

Compassion, Concern and Conflicted Feelings: New Yorkers on Homelessness and Housing

A Report from  PUBLIC AGENDA
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Contents

Introduction 4

Executive Summary 6

**A Compassionate City: Society Should Help the Homeless,
and New Yorkers Are Willing to Pay for It** 8

The Limits of Compassion 9

Perceived Causes of Homelessness 11

The Housing High Wire: Feeling Personally Vulnerable 14

Solutions: New Yorkers on What Might Work 15

Afterword 19

Methodology 21

Full Survey Results 22

Introduction

The study finds general public consensus on solutions that lean toward investments in prevention, despite reservations about whether homelessness can ever be eliminated

When they think of the homeless, whom and what do New Yorkers think of? What does the sight of a man lying on the sidewalk, buried in a jumble of dirty blankets and surrounded by a ramshackle collection of belongings, evoke in New Yorkers? Do they think at all about the families with children and runaway youth who make up a large portion of the homeless population? What does the knowledge that 3,843 of their fellow residents live on the streets¹ and 35,013 more are housed in shelters²—or live such economically precarious lives that they could tumble into the ranks of the city’s homeless—mean to the eight million residents of America’s largest city?

These tough and complex questions touch on emotions of empathy and fear, social and religious values, politics, public policy and individual rights and freedoms. They elicit myriad impressions, feelings and ideas. Public Agenda’s examination of New Yorkers’ attitudes toward homelessness has yielded meaningful insights that should guide policy makers, opinion leaders and the public itself to think again about how to address this significant and tragic social problem.

Homelessness has been a long-standing problem in New York City, with the numbers of homeless rising from over 25 years ago to the early part of this decade, according to the city’s Department of Homeless Services.³ Since the state of New York began releasing large numbers of patients from psychiatric facilities half a century ago, mentally ill people living on the streets have become a highly visible and fraught issue—although they are far from the only homeless people in the city. Court rulings have required the city to provide shelter for the homeless, and city officials have made many efforts to assist the street population as well as those at risk of homelessness and seeking temporary shelter. But how successful are city government and

other social service providers in serving the homeless and ameliorating their plight?

Given New Yorkers’ sense that homelessness is a serious problem and priority, and one that has not gone away over recent decades, what existing, proposed or new strategies does the public think should be considered by policy makers? Do New Yorkers believe homelessness will always be with us? Or can homelessness be prevented or eradicated, and if so, how?

“Compassion, Concern and Conflicted Feelings: New Yorkers on Homelessness and Housing” examines New Yorkers’ attitudes and beliefs about homelessness and their implications for public action. We found that New Yorkers have varied views of homelessness, and the impulses they feel range from compassion to fears and doubts. The study finds general public consensus on solutions that lean toward investments in prevention, despite reservations about whether homelessness can ever be eliminated. New Yorkers empathize with the plight of the homeless and believe that solving the problem should be near the top of the city government’s list of priorities. But the public’s compassion is not without limits.

The study was funded by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Fannie Mae Foundation. Public Agenda also provided a grant for the study from its Wadsworth Program Development Fund. The study is based on focus groups representing all five boroughs and a citywide random telephone survey of 1,002 adult New Yorkers. The rich, diverse and compelling findings on New Yorkers’ attitudes toward homelessness reflect both qualitative and quantitative opinion research. Public Agenda designed the focus group guides and survey questions in consultation with the NYC Department of Homeless Services. Public Agenda conducted all interpretation of the data reflected in this report.

The study is intended to explore what the public knows about the problem and help policy makers to better understand public attitudes about

¹ HOPE 2006, NYC Department of Homeless Services.

² Shelter Census (February 22, 2007), NYC Department of Homeless Services.

³ Average Daily Census, NYC Department of Homeless Services.

Introduction (continued)

The findings in the study have implications that could inform leaders of other large cities who are working to better serve homeless populations of their own

homelessness. It is also designed to inform the Department of Homeless Services, as well as other city, state and national policy leaders, the media and the public, with the goal of assessing and translating public attitudes into concrete and constructive policies that better serve the homeless and reduce homelessness in New York City. In addition, the findings in the study have implications that could inform leaders of other large cities who are working to better serve homeless populations of their own.

The study also explores a variety of other topics. Do New Yorkers believe that society—in the form of the New York City government, nonprofits and themselves as taxpayers, citizens and volunteers—has a responsibility to help the homeless? How big a problem is homelessness and the related issue of housing insecurity? What do they know and believe about homelessness? What are the causes of homelessness, and who makes up the homeless population? Likewise, do New Yorkers believe that homelessness is generally beyond an individual's control, or does an element of personal responsibility play a part in the fortunes of the city's most destitute?

