

# State of the Cities 2016



# STATE OF THE CITIES 2016

## About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is the nation's leading advocacy organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. Through its membership and partnerships with state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource and advocate for more than 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans. NLC's Center for City Solutions and Applied Research provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities and creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities.

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## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

**A**s the economy rebounds and fiscal health stabilizes, mayors across the country are using their State of the City speeches to tout the progress their communities have made through hard work, innovation and collaboration. The State of the City speech is a mayor's opportunity to reflect on the city's recent accomplishments, current challenges and roadmap for the future. Its words provide unique insight into the state of municipal leadership, revealing the issues that matter most to city leaders.

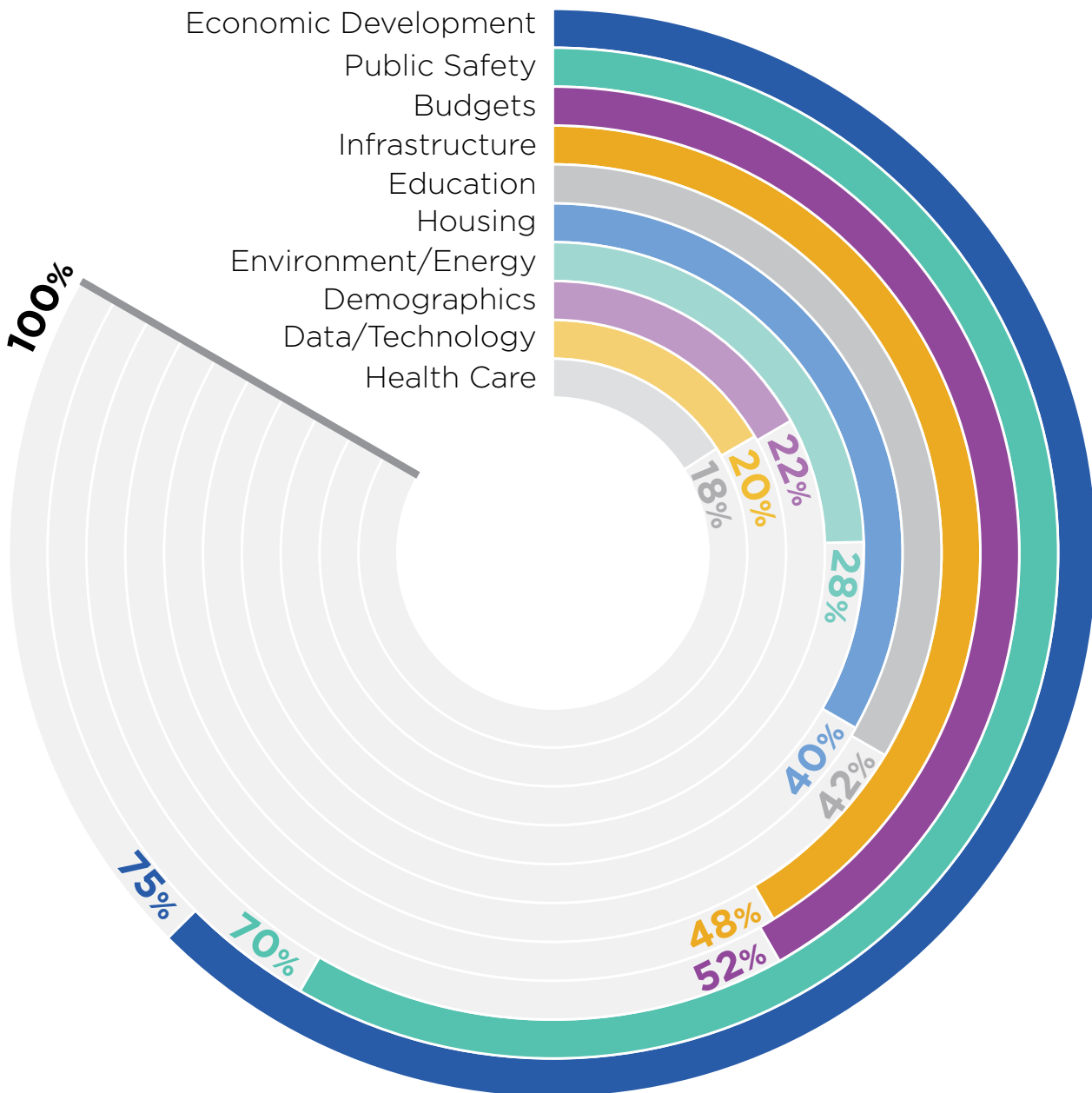
### This year's *State of the Cities* reveals the following trends:

- 1** Mayors continue to be focused on improving their local economies and encouraging entrepreneurship.
- 2** Mayors are seeing improved revenue and are being judicious about how to spend it.
- 3** Mayors are cautiously optimistic about the future and are leading in the development of sustainable communities where people want to live.
- 4** Mayors are concerned about the uptick in the murder rate even though overall crime rates are historically low.
- 5** Mayors are concerned about the increasing opioid epidemic.
- 6** Mayors are helping their cities see the value of using technology and data to drive decisions and make their city governments more efficient and effective.

Nashville Mayor  
Megan Berry



# Top 10 Issues





## Introduction

In the words of our nation's mayors, the state of cities is "strong again," "thriving," "dynamic," "poised," and "full of momentum and pride." These sentiments conjure up a common theme: cities are resilient. Mayors caution, however, that the promise of cities will be stifled if challenges such as lack of access to jobs, water contamination, discrimination and gun violence are not addressed.

The State of the City speech is a mayor's opportunity to reflect on the city's recent accomplishments, current challenges and roadmap for the future. Its words provide unique insight into the state of municipal leadership, revealing the issues that matter most to city leaders. As the economy rebounds and fiscal health stabilizes, mayors across the country are touting the progress their

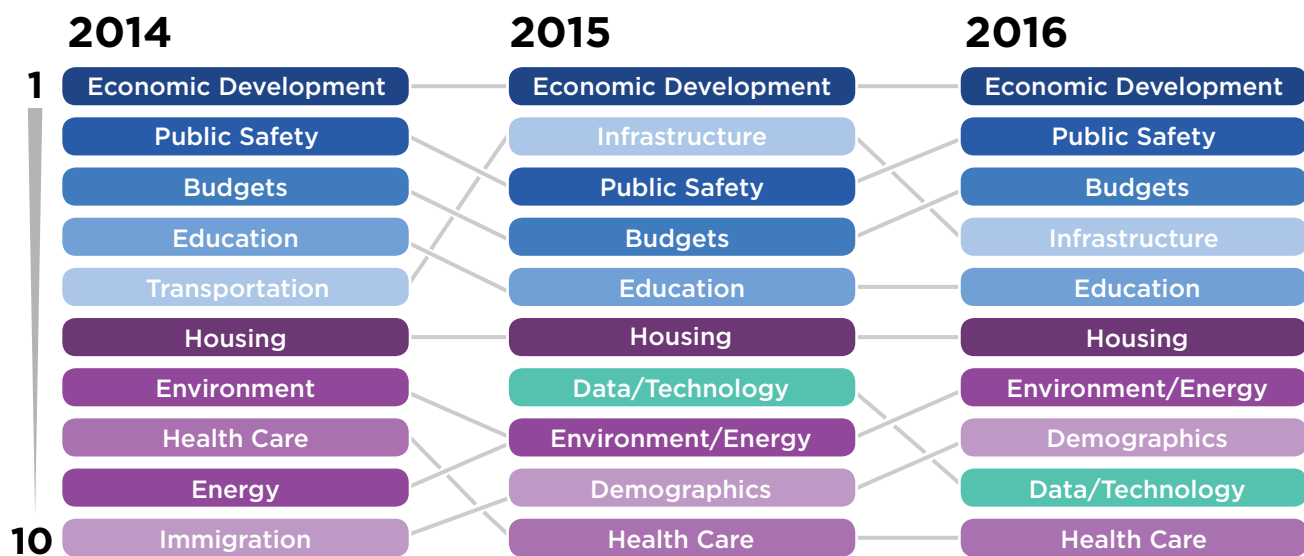
communities have made through hard work, innovation and collaboration. There is a sense in their speeches that their city's next great moment is imminent.

Mayors recognize, however, that this moment is not guaranteed.

