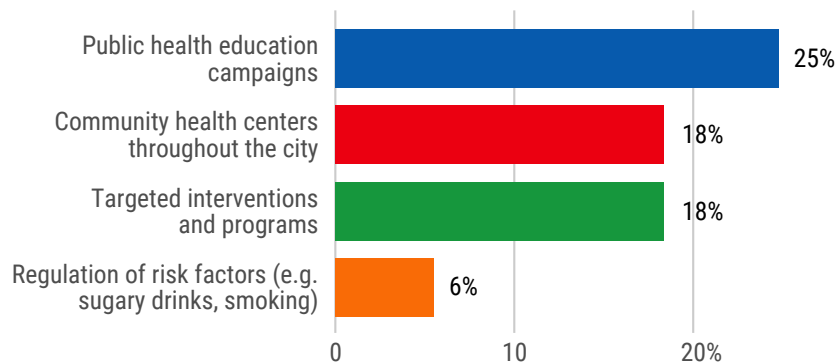
Mayors do not agree on any one set of policies that would have the greatest impact on resident health.

When asked which of a set of plausible city actions — including public health campaigns, targeted interventions, community health centers, and regulation of risk factors — can have the greatest impact on resident health, the plurality of mayors (33 percent) selected “other.” Some of these responses reflect other tactics not captured in the response options. For example, some mayors said things such as “encouraging people to be active” or “strong hospitals.” Others chose not to identify one policy that could have the greatest impact because there were too many plausible options. Yet others opted not to choose any of the proposed options because they see health as a county or state issue and noted that the city has relatively little involvement (see Figure 18). A quarter opted for public health campaigns, while 18 percent selected targeted interventions and another 18 percent selected community health centers (Figure 15 excludes “other”). In short, rather than clustering around one particular policy option, the mayors highlighted a wide variety of policies, reflecting perhaps the diverse health concerns facing U.S. cities.



Figure 15: Impacting Resident Health

In what way can cities have the greatest impact on resident health?

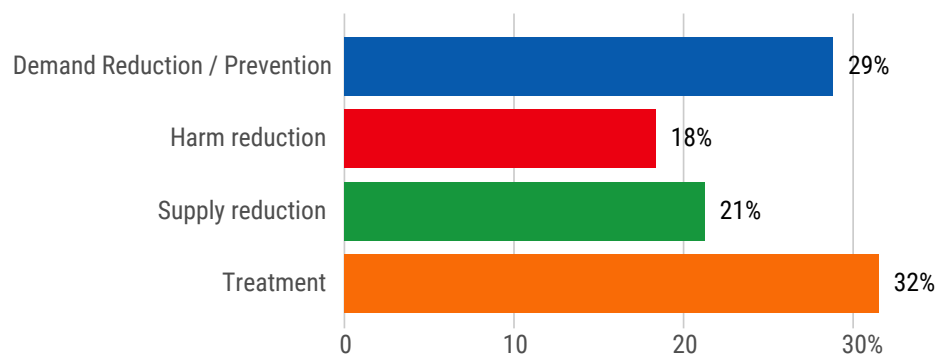


Mayors would allocate money to fight opioids across a wide array of policy areas, but there is no one area to which they would target the bulk of these (hypothetical) new funds. Mayors were offered a (hypothetical) “large amount of money” to fight the opioid epidemic and were asked to allocate the money across four areas: (1) demand reduction/prevention (e.g., community development, post-incarceration support, education), (2) harm reductions (e.g. naxolone access, supervised use spaces, overdose surveillance), (3) supply reduction (e.g., Rx monitoring, policing, international/border interdiction), (4) and treatment (e.g. medication assisted treatment, Medicaid spending, drug courts). No one area stands out as receiving especially large amounts of (hypothetical) resources. Mayors, on average, would allocate 32 percent of their “large amount of money” to treatment, 29 percent to demand reduction, 21 percent to supply reduction, and 18 percent to harm reduction.

This question was adopted from the *New York Times* survey of 30 experts, including health policy specialists, politicians, and law enforcement.³ The average allocations of mayors were relatively similar to those of the experts, particularly for harm reduction and demand reduction. Mayors were more inclined to highlight supply reduction (21 percent) relative to the *Times* panel (11 percent.) In contrast, the *Times* panel emphasized treatment 15 percentage points more frequently, with 47 percent of the *Times* experts suggesting treatment, relative to 32 percent of mayors.⁴

Figure 16: Allocating Money to Fight the Opioid Epidemic

If you could allocate a large amount of money to fighting the opioid epidemic, how would you allocate it across the following areas?





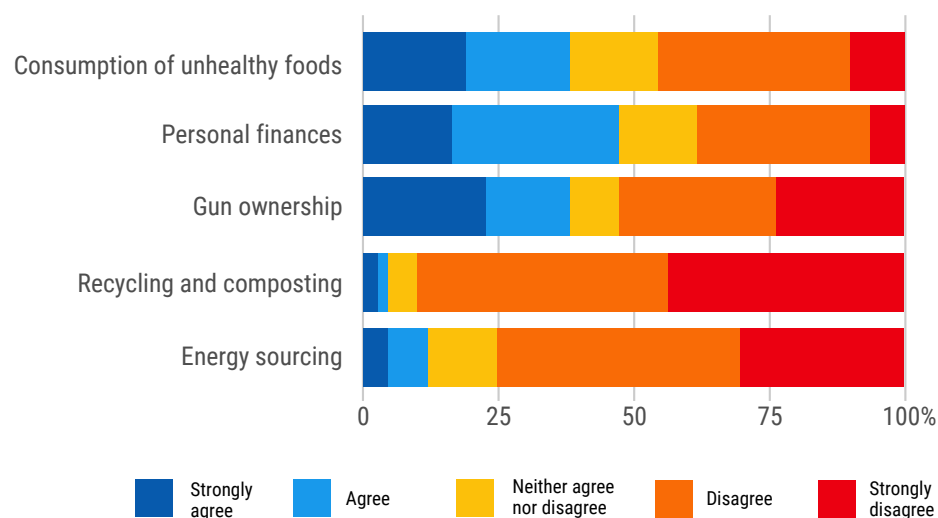
Mayors see a role for local government involvement in individuals' choices around health and environmental matters, but their views around potential interventions in household-level choices vary considerably by issue.

Mayors were asked whether they agreed that city government should *stay out* of individual decisions across a variety of issues. The responses speak to their views on certain potential health-related policies and their view of local government's role in these areas relative to other areas of individual choice. Over 75 percent of mayors believed that city government should play a role in recycling and composting. Just over 50 percent felt that cities should be involved in regulating gun ownership. Under 50 percent of mayors expressed similar agreement concerning local government's role in the consumption of healthy foods and in personal finances.

