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# 2022 Menino Survey of Mayors: mayors and the climate crisis

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*Boston University*

MAYORS

AND THE

CLIMATE CRISIS

2022 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

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## INTRODUCTION

In August, 2022 President Biden signed the “Inflation Reduction Act.” Among other things, it featured hundreds of billions of dollars in commitments to reshaping American energy use and reducing emissions.<sup>1</sup> These commitments include tax credits and rebates for solar panels, electric vehicles, and heat pumps. Many groups committed to electrification and fighting climate change heralded the legislation’s environmental initiatives. Rewiring America called it a “landmark climate investment to charge a path forward.”<sup>2</sup> The President of the Environmental Defense Fund declared it “a new day in the fight against climate change,” and celebrated the law as “the largest, most ambitious climate legislation Congress has ever passed.”<sup>3</sup>

These new federal investments encourage Americans to make their homes and communities more energy and economically efficient. They also represent new opportunities for local governments and local elected officials who have already been addressing climate change or who wish to do so. Some cities and towns have been taking steps to fight climate change on their own for years. They have been buying electric vehicles, updating municipal buildings, revisiting building codes, and encouraging walking, cycling, and transit.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the vigor with which cities have pursued these initiatives varies considerably. Local climate action can be costly and complicated, and it has to compete with all of the other challenges mayors are facing. Mayors have their own views on the relative priority of these issues at the local level, face varying economic and infrastructure contexts, and lead constituencies with different appetites for making personal and collective changes to reduce climate impact.

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*“Local climate action can be costly and complicated, and it has to compete with all of the other challenges mayors are facing.”*

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The 2022 Menino Survey unpacks mayors’ current views on local climate action and related issues. The survey focuses on their beliefs about the underlying issues and threats, their sense of the tools they have at their disposal, and their enthusiasm for using them. It also highlights their thoughts on community engagement as well as disinformation, which has important connections to climate action, but also has much broader implications.

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1 Isaacs-Thomas, B. “What the Inflation Reduction Act Does for Green Energy.” PBS News Hour (Aug. 17, 2022): <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/what-the-inflation-reduction-act-does-for-green-energy>.

2 Rewiring America. “The Electric Explainer: Key programs in the Inflation Reduction Act and what they mean for Americans”: <https://www.rewiringamerica.org/policy/inflation-reduction-act>.

3 Krupp, F. “The biggest thing Congress has ever done to address climate change.” Environmental Defense Fund (August 12, 2022): <https://www.edf.org/blog/2022/08/12/biggest-thing-congress-has-ever-done-address-climate-change>.

4 Einstein, Katherine, D. Glick, M. Palmer, and S. Fox. 2019 Menino Survey of Mayors. Boston University Initiative on Cities (pgs. 20-22): <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/2019-survey-infrastructure-climate/>; Einstein, Katherine, D. Glick, and M. Palmer. 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors. Boston University Initiative on Cities (pgs. 18-23): <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/2017-survey-sustainability-and-climate-change/>.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Mayors overwhelmingly continue to agree that climate change is due to human activities.**

This year, 90 percent of mayors acknowledge climate change is human-induced. While there are some partisan differences, the most notable gap is actually between Republican mayors and Republican voters. Seventy-one percent of Republican mayors agree, relative to just 32 percent of Republican voters.

### **Nearly all mayors worry about climate impacts on their cities.**

Only three percent of mayors said they are not worried about any local effects. Majorities of mayors worry about drought, extreme heat, flooding, and air pollution with some regional variation.

### **Mayors worry about both costs of current energy supplies and energy supplies' impact on the environment.**

Fifty-seven percent cite rising costs as one of their top two energy concerns and 47 percent cite environmental impacts. Democrats and Republicans agree about cost concerns, but Democrats are much more concerned with environmental impacts.

### **A little more than half of mayors believe that real progress requires residents to make sacrifices.**

Fifty-five percent of mayors, with no partisan gap, agree that making “real progress on climate issues” will require their “residents to make real sacrifices.” Twenty-six percent disagree.

**Mayors see regulatory powers as their strongest potential climate tools but are reluctant to limit individual behavior.** Mayors most often chose influence over a) building codes and b) zoning when selecting their top two most powerful potential climate tools. Mayors across party lines see other types of tools such as subsidizing behavior or using city procurement as less consequential.

### **Mayors from both parties strongly support purchasing or encouraging new technologies like electric vehicles.**

Seventy-four percent of mayors support replacing their city’s municipal vehicles before their natural lifecycle ends, which suggests a major opportunity to capitalize on new federal funds for things like electric school buses, fire trucks, and public works vehicles. Restrictions on gas stoves, gas lawn tools, gas and oil heat, along with dissuading people from driving, are not popular among city leaders.

### **Mayors are almost perfectly divided about whether public meetings are informative or misleading.**

Mayors split evenly on whether public meetings are a “valuable source for learning about the views of the community” or a source of unrepresentative views.

### **No consensus among mayors on the best way to hear concerns from marginalized communities.**

Roughly equal proportions of mayors cite private meetings with community groups, community meetings, and direct outreach on the street as the best ways to hear concerns from marginalized groups in their cities.



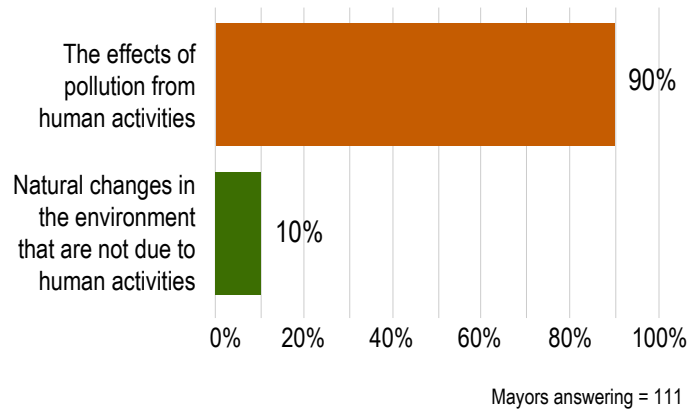
## MAYORAL BELIEFS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND RELATED THREATS

### Large majorities of mayors believe climate change is caused by human activities

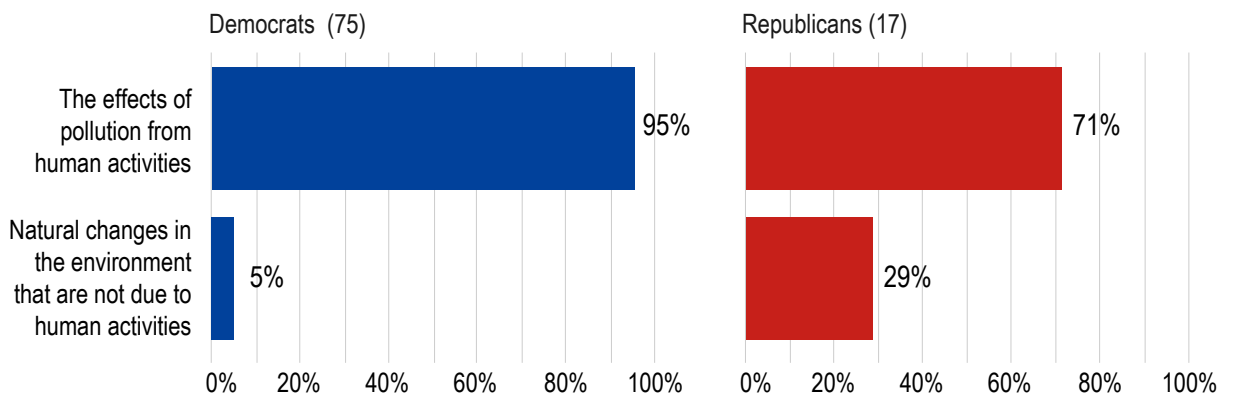
Mayors overwhelmingly believe that climate change is real and caused by human activities. Overall, 90 percent say that “changes in the Earth’s temperature” are caused more by “human activities” than by “natural changes in the environment.”<sup>5</sup> In 2017, 84 percent said “human activities.” There is a notable partisan split with 95 percent of Democrats citing human activities compared with about 71 percent of Republicans. The percentage of Democratic mayors who cite human activities is consistent with Democrats in the general public (88 percent). However, the 71 percent of Republican mayors is notably higher than the 32 percent of Republicans in the general public.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1. Climate Change Causes: Human Activity vs. Natural Causes**

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



**Figure 2. Climate Change Causes: Human Activity vs. Natural Causes, by Party**



<sup>5</sup> This question was adapted from Gallup: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/161645/americans-concerns-global-warming-rise.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Saad, Lydia. Global Warming Attitudes Frozen since 2016. Gallup (Apr. 5, 2021): <https://news.gallup.com/poll/343025/global-warming-attitudes-frozen-2016.aspx>.