Oklahoma City Mayor  
Mick Cornett



## Top 10 issues over the last three years



For example, given the challenge of affordability in the city of Austin, Texas, Mayor Steve Adler committed nearly his entire speech to discussing how to improve economic opportunity for all city residents. “The price of growth cannot be that the cost of living is growing so much that people can’t afford to live in Austin,” he said. “It should not be a radical notion to say that Austinites should be able to afford to live in Austin. In fact, this should be our policy.”

Meanwhile, Mayor Rick Kriseman of St. Petersburg, Florida, like many mayors, focused on gun violence as a key impediment to his city’s future. “We are determined to do what we can to end gun violence, and most importantly, the underlying choices that lead to violence. Violence that too often leads to an exponential loss of life. Those killed, and those who have killed ... both are promises broken. Both are lives lost.”

Just as mayors lament lives lost to murder, they are also hopeful for a better future. They praise the integral work of community groups; they highlight their cities’ rankings on various lists, such as “best place to start a business”; they talk about moments that reinforce their commitments to improving the cities they serve. On any given day, mayors deal with crime, traffic and homelessness while working to cultivate a thriving local economy attractive to businesses and families. From their unique vantage point, mayors approach these issues as complex and interrelated, recognizing that for the city to reach its potential, all facets must be functioning and all people must feel welcome, safe and included in the prosperity yet to come.

The question of how cities meet that goal is precisely what makes this annual analysis of 100 State of the City speeches particularly insightful.

# STATE OF THE CITIES 2016

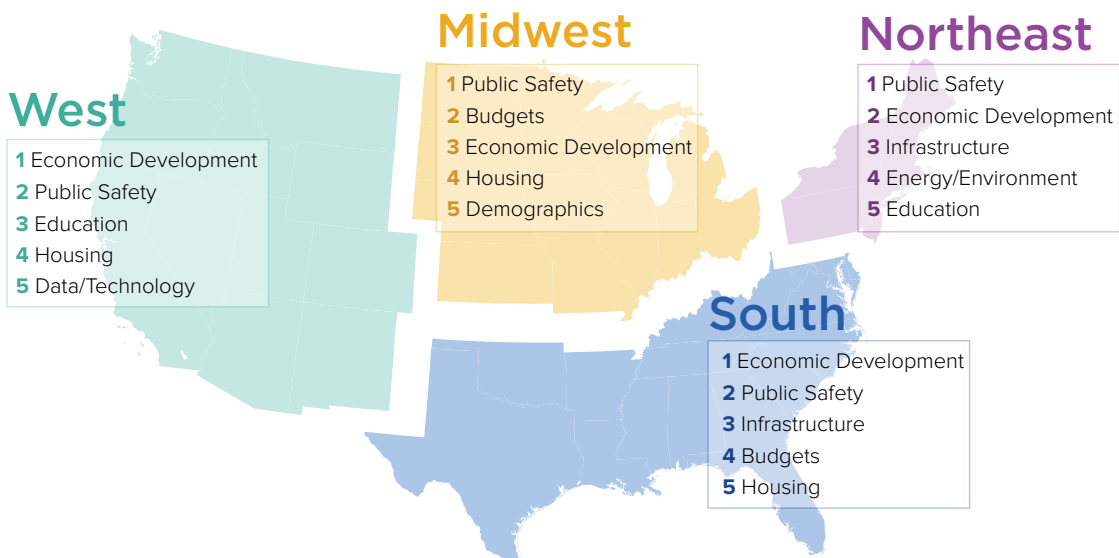
## Top-Line Trends

In 2016, mayors are focusing most on economic development, public safety, budgets, infrastructure and housing as broad strategies to advance their cities. The prominence of these top-line issues, or those receiving what we call “significant coverage” within mayors’ speeches, has been consistent in the three years since we started the analysis. Economic development has been the most widespread issue addressed by mayors in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Infrastructure, public safety and budgets have remained in the top five, and education and housing have vied for a spot in the top rankings over the past few years.

What has changed is how mayors view particular issues as supporting the advancement of cities. Education, for example, has traditionally been discussed in terms of schools, teachers and test scores. More recently, however, education is viewed as a lynchpin within a broader system needed to drive social and economic cohesion and viability.

In his speech, Mayor Jorge Elorza of Providence, Rhode Island, said, “We are developing full-service community schools whereby our school buildings become resiliency centers that bring our neighbors together and provide the social and emotional supports that our students and families need. We are enhancing career and technical education to provide multiple pathways to success.”

## Rank by geographic region (top 5 significant coverage)





Rank by population (top 5 significant coverage)

**Less than 50,000**

- Economic Development
- Public Safety
- Infrastructure
- Budgets
- Energy/Environment

**50 - 99,000**

- Public Safety
- Budgets
- Economic Development
- Education
- Housing

**100 - 299,000**

- Economic Development
- Public Safety
- Infrastructure
- Education
- Housing

**300,000 or more**

- Economic Development
- Public Safety
- Education
- Budgets
- Housing

Austin, TX Mayor  
Steve Adler



## A Deeper Look

Across regions of the country and population categories, the core focus areas of mayors have not changed significantly in the past few years. However, two notable differences have emerged. Housing has become more prevalent in speeches of mayors from cities in the Northeast, Midwest and South, and environmental and energy issues have become prominent in smaller cities.

Despite nearly eight years into recovery of a housing market-driven recession, housing issues remain the top concern of mayors across most regions. According to the 2016 Joint Center for Housing Studies report, the overall housing market is improving, but several key challenges remain: lack of affordable housing stock is impeding first-time homebuyers; abundance of vacant, distressed properties continues to plague most regions; and neighborhoods hit especially hard by the housing market crash and recession are still struggling to rebound.<sup>1</sup> Issues of blight and affordability appear in mayoral speeches across the Rust Belt and Sun Belt, with particular strategies targeted toward increasing affordable housing near where people work.

Nashville, Tennessee, Mayor Megan Barry said, “Our goal is to ensure access to affordable and workforce housing options near transportation and jobs. On the building side, we have launched a Metro Property Donation Process for infill and large-scale housing development. Nearly 60 infill lots will be available for

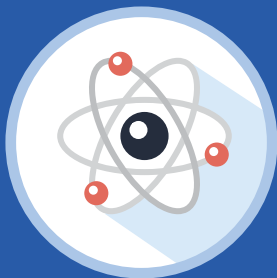
housing development throughout Davidson County. More than half of them are in the urban core. For the first time, we’re making Metro’s own property available for affordable housing.”

A deeper look at differences in top-line issues among cities of different population sizes reveals that in smaller cities, energy and environmental issues are receiving greater attention this year than last. In addition to highlighting the importance of stewardship of the natural environment, small-town mayors understand that a “sustainable” community is one that attracts economic activity, a talented workforce and families.

Dearborn, Michigan, Mayor John B. O’Reilly Jr. noted, “We’ve already been successful at laying the foundation for alternative energy projects and other green initiatives that have the possibility to boost our local economy. We want to promote Dearborn as a forward-thinking community, and one that is environmentally-friendly. And that could help us attract even more young families to our city.”

The state of our nation’s cities in 2016 is cautiously optimistic. Mayors are hopeful, yet realistic about the challenges before them. As people whose actions speak even louder than their words, mayors are leading change from the grass roots. Despite the challenges, they are working to ensure a future in which cities are rich with opportunity, socially cohesive and safe.

# TOPIC BREAKDOWNS



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**E**conomic development is once again the most discussed topic in mayors' addresses.

## Job Growth

Having almost fully emerged from the Great Recession, mayors touted the many gains their cities have made in business and job growth. "Today, we're at a record level of jobs in our parish," said Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Mayor-President Melvin "Kip" Holden. "I could tell you about the more than 7,000 jobs created, or the \$327 million in new payroll or the \$1.1 billion in capital expenditures," he said before listing the names of major companies that chose to expand operations in his city. In Boston, Massachusetts, Mayor Marty Walsh welcomed General Electric to its new global headquarters in the city: "GE is not only a historic innovator, returning to the city where Thomas Edison got his start. It's not only another step forward for Boston on the world stage. It's a magnet for talent and investment that we'll direct toward our shared goals: in opportunity, in community, in education."