There was considerable variation by policy as to the extent to which mayors endorsed a strong government role. Many of those who supported interventions into things like finances and food choices, did so in a limited way. For instance, one mayor says that the *"city should provide education and information but not regulate."* In general, mayors were much more amenable to government intervention into areas where the city is involved, even if that involvement is not necessarily in the personal choice realm. For example, many mayors explained their view that government should be involved in choices about energy and recycling because the city is already involved in trash collection. We frequently heard similar sentiments of the mayor who said it is *"not the government's place [in general],"* but for recycling *"it's a different world because we own the landfill."*

Figure 17: Areas Where City Government Should Stay Out

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: City government should stay out of shaping individuals' decisions around the following issues:

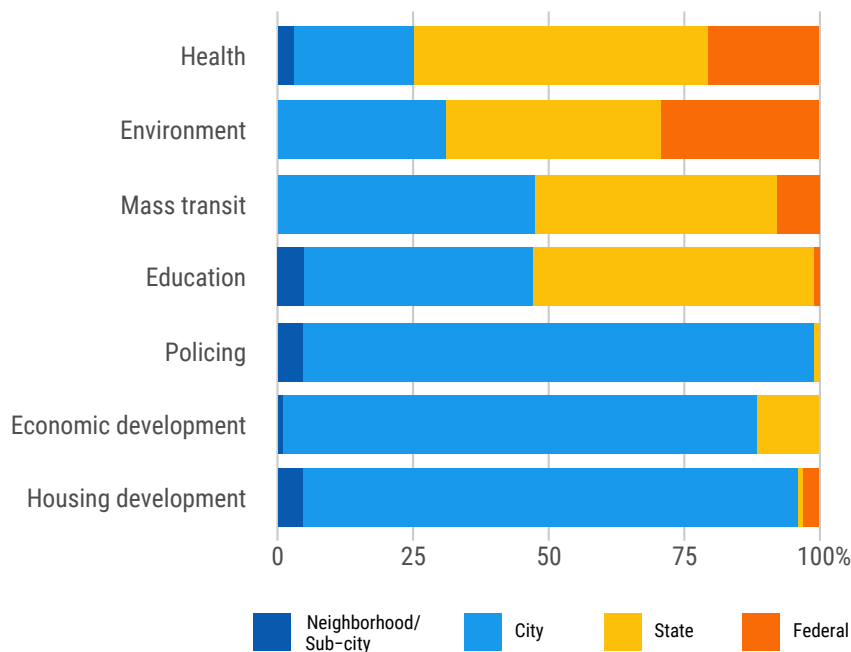




Mayors see city government as the best place to make policy that affects their cities in many areas, but see higher levels of government as preferable for dealing with health and the environment. Mayors almost universally said that city government is the “ideal level” for making policing, housing, and economic development policy. However, most mayors report that the state or federal government rather than city government is the best venue for tackling health and environmental challenges. Mayors were quite divided on the best level of government involvement in education and transit decisions. Lastly, only a handful of mayors indicated that sub-city level institutions would be ideal in any of these policy areas.

Figure 18: Federalism and Policy Making

Which level of government would be the ideal level for making decisions that affect the city in each policy area?





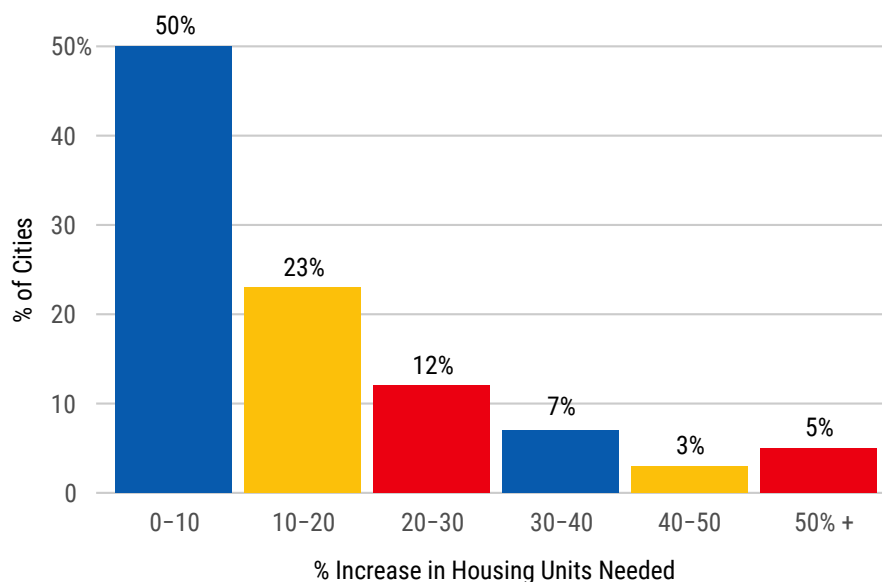
HOUSING: DESIRED GROWTH

Housing has been a critical area of focus in multiple years of the Menino Survey. It remains a salient issue underlying a range of other urban concerns, including inequality, health, economic growth, and displacement. It is also a key local policy area where mayors are particularly well-informed and have significant latitude to signal priorities and affect change. This year mayors were asked a range of new questions pertaining to desired changes to their housing stock.

Mayors broadly want to increase the amount of housing in their cities, though most aim for only modest increases over the next 10 years. Half of the mayors indicate that they want to increase the number of housing units in their cities by 0–10 percent over the next 10 years, while half aim for more substantial growth. Twenty-three percent favor a 10–20 percent increase in their housing stock, and 27 percent want at least 20 percent growth. These mayors pushing for sizable growth may be responding, in part, to growing demand for housing. In general, though, while mayors see high housing costs as a top obstacle to social mobility, their housing stock goals are quite modest.⁵