Homelessness and related problems of poverty and lack of affordable housing are significant issues in New York and are highly salient in the eyes of many New Yorkers. Even without focusing on the homeless, affordable housing is the number one concern among New Yorkers. In addition, 78 percent of all New Yorkers believe that homelessness is a “big problem” nationally. They believe that there is an inherent social responsibility to assist the homeless and try to prevent homelessness. While their concern stems from the visibility of the homeless and a sense of compassion, it is also for many a function of personal vulnerability, as more than one-third worry about the possibility of becoming homeless (very worried: 15 percent; somewhat worried: 21 percent).

Respondents broadly support a variety of strategies intended to help the homeless and prevent New Yorkers from ending up on the streets. In question

after question, New Yorkers endorsed measures to help people living on the streets and to prevent those in precarious living circumstances from becoming homeless. Although more than half are not optimistic that the problem can be eliminated completely, they are solidly behind the idea that the city should act and act forcefully on a variety of fronts. But the empathy is not open-ended. Most New Yorkers are focused on the most severe manifestations of the problem—people living on the streets, most of whom are mentally ill or substance abusers. Substantial numbers also fear that some New Yorkers may take advantage of social services rather than help themselves. In the spirit of welfare reform and welfare-to-work, most believe that homeless New Yorkers who are able should work, participate in training or otherwise pay back the community for services rendered to them.

Full survey results for this report, as well as for other studies by Public Agenda, can be found at publicagenda.org.

Executive Summary

New Yorkers care deeply about helping the homeless in their city—81 percent believe that homelessness is a “big problem” for New York, and 78 percent think it is a large national issue. Their compassion and empathy for the homeless is unmistakable, and New Yorkers are open to a variety of approaches to reduce homelessness.

Findings:

1. New York Should Help the Homeless and Its Citizens Are Willing to Pay for It

New Yorkers believe that society has a moral responsibility to help the homeless and to try to prevent people from becoming homeless. As many as 90 percent of city residents agree that everyone has a basic right to shelter, while 72 percent agree that as long as homelessness exists, the United States is failing to live up to its values. New Yorkers are also willing to put their money where their ideals are. Eighty-five percent approve of having their tax dollars pay for housing for the homeless, and 62 percent would increase public spending on programs for the homeless.

2. But Their Eyes Are Wide Open and There Are Limits to Their Compassion

While 67 percent say most homeless people are homeless because of circumstances beyond their control, 76 percent say that lack of motivation is responsible for at least some of the city’s homelessness. Nor are New Yorkers naïve about the potential to game the system, with 75 percent saying that some people take advantage of the city in order to get better housing.

New Yorkers also strongly believe in personal responsibility, with 96 percent agreeing that benefits for the homeless should be tied to getting training, employment or treatment for mental illness or substance abuse and half believing that jobs are available for people who really want to work.

3. What Do New Yorkers Think Causes Homelessness?

New Yorkers define homelessness as living in a shelter or sleeping on the street, and they do identify

a variety of causes that can lead to homelessness. Among these reasons are:

- Drug and alcohol abuse are seen as major causes by 95 percent, while 92 percent name the closing of mental health facilities.
- High housing costs are cited by 89 percent as an important cause, while eviction is cited by 92 percent.
- Poor education and lack of skills are cited as key causes by 87 percent.
- Lack of good jobs is highlighted by 82 percent as an important cause, with 90 percent of African-Americans and 92 percent of Hispanics holding this view.

4. It Could Happen to Me

New Yorkers’ concerns for the homeless are affected by their own feelings of vulnerability. More than one-third (36 percent) worry that they themselves could become homeless, and 30 percent know a family member or a friend who has experienced homelessness.

Affordable housing is New Yorkers’ chief concern. When asked what is the most important problem facing New York City, “affordable housing” was the top answer, besting terrorism, crime, education, poverty, jobs and a number of other critical issues.

5. On Solutions

While only a slight majority (54 percent) of New Yorkers believes that homelessness can ever be eliminated, the public strongly supports more preventive programs.

Huge majorities want to aid homeless people who find it difficult to help themselves, with 92 percent favoring more mental health care for anyone who needs it and 90 percent in support of more drug and alcohol treatment.

Large majorities also spotlight housing. An overwhelming 88 percent favor placing homeless people who need additional assistance in supportive housing that provides them with medical and other social services, while 83 percent support rent

Executive Summary (continued)

subsidies for those having difficulties paying rent. Sixty percent say they would not mind at all if subsidized housing existed in their neighborhoods.

Asked what should be the main priority of the government in dealing with homelessness, 48 percent chose “intervening to keep individuals and families in permanent housing, with shelters only as a last resort.” Sixty-nine percent believe that at least some of the city’s homeless shelters are unsafe and unsanitary, but 88 percent also feel that some will always need shelters, no matter what the city does.

New Yorkers also look to job training and education. Ninety percent support expanded job training, while 88 percent say that improving public schools in low-income neighborhoods would be an effective step to take.

Perhaps because of their awareness of the issue’s complexity and multi-faceted nature, New Yorkers are, however, skeptical about the ability of any entity—nonprofit, government or private business—to run homelessness programs well.