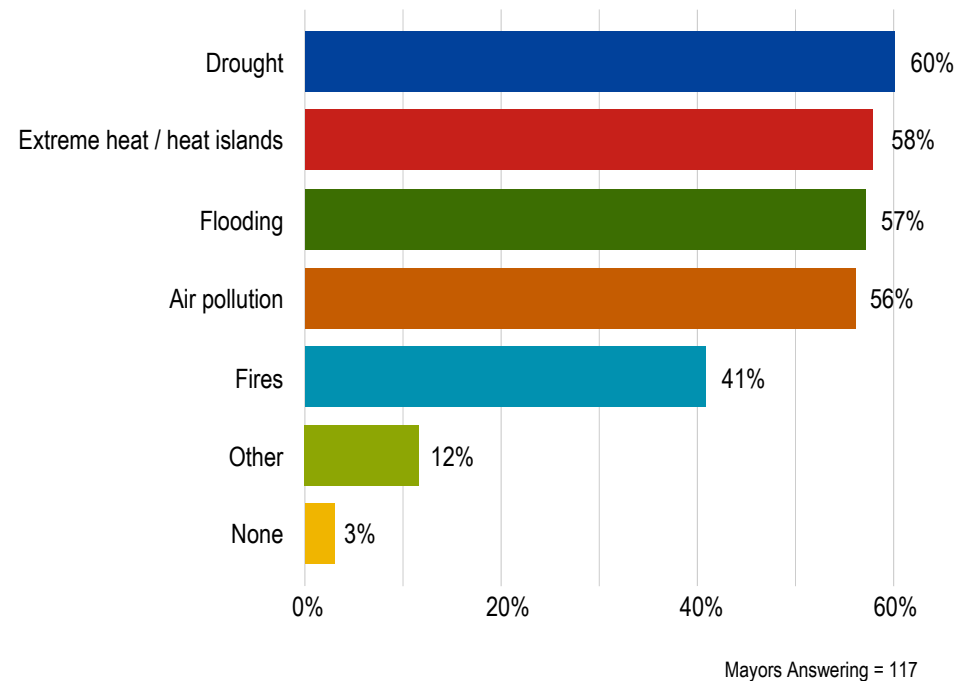


### Nearly all mayors worry about local impacts of climate change

Mayors not only believe climate change in general is caused by human activities, but they also worry about its direct effects on their cities. Only three percent of mayors said they are not worried about any local effects. Majorities of mayors worry about drought, extreme heat, flooding, and air pollution.<sup>7</sup> In response to an open-ended question about the single biggest threat to their residents' health and safety, eight out of 118 mayors cited climate-related threats including air quality, drought and fires, and heat.

**Figure 3. Concern About Local Impacts of Climate Change**

*What, if any, local impacts of climate change are you very worried about? Choose all that apply.*



Mayors' concerns reflect regional threat differences. For example, mayors in the west are much more worried about fires (roughly 80 percent to 20 percent) than other mayors. They also worry the most about drought, and the least about flooding. Differences may also reflect variations in infrastructure and urban design. For example, fewer Southern mayors are worried about extreme heat than mayors in the Northeast, which may be due to differences in the availability of resources like air conditioning in homes or schools.

### Mayors are simultaneously worried about energy costs and climate impacts

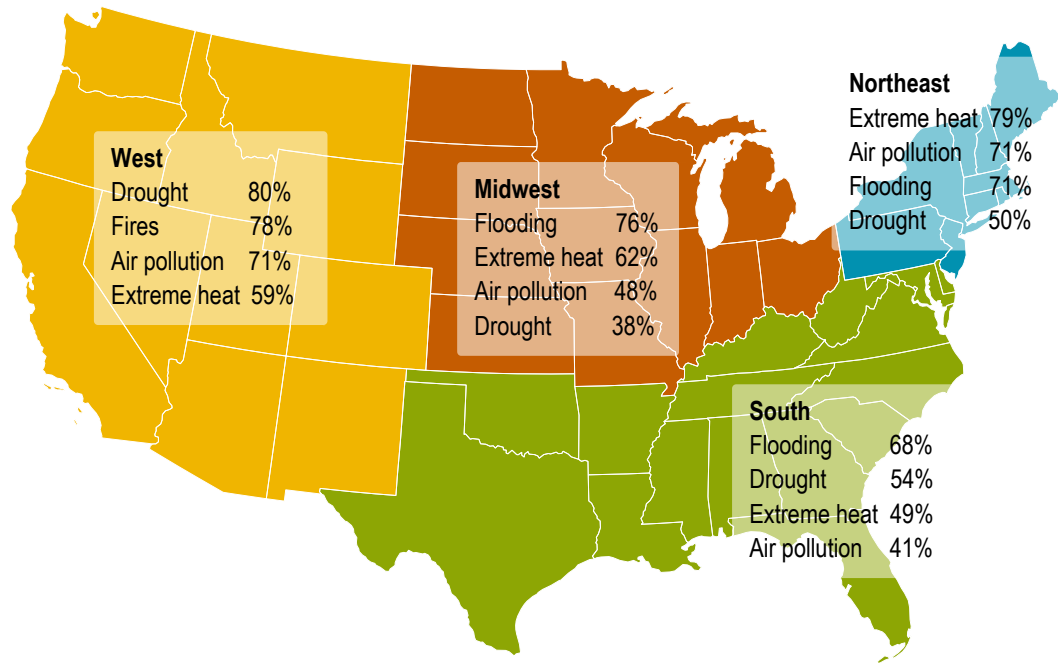
Energy for cities and their residents is one key domain in which climate, economic, and social concerns and challenges intersect. Mayors cite "rising costs" (57 percent) and "adverse environmental impact" (47 percent) most often as their top two concerns about local energy supplies. Democrats and Republicans agree about cost concerns, but Democrats are more concerned with environmental impacts while Republicans worry more about keeping up with future demand. Twenty-four percent of Republican mayors have no concerns about energy supply compared to 11 percent of Democrats. Rising costs and adverse environmental impact were the most and second most cited concern respectively

<sup>7</sup> Mayors could choose all that apply.



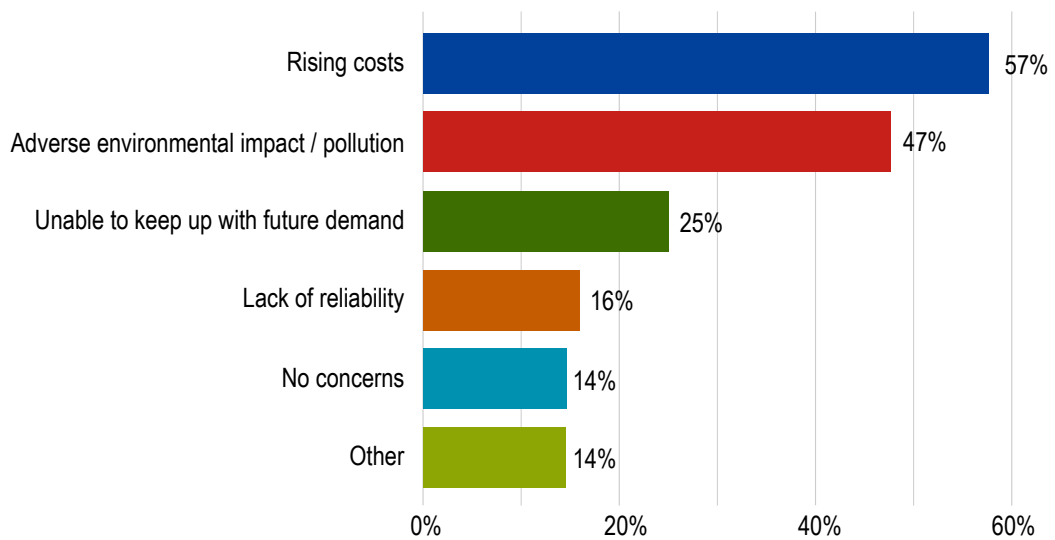
across all geographic regions. The proportion of mayors selecting rising costs ranged from 71 percent in the Midwest to 51 percent in the South. Responses looked generally similar across cities with higher and lower housing costs.

**Figure 4. Concern About Local Impacts of Climate Change, by Region**



**Figure 5. Top Two Concerns about Local Energy Supply**

*Currently, what, if anything, are your top TWO concerns about your city's energy supply?*