Figure 19: Housing Needed in the Next Ten Years

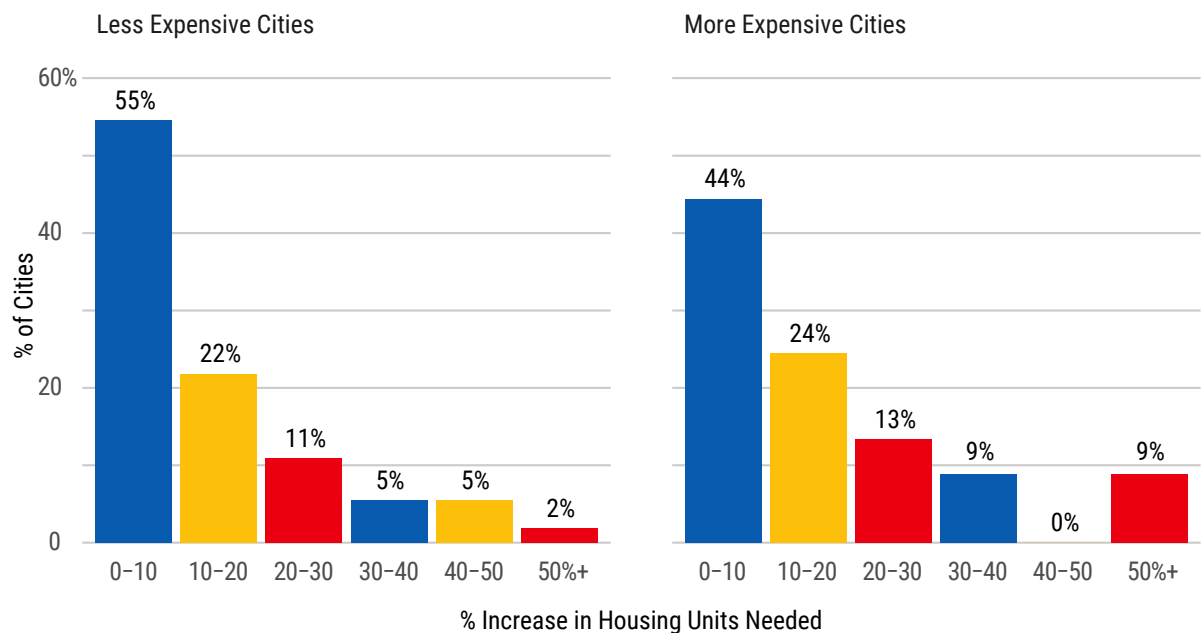
How many new housing units do you think your city needs to add in the next ten years?



Mayors of higher- and lower-cost cities have fairly similar views on the (relative) additional number of housing units they want to see built over the next 10 years. Compared with their counterparts governing lower-cost cities, mayors of more expensive cities are slightly more likely to favor increases in their housing stock of greater than 50 percent, and somewhat less likely to endorse increases of 0–10 percent.

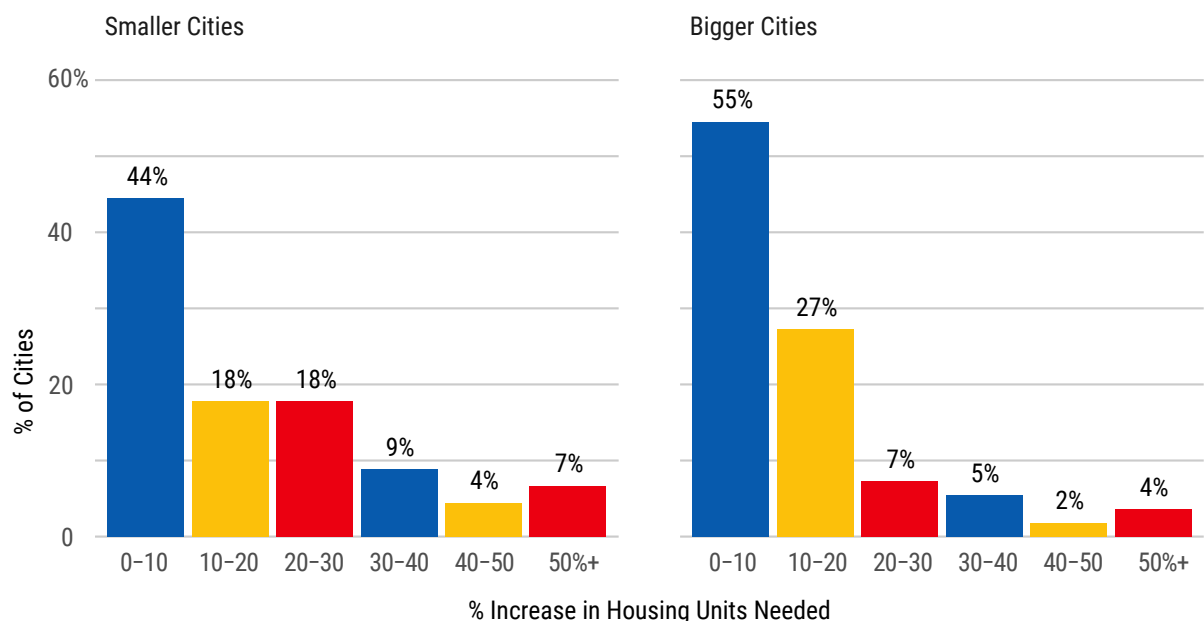


Figure 20: Housing Needed in the Next Ten Years by Housing Costs



Mayors of bigger and smaller cities differed somewhat more on their preferences for the construction of additional housing. Relative to their peers in smaller cities, big-city mayors favored more modest growth in their housing stock (0-10 percent). While 38 percent of small-city mayors wanted their housing stock to grow by more than 20 percent, only 18 percent of big-city mayors favored similarly significant changes to their housing stock.

Figure 21: Housing Needed in the Next Ten Years by City Size

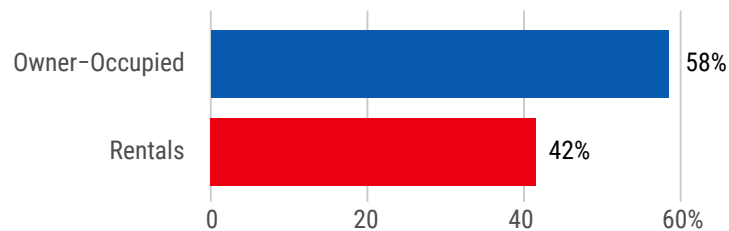




Mayors preferred that 58 percent of these potential new units be owner-occupied, with the remainder as rentals. This reflects the high demand for both types of housing. Mayors highlighted shortages in units available for purchase, particularly smaller “starter homes” for young families, as well as a need for more apartments and other rentals. Democrats tended to emphasize more rental housing than Republicans. Democrats, on average, split their housing allocations about evenly between rental and owner units. Republicans split them, by a two-to-one ratio, in favor of owner-occupied.

Figure 22: Allocation of New Housing Between Owners and Renters

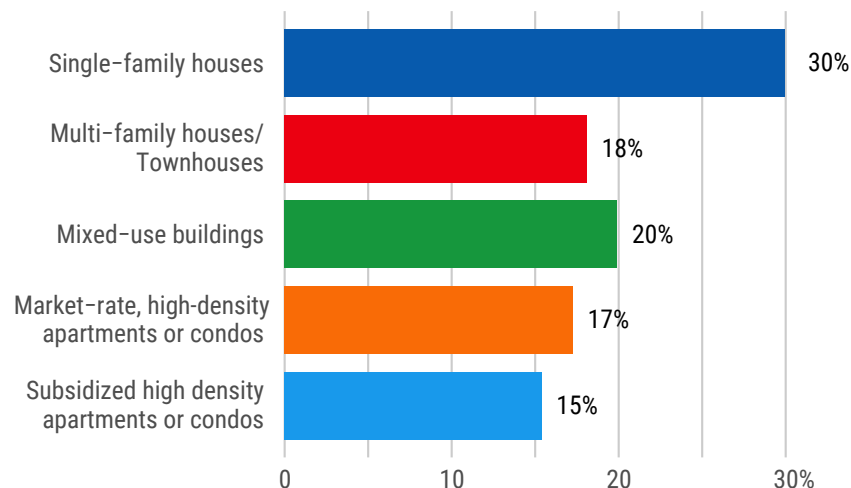
Of these housing units, ideally what percent should be owner-occupied and what percent should be rentals?