## Manufacturing and the Maker Movement

Other cities looked to unleash the potential of manufacturing and the maker movement, a growing group ranging from hobbyists and tinkerers to independent inventors and designers. "Small, independent businesses from craft brewers to design firms, bakeries, and salons are popping up all along our streets and in our squares," said Mayor Joseph Curtatone of Somerville, Massachusetts. "So just like our thriving maker community, we're working to handcraft our future." Looking to grow their local maker movements, cities have hosted Maker Faires, opened co-working spaces, and made linkages between makers, the technology sector and local manufacturers.<sup>2</sup>

## Making It Easier to Start a Business

More and more cities are making it easier for entrepreneurs to apply for the permits and licenses needed to start or grow a business. "We will be expanding our online offerings for business—where now, for the first time ever, business licenses can be acquired through our city's website, and soon, the entire building permit process will be available in a single, seamless online system," said Mayor John Tecklenburg of Charleston, South Carolina. Similarly, Mayor Andrew Ginther spoke of how Columbus, Ohio, established a "small business concierge, to help entrepreneurs navigate city government" as well as "the Small Business Builder, an online roadmap for each stage of starting or expanding a business."

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# 75%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of economic development issues.

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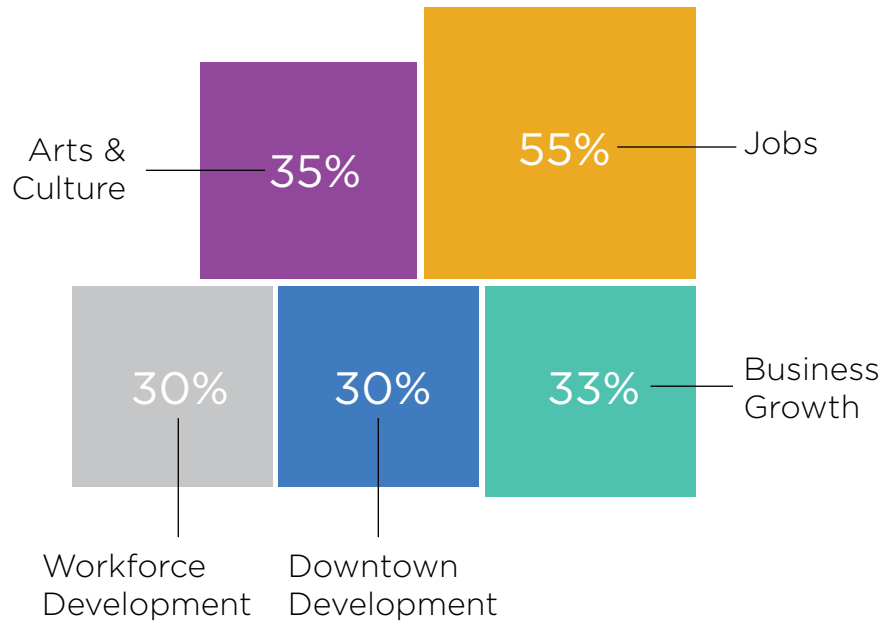




# TOP 5

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



### Other Economic Development Sub-topics (%)



Unemployment	29	Tourism	17	Economic Gardening	3
Business Attract.	25	Accelerators/Incubators	13	Innovation Districts	3
Wages	23	Manufacturing	13	Foreign Direct Invst.	2
Small Business	22	Entrepreneurship	12	Ports	2
Minority/Women Owned Businesses	17	Film	7	Sharing Economy	2
Neighborhood Revitalization	17	Maker Movement	5		

“ Today, we are not just talking about where our kids have moved for work, we are talking about our kids coming back.”

Mayor Byron Brown  
Buffalo, NY

# PUBLIC SAFETY

**M**ayors see public safety and the alleviation of crime as one of the most critical components of their jobs.

## An Increase in Murders

Many mayors reported an uptick in crime within their cities, and this trend, noticeable across the country, was particularly alarming for homicide. Other research has shown, however, that even though the short-term homicide trend is pointed in the wrong direction, crime overall is still at the lowest point in decades nationally.<sup>3</sup>

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, following the national trend, saw its overall crime rate decrease 10 percent from last year. However, the murder rate, “which had dropped significantly in 2013 and 2014 has followed the national trend and is back up again,” according to Mayor Mick Cornett. “Many of our homicides are the result of domestic violence. In the past two years, we have made significant changes in the way we deal with these situations. We are handling the calls differently. We are handling the investigations differently. We are learning more and more about which cases are likely to escalate,” said Cornett.

## Police Body Cameras

After a year of growing concern over police misconduct, cities are eager to embrace new technologies and techniques in public safety. Body cameras worn by police officers are one approach. Elizabeth, New Jersey, Mayor Chris Bollwage said that the devices are an additional aid in “relaying, documenting and verifying information during interactions with law enforcement.” Bollwage is one of many mayors who announced plans to outfit all officers with body-worn cameras this year. While cities of all sizes are embracing the technology, many are developing policy and transparency procedures for use of the recordings.

## Community Policing

Community policing continues to be a popular topic within mayors’ addresses. “We’ve placed an emphasis on reestablishing community policing to improve dialogue between our community and police officers,” said Buffalo, New York, Mayor Byron Brown. “We hold monthly meetings at each district police station, as well regular meetings with the Concerned Clergy, and Block Club leaders.” In San Diego, California, Mayor Kevin Faulconer said that “now more officers work hand-in-hand with residents” to keep neighborhoods safe. To do so, San Diego is continuing its efforts to hire police officers from the local community “to ensure the force reflects the people it serves.”

# 70%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of public safety issues.

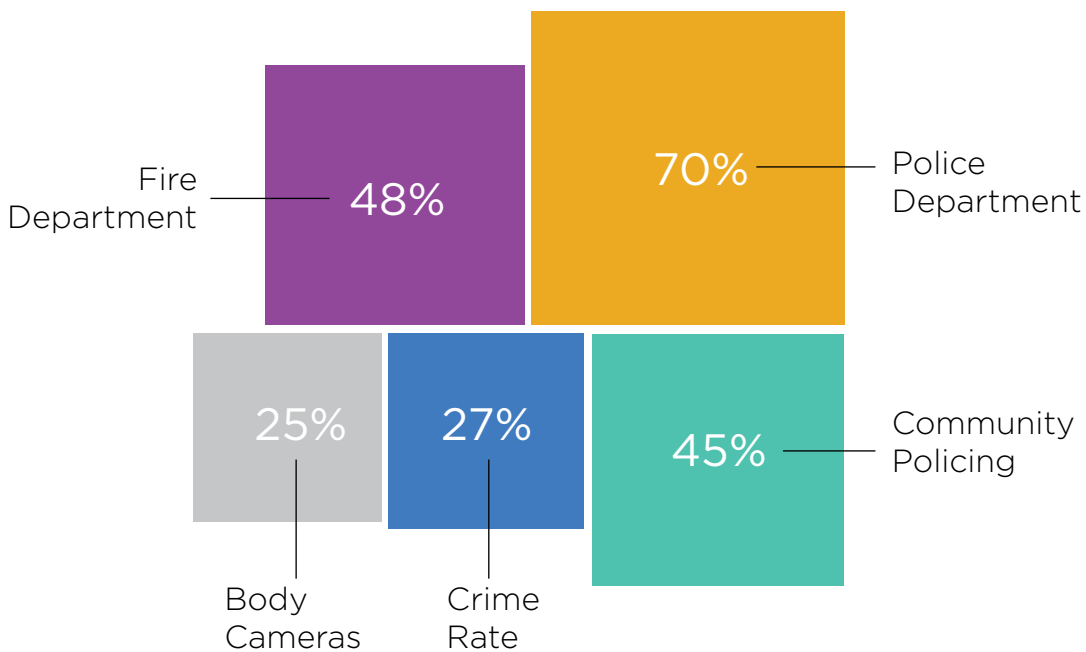






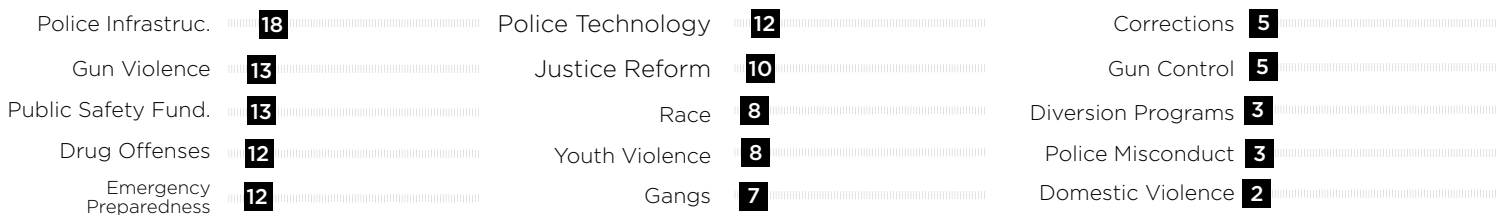
# TOP 5

## PUBLIC SAFETY SUB-TOPICS



**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

## Other Public Safety Sub-Topics (%)



**“ Nothing is more fundamental than the safety of our neighborhoods. Nothing is more important than secure streets for our children and families to walk on.”**

Mayor Eric Garcetti  
Los Angeles, CA

# BUDGETS

Mayors who devoted portions of their addresses to budgetary issues noted the relative strength of their cities' finances.