Seventy-two percent say they have at least some confidence in nonprofits to run such programs, but only 23 percent have a great deal of confidence. Fifty-six percent express at least some confidence in New York City government, but only 12 percent have great confidence. Only 13 percent have great confidence in the ability of business.

New Yorkers believe homelessness is a critical issue for the city. In spite of their questions about any agency’s ability to effectively run homelessness programs, New Yorkers want to try. New Yorkers believe we have fallen short of our ideals and must do more. And so they strongly support multiple approaches to the problem such as more mental health and substance abuse treatment, more supportive housing and rent subsidies, improving public schools in low income neighborhoods and more job training. While wanting to tie assistance to treatment or training, and saying a lack of motivation is responsible for at least some homelessness, New Yorkers fundamentally believe people are homeless for reasons beyond their control, and therefore see helping the homeless as a top priority. They want the city to continue to take action on many fronts. They believe there are successful strategies for reducing and preventing homelessness, and they want them to be vigorously pursued.

A Compassionate City: Society Should Help the Homeless, and New Yorkers Are Willing to Pay for It

Seventy-two percent of the city's residents agree that as long as homelessness exists, the United States "has failed to live up to its ideals"

Whether because of religious, political or other values or their own fears, New Yorkers believe that society has an inherent moral responsibility to help the homeless and try to prevent people from having to live on the streets or in shelters. In short, despite some important caveats, New Yorkers express strong compassion and empathy for the homeless.

According to this survey, 90 percent believe that everyone has a basic right to shelter, even if it has to be funded by the government and taxpayers (70 percent agree strongly and 20 percent agree somewhat). But only 26 percent believe that if they and their families fell on bad times, the government would help them.

Eighty-five percent of New Yorkers say they approve of having their tax dollars pay for housing for the homeless (53 percent strongly approve and 32 percent somewhat approve), whereas only 13 percent disapprove (7 percent strongly disapprove and 6 percent somewhat disapprove). Those with at least a college education are more likely to strongly support public spending on initiatives for the homeless, while New Yorkers with less education are somewhat less supportive. Asked what they would do if they could make up the New

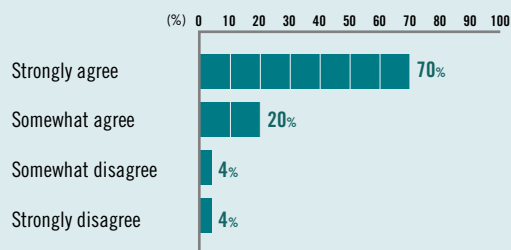
York City budget, 62 percent of New Yorkers say they would increase spending on programs for the homeless, while a mere 4 percent would cut such spending. Twenty-seven percent say they would keep spending for homeless programs the same.

Many connect the belief that society should help the homeless and neediest to fundamental American principles. Seventy-two percent of the city's residents agree that as long as homelessness exists, the United States "has failed to live up to its ideals" (48 percent agree strongly and 24 percent agree somewhat). As a Brooklyn resident said in a focus group: "The treatment of the homeless is a measure of what our society is like."

Many New Yorkers also say they take personal initiatives to help the homeless. Nearly half, 45 percent, of New Yorkers say that they have given money within the last year to organizations that help the homeless. And a notable 17 percent spends time participating in community service or volunteer work to help the homeless. Another 47 percent say that they have directly tried to help a homeless individual or family—it should be noted, however, that "help" is a broad term and can mean different things to different respondents.

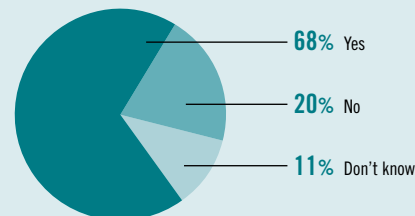
New Yorkers overwhelmingly believe in a right to shelter ...

Do you agree or disagree that everyone has a basic right to shelter, even if it has to be funded by the government?



... and they assume the government is responsible for guaranteeing that right

To the best of your knowledge, is the city legally required to provide housing for the homeless or not?*



*Court rulings mandate the city to provide shelter, but not housing, to needy residents.

Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Full question wording is available in the Full Survey Results at the end of this report. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

The Limits of Compassion

While only 24 percent think that homeless people have brought their fate upon themselves, a striking number say that the homeless lack motivation

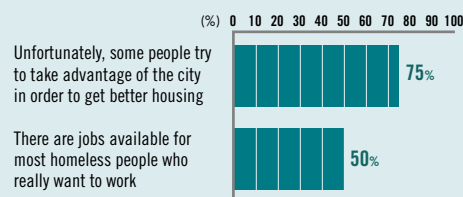
New Yorkers' empathy comes with several caveats. Overwhelming majorities believe that the most unfortunate are deserving of support from the government, while a smaller number think that those living on the edge of homelessness are not really homeless and do not qualify for the same degree of assistance. A significant number also feel that some take advantage of the system and believe that homeless benefits should be tied to work, treatment and training requirements. Some focus group participants expressed fears similar to those that fueled the welfare reform debates: specifically, that aid to the homeless creates a "culture of dependency."