Mayors also preferred to see a variety of new housing types. On average, mayors said that “ideally” 30 percent of new housing would be single-family homes, and preferred a mix of higher-density, multi-family housing for the remainder of the new housing units. Mayors were evenly divided across different types of multi-family housing, including mixed-use buildings (20 percent), townhouses (18 percent), market-rate apartments (17 percent), and subsidized apartments (15 percent). The similar levels of market-rate apartments and subsidized apartments demonstrates the perceived need for both types of new housing. While there is high demand for market-rate apartments in many cities, there is also a need for subsidized apartments for residents who cannot afford market-rate housing and are being priced out of their neighborhoods as home prices and rents rise. Interestingly, mayors’ preferences for multi-family units do not correlate with city size. Small-city mayors allocated 31 percent of their ideal new housing units to the single-family category and big-city mayors allocated 28 percent.

Figure 23: Allocation of New Housing by Type

Ideally, how would you like to see these new housing units allocated across the following categories? Please allocate 100 percent of these new housing units.

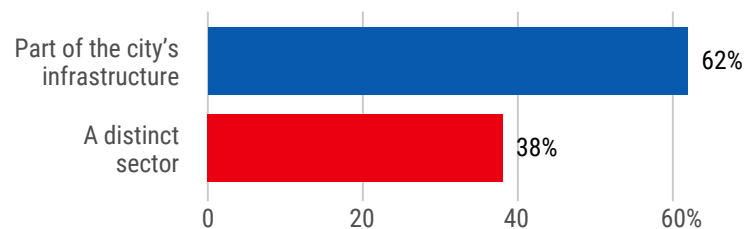




Nearly two-thirds of mayors see affordable housing as part of the city's infrastructure. When asked to consider whether affordable housing is a part of the city's infrastructure or a distinct sector, 62 percent of mayors said it is interwoven with the city's infrastructure. Housing thus appears interconnected in mayors' minds with a variety of other salient urban policies, like roads, transit, and water systems. Indicative of this thinking, one western mayor pushed back on what he sees as the misperception that affordable housing is "government housing poor people" and instead advocates for viewing it as infrastructure because "affordable housing is linked to city service providers. It's all linked." Another mayor, from the Midwest, states that housing is "a distinct sector for the time being.... [but it] is shifting, particularly for high-cost cities." Finally, some draw a sharp line between housing and infrastructure; for example, one mayor says "the city is not in the affordable housing business, but we facilitate affordable housing."

Figure 24: Is Affordable Housing Infrastructure?

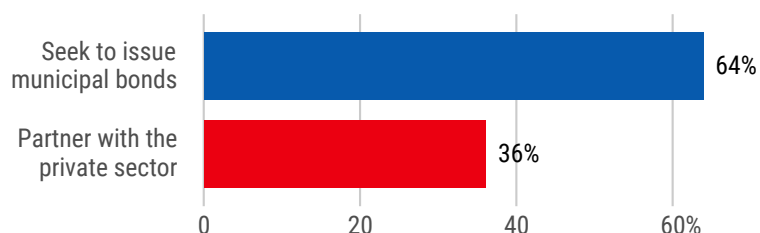
Do you think affordable housing should be thought of as part of the city's infrastructure or as a distinct sector?



When implementing major infrastructure projects, two-thirds of mayors prefer to seek municipal bonds rather than partner with the private sector. Given limited financial resources and diminished federal and state support, cities must frequently secure extra financing to implement major infrastructure programs. Mayors were asked about how they weigh two common choices — municipal bonds and public-private partnerships — to raise money for infrastructure spending. Two-thirds of mayors preferred issuing municipal bonds. A sizable minority, though, are increasingly turning to partnerships with the private sector. In general, mayors said they are supportive of public-private partnerships and intrigued by expanding their use, but that in core infrastructure projects there were some downsides. They cited trade-offs like the short- vs. long-term costs, less control over projects including, for example, jobs they produce when partnering, and their belief that private money is often not available for core infrastructure projects. One mayor said the "P3 (public private partnerships) models do not work for core infrastructure, they don't want to pay for sewer lines, no money in it for them." Another mayor differentiated infrastructure from other areas such as housing: "We do it for affordable housing. We self-finance infrastructure." On the other side, some mayors emphasized the possibilities of debt reduction. According to one mayor, partnering "minimizes liability to the city, brings in new partners, and more creativity."

Figure 25: Financing Major Infrastructure Projects

When financing major infrastructure projects, are you more likely to partner with the private sector for financing or seek to issue municipal bonds?





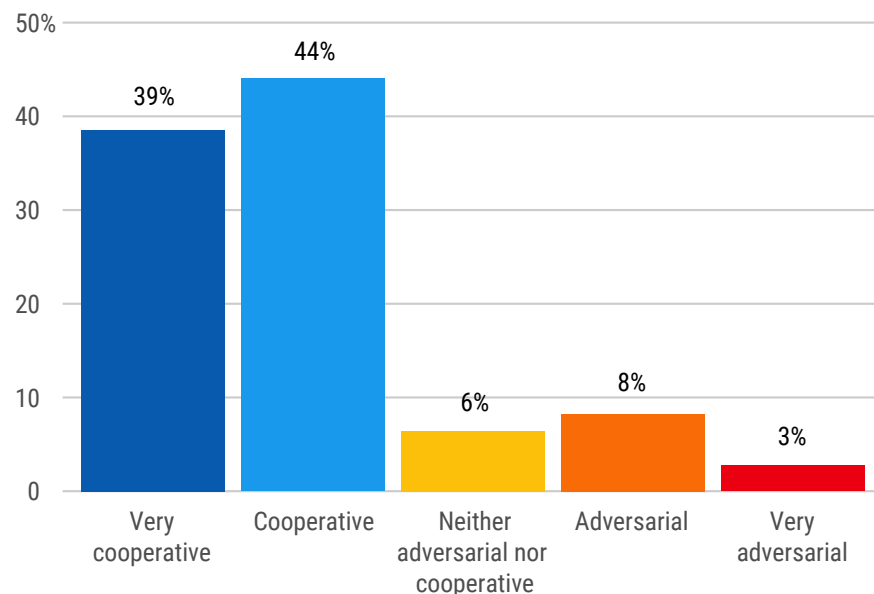
CITY COUNCILS: INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

In order to be effective leaders in arenas like housing, economic development, and healthcare, mayors must work with other government officials to promulgate successful policies. Prior years of the Menino Survey have delved into mayoral relationships with higher levels of government, notably state legislatures and governors, as well as federal agencies and Congress. Perhaps the most important and unavoidable partner in pursuing policy at the local level is the city council. This makes mayors' relationships with their city councils paramount to effective governance.