## Signs of Continuing Improvement

Many cities are returning to pre-Recession levels of fiscal health. Detailing the economic success his city has felt these last few years, Kansas City, Missouri, Mayor Sly James said that this year's budget continues that momentum and "supports our neighborhoods and our young people. We'll be able to demolish dangerous buildings and invest more in summer youth employment."

## Using New Revenue Wisely

Many mayors are committed to raising the level of service their cities provide without raising taxes. Noting the fiscal discipline that brought five years of budget surplus, Columbia, South Carolina, Mayor Stephen Benjamin said he intends to improve infrastructure "without raising taxes, without limiting services and without cutting funds to public safety." In Covina, California, the city council adopted a budget that was structurally balanced following the elimination of 22 positions and the implementation of cost-saving measures. "We are continuing to identify ways to reduce our costs and make our organization more efficient and more responsive and ensuring that more of our tax dollars are available to be used for community improvements," said Mayor Peggy Delach.

## Pension Funding Concerns

Pension liabilities continue to be a source of trouble for cities. Mayor Jim Lane of Scottsdale, Arizona, questioned how his city can balance its infrastructure needs with its pension obligations. "We can't afford to ignore it, and need to explore reasonable and effective reforms to our pension plans and compensation policies," he said. In Atlanta, Georgia, Mayor Kasim Reed noted the legal challenges his city faced when it "carved out a new path for pension reform, saving the city \$270 million over ten years." And city leaders in Evanston, Illinois, were disappointed to find out that the city's public safety pensions were funded to a lesser degree than previously thought. However, the city has been contributing more than the amount required by its actuaries. "Every time I think we are making substantial progress on pensions, we are not. We are making incremental progress," said Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl.

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# 52%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of budget issues.

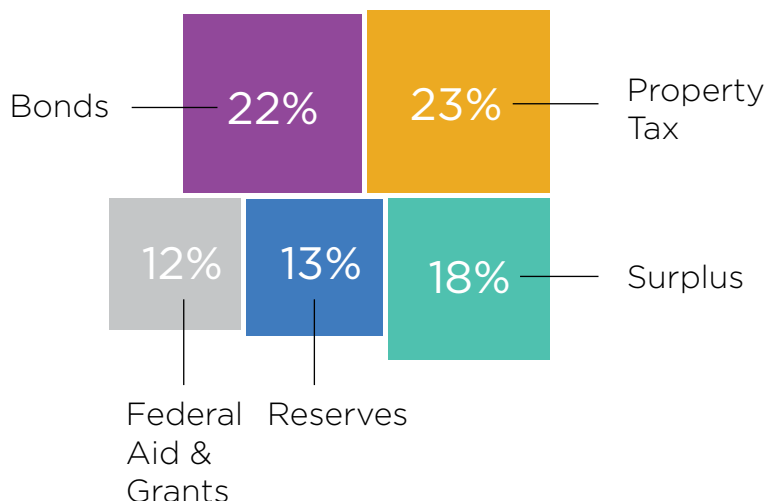
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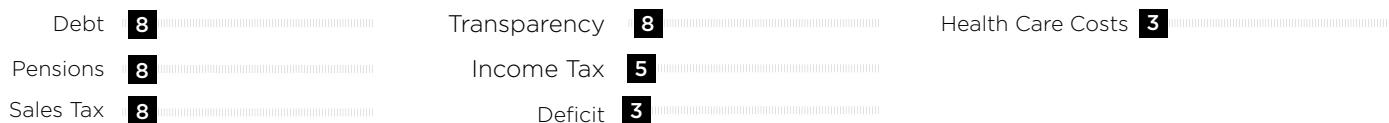


# TOP 5 BUDGETS SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



## Other Budget Sub-Topics (%)



**“ We are investing new revenues into our people. We are addressing those areas that success has often left behind.”**

Mayor Megan Berry  
Nashville, TN

# INFRASTRUCTURE

**F**rom bike paths to sewer systems, infrastructure is a diverse topic that received a high level of attention in this year's speeches. Despite the need to address failing systems, city leaders are faced with constrained budgets and limited funding tools.

## Learning from Flint

The crisis in Flint, Michigan, where high levels of lead were discovered in the city's drinking water, demonstrated the effect that decisions can have on the lives of the most vulnerable residents. Lead in water can cause serious and irrevocable health effects, especially in children. In Flint, the decision to change the source of the city's water caused lead contaminants to leach from aging pipes.<sup>4</sup>

Many cities have lead service lines that were installed largely before the 1930s. Oneonta, New York, is one such city, but through careful monitoring and vigilant maintenance, "the residents of Oneonta are very fortunate to have safe drinking water," said Mayor Gary Herzig. However, residents in other cities are not as fortunate. Almost 2,000 water systems in all 50 states have shown excessive levels of lead contamination over the past four years.<sup>5</sup>

Cities are taking steps to minimize the chance of crisis in their own communities. Bloomington, Indiana, Mayor John Hamilton announced in his address that immediate improvements to his city's water system are already under way. In Toledo, Ohio, Mayor Paula Hicks-Hudson called "safe drinking water as well as source water protection" hallmarks of a 21st-century city. And in Rock Island, Illinois, the city's 100-year-old water treatment plant will soon be replaced.

## Safe Roads and Trails

Linking another element of infrastructure to public health, mayors also stressed the importance of active and safe transportation to the vitality of their cities. Trail systems, like the one in Fayetteville, Arkansas, have been installed in multiple cities to provide connections for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as to promote storm drainage. New York is committed to achieving Vision Zero of no road fatalities or serious injuries. "Our Vision Zero Action Plan made 2015 the safest year on New York City roads for EVERYONE—pedestrians, cyclists AND motorists—since 1910," said Mayor Bill De Blasio. Seattle, Washington, decreased road fatalities by 25 percent, just one year after launching Vision Zero. Using data to its advantage, the city saw traffic deaths drop to "an all-time low," said Mayor Edward Murray.

# 48%

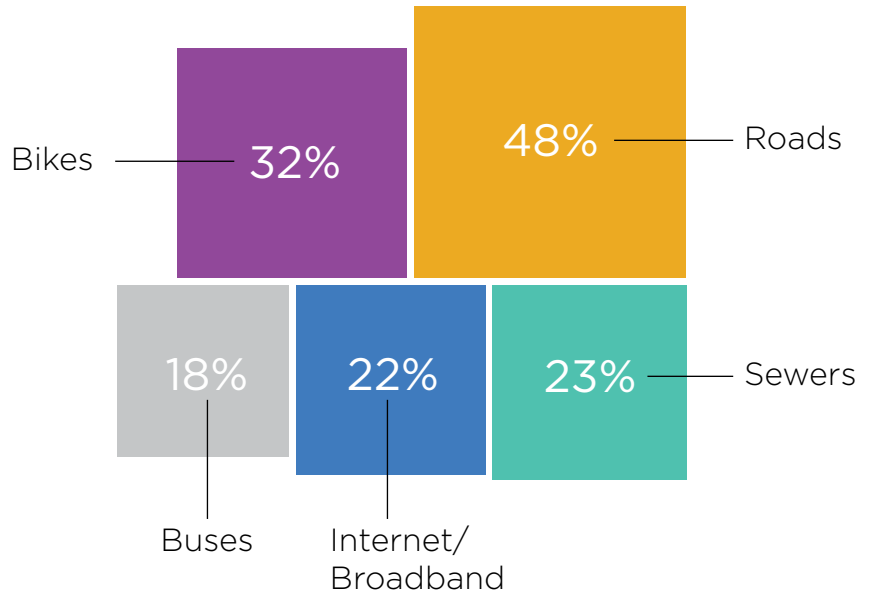
of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of infrastructure issues.