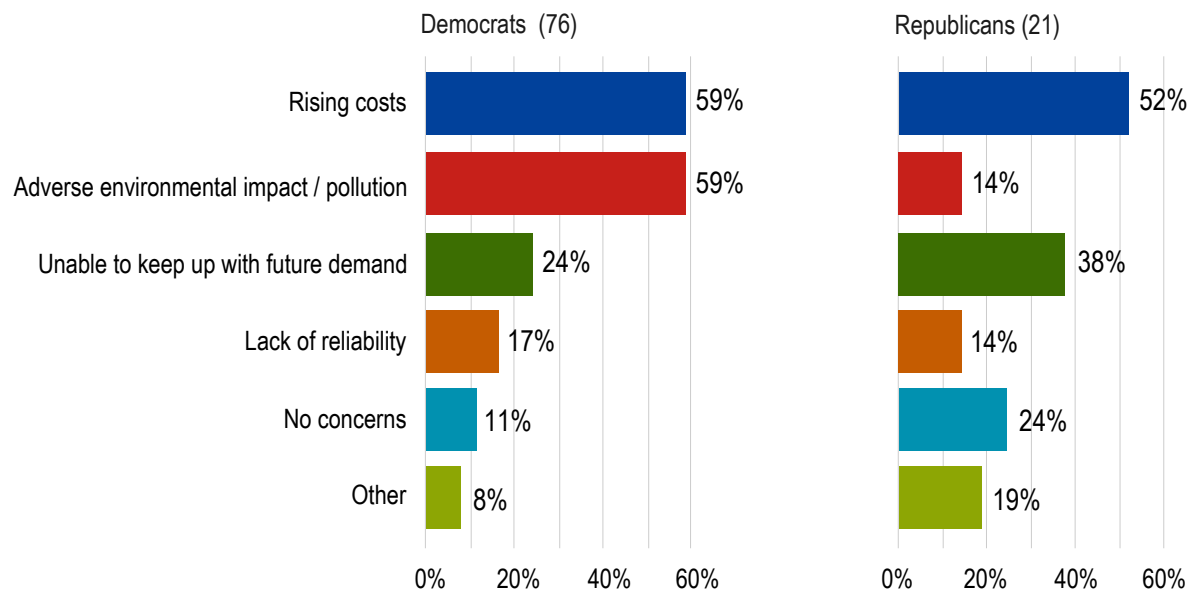


Mayors answering = 118





**Figure 6. Top Two Concerns about Local Energy Supply, by Party**



## CLIMATE ACTION MOTIVATION

### Mayors cite the need to take significant local climate action, even if it is costly

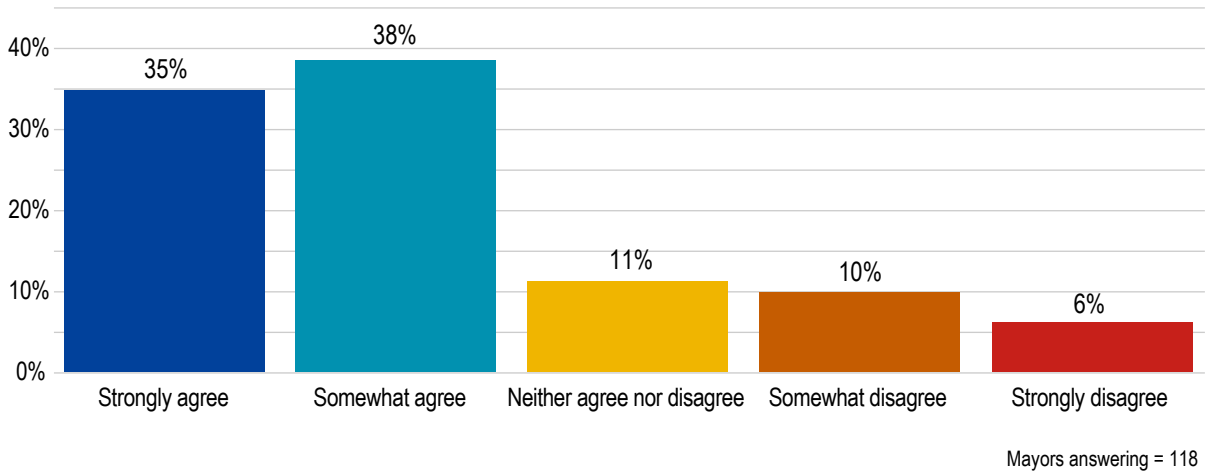
Seventy-three percent of mayors agree that cities should be willing to expend resources and incur costs to address climate change locally. The portion of mayors agreeing with this tradeoff is very similar to the proportion in 2019 and 2017.<sup>8</sup> Once again, Democrats and Republicans have notably different perspectives. Eighty-seven percent of Democrats agree with the tradeoff compared to 43 percent of Republicans (46 percent of Democrats strongly agree vs. five percent of Republicans). While still sizable, the partisan gap has closed since 2019. This shift is due to a growing share of Republicans agreeing that the tradeoff is necessary. However, the number of Republican mayors in the sample is modest and thus the estimate is very sensitive and subject to noise. Big city mayors, who are overwhelmingly Democrats, are more likely to agree with the tradeoff than smaller city mayors (79 percent compared to 63 percent).

8 Einstein, Katherine, D. Glick, M. Palmer, and S. Fox. 2019 Menino Survey of Mayors. Boston University Initiative on Cities (pgs. 20-22): <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/2019-survey-infrastructure-climate/>; Einstein, Katherine, D. Glick, and M. Palmer. 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors. Boston University Initiative on Cities (pgs. 18-23): <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/2017-survey-sustainability-and-climate-change/>.

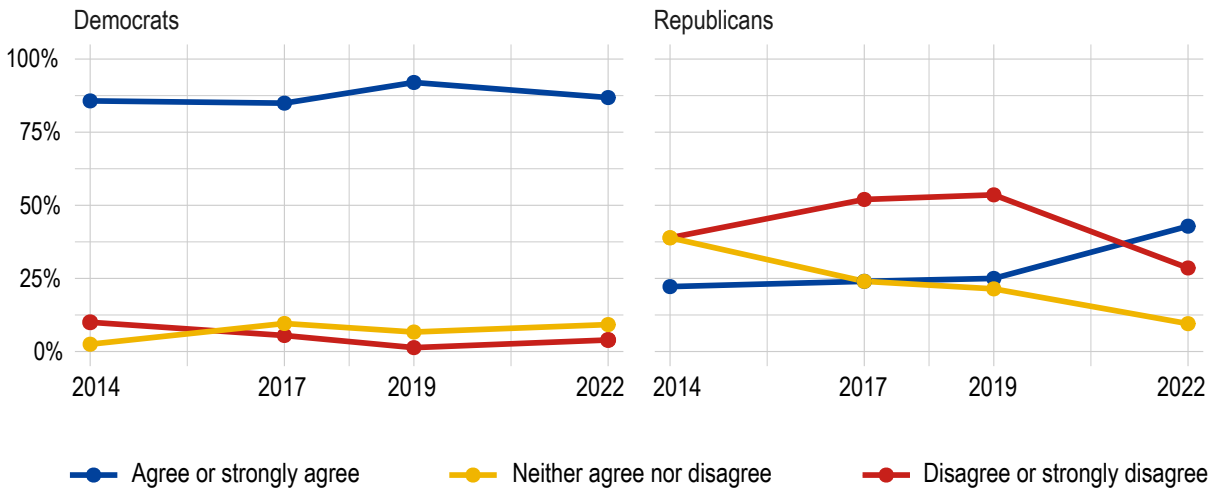


**Figure 7. Trade-offs: Mitigating Climate Change**

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



**Figure 8. Trade-offs: Mitigating Climate Change, Longitudinal by Party**



**“Desire to do our part” is the most common reason for taking local climate action**

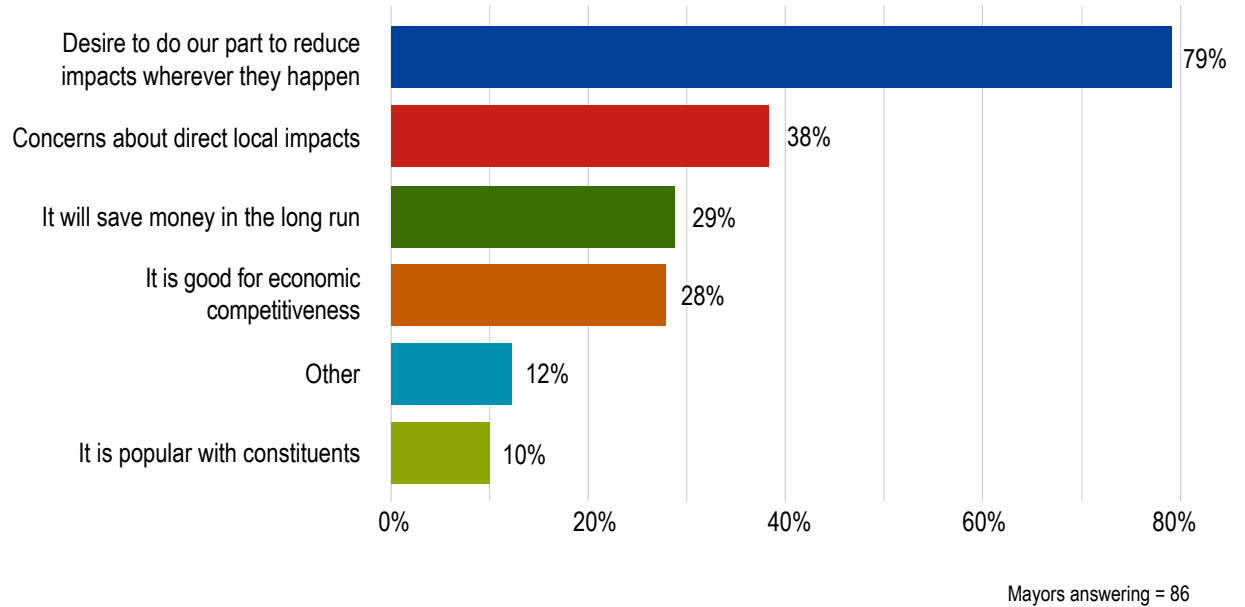
Among the mayors who agree with the local climate action tradeoff (Figure 7), 79 percent (choosing as one of their top two) say they are motivated by a “desire to do our part” irrespective of where climate impacts happen. Concern about direct impact on their cities is the (distant) second most cited motivator; it was chosen by half as many mayors as one of their top two (38 percent). Between a quarter and a third of mayors list saving money in the long run (29 percent) and economic competitiveness (28 percent) as one of their top two motivators for taking local climate action. Only 10 percent cite popularity with constituents, though this response was more common — by 11 percentage points — among the small number of Republicans who answered the question. Twelve percent of



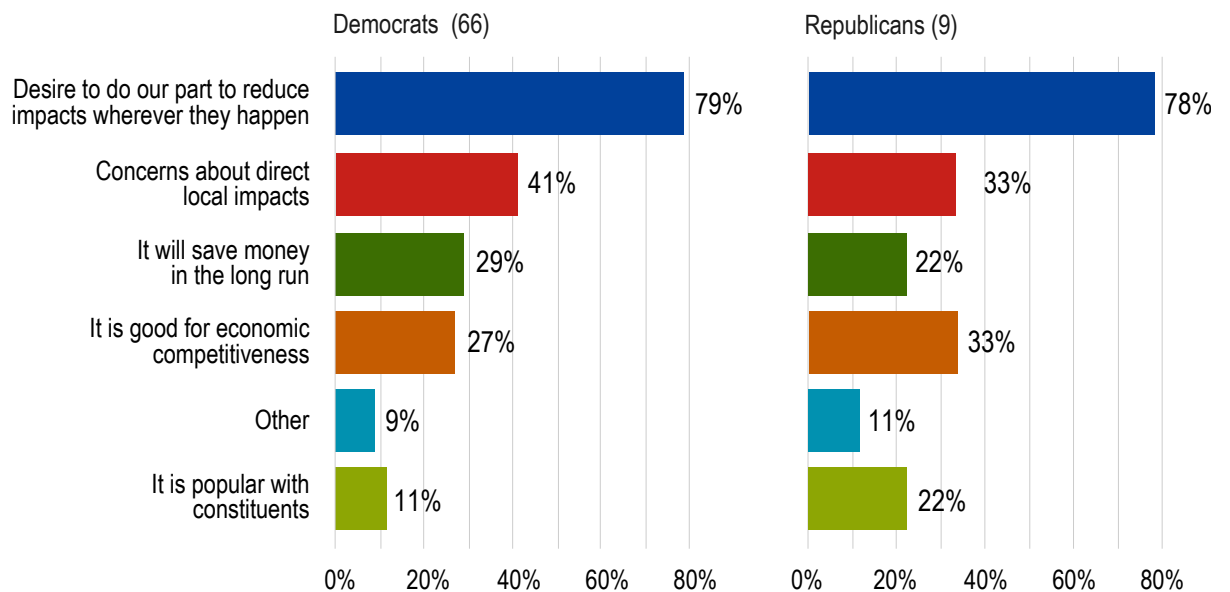
mayors provide “other” motivations for taking climate action. Related to the idea of “doing our part” a few mayors said simply that “it’s the right thing to do” or “it’s our moral imperative.” Others cite the opportunity to “lead by example” for other cities or a city’s own residents.