A large majority of mayors report having a cooperative relationship with their city councils. An overwhelming majority of mayors, 83 percent, believe their relationships with their city councils are either cooperative or very cooperative, with only 11 percent describing their working relationship as adversarial. Mayors thus largely believe that they have an effective and willing partner in their city councils.

Figure 26: Relationship with the City Council

What best describes your relationship with your city council (or the rest of your city council)?

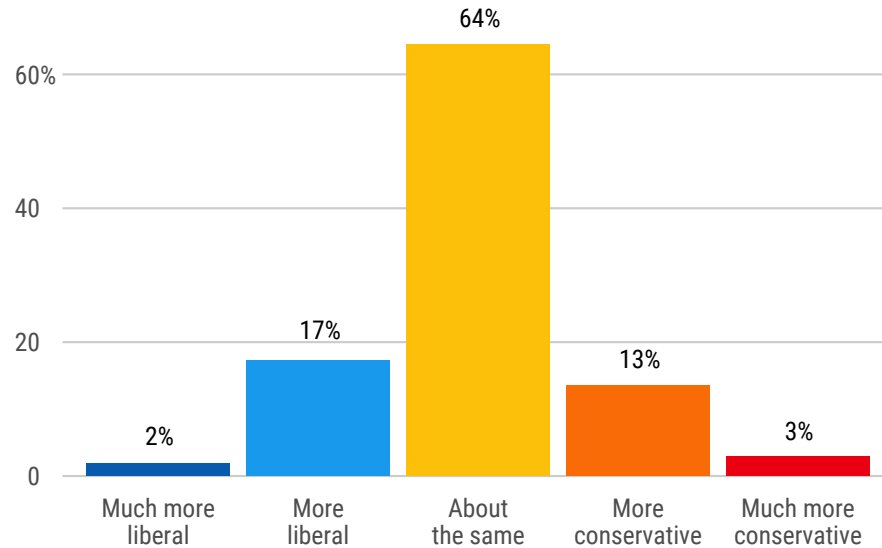


Two-thirds of mayors believe that their ideological leanings align with those of their city council. Sixty-four percent rated their city councils' ideology as "about the same" as theirs. Sixteen percent of mayors described their city councils' ideologies as more conservative than their own. And 19 percent believed their city councils were more liberal than themselves. In most cities, mayors largely see their preferences as aligned with those of their councils. Similarly, this likely helps to explain mayors' views that their relationships with their councils are cooperative.



Figure 27: City Council Ideology

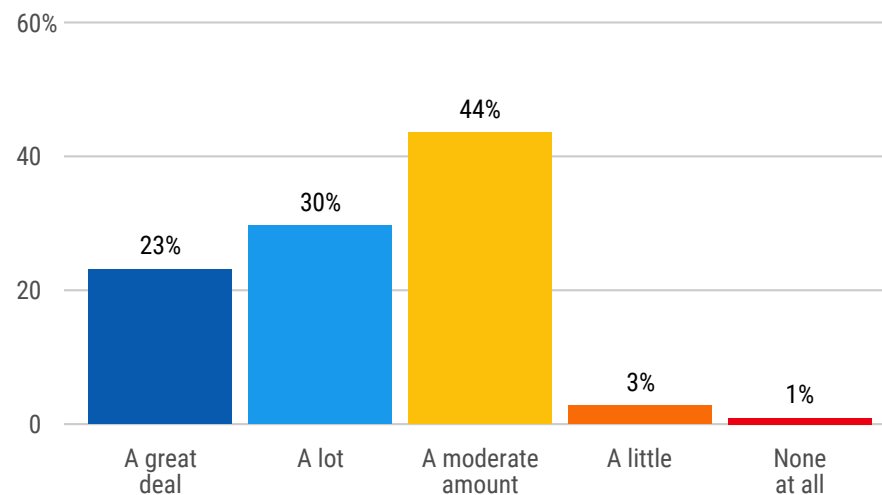
How does your city council (or the rest of the city council) compare to you ideologically?



Large majorities of mayors believe they wield at least some influence over their city council. Further confirming mayors' positive perceptions of their relationships with their city councils, only 4 percent of mayors believe that they had little or no influence over them. In contrast, 23 percent feel that they have a great deal of influence, and 30 percent describe themselves as holding "a lot" of influence over their city councils. Taken in concert, these results suggest that mayors believe they can work well with their city government partners to accomplish important policy goals and that when they work together, mayors believe that it is they themselves who shape the discussion.

Figure 28: Influence Over the City Council

In general, how much influence do you have over decisions made by the city council?