# TOP 5 INFRASTRUCTURE SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



## Other Infrastructure Sub-Topics (%)



Infrastruc. Funding	17	Bike Lanes	8	Public-Priv. Partner.	3
Sidewalks	17	Complete Streets	7	Smart Cities	3
Walking Paths	17	Drinking Water	7	Street Car	2
Transit Development	15	Ports	7	TIGER Grant	2
Rail	13	Green Infrastructure	5	Trans. Network Comp.	2
Bike Share	10	Resiliency	5	Bridges	2
Storm Water	10	Fire-Infrastructure	3	Bus Rapid Transit	2
Active Transport	8	Multi-modal Transit	3	Sensor Network	2

**“ Growing equitably and sustainably means getting transportation right.”**

Mayor Ed Murray  
Seattle, WA

# EDUCATION

**M**ayors view education and workforce development as inseparable from their broader economic development agendas, and a key tool to fight poverty.

## Closing the Achievement Gap

As the conversation about inequality and opportunity gets louder across the country, a growing body of research acknowledges the power of education and youth-focused programs to foster upward mobility.<sup>6</sup> Many mayors announced policies aimed at closing the educational achievement gap between groups defined by socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity and gender. In Saint Paul, Minnesota, Mayor Chris Coleman has an ambitious goal “not to narrow the achievement gap, but to close it.” Modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone, the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood initiative has significantly reduced the gap between student test scores. For his part, Columbia’s Mayor Benjamin hopes that the installation of “high-speed gigabit fiber and focused neighborhood Wi-Fi” will give students in his city “access to a 21st Century education, closing the homework gap.”

Mayors suggested summer and after-school programs as ways to close educational gaps. “We need kids to be picking up books and learning during the summer,” said Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Mayor Tom Barrett. “That’s why I’ve been so committed to the library’s summer reading program. We need to address the achievement gap and summer school is one way to do it.”

## Workforce Development

Mayors noted the many well-paying jobs in health care, advanced manufacturing and information technology that go unfilled because of a mismatch between what is taught and what is required. “The impact of this skills gap is particularly harsh on low income communities—especially for our young adults,” said San Diego’s Mayor Faulconer. Along those lines, Columbus’s Mayor Ginther noted, “We must ensure that the skillset of our workforce properly aligns with available jobs. To fill these jobs, we are refocusing our workforce development effort.” Initiatives like the Summer Youth Employment and Internship Program in Buffalo provide youth with not only meaningful jobs but also training and education that will stimulate the local economy. In his address, Mayor Byron Brown announced “funding to create 50 additional jobs, bringing my administration’s total commitment to youth employment to over \$10 million since 2006.”

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# 42%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of education issues.

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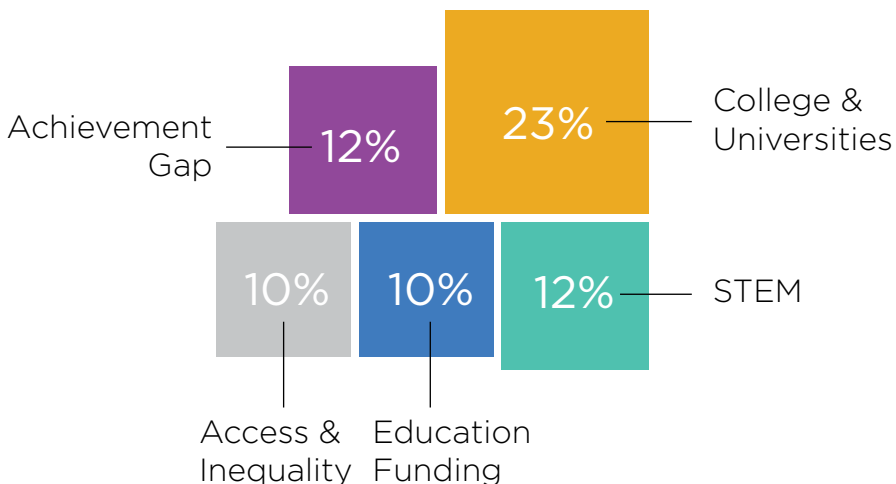






# TOP 5 EDUCATION SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



## Other Education Sub-Topics (%)



**“ In order to do all the other things we want to do as a city, we have to get education right.”**

Mayor Muriel Bowser  
Washington, DC

# HOUSING

**M**ayors are facing a wide-range of housing-related challenges—from affordability to homelessness to the lingering effects of the housing market crash of 2008.

## Eliminating Blight

Within the issue of housing, blight was a widely discussed topic among mayors in our sample this year. “Our neighborhoods are beginning to show signs of rebirth after being bruised by the effects of the nationwide housing crisis,” said Dayton, Ohio, Mayor Nan Whaley. “The city has invested millions in the removal of neighborhood eyesores and blight, including \$1.3 million just in the last year.” Similarly, Baltimore, Maryland, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake touted the success of her city’s Vacants to Value initiative, which quadrupled demolition funding to \$100 million over 10 years. “It makes me proud that Vacants to Value was recognized by the Clinton Global Initiative, and honored by the Financial Times as an original idea that made life better for people living and working in cities,” said Rawlings-Blake.

## Affordable Housing

Affordable housing and homelessness continue to be top issues for cities. Many mayors across the country announced plans this year to alleviate the burden, especially for seniors and veterans. Veteran homelessness has been functionally ended in two states and 24 communities. Cities, such as Eugene, Oregon, have joined the Mayors Challenge to end veteran homelessness and are nearing their goal. In cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles and New York, however, homelessness continues to be a large-scale, complex problem with little measurable change. In smaller cities, although city leaders are taking action through ordinances aimed at dismantling “tent cities,” these policies are not long-term answers. In Charleston, the city is leveraging the work of its housing agencies alongside regional partners “to bring to a humane but clear and final end in the near future,” according to Mayor Tecklenburg.

Recognizing that when workers are pushed out of the city and forced into long commutes, traffic and parking problems become more severe, Tecklenburg said his city “will work through the Housing Authority and with the private sector to incentivize the creation of more workforce and affordable housing where it’s needed most.” Austin’s Mayor Adler stressed the need to stop gentrification or forced displacement “in a way that will actually achieve opportunities for permanent affordability.” Adler noted the success of a particular planned unit development with dedicated affordable housing units, amounting to between 650 and 1,000 single-family homes and over 350 units in multifamily developments.

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# 40%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of housing issues.

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# TOP 5 HOUSING SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



## Other Housing Sub-Topics (%)



Renovations	8	Foreclosures	2	Rentals	2
Housing Dev.	7	Gentrification	2		
Student Housing	3	Home Improvements	2		

**“ We need to build more housing. Period.”**

Mayor Edwin Lee  
San Francisco, CA

# ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY

**F**or mayors, the fight to combat environmental and energy challenges takes on increasing importance with each passing year.

## Climate Leadership

Last year was a monumental one for green mayors. Boston's Mayor Walsh was proud to defend his city's title as "the number one American city for energy efficiency" and to "beat out cities around the world to win the award for [Smart Cities and Community Engagement]" at the UN Climate Change conference, known as COP21. Atlanta's Mayor Reed was another of the 510 global mayors who traveled to the conference in Paris to be part of the historic agreement and sign the Compact of Mayors. "We're doing our part here at home to answer our moral obligation and build the clean energy economy," said Reed. "We've launched a new program to install low-cost solar panels on our city's buildings, we're a leader in a national effort to conserve water and energy and we have reduced our water consumption by 20 percent."

## Energy Efficiency

Cities continue to install LED streetlamps and to weatherize homes and municipal buildings. In Duluth, Minnesota, the cost savings from energy efficiency projects will be "reinvested into a dedicated energy fund for additional improvements," said Mayor Emily Larson. Fayetteville's Mayor Lionel Jordan noted the success of the city's Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Improvement Project, the first in the state, and described the project as "a creative financing mechanism allowing commercial property owners to borrow money at very low interest rates for weatherization, energy efficiency, renewable energy or water conservation improvements."