Large majorities, about three-quarters or more in each case, approve of having their taxes spent on services for people with a history of drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS and mental illness, those coming out of prison or single parents with multiple children. However, the support is strongest for those with health problems—either mental health issues or AIDS. More than 6 in 10 strongly support programs for these groups, while fewer are strongly in favor of having their taxes go to former prisoners (33 percent), single parents (40 percent) and those with substance abuse problems (38 percent).

But despite their support for services to help these groups of people, half believe that jobs are available to homeless people who want to work, suggesting that some harbor beliefs that many homeless New Yorkers are apathetic about their situation. While only 24 percent think that homeless people have brought their fate upon themselves, a striking number say that the homeless lack motivation. Seventy-six percent say that lack of motivation is an important reason (most important reason: 16 percent, very important reason: 28 percent, somewhat important reason: 32 percent).

Some homeless people are perceived to be unmotivated—they could get jobs if they wanted them and they abuse city services

% who agree:

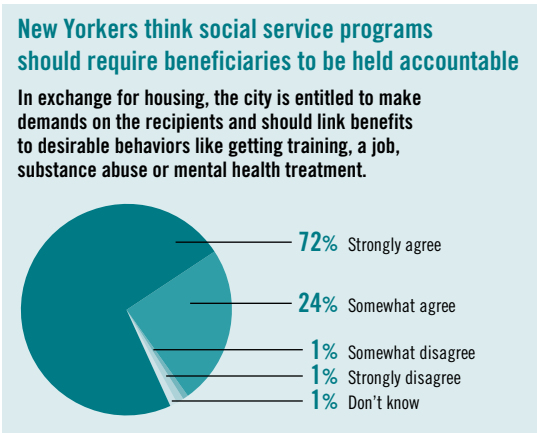


In addition, 46 percent "strongly agree" and another 29 percent "somewhat agree" that "some people try to take advantage of the city in order to get better housing." This feeling is slightly more prevalent among African-Americans, Hispanic and lower-income New Yorkers. "New Yorkers learn the system to the point where we know how to manipulate through it," a Brooklyn resident said in a focus group. "You have to. In some respects, you have to know what lie to tell."

Despite widespread concerns about affordable housing and their own economic vulnerability, many New Yorkers define homelessness in limited terms. They generally characterize homelessness as living in a shelter or sleeping on the street. Fewer hold broader definitions—for example, just 27 percent strongly agree that people living in crowded, squalid conditions are really homeless (another 23 percent somewhat agree). Only 23 percent strongly agree that New Yorkers living with relatives because they cannot afford their own housing are homeless (another 18 percent somewhat agree). Women are somewhat more likely to hold a broader definition of homelessness than men.

The Limits of Compassion *(continued)*

Finally, very large majorities believe homeless support should come with strings attached. Seventy-two percent strongly agree and another 24 percent somewhat agree that in exchange for housing or related benefits, recipients should be required to get training, a job and/or substance abuse or mental health treatment.



Perceived Causes of Homelessness

New Yorkers see that people generally do not become homeless overnight, but rather suffer a series of setbacks that lead to life on the streets or in shelters

New Yorkers are divided on the change in homelessness in recent years: 45 percent say homelessness has not increased in the past five years (including 16 percent that feel it has actually decreased), but 43 percent of New Yorkers think that homelessness has increased. African-Americans and Hispanics are more likely to believe the problem is escalating. So too are residents of the Bronx. Nearly two-thirds of New Yorkers perceive there to be “some” (53 percent) or “a lot” (10 percent) of homeless people in their neighborhoods, with 86 percent of Manhattanites expressing that view (12 percent say there are “a lot” and 74 percent say there are “some” homeless in their neighborhood).

In addition, with no significant differences among New Yorkers of different socioeconomic

backgrounds, the city’s inhabitants believe that homelessness is worse in New York than other American cities by about a five-to-one margin. Nevertheless, some focus group participants observe that among large cities, New York has a more modest homeless problem. For example, one woman from Staten Island pointed out that “I’ve seen more homeless in downtown San Francisco than I do in New York City.” Indeed, this view is consistent with national statistics—according to the Department of Homeless Services, New York City records 1 in 2,109 persons as homeless, while San Francisco records 1 in 280.⁴

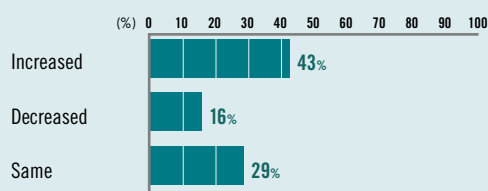
New Yorkers’ beliefs about the causes of homelessness are complex and diverse. Moreover, they recognize that the homeless are far from a monolithic population and embrace a variety of categories of people. However, as we have seen, some groups of people who might be considered

⁴ HOPE 2006, NYC Department of Homeless Services.