**Figure 9. Motivation for Local Climate Action**

*If you agree [that cities need to take significant local climate action, even if costly], which of the following are major motivators of wanting to see your city play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change? Choose up to two.*



**Figure 10. Motivation for Local Climate Action, by Party**





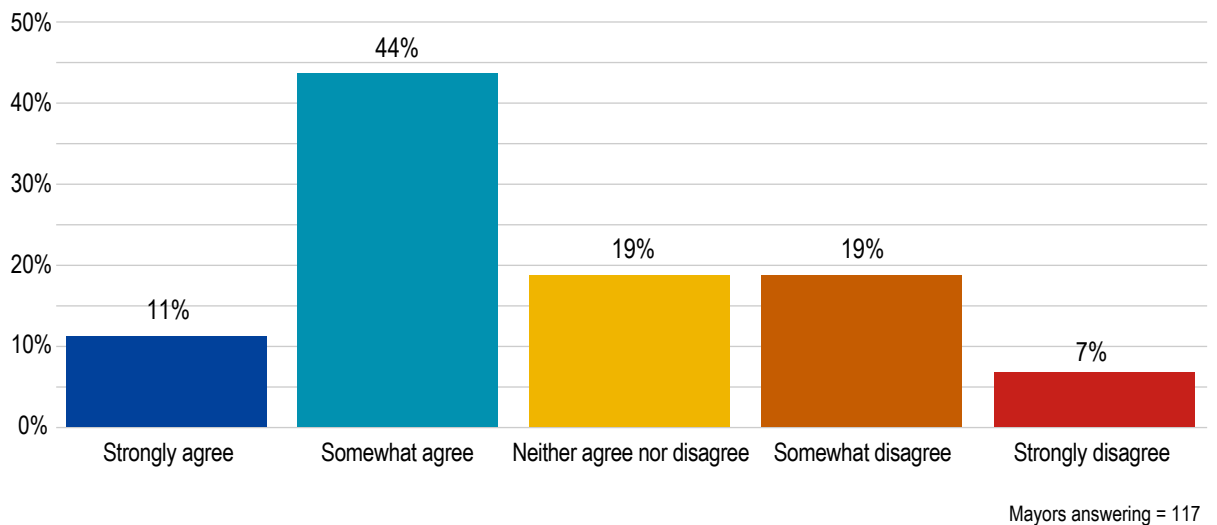
## SPECIFIC ACTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

### A little more than half of mayors believe that real progress requires residents to make sacrifices

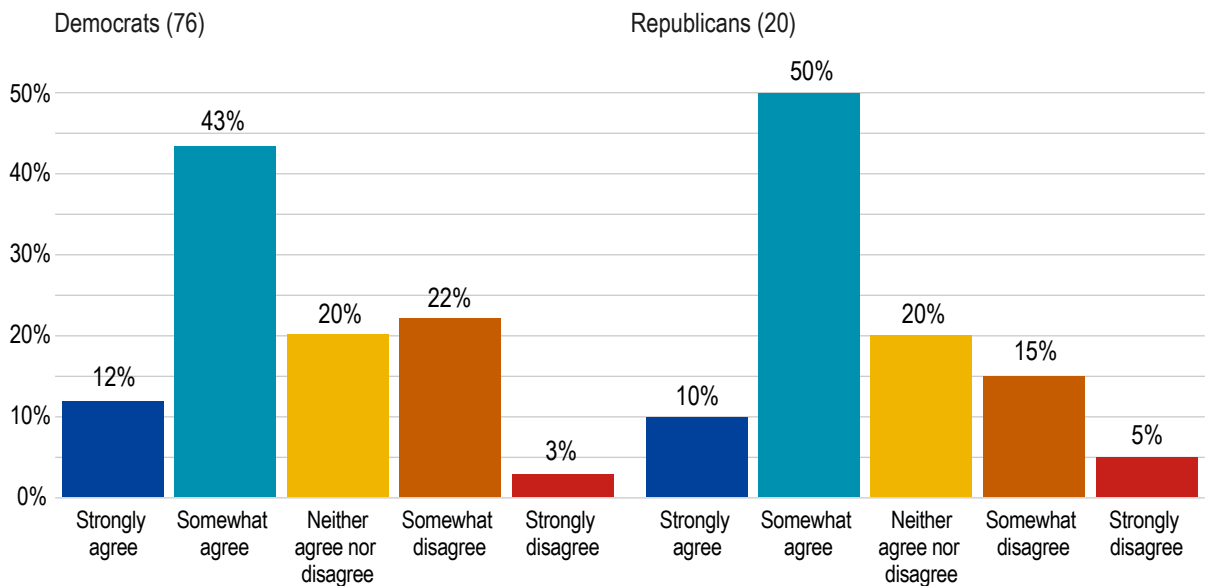
Fifty-five percent of mayors agree that making “real progress on climate issues” will require their “residents to make real sacrifices.” Evinced the relative lack of consensus on this issue, a quarter of mayors disagree with the sentiment and only 11 percent strongly agree. Notably, there is virtually no partisan gap on this issue: 55 percent of Democrats and 60 percent of Republicans agree. Likewise, mayors of bigger and smaller cities and those with higher and lower housing prices also have similar views about the extent to which climate progress requires resident sacrifices.

**Figure 11. Making Progress on Climate Issues**

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: *If my city wants to make real progress on climate issues, my city's residents will have to make real sacrifices.*



**Figure 12. Making Progress on Climate Issues, by Party**





Many mayors who disagree that climate progress would require residents to make changes do so because they do not see such changes required as real sacrifices. For example, one mayor bluntly said: *“Not sure I would say sacrifices. They need to make changes.”* Another elaborated: *“People perceive this work to be demanding a sacrifice of them [...] I think to suggest that people should gradually swap out their gas stoves to electric is not a huge sacrifice, some people talk as if the world is ending [...] my goal in leadership is not to allow short-term objections to sidetrack us from the long-term goal.”* Others see the types of individual changes that are necessary as good for residents — whether or not residents see it that way at the moment. One mayor saw them as *“beneficial sacrifices,”* another expressed confidence in their ability to *“educate people on the benefits”* and a third said *“improving energy efficiency of your house is a benefit.”* Relatedly, one explicitly said that technology will mitigate the hard tradeoffs: *“I don’t see them as sacrifices. There’s enough tech not to affect people’s lives.”*

While these mayors recognized the potential for individual level tradeoffs, others immediately thought of “resident sacrifice” collectively. One simply said they *“don’t see them as sacrifices. It’s for the collective good.”* Another said *“residents who like their cars the way they are, or like exclusionary zoning the way it is, or don’t like the bike lanes, they will be making sacrifices and those sacrifices are necessary. But I also think that’s not really a sacrifice in the aggregate.”* At the other end of the spectrum, a different group of mayors rejected the “making real progress on climate” part of the prompt either because they rejected it as a goal or because they question whether *“anything our citizens do would have an impact on it [climate change].”*

Overall, a majority of mayors perceive real tradeoffs such that robust local climate action will impose costs of various types on residents. These sacrifices may be financial, they may be restrictions on consumer choices, they may be changes to lifestyle, or they may be a variety of other things. A smaller, but considerable, group of mayors does not perceive such tradeoffs. Below, these differing views manifest as widely varying levels of enthusiasm for different local climate actions with those that require significant resident sacrifice, even if potentially efficacious, as those that mayors have the least enthusiasm for.

### Mayors see regulatory powers as their strongest potential climate tools

When asked to choose their two most powerful climate change tools, irrespective of desire to use them, mayors most often chose influence over 1) building codes and 2) zoning. Overall, 55 percent said building codes were one of their top two potential tools with no partisan differences. Thirty-eight percent chose zoning as one of the top two, with Democrats choosing it somewhat more often (12 percentage points). As one mayor explained about their zoning selection: *“The influence over zoning I think is one of the biggest ones we can have. Just because if we can decrease the need to jump in your vehicle by making communities more walkable [...]”* Views on the most powerful local tools did not vary with city size or housing prices. Midwestern mayors chose building codes less, and power over zoning more, than mayors from other regions.

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***When asked to choose their two most powerful climate change tools, irrespective of desire to use them, mayors most often chose influence over 1) building codes and 2) zoning.***