## Environmental Challenges

Many initiatives are a response to pressing environmental challenges. A number of mayors from western cities discussed the impact that drought is having on their communities. "While we have every reason to believe that we have sufficient water for our current and future requirements, we need to be extremely vigilant," said Carson City, Nevada, Mayor Bob Crowell. In Riverside, California, the city's public utilities are leveraging good finances to create long-term sustainability. Announcing a new water recycling project, Mayor Rusty Bailey explained that "we have an opportunity during an historic drought for long-term infrastructure improvements."

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# 28%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of environment/energy issues.

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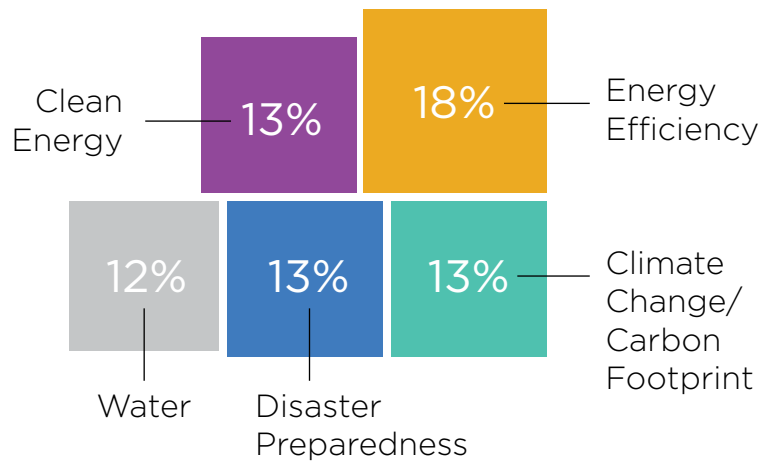




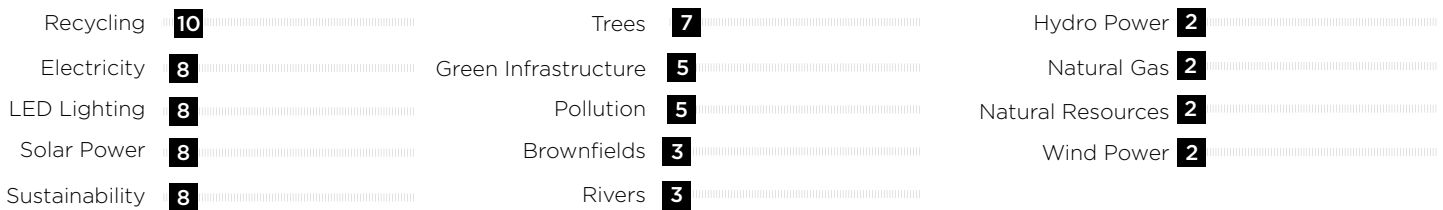
# TOP 5

## ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



### Other Environment/Energy Sub-Topics (%)



“There is nothing more important than the air we breathe. And working to clear our skies is a top priority of my administration.”

Mayor Jackie Biskupski  
Salt Lake City, UT

# DEMOGRAPHICS

In addition to economic and fiscal health, mayors view opportunity and inclusiveness as critical benchmarks of a successful community.

## Opportunity for All

With the ongoing demographic shift in America to a more diverse society, discussions about opportunity for minority and low-income communities were prevalent in a number of mayors' speeches. "We must create a concentration of opportunity to combat our concentration of poverty," said Syracuse, New York, Mayor Stephanie Minor. "And we must not stop until that opportunity is within reach for all," she added, demanding community benefits agreements for all developments. In Columbus, Mayor Ginther devoted a significant portion of his speech to the topic as well. "We are focused on fostering greater diversity and inclusiveness. We know our diversity is one of our great strengths, which is why we have been recognized nationwide as one of the best cities for women, for African Americans, for new Americans and for the LGBT community," he said.

## LGBT Inclusiveness

Cities wanting to broaden opportunity and human rights sometimes face opposition from their state governments. After Charlotte updated its ordinance banning LGBT discrimination and creating the transgender bathroom accommodation, the North Carolina state legislature voted to preempt the law. Phoenix, Arizona, Mayor Greg Stanton said that he was "proud that when the state legislature was considering a bill to legalize discrimination, the Phoenix City Council stood tall and passed a human rights law to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or disability. Because of that action, and many others, Phoenix earned national recognition as a leader on LGBT issues, and became the first Arizona city to earn a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign's municipal equality index," said Stanton.

## Immigrants

While the issue of immigration and the status of undocumented workers divides the nation, some mayors pointed to the important role that immigrants play in their cities. "It lifts up our entire community when immigrants become part of our civic discourse, when they earn a better wage, and when they have a voice in their city's, and their nation's, future," said Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. "Here in L.A., we don't build walls, we build bridges," he added before repeating the statement in Spanish.

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# 22%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of demographics issues.

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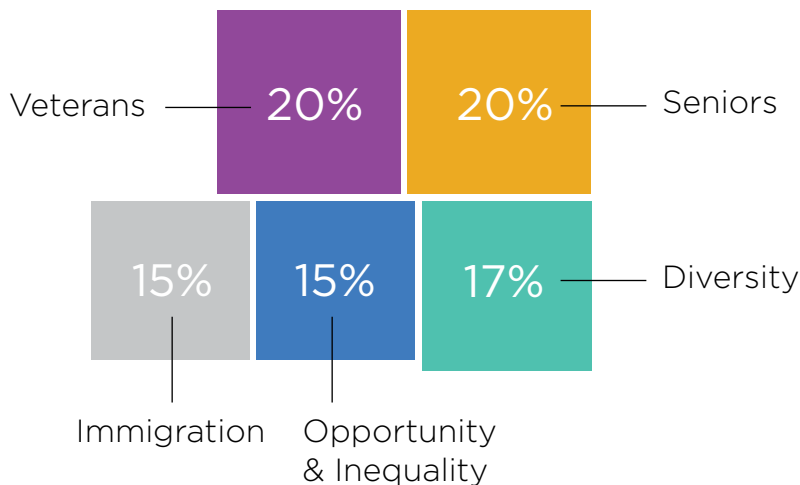




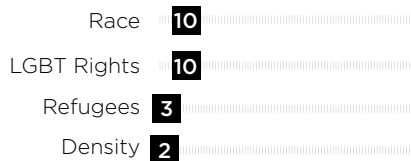
# TOP 5

## DEMOGRAPHICS SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



### Other Demographics Sub-Topics (%)



**“ We draw our strength from diversity. We are a city where everyone is respected.”**

Mayor Bill de Blasio  
New York, NY

# DATA/TECHNOLOGY

Cities are using data and technology to make themselves smarter and more effective and to enhance service delivery.

## Smart Cities

In this year's speeches, the cities of Columbia and Nashville, as well as Escondido, California, all committed to becoming smart cities, where classrooms, neighborhoods and businesses leverage data and technology to become better connected and more productive. "We need to focus on new technologies, because the solutions we envision today may be obsolete 10 years from now," said Nashville's Mayor Barry.

"Businesses appreciate that we run Kansas City [Missouri] using data, facts and evidence to give our customers-taxpayers, residents, visitors and companies-what they expect," said Mayor James. Kansas City, which will host TechWeek later in 2016, became a finalist city for a \$50 million U.S. Department of Transportation Smart City grant. The recipient is tasked with becoming country's first city to fully integrate innovative technologies—self-driving cars, connected vehicles and smart sensors—into its transportation network.

## Cloud Computing

Cities are also moving their operations online and into the cloud to increase transparency and efficiency. "Greenwood is the first city in Indiana to use OpenGov, a software platform that is transforming how governments analyze, share and compare financial data," said Mayor Mark Myers. "It's a remarkable tool, and I urge all citizens to visit the City's website and take a look." In Syracuse, residents can submit and track requests for things like sewer backups, trash removal and pothole filling anytime online using "City Line."

## Data-Driven Policing

Data help law enforcement better address crime and improve community safety. In Euclid, Ohio, the police department has recently begun to "utilize crime analytics," according to Mayor Kirsten Holzheimer, to help identify trends. The Jersey City [New Jersey] Open Data Portal is an example of a platform that allows the city to proactively provide the public with unfiltered and unbiased information on crime and other police activities. "We are trying to break down the informational barriers between government and residents in order to encourage honest dialogue aimed at increased public safety," said Mayor Steven Fulop. The usage of data to drive decision making in cities is continuing to grow, and the myriad usages for these data are being further incorporated into city operations.