The homeless population

New Yorkers are divided as to whether homelessness is increasing; in reality, the numbers were going up until 2005

Thinking back over the last five years, have the number of homeless people in NYC increased, decreased or stayed about the same?



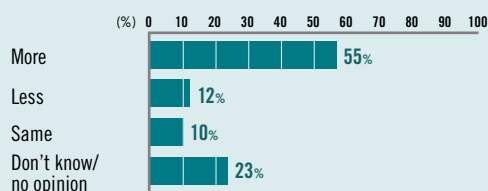
Average daily census (adult system)



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services

While New York City may have more homelessness than other cities, as the public suspects, the level is much lower than in other sizable urban areas

Proportionally speaking, does NYC have more or less homelessness than other cities?

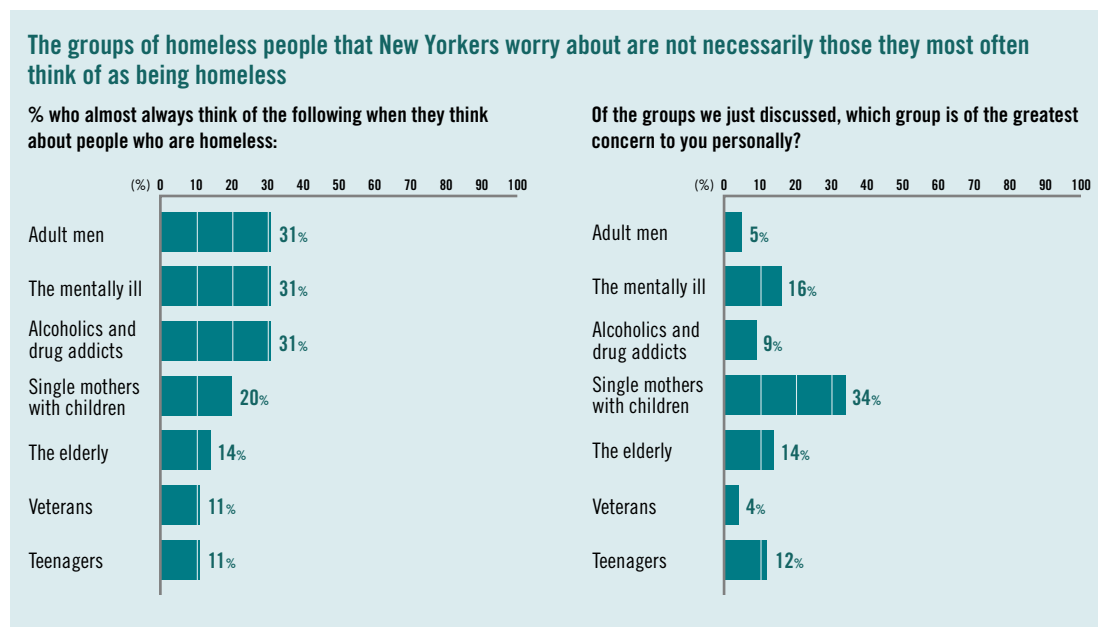


2004 city comparison—ratio of street homeless to general population

New York City: 1 in 2,109
Miami-Dade County: 1 in 1,347
Phoenix: 1 in 773
San Francisco: 1 in 280

Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services

Perceived Causes of Homelessness (continued)



Drug and alcohol abuse are seen as important causes of homelessness by 95 percent of New Yorkers

homeless are excluded from many New Yorkers' definitions of homelessness.

That New Yorkers understand the many factors that can lead or contribute to homelessness reflects a relatively sophisticated understanding of the problem, including the recognition that homelessness can happen to many people as a result of unexpected life circumstances. They also see that people generally do not become homeless overnight, but rather suffer a series of setbacks that lead to life on the streets or in shelters.

"It seems like you don't wake up homeless," a Queens resident said. "There are different stages, different levels that bring you down to that level."

Similar sentiments, as well as the belief that homelessness can be a vicious cycle, were echoed by a focus group participant on Staten Island: "They're shut out of society, because once you reach a certain point, how are you going to get a job if you are on the street?"

The vast majority of New Yorkers—67 percent—concur that most homeless people are on the streets or in shelters owing to "circumstances beyond their

control." Only 24 percent say that the homeless are "responsible" for their condition. Generally speaking, New Yorkers recognize and empathize with the extenuating circumstances that lead many to homelessness.

According to New Yorkers, the causes of homelessness are varied and complex. In addition to expected triggers like substance abuse and mental illness, broader socioeconomic issues play a part: housing costs, lack of good jobs, poor education and medical problems coupled with inadequate health care coverage. At the same time, focus group participants repeatedly pointed out the need for various reforms to the system of social services in New York.

Drug and alcohol abuse are seen as important causes of homelessness by 95 percent of New Yorkers. The elderly are more likely to see alcohol abuse and drug addiction as significant causal factors than are younger New Yorkers.