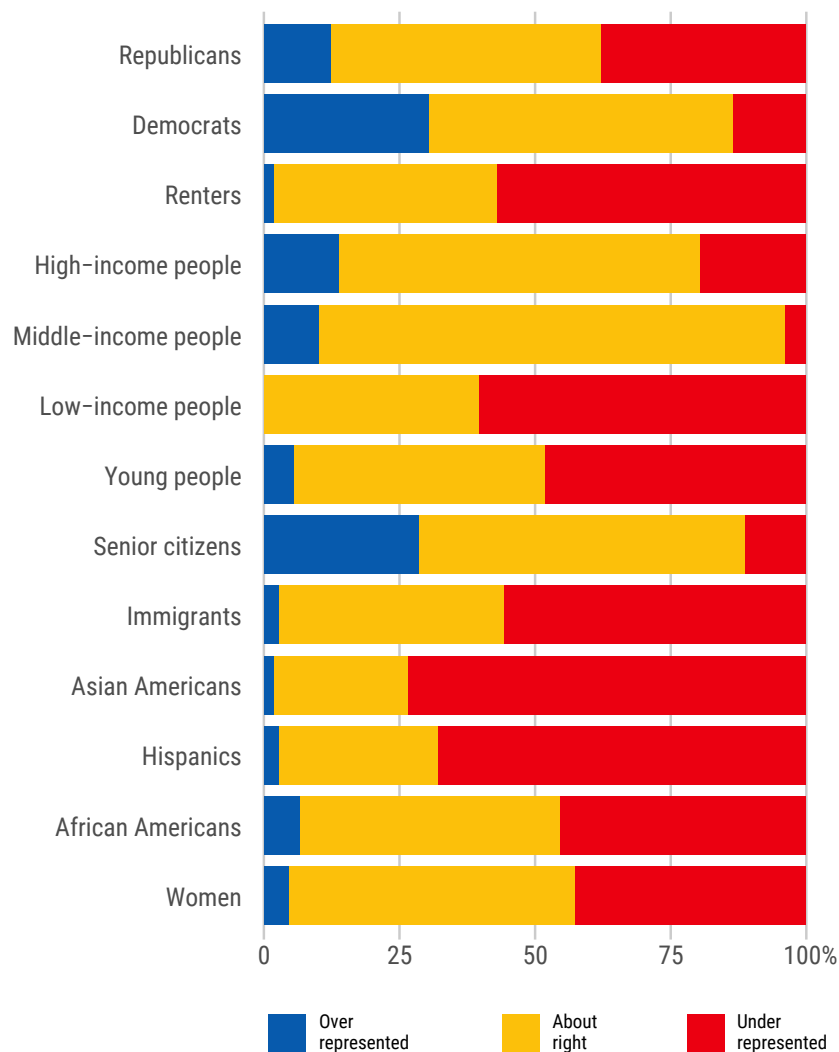




According to mayors, some groups are well-represented by their city councils, while others — notably Asian Americans, Hispanics, low-income people, renters, and immigrants — are underrepresented. We asked mayors how well their city councils represent the interests of a series of income, racial, and age groups. Mayors exhibited striking variation. Strong majorities of mayors believed that the voices and perspectives of Democrats, high-income people, middle-income people, and senior-citizens were proportionally represented by their city councils. In contrast, majorities of mayors worried that Hispanics, Asian Americans, immigrants, low-income individuals, and renters are *under-represented* by their councils. Interestingly, mayors appear hesitant to describe any group as over-represented; only a quarter of mayors labeled Democrats and senior citizens as over-represented by their city councils — by far the highest for any grouping. In sum, while mayors believe that their city councils are largely good governing partners, they have some reservations about the representativeness of these legislative bodies on at least some important dimensions.

Figure 29: Representation on the City Council

How well are each of the following voices and perspectives represented on the city council?





POLL: POLITICAL HOT BUTTONS

Each year, the Menino Survey has sought to gauge mayoral opinions on a number of highly salient issues. This final module provides insight into mayoral perspectives on a number of timely concerns, including some that have appeared on state and local ballot initiatives and others that are the focus of heated local and national debates. They are grouped here because they are perhaps best understood in contrast to, rather than in isolation of, one another.

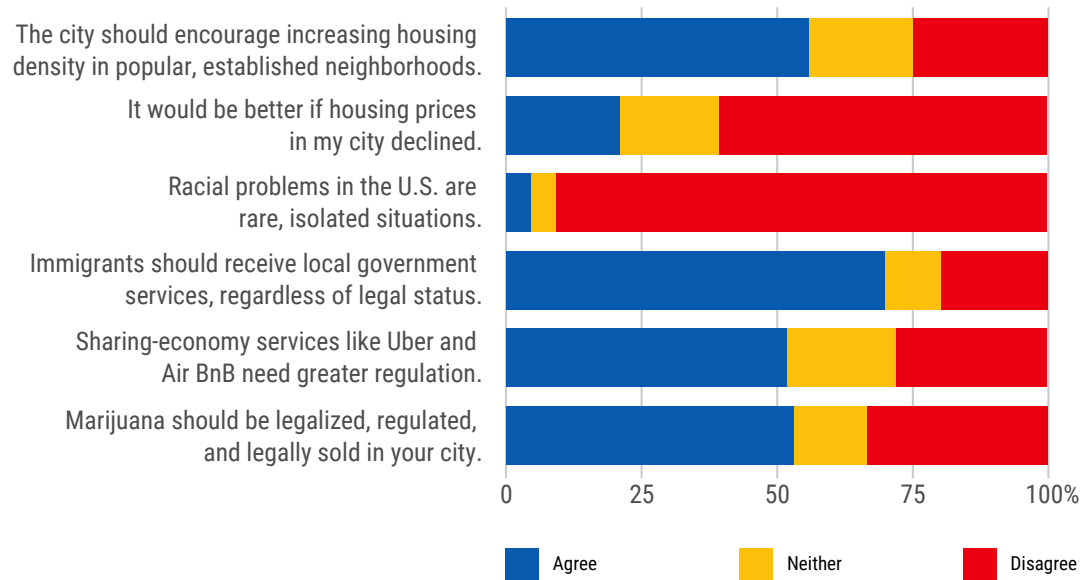
Mayors are divided on a number of salient contemporary issues and trade-offs. One area where most mayors agree is the extent of racial problems in America and the breadth of systematic racial challenges. Roughly 90 percent of mayors *disagreed* with the statement that “racial problems are rare, isolated, situations” meaning that they believe racial concerns are widespread. Something of a consensus also exists on the potentially contentious issue of undocumented immigrants’ access to local services (though see Figure 35 on party gap). Two-thirds of mayors agreed that immigrants should receive services irrespective of legal status while 20 percent disagreed.

Mayors’ views on housing policy trade-offs suggest ambivalence — at least among some mayors — about pursuing the most aggressive policy solutions to their community’s affordability challenges. Approximately 55 percent of mayors agree that cities should encourage “increasing housing density in popular established neighborhoods.” Twenty-five percent disagreed. Perhaps the most direct trade-off concerning housing affordability is whether it “would be better if housing prices declined.” Only 20 percent of mayors agreed that it would be better if prices declined; 60 percent disagreed.

A bare majority support greater regulation of emerging industries, specifically sharing economy services and cannabis sales. While mayors are enthusiastic about the economic benefits of the sharing economy, a sizable number believe it needs to be more tightly regulated. Based on the responses to other questions about the sharing economy, it is likely that the number of mayors that support additional regulations would be higher if the question was limited to home sharing, and potentially lower if restricted to ride-sharing. A similar number of mayors support the legalization of marijuana in their cities. This question was notably polarizing, with 35 percent of mayors disagreeing. Many mayors suggested that their views on marijuana were less about philosophy or values and more about practical challenges related to policy implementation.



Figure 30: Mayors Views on Select Policy Issues



Many, but not all, of these local policy dilemmas divided mayors along partisan lines. Democrats were much more likely to: support making local services available to immigrants in contrast to Republicans (86 percent vs. 29 percent, respectively), to increase regulations for the sharing economy (67 vs. 18 percent), and to legalize marijuana (62 vs. 25 percent). Democrats were also much more likely to support increasing housing density in established neighborhoods compared to Republicans (68 vs. 32 percent). On the other hand, roughly equal numbers of mayors across party lines disagreed that it would “be better if housing prices declined” and that racial problems “are rare and isolated.”



Figure 31: The city should encourage increasing housing density in popular, established neighborhoods.