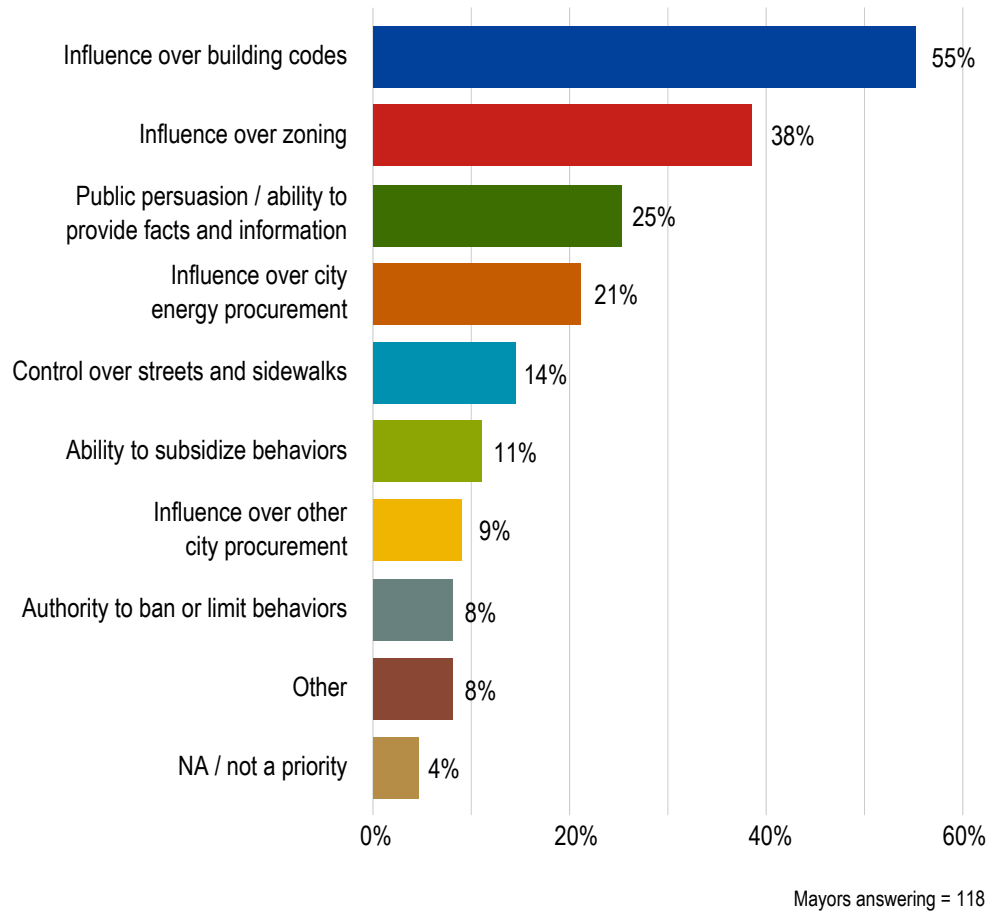
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Other tools such as using subsidies or city procurement were seen as less consequential. Only 11 percent cited the ability to subsidize behaviors as one of their strongest potential climate tools. Interestingly, very few mayors (eight percent) cited their authority to ban or limit behaviors, suggesting that mayors are not equally bullish about all regulatory powers. Nine percent said city procurement. The most cited non-regulatory power was persuasion. A quarter of mayors believe the ability to make arguments and provide information is one of their two biggest sources of potential influence on local climate change outcomes.



**Figure 13. Most Powerful Tools to Address Climate Change**

*Whether or not you are inclined to use them, which TWO of the following are the most powerful potential tools your city government has related to climate change?*

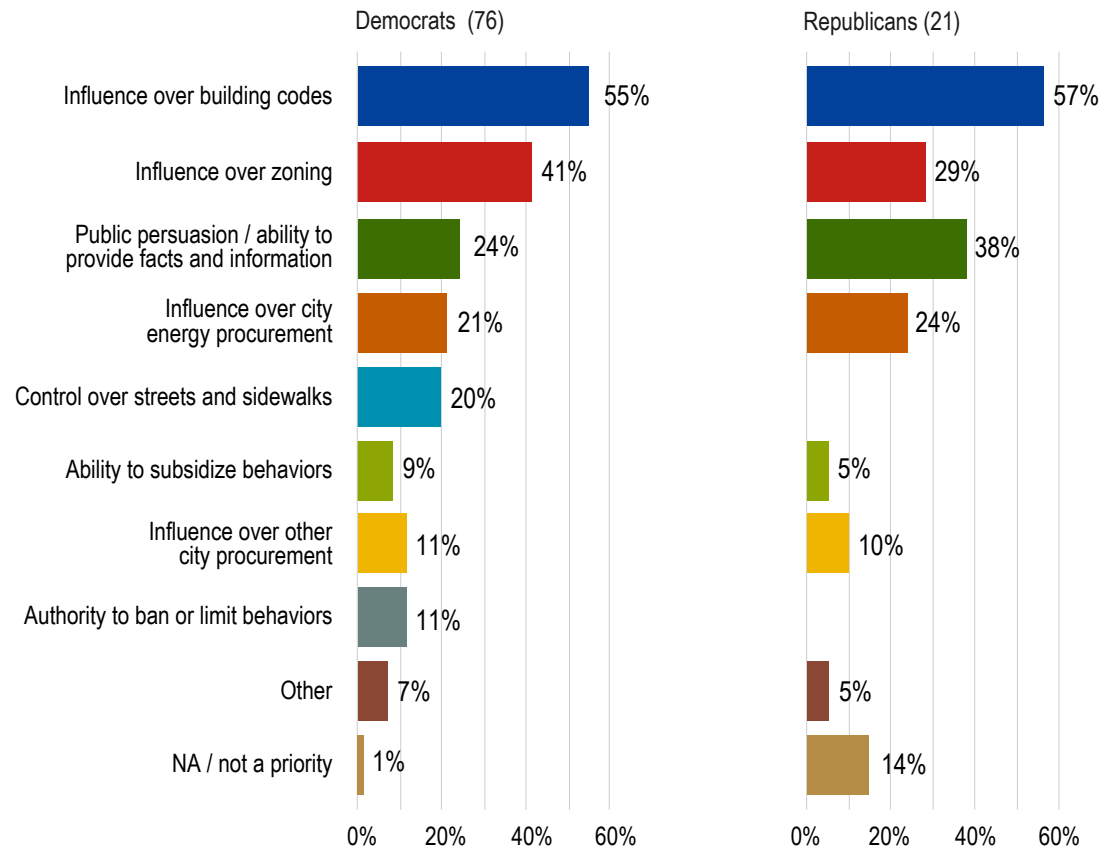


### Mayors are much less supportive of local actions that rely on assertive uses of their potent regulatory powers

While mayors recognize the potential impact of regulatory powers such as building codes, they are much more supportive of other types of local climate actions. Specifically, they are especially supportive of purchasing or encouraging new technologies. In contrast, they are significantly more reticent to restrict resident behaviors, or the use of older technology, via their regulatory powers.



**Figure 14. Most Powerful Tools to Address Climate Change, by Party**



**When presented with a variety of potential local emissions reduction policies, mayors were by far the most enthusiastic about updating their cities’ fleets with efficient vehicles**

Seventy-four percent strongly support replacing municipal vehicles early — “before their natural lifecycle ends.” In this vein of actions involving the city’s own resources, a majority were also supportive of using local government funding for energy efficiency upgrades in private homes.

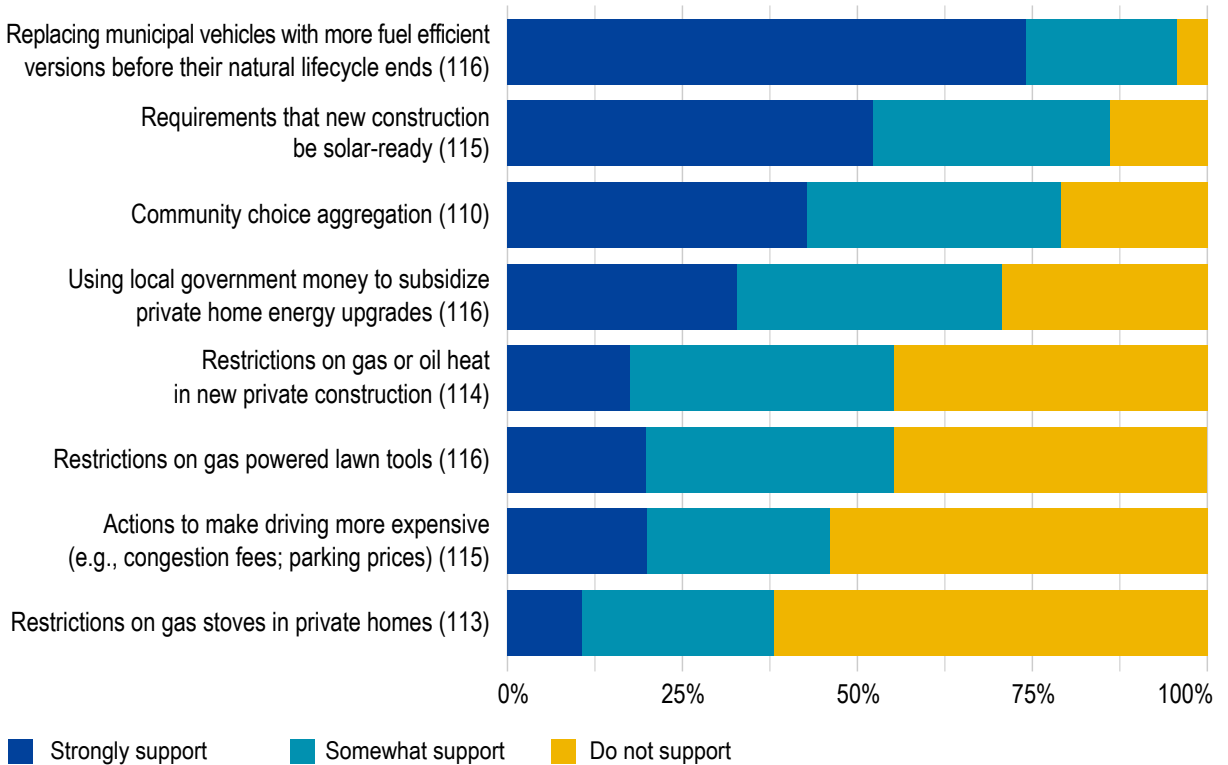
At the other end of the spectrum, restrictions on 1) gas stoves, 2) gas lawn tools, 3) gas and oil heat, and 4) dissuading people from driving, are quite unpopular with mayors. Mayors’ elaborations help shed light on the political constraints and limits on their eagerness to impose on their residents. For example, one said they “*wanted to ban leaf blowers*” but “*did not have the support.*” Similarly, a progressive big city mayor said of oil and gas restrictions “*[we’re] not doing it, but ultimately, [it’s] the right thing to do.*” A third said restrictions on gas and oil would “*go over like a lead bullet*” and that they “*would be hung*” for going after lawn tools. Pushing back on making driving less attractive, one mayor explained, “*I like carrots more than sticks.*” Perhaps best capturing the general dynamics was the mayor who said “*restrictions where we would say it’s not allowed, I don’t think we could do that. So I’d say strongly support this with the caveat that “restrictions” includes incentives or encouragement.*”



It is important to note there was also strong support for ensuring new developments be “solar ready,” and supporting community choice aggregation, which empowers residents to select green energy. However, it is noteworthy that while a number of mayors supported community choice aggregation, many others were unfamiliar with it. If a common theme exists, it is that mayors seem most comfortable with allocating their own resources and creating choices for consumers, but least comfortable dictating how others spend their money or restricting choice.