The mentally ill are probably the most visible of the homeless population. And with considerable news coverage over the years about the impact of de-institutionalization, it is not surprising

Perceived Causes of Homelessness (continued)

The circumstances of abused women loom large in New Yorkers' minds

that two-thirds “almost always” (31 percent) or “frequently” (35 percent) think of the mentally ill when they think about the homeless. Ninety-two percent think that the closing of mental health facilities has been either the “most” (20 percent), a “very” (48 percent) or a “somewhat important” (24 percent) causes of homelessness. “The mentally ill are the ones mostly on the street,” one Manhattan focus group participant said.

“Too high” housing costs are cited by 89 percent of those surveyed as the “most” (26 percent), a “very” (42 percent) or a “somewhat important” (21 percent) reason for homelessness. Eviction due to bankruptcy stemming from medical problems or a lost job is seen as an important problem by 92 percent (most important: 25 percent, very: 38 percent, somewhat: 29 percent).

Moreover, the lack of good jobs is highlighted by more than 8 in 10 as the “most” (21 percent), “very” (36 percent) or “somewhat important” (25 percent) cause, even though half of New Yorkers believe that some jobs—perhaps not high-skilled or high-paying ones—are available. The absence of good jobs is a significant difference in perception across racial lines. Majorities of African-Americans and Hispanics see the absence of good jobs as an important cause of homelessness, 90 and 92 percent respectively, compared with 69 percent of whites. Finally, poor education and the lack of marketable job skills are important causes of homelessness in the eyes of 87 percent of New Yorkers (24 percent say it is the most important, 40 percent say it is a very important and 23 percent say it is a somewhat important reason).

These findings strongly suggest that New Yorkers feel these are serious social problems for a wealthy democratic nation predicated on equal opportunity and justice. One Brooklyn resident commented: “New York is ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ now, the rich and the poor.”

Beyond these causes for homelessness, New Yorkers recognize a variety of other reasons that tend to be beyond one’s personal control. The circumstances

of domestic abuse loom large in New Yorkers’ minds. Ninety-two percent say it is the “most” (18 percent), “very” (46 percent) or “somewhat important” (28 percent) causes of homelessness. Other populations also come to mind when New Yorkers think of the homeless: single mothers with children, the elderly, veterans, single men and teenagers.

Additional causes that New Yorkers cite for homelessness include poor or imprudent behavior(s). As noted in the preceding section, many attribute homelessness to a lack of individual motivation.

New Yorkers have mixed views when it comes to the group of homeless people they are most concerned about—single mothers with children. Although respondents feel that the struggles that often accompany single parenthood can lead to homelessness, and 74 percent believe homelessness is exacerbated by “too many single mothers” (15 percent say it is the “most important” cause of homelessness, 32 percent say it is “very important” and 27 percent say it is “somewhat important”), they prefer to keep families together as much as possible. Nearly 8 in 10 believe that children should be allowed to stay with homeless parents.

In short, New Yorkers do recognize the diverse composition of the homeless population—including alcohol and drug abusers, families, the elderly, veterans and teenagers—even if they are mostly likely to think of adult males and the mentally ill. And they believe that people become homeless for a wide variety of reasons—from bad luck, mistakes, situations they cannot avoid and other circumstances beyond their control to personal choices and actions deemed “bad” by society. But regardless of the hows or whys, New Yorkers feel an imperative to help all who are homeless.

The Housing High Wire: Feeling Personally Vulnerable

Thirty-six percent of New Yorkers feel their families have fallen behind during the past few years, and thirty-six percent worry that they could become homeless.

At a time when economic insecurity has been intensifying among middle- and lower-middle-class Americans, we were not surprised that affordable housing was most often cited as “the most important problem facing New York City today”—named more frequently than terrorism, education or crime.

More startling may be the fact that 36 percent of New Yorkers feel their families have fallen behind during the past few years, and 36 percent worry that they could become homeless. Extrapolating, this could mean that more than two and a half million New Yorkers are feeling vulnerable about becoming homeless. This concern was also felt more by Hispanics and African-Americans, as 54 percent of Hispanics are at least somewhat worried that they could become homeless and 48 percent of African-Americans say the same.

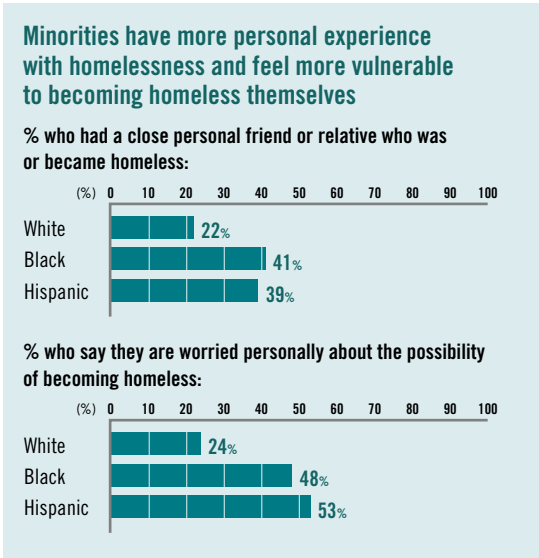
One single mother from Brooklyn poignantly described how, after separating from her partner, she and her two children had to move out of her home of 33 years and spent two nights in a Bronx homeless shelter. “I still have my job ... [and] I was only homeless for two days,” she said. “Things happen in people’s lives ... Tragedies happen to everyone.”