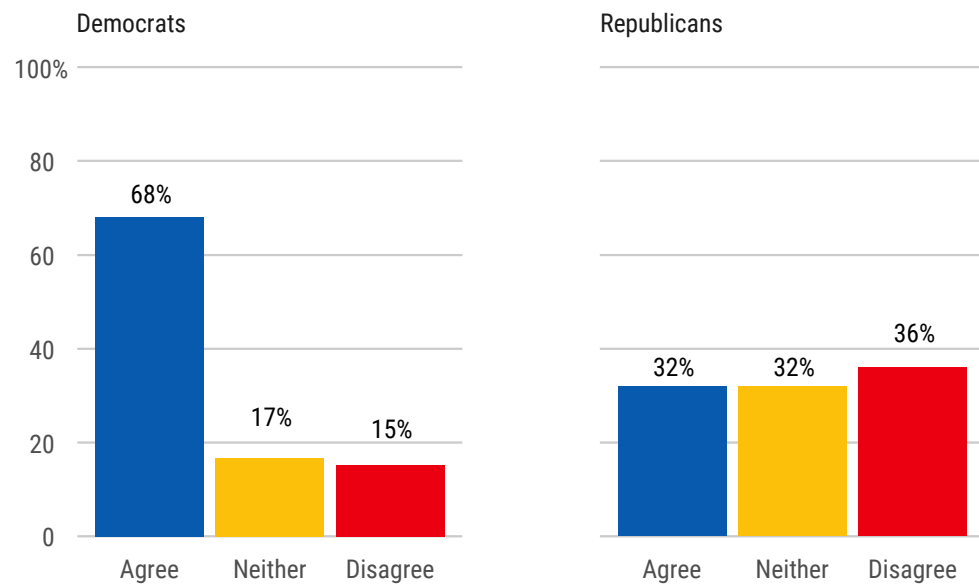


Figure 32: It would be better if housing prices in my city declined.

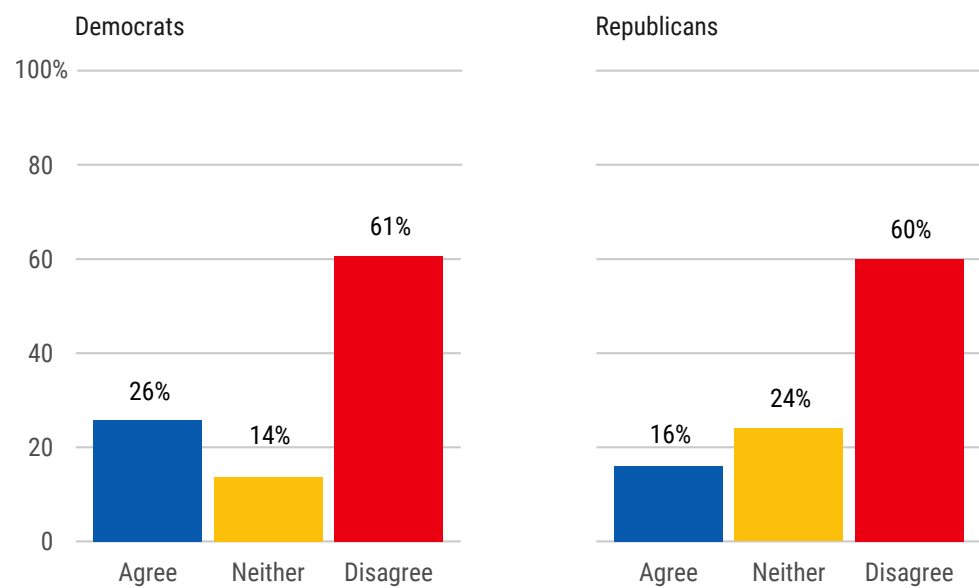




Figure 33: Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.

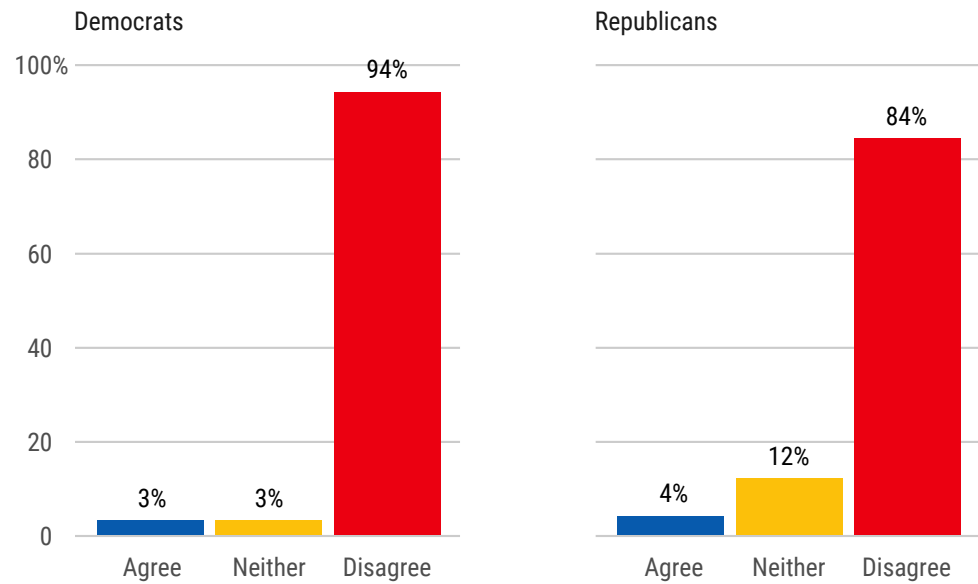


Figure 34: Immigrants should receive local government services, regardless of legal status.

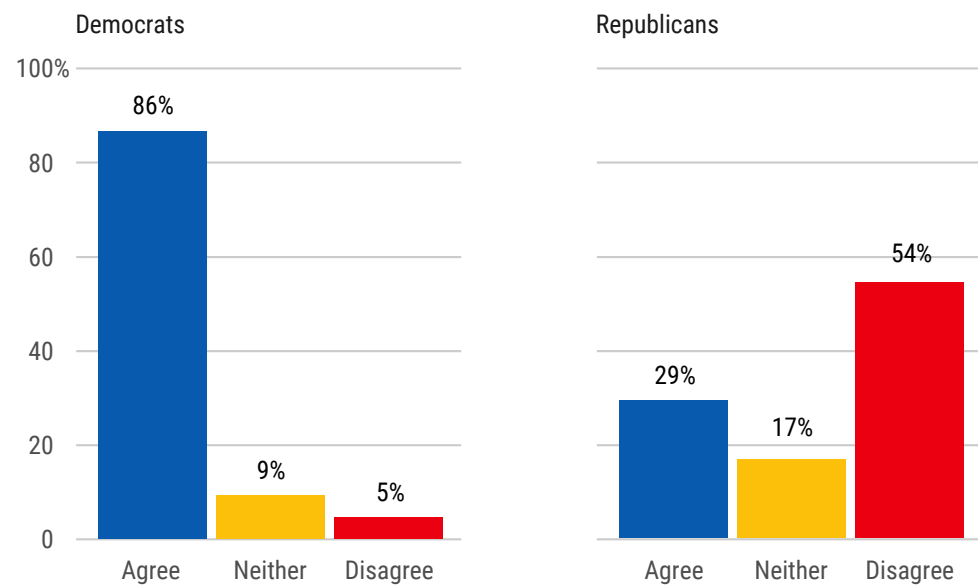




Figure 35: Sharing-economy services like Uber and Airbnb need greater regulation.