# 20%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of data/technology issues.

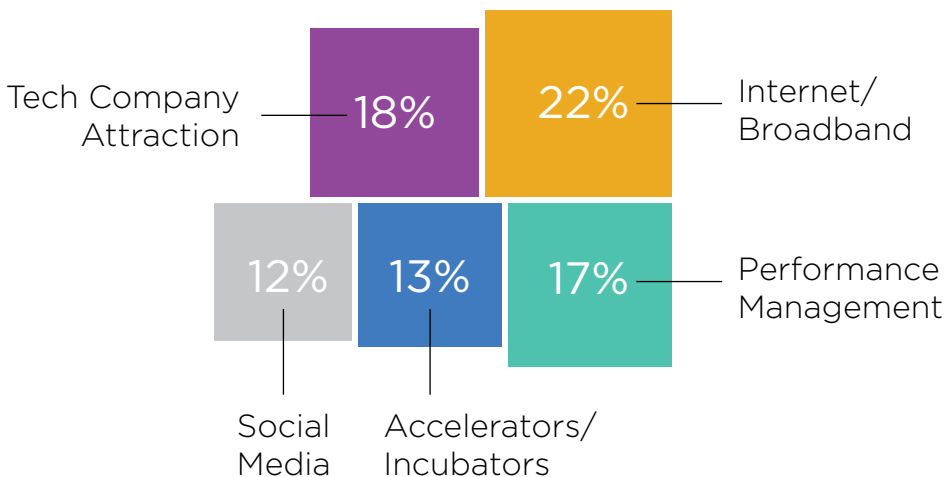




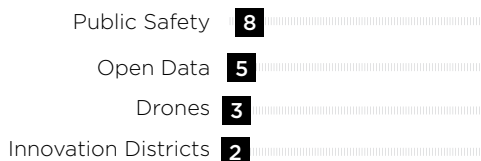
# TOP 5

## DATA/TECHNOLOGY SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



### Other Data/Technology Sub-Topics (%)



**“ Data helps us make decisions. It’s a tool to help us make choices. And the more we know, the better decisions we can make.”**

Mayor Andy Hafen  
Henderson, NV

# HEALTH CARE

**W**hile many health care issues are not controlled by city governments, mayors play a vital role in improving health care for residents.

## Opioid Abuse

Policies addressing substance abuse, fueled by an increase in opioid addiction, consumed much of the coverage of health-related topics in this year's State of the City speeches. "It's a living and breathing epidemic—like a virus—infesting residents of all walks of life. It's dashed young people's dreams of going to college or landing a job. It's torn families apart. Parents have had to bury their children," said Binghamton, New York, Mayor Richard David. "Elected leaders, law enforcement and health care officials from across the country are left feeling helpless—asking themselves how the heroin epidemic got this bad so fast," he added, while Baltimore's Mayor Rawlings-Blake said that she has "personally seen the devastation that heroin addiction brings to a family." Cities are responding to the crisis in many ways, from both the law enforcement and public health perspectives. "We were the first city in the region to equip our police and firefighters with Narcan, which they've administered more than 600 times, saving lives," said Buffalo's Mayor Brown.

Seventy-eight Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. The fact that this epidemic has grown at such an expansive rate in recent years has led NLC to join with the National Association of Counties (NACo) to form the National City-County Task Force on the Opioid Epidemic.<sup>7</sup>

## Affordable Health Care

Access to health care was another issue of importance for many mayors. Duluth's Mayor Larson envisions a city where residents have "affordable health care, including mental health and preventative care." Likewise in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Mayor Michael Brown referred to a number of grass-roots initiatives and health care nonprofits and said that "we will need this strong team as we continue to focus on critical community issues before us like mental health, opioids and addiction, and overall affordability." While many health care issues are not controlled by city governments but instead by counties, there are only so many levers that mayors can operate to improve their health care systems. However, because of the outsized importance to the welfare of community residents, mayors operate as many levers as they can to improve and enhance health care in their cities.

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# 18%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of health care issues.

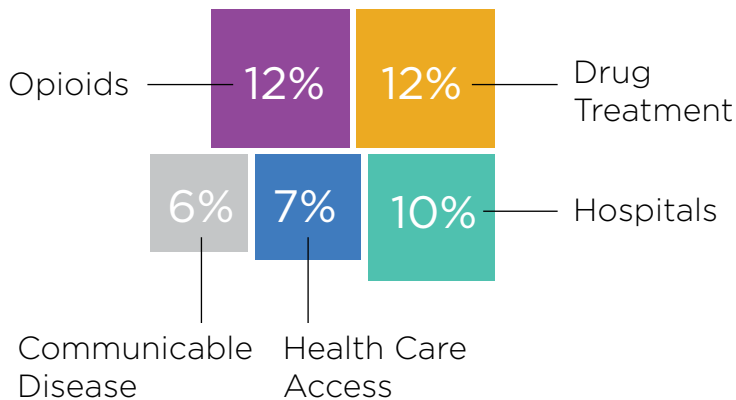
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# TOP 5 HEALTH CARE SUB-TOPICS

**NOTE:** Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.



## Other health care Sub-Topics (%)



Mental Health	3
Health Care Costs	3



**“ We must begin by providing our youngest residents the most basic of opportunities: the opportunity for infants to celebrate their first birthdays.”**

Mayor Andrew Ginther  
Columbus, OH

# Conclusion

Our nation's mayors are leading our country forward with a critical focus on the issues that matter to citizens. Cities are the foundation for the nation's success; they are diverse places with people from all walks of life and where people from all over the world—rich, poor, black, white, old, young, and everything in between—come together.

However, while cities are the nation's laboratories for innovation and the economic engines that bring all the pieces together, there are at times challenging fractures in the larger civic puzzle—from affordable housing to racial equity to gun violence. In their State of the City speeches, mayors highlight proactive policy prescriptions to alleviate these challenges and elevate opportunities.

**Mayors share information with one another; good ideas and best practices that surface in one city are continuously transferred to other cities where they are assiduously brought into the operations of those cities.** This knowledge transfer further reinforces the network effect that cities have at the microlevel, at the state and regional levels that scale nationally, and all the way to the global level where cities are increasingly influencing policy.

**Mayors continue to lead the charge in developing sustainable, livable communities, with this leadership exhibited both locally and globally.** Key examples of global influence can be seen in climate policy, where mayors were both instigators and critical participants in the COP21 Climate Talks in Paris. This was not only the first time that mayors played an outspoken and advocacy role but also the first time since the Kyoto Protocol that real action was taken and global agreement was reached.

**Mayors continue to be focused on improving their local economies and encouraging entrepreneurship.** Additionally, on issues surrounding economic development and data/technology, it is mayors who are joining together to drive enhanced usage of data in decision making at the local level, making city government more efficient and effective. City leaders are sharing best practices on how to grow the maker movement and reformulate how manufacturing thrives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Mayors are concerned about the uptick in the murder rate even though overall crime rates are still historically low.** Public safety, from community policing to the usage of new technology, is an ever-important component of city leadership. Keeping citizens safe and providing an environment that allows everyone to thrive is at the top of every mayor's priority list.

**With budgets continuing to grow as the Great Recession finally begins to recede, there are also targeted opportunities for investment.** These investments are largely centered on infrastructure, which is an ever-present high-priority issue for cities. This funding priority is a challenge that necessitates a close partnership among all levels of government—local, state, and federal. At the same time, because mayors and all city leaders are



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those elected officials who are closest to the people, they recognize that issues of equity—with affordable housing, job opportunity and race relations—must always be a critical and connected component of this policy making.

**Mayors are the leaders of our cities, working from the bottom up, not the top down, to make things happen.**

These leaders are bringing people together to create opportunity-filled, socially cohesive, safe places for all, now and into the future—moving our country forward. As national politics continues to fracture and divisions

solidify, it is in our nation's cities where forward-thinking policy solutions are being formulated. The mayors' State of the City speeches provide a clear view into America's economic and cultural progress, and the leadership we need to move the country forward.

St. Paul Mayor  
Chris Coleman

Credit: National League of Cities, 2016



# Methodology

For the 2016 State of the Cities report sample, we included State of the City speeches with online transcripts given between January 1 and May 1, 2016. One hundred speeches were chosen to obtain a balanced sample from cities in each of the four population categories (less than 50,000, 50-99,999, 100-299,000, 300,000 or more) and four geographic regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, West). The variance of city population sizes and geographic regions ensures a diverse sample and allows for comparisons between categories, but owing to sample size limitations, findings cannot be generalized to all cities. The methodology used is similar to that used in 2015’s analysis, which built upon the work of Sarah Beth Gehl and Katherine Willoughby, who conducted a content analysis of State of the State speeches in 2013.