**Figure 15. Support for Local Actions to Reduce Emissions**

*For each of the following potential local actions to reduce emissions, which is closest to your position?*

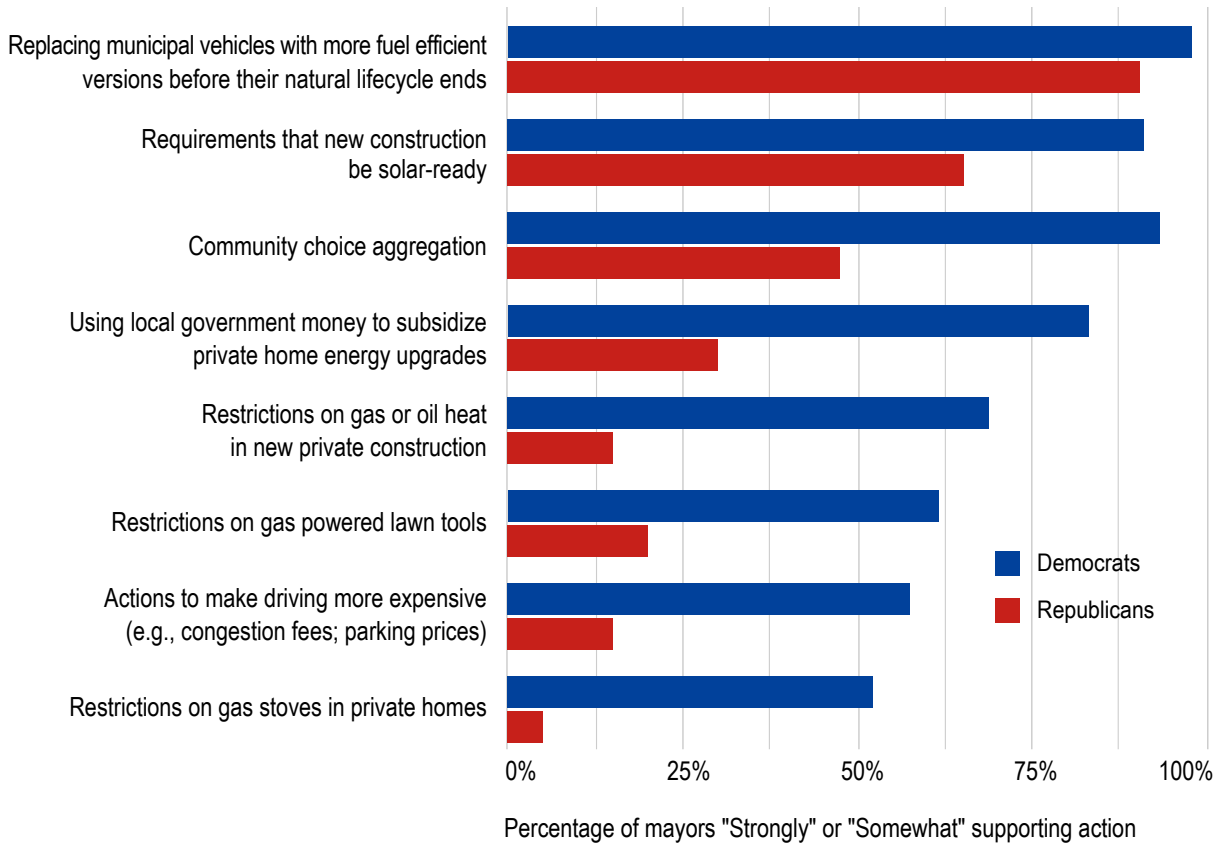


Replacing municipal fleets with more fuel-efficient vehicles is, by a wide margin, the local climate action mayors support the most. General support for this item crosses party lines. Only three percent of Democrats and 10 percent of Republicans do not support it. Democrats almost uniformly strongly support it (81 percent) while Republicans split between strong (55 percent) and moderate (35 percent) support. This suggests recently approved federal programs to electrify school buses, or electrification of garbage trucks and public safety vehicles, are the kinds of actions that mayors of both parties will enthusiastically embrace. This also suggests an opportunity for federal agencies and partners to help cities improve fleet management practices and align EV charging infrastructure investments with future municipal fleet needs.





**Figure 16. Support for Local Actions to Reduce Emissions, by Party**



Republicans consistently oppose most of the other local climate actions surveyed. Between 80 and 95 percent of Republican mayors oppose restrictions on gas stoves, restrictions on gas and oil heat, restrictions on gas lawn tools, and actions to dissuade driving. Notably smaller, but considerable fractions of Democrats (between one third and one half) opposed each of these local actions. While majorities of Republican mayors only supported two of these actions, majorities of Democratic mayors supported all eight.

### Electric vehicles and solar are the climate innovations mayors are most excited about

Broadly consistent with their views on the policy interventions (Figure 16), mayors most commonly cited something related to either electric vehicles or solar energy in response to an open-ended question about the technology or innovation they are most enthusiastic about. While the bulk of the responses in the electric vehicle category were about personal vehicles or cars more generally, it also includes mayors who said things like “*electric fire trucks.*” No other specific technology or category of climate-friendly innovation was cited with any regularity at all. For example, heat pumps and water reuse/management were cited by only a couple of mayors each.

### Mayors cite a range of areas in which they have taken their most politically difficult climate action

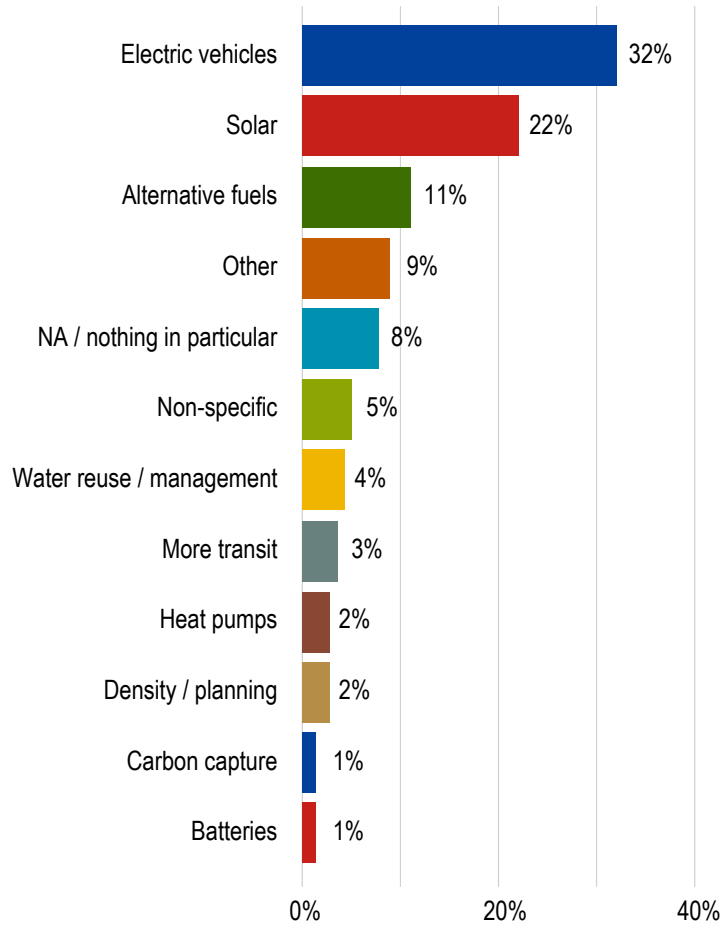
In response to an open-ended question, 19 percent of mayors said a change related to their cities’ energy supply was the most politically difficult climate-related action they have taken or plan to take. These included setting renewables goals, adopting community choice aggregation, and related issues. Twelve percent referenced a change to building codes or emissions reductions, and 10 percent cited something related to reducing car usage.



For instance, one said “it would be congestion pricing and tolling. We took that action because ultimately, our behaviors will remain the same unless there’s something that encourages us to change them.” Six and four percent cited electric vehicles and solar, respectively, as the area in which they have taken their most politically difficult action.

**Figure 17. Enthusiasm for Climate Innovation/Technology**

What one climate-friendly innovation or technology are you most enthusiastic about? Why?



*“I don’t believe climate action has to be politically difficult or costly. You get a return on investment if planned properly [...] there is plenty of low hanging fruit there.”*

Only a couple of mayors each explicitly invoked “regulations” — in the context of building codes and emissions — and “bans” — related to plastic bags. Thirteen percent indicated that the actions they have taken are not difficult because their residents are supportive. One mayor said “I don’t believe climate action has to be politically difficult or costly. You get a return on investment if planned properly [...] there is plenty of low hanging fruit there.” Another ten percent said they do not take local climate actions. One mayor was “amazed by how much attention other

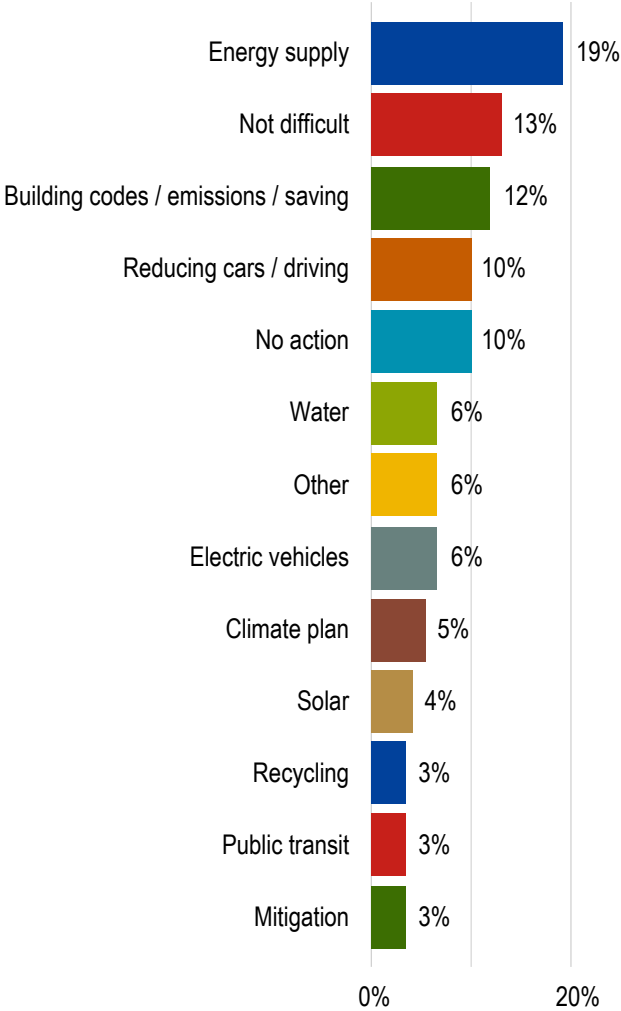
mayors spend on climate change” explaining “it just isn’t a topic we discuss or spend any time on here.” Here we explicitly note that the question does not allow us to identify actions not taken because they are too difficult, or those taken but not considered difficult. The responses do however provide a sense of the areas in which mayors see themselves doing politically difficult things related to climate and the scope of the actions they see as politically challenging but doable.