What do you think is the most important problem facing New York City today?	
	(%)
Affordable housing	12
Terrorism	11
Crime/gangs/violence	11
Education	11
Cost of living	10
Transportation/traffic	5
Homelessness	5
Poverty	4
Development/growth/overcrowding	3
Health care (cost/accessibility)	3
Jobs	3
Dissatisfaction with government/politics	3
Drug/alcohol addiction	2
Littering/pollution	1
Budget/taxes	1
Police/justice system	1
Other	7
No problem	*

In focus groups, many respondents attribute their fears to rising rents and an economy that is not benefiting all and feel that anyone who falls on hard times could easily become homeless. These fears are compounded by the belief that if such a tragedy befell them, the government would not help them or their families; only 26 percent think that public authorities would assist them.

“It’s an economic thing now,” a Bronx resident said. “People who could afford an apartment at one time are becoming homeless now. It’s a shame, because everything is going up...People losing jobs, people aren’t getting paid as much.”

African-Americans and Hispanics are also more likely to say that they or their immediate family members had received welfare or other public assistance in recent years, 41 percent and 51 percent respectively, compared with 35 percent of New Yorkers overall who also acknowledged that their families had obtained such benefits. Close proximity to people who have taken advantage of social services may make some New Yorkers feel even more empathy towards to those who become homeless, because they are more familiar with the challenges that lead people to require government help.



Solutions: New Yorkers on What Might Work

The city is trying to prevent people from becoming homeless with a variety of strategies—ones that the public broadly supports

Do New Yorkers believe homelessness can be solved? And if so, how? A narrow majority of New Yorkers (54 percent) say that if money were no object, homelessness could be eliminated. But there are differences on this issue across racial lines: 42 percent of whites agree, while 69 percent of African-Americans and 61 percent of Latinos believe that money could buy a solution to homelessness. Forty-five percent of all New Yorkers believe there will always be homeless people, regardless of any and all public policies.

“I have to believe that it’s possible to reduce it,” a Bronx resident said. If not, “you become sort of defeated.”

Conversely, a Manhattanite declared: “There will always be homelessness. No matter what, there will be circumstances.”

Nonetheless, New Yorkers do support a variety of policies to assist the homeless and prevent homelessness, recognizing—as a Staten Island resident said—that “there’s not one answer.”

But even if it is impossible to eradicate homelessness, most feel that we should try. As one Bronx man put it: “I’m not sure what the government could possibly do that wouldn’t be a sort of half measure. Maybe we just need to do a half measure just for moral purposes.”

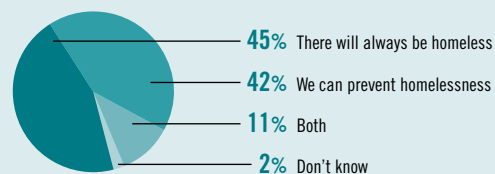
The public clearly thinks there are multiple strategies that policy makers, charities and advocates for the homeless should adopt or try. They believe in enhancing educational and job-related opportunities to help prevent the economic conditions that contribute to homelessness; expanding mental health, substance abuse and counseling services; subsidizing more affordable housing; and improving or providing alternatives to shelters.

More than 9 in 10 New Yorkers believe that subsidizing more affordable housing would be an effective approach, with 46 percent saying it would be “extremely effective” (46 percent say it would be “somewhat effective”). A similar split was found with respect to providing financial assistance to people whose rents are becoming unaffordable: 85 percent see this strategy as effective, and 43 percent of those think it would be “extremely effective.”

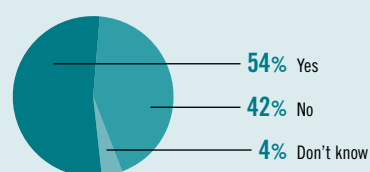
The city is trying to prevent people from becoming homeless with subsidies, eviction interventions and permanent housing options, particularly for single mothers with children—strategies that the public broadly supports. Indeed, there is also strong backing for supportive housing, in which support services are provided on-site along with housing to the needy individuals, rather than intervening to keep people in permanent housing, especially those with disabilities that make it difficult to live alone without such assistance. A substantial minority (38 percent) would make it a priority to improve the shelter system for homeless individuals, but once the concept was explained, 88 percent favor supportive housing for the homeless. One Queens resident said in a focus group, it “is a great idea.”⁵

Although people support public spending to reduce homelessness, they are divided as to whether or not the problem can be eliminated

Which statement comes closest to your own views? There will always be people who for whatever reasons end up homeless, on the streets, or there are things in society we can change or the government can do to prevent homelessness.