## Coding Guidelines

Speeches were coded for significant coverage of major topics (e.g., economic development, public safety) and subtopics (e.g., workforce development, sewers). A speech was considered to have significant coverage of a major topic if the mayor dedicated at least three full paragraphs (or a roughly equivalent portion of text) exclusively to that topic and articulated issues related to the topic in detail. A speech was considered to have coverage of a subtopic if the mayor specifically discussed the topic as relevant to city operations and the budget going forward. A review of past accomplishments in any particular subtopic counted in the content analysis so long as the mayor suggested that the issue would continue to be a priority in the future.

Sample breakdown by region

Region	Number of speeches
Northeast	23
Midwest	23
South	27
West	27
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100</b>

Sample breakdown by population

Population	Number of speeches
Less than 50,000	28
50-99,999	20
100-299,999	24
300,000 or more	28
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100</b>

## Cities in 2016 sample

City	Mayor	Date of Speech
Asbury Park, NJ	Michael Capabianco*	2/10/16
Atlanta, GA	Kasim Reed	2/4/16
Austin, TX	Steve Adler	2/16/16
Baltimore, MD	Stephanie Rawlings-Blake	2/29/16
Baton Rouge, LA	Melvin "Kip" Holden	1/6/16
Beaverton, OR	Denny Doyle	1/13/16
Benton, AR	David Mattingly	2/22/16
Berea, KY	Steven Connelly	1/28/16
Bessemer, AL	Kenneth Gulley	1/26/16
Biloxi, MS	Andrew "FoFo" Gilich	2/16/16
Binghamton, NY	Richard David	2/23/16
Bloomington, IN	John Hamilton	2/16/16
Boston, MA	Marty Walsh	1/19/16
Buffalo, NY	Byron Brown	2/5/16
Carson City, NV	Bob Crowell	1/27/16
Charleston, SC	John Tecklenburg	1/26/16
Chubbuck, ID	Kevin England	1/6/16
Coburg, OR	Ray Smith	1/12/16
Columbia, SC	Steve Benjamin	1/26/16
Columbus, OH	Andrew Ginther	2/24/16
Covina, CA	John King	3/8/16
Dayton, OH	Nan Whaley	2/10/16
Dearborn, MI	John B. O'Reilly, Jr.	3/1/16
Duluth, MN	Emily Larson	4/27/16
Elizabeth, NJ	J. Christian Bollwage	1/5/16
Escondido, CA	Sam Abed	2/24/16
Euclid, OH	Kirsten Holzheimer Gail	2/1/16
Eugene, OR	Kitty Piercy	1/16/16
Evanston, IL	Elizabeth Tisdahl	3/18/16
Fayetteville, AR	Lioneld Jordan	1/19/16
Fort Wayne, IN	Tom Henry	2/10/16
Grand Forks, ND	Michael Brown	2/24/16
Greenwood, IN	Mark Myers	2/19/16
Gresham, OR	Shane Bemis	2/17/16
Harlingen, TX	Chris Boswell	1/29/16

City	Mayor	Date of Speech
Hartford, CT	Luke Bronin	1/4/16
Helena, MT	James Smith	1/25/16
Henderson, NV	Andy Hafen	2/13/16
Hoboken, NJ	Dawn Zimmer	2/11/16
Idaho Falls, ID	Rebecca Casper	1/14/16
Independence, OR	John McArdle	1/13/16
Iowa City, IA	Jim Throgmorton	2/16/16
Irvine, CA	Steven Choi	2/9/16
Jersey City, NJ	Steven Fulop	3/16/16
Johns Creek, GA	Mike Bodker	4/22/16
Kansas City, MO	Sly James	3/29/16
La Crosse, WI	Tim Kabat	1/14/16
Lenexa, KS	Mike Boehm	2/17/16
Lexington, KY	Jim Gray	1/19/16
Los Angeles, CA	Eric Garcetti	4/16/16
Louisville, KY	Greg Fischer	1/28/16
Memphis, TN	Jim Strickland	1/1/16
Meridian, ID	Tammy de Weerd	2/3/16
Miami, FL	Carlos Gimenez	1/27/16
Middletown, NY	Joseph DeStefano	2/16/16
Milwaukee, WI	Tom Barrett	2/8/16
Milwaukie, OR	Mark Gamba	1/27/16
Nappanee, IN	Phil Jenkins	2/1/16
Nashville, TN	Megan Barry	4/29/16
New York, NY	Bill de Blasio	2/4/16
Newark, NJ	Ras Baraka	3/15/16
North Port, FL	Jonathan Lewis*	1/21/16
North Ridgeville, OH	G. David Gillock	1/14/16
Ocean City, NJ	Jay Gillian	2/11/16
Oklahoma City, OK	Mick Cornett	1/13/16
Omaha, NE	Jean Stothert	2/26/16
Oneonta, NY	Gary Herzig	3/1/16
Petersburg, VA	W. Howard Myers	2/11/16
Philadelphia, PA	Jim Kenney	1/14/16
Phoenix, AZ	Greg Stanton	1/4/16

# APPENDIX

## Cities in 2016 sample

City	Mayor	Date of Speech
Plainfield, NJ	Adrian Mapp	2/4/16
Providence, RI	Jorge Elorza	2/9/16
Raleigh, NC	Nancy McFarlane	3/7/16
Richardson, TX	Paul Voelker	1/27/16
Riverside, CA	Rusty Bailey	1/28/16
Rochester, MN	Ardell Brede	1/1/16
Rock Island, IL	Dennis Pauley	2/1/16
Rye, NY	Joe Sack	1/3/16
Salem, MA	Kim Driscoll	1/4/16
Salt Lake City, UT	Jackie Biskupski	1/26/16
San Diego, CA	Kevin Faulconer	1/14/16
San Francisco, CA	Edwin Lee	1/8/16
San Jose, CA	Sam Liccardo	3/5/16
Saratoga Springs, NY	Joanne Yepsen	1/30/16
Scottsdale, AZ	W.J. "Jim" Lane	2/25/16
Seattle, WA	Edward Murray	2/16/16
Somerville, MA	Joseph Curtatone	1/4/16
St. Marys, GA	John Morrissey	1/14/16
St. Paul, MN	Chris Coleman	4/19/16
St. Petersburg, FL	Rick Kriseman	1/24/16
Summit, NJ	Nora Radest	1/5/16
Sunny Isles Beach, FL	George "Bud" Scholl	1/25/16
Syracuse, NY	Stephanie Miner	1/28/16
Toledo, OH	Paula Hicks-Hudson	2/10/16
Tonawanda, NY	Rick Davis	1/19/16
Troy, NY	Patrick Madden	2/5/16
Tucson, AZ	Jonathan Rothschild	3/1/16
Virginia Beach, VA	William Sessoms	2/11/16
Washington, DC	Muriel Bowser	3/22/16
Wichita, KS	Jeff Longwell	3/10/16

\* Denotes city manager

# Tools for Local Leaders

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## **Economic Development**

[How Cities Can Grow the Maker Movement](#)  
[Startup in a Day Pledge](#)



## **Public Safety**

[City Officials Guide to Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#)



## **Budgets**

[City Fiscal Conditions 2015](#)



## **Infrastructure**

[Paying for Local Infrastructure in a New Era of Federalism](#)



## **Housing**

[City Practice Database: Homeless Encampments](#)  
[Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness](#)



## **Education**

[Closing the Skills Gap](#)  
[YEF Council Education Playbook](#)



## **Health Care**

[Addressing the Opioid Epidemic](#)



## **Data/Technology**

[City of the Future: Technology and Mobility](#)  
[City Open Data Policies](#)



## **Environment/Energy**

[NLC Sustainable Cities Institute](#)  
[The Compact of Mayors](#)



## **Demographics**

[Race, Equity And Leadership \(REAL\) Initiative](#)

# STATE OF THE CITIES 2016

## Endnotes

- 1** Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. (2016). The State of the Nation's Housing. Cambridge, MA. Retrieved from [http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research/state\\_nations\\_housing](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research/state_nations_housing)
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