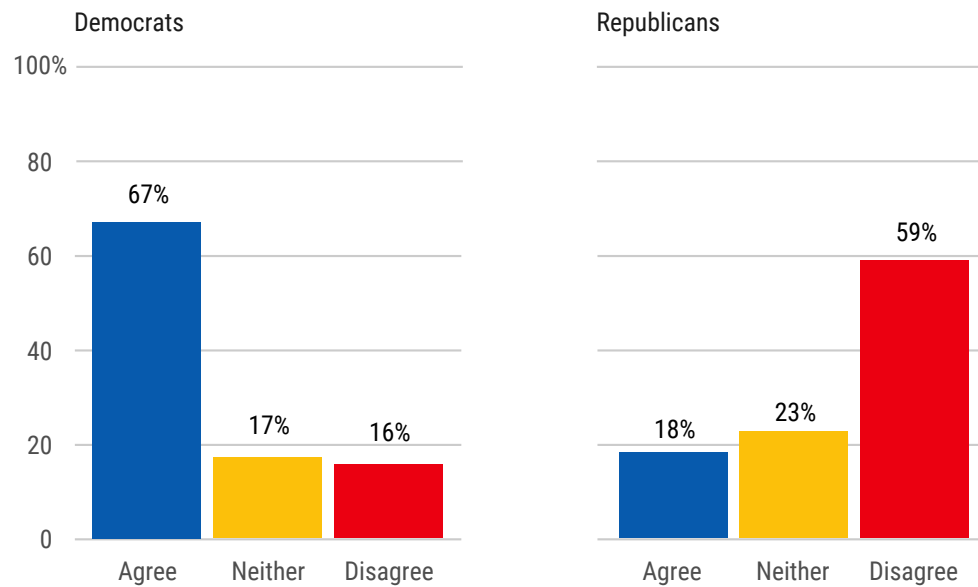
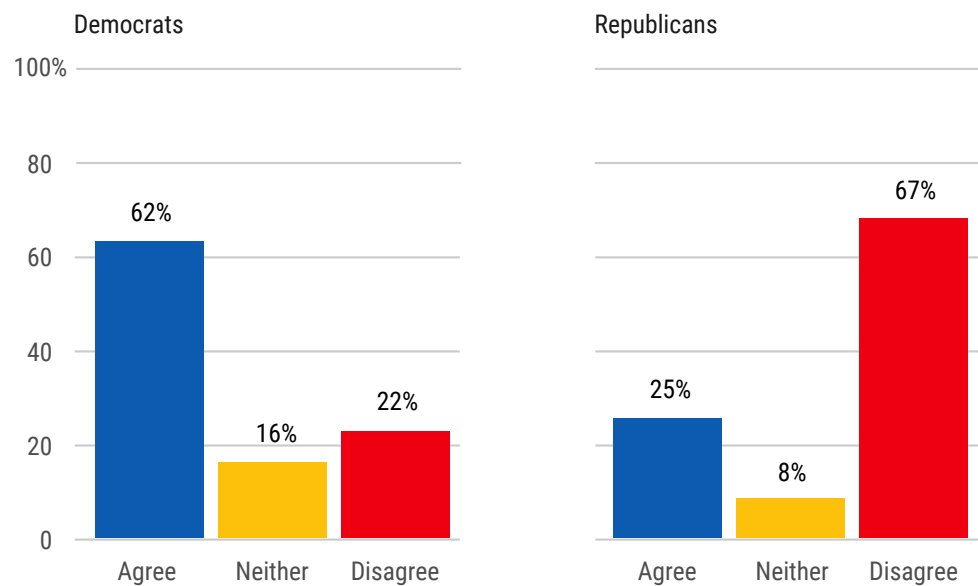


Figure 36: Marijuana should be legalized, regulated, and legally sold in your city.





CONCLUSION

After close to 500 interviews and five years of survey findings, we continue to be amazed by the breadth of responsibilities that mayors must bear. In our increasingly urban world, we often hear cities referred to as test beds of ideas. Mayors must innovate, create — and often, muddle through — because cities are leading from the frontline of action and change.

The 2018 Menino Survey takes the pulse of mayors on several key contemporary challenges, some of which have dominated news cycles this year, including Amazon’s highly publicized competition for its second headquarters and the local effects of sharing-economy services like Uber and Airbnb. We sought to illuminate the roles mayors play in promoting economic development and public health, as well as shed light on what they perceive as obstacles for their residents. This year, we also delved into the relationships mayors have with their city councils — perhaps the most important partner in pursuing policy at the local level.

Mayors believe housing costs and living-wage jobs are key barriers to social mobility for their residents; however, they are divided along party lines on support for living-wage ordinances at the local level. While mayors almost uniformly view financial incentives for economic development as good for the city, they also think that *other cities* offer too many incentives. We also found that there is no one “sharing economy” conversation: overall, mayors view the sharing economy as positive for their cities, but expressed more concern for home-sharing than bike- or ride-sharing services.

The most common responses to the top health challenge facing cities includes obesity, addiction — most often, opioids — and access to and cost of healthcare. Although mayors have been increasingly tasked with addressing a variety of initiatives related to resident health, they do not believe the public holds them accountable for many public health outcomes and challenges, with some exceptions — most notably, traffic accidents. The wide range of responses to this question, as well as the policy options to address them, reflect the diverse health concerns facing American cities.

The Initiative on Cities’ co-founder, the late Boston Mayor Tom Menino, once said that “change makes cities, and great change makes great cities.” With each passing year, we have sought to shed light on some of the many changes confronting urban leaders, approaching the Menino Survey as a dynamic barometer rather than a static poll. We look forward to whatever changes lie ahead.



Footnotes

- 1 Source: 2016 American Community Survey (ACS), US Census Bureau.
- 2 Mayors were asked to list their top challenge. Some mentioned more than one. We focus on the first they listed, but including all responses would not affect the results.
- 3 Katz, Josh. "How a Police Chief, a Governor and a Sociologist Would Spend \$100 Billion to Solve the Opioid Crisis." *The New York Times*, Feb. 14, 2018: available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/14/upshot/opioid-crisis-solutions.html>.
- 4 Katz, Josh. "How a Police Chief, a Governor and a Sociologist Would Spend \$100 Billion to Solve the Opioid Crisis." *The New York Times*, Feb. 14, 2018: available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/14/upshot/opioid-crisis-solutions.html>.
- 5 We asked mayors, "How many new housing units do you think your city needs to add in the next ten years?" We then calculated the percentage of housing stock growth using the number of housing units in each city from the 2016 *American Community Survey*.



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