More broadly, few mayors cited an action related to climate as the most unpopular thing overall that they have done in the past year. In response to an open-ended question about the recent “decision you made that had the lowest level of public support,” only seven percent of mayors’ responses were related to climate action. These included a couple of controversial bike lane efforts, a failed leaf blower ban, and actions around energy supply. One mayor cited taking away a shared street to free up lanes for traffic as their most unpopular action because it upset those who support climate action.

**Figure 18. Politically Difficult Climate Action**

*What is the most politically difficult action you have recently taken or are likely to take soon to address climate change in your city. Why?*





## PUBLIC MEETINGS, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, AND DISINFORMATION

Local decisions about climate change require direct engagement with residents. Many of the most substantial potential local climate actions, like regulatory changes, siting solar arrays, or increasing residential density will pass (or not pass) through mandatory public engagement processes. Residents may hold misperceptions about climate policies, both because of the nationally polarized climate and generally low levels of political information. Mayors' beliefs about the public engagement process and residents' information levels are thus central to understanding the politics of climate action.

### Mayors are almost perfectly divided about whether public meetings are informative or misleading

Mayors split evenly regarding the informational value of the types of public meetings through which many climate related, and other, changes must pass. About half of mayors see public meetings as a “valuable source for learning about the views of the community.” The other half say they mainly “provide information from a non-representative group and can be a misleading source of public views.” While the gaps are modest given the sample size, Democrats and big city mayors, with considerable overlap between the two groups, are not more likely to worry about public meetings offering potentially misleading perspectives of a small group of privileged residents. Sixty-two percent of big city mayors see public meetings as valuable compared to 48 percent of smaller city mayors. Likewise, 56 percent of Democrats and 44 percent of Republicans take the more optimistic position on public meetings.

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*“If you want to know what hyper-interested citizens think, have a public hearing, if you want to know what the general public thinks, take a poll.”*

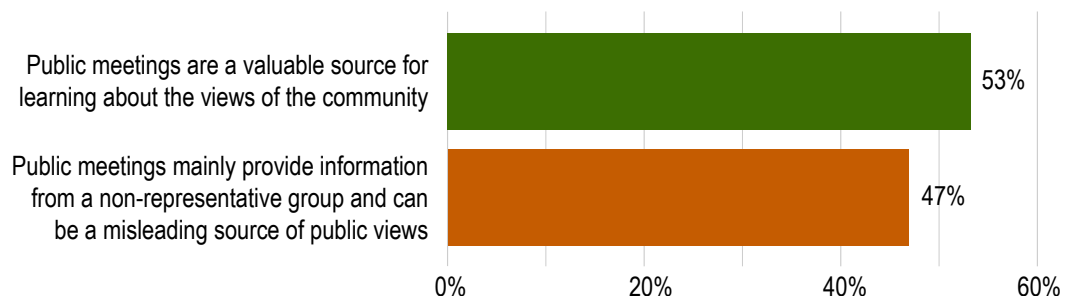
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One mayor who said public meetings provide information from a non-representative group explained: “My opinion on this has shifted in the last two years. I would have answered this differently in the past.” Another said, “if you want to know what hyper-interested citizens think, have a public hearing, if you want to know what the general public thinks, take a poll.” A third revealed: “I use the acronym, STP: same ten people.”

On the other hand, a mayor who was optimistic about public meetings said they “call public meetings, mutual educational opportunities. People know their neighborhoods better than we do.” Another agreed that public meetings were valuable “with the caveat that meetings are led and moderated well.” This was not the only mayor to see value downside. A number rejected the dichotomy. As one who ultimately said meetings were a valuable source of information put it, “it’s both, but value outweigh dangers.” Another who saw some downsides concluded that you “have to respect that people give time to attend meetings.”

**Figure 19. Value of Public Meetings**

Which of the following statements do you most agree with?



Mayors answering = 105



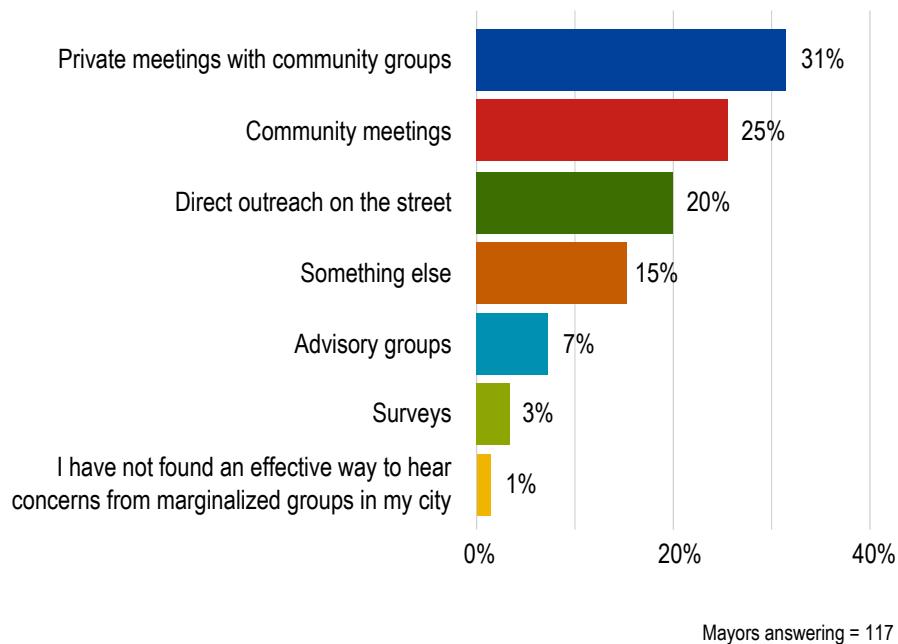
### No consensus among mayors on the best way to hear concerns from marginalized communities

Roughly equal proportions of mayors cite 1) private meetings with community groups, 2) community meetings, and 3) direct outreach on the street as the best way to hear the concerns of marginalized communities. One mayor who selected private meetings with community groups explained that you “need to go where they are and be in a trusted space.” Another who selected community meetings expressed a similar sentiment about “being where they are.” A mayor who chose direct outreach said “people learn differently, and I see public engagement the same way [...] have to do everything. But, most effective is direct outreach/knocking on doors.” Another said, “being among people is the best way that I’ve had to hear those concerns from a variety of different groups,” and explained that as a Spanish-speaking mayor having “the opportunity to speak in the language of preference for many of our residents” makes a difference. About a dozen mayors did not choose one or the other because they said both were equally true at the same time.

Surveys or similar approaches are much less popular and relatively few mayors cited technological solutions or other options.

**Figure 20. Effective Ways to Hear from Marginalized Groups**

*What, if anything, have you found to be the most effective way to hear concerns from marginalized groups in your city? Please choose one.*



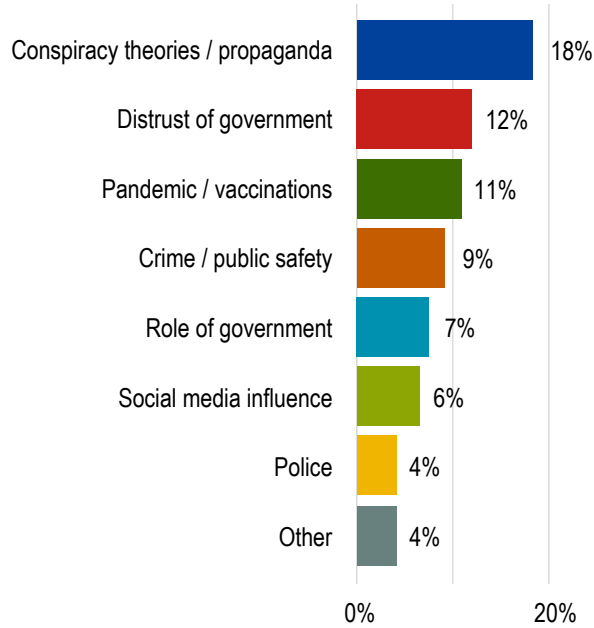
### Mayors are concerned about a wide range of types of disinformation

In response to an open-ended question about the resident disinformation that most concerns them, mayors provided responses across a breadth of categories with no clear consensus. It is important to note that while they were asked about disinformation (false information intended to deceive), some also responded about misinformation (things that are false/untrue) or simply areas where they feel constituents may be ill-informed. The most common response was related to conspiracy theories in general (18 percent of mayors). Other types mentioned by at least a few mayors included disinformation about the pandemic or vaccinations, disinformation about crime and policing, and disinformation about the government in general. Only a couple of mayors’ responses touched on climate-related disinformation — one was about bike lanes and the other about zoning and density.



**Figure 21. Concerns about Disinformation**

What type of disinformation, if any, do you hear from constituents that most concerns you?



Responses provided by fewer than five mayors are omitted.

Mayors rely on direct engagement, experts, and community allies to counter disinformation. Thirty-three percent of mayors say direct outreach (e.g., town halls) is their most effective tool for countering disinformation among their residents. Another 23 percent say they enlist experts or community leaders. Democrats are notably more likely than Republicans to express confidence in these approaches. Only eight percent say working through the local media is their most effective tool. Finally, mayors are generally optimistic about their ability to take on disinformation. Just three percent say they have not found any effective tools. One mayor said, “it’s got to be one on one, and it’s impossible to reach that many people, but that’s the best.” Another, evincing some optimism, said “people trust us — power of the person” while citing social media as a good alternative when traditional media is not trusted.

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**Mayors rely on direct engagement, experts, and community allies to counter disinformation.**

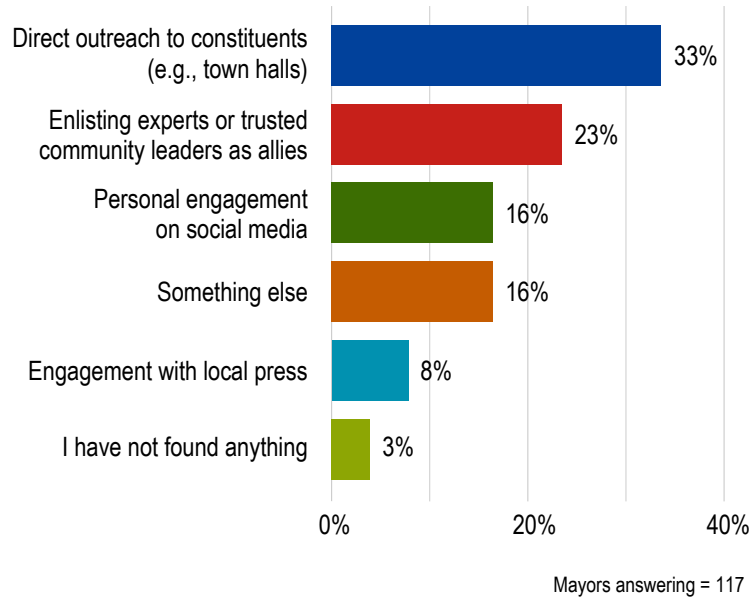
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Republican mayors are somewhat more likely to rely on engagement through social media or the press to counter disinformation. They are also much less optimistic than Democrats. Only one percent of Democratic mayors said they have not found any effective tools compared to 14 percent of Republicans.

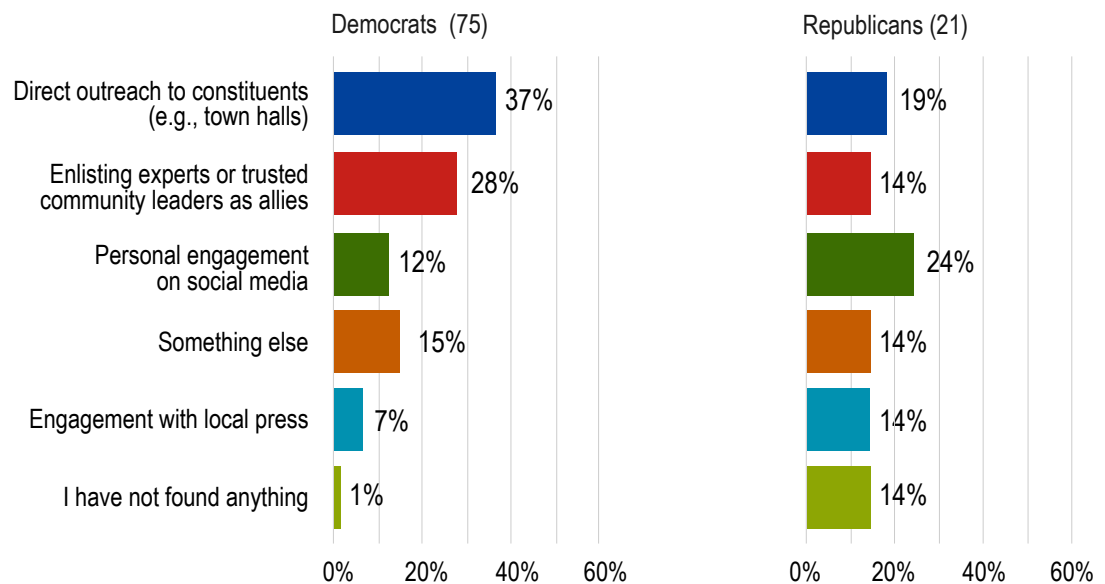


**Figure 22. Most Effective Way to Counter Disinformation**

What, if anything, have you found to be the most effective way to counter disinformation in your community?  
Please choose one.



**Figure 23. Most Effective Way to Counter Disinformation, by Party**





## CONCLUSION

Communities across the country face real and immediate climate impacts — from drought to extreme heat to flooding — and America’s mayors feel a sense of urgency to act. They believe in the need to take significant local climate action, even if costly, and are motivated not only by a desire to promote the well-being of their own cities, but also by a desire to affect change on national and international scales. While many cities have been taking steps to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change on their own for years, new federal investments will provide an opportunity to accelerate these local plans. Frontline communities will be key allies in putting these dollars to work, and mayors see regulatory powers, like building codes and zoning, as their top climate tools. Yet, local leaders are relatively reluctant to impose restrictions on their residents, such as dissuading them from driving or from using gas and oil heat. Instead, they are more comfortable using government resources to purchase climate-friendly technologies, like electric vehicles, or to support consumers in doing so.





## 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 1 shows, the sample of participating cities closely mirrors the broader population on traits including size, racial demographics, housing prices, and geographic distribution.

**Table 1. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All US Cities with Populations >75,000**

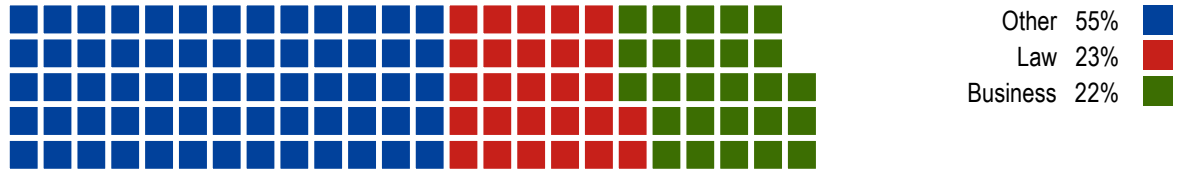
|                              | Surveyed Cities | All Cities  |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Number of Cities             | 118             | 501         |
| Average Population           | 212,121         | 222,955     |
| Average Percent White        | 51.2%           | 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.

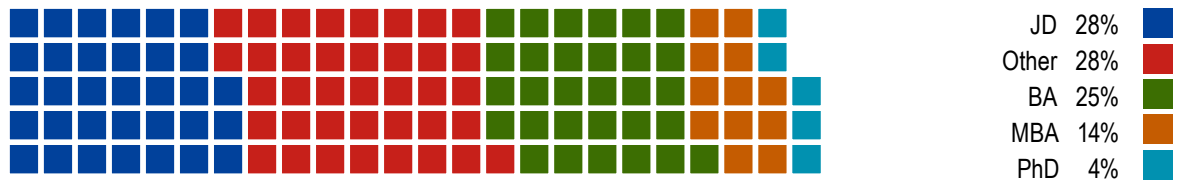


**Figure 24. Demographics of Surveyed Mayors**

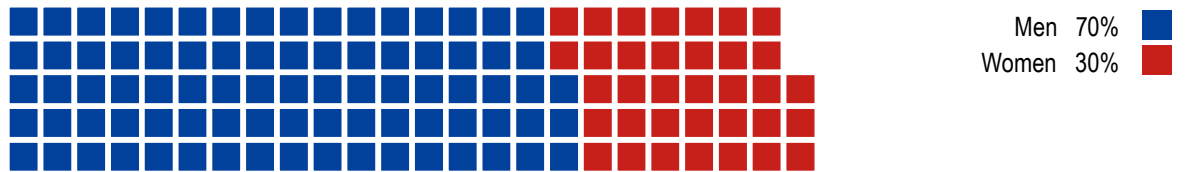
Professional background



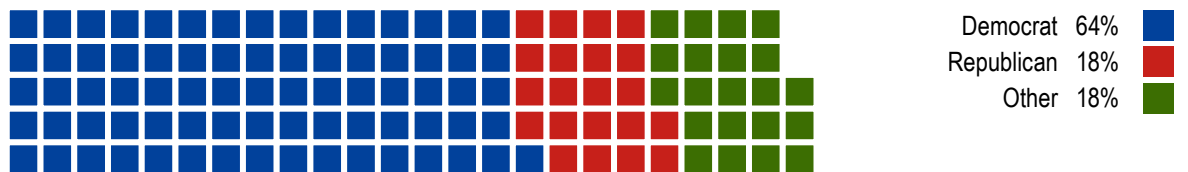
Highest degree



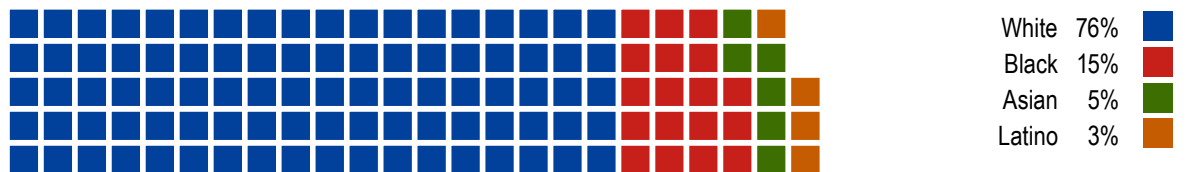
Gender



Party



Race



## 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](https://bu.edu/ioc)

To learn more about the Menino Survey of Mayors, visit [surveyofmayors.com](https://surveyofmayors.com)