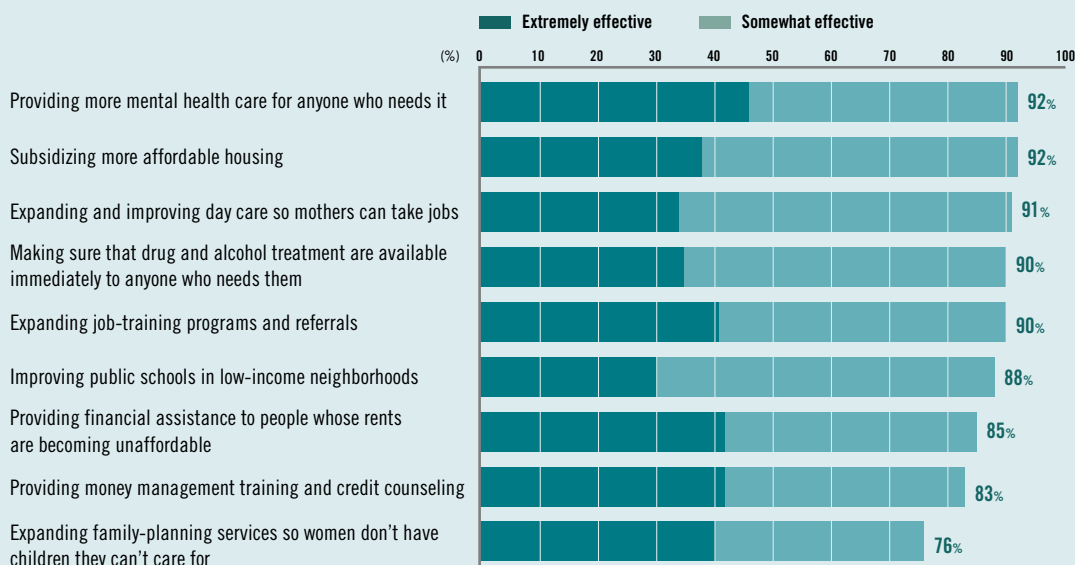
If the city were willing to spend whatever it thought necessary to eliminate homelessness, do you think this could be accomplished, or not?



Solutions (continued)

Preventive solutions to homelessness all enjoy majority support

% who say the following would be “extremely effective” or “somewhat effective” at preventing homelessness in New York City



In the focus groups, New Yorkers favored permanent housing, but some think that shelters should always be available for the inevitable short-term needs.

Sixty percent of New Yorkers say that they would not be upset at all at having subsidized apartments in their neighborhoods, and 48 percent say they would not mind having a shelter near where they live. This suggests that the NIMBY (not in my backyard) phenomenon may not be as strong as it is generally thought to be or that NIMBY concerns are expressed by a vocal minority. Still, New Yorkers of all socioeconomic backgrounds believe that affluent New Yorkers would not like shelters and supportive housing as their neighbors. Some believe that mixed-income housing will not work and agree with the Manhattan resident who said: “There’s no way you can have a luxury apartment combined with low-income housing.”

New Yorkers have highly negative feelings about homeless shelters. Focus group comments elucidated ideas about shelters breeding

“dependency.” And 69 percent believe that at least some shelters are unsafe and unsanitary, with only one percent saying that all shelters are not in that condition (10 percent say “a few” are).

Many focus group participants believe that it is actually safer on the streets and that shelters harbor criminals. As one Brooklyn man said of shelters: “I’m afraid of all the stories that I’ve heard—going to sleep, and all of a sudden, they’re mugging you, they’re beating you up.”

In the focus groups, New Yorkers favored permanent housing, but some think that shelters should always be available for the inevitable short-term needs. In the survey, 48 percent say that working to provide permanent housing in the ways described earlier would be the best policy approach to address homelessness, yet 38 percent say ensuring that shelters are clean and safe, and using shelters only as a last resort, would be a preferred strategy for responding to homelessness.

Thinking back to root causes in an effort to prevent homelessness, New Yorkers resoundingly

⁵ Survey respondents were told: “Supportive housing usually consists of individual units within a regular apartment building. It’s called supportive housing because in addition to rental subsidies, it is permanent housing, which provides social services such as job training, alcohol and drug abuse programs, mental health treatment and social workers on-site. This gives homeless people a permanent place to live.”

Solutions (continued)

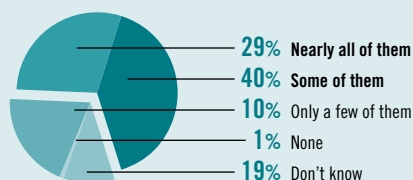
To better address some of the causes of homelessness, New Yorkers strongly favor options beyond housing help

agree that improving public schools in low-income neighborhoods would be a worthwhile strategy for attacking the root causes of homelessness. Fifty-eight percent say this would be “extremely effective,” with another 30 percent saying it would be “somewhat effective.” “You want to start preventing” homelessness, one Bronx resident said, “you gotta go straight back to when they were in high school and fix the education system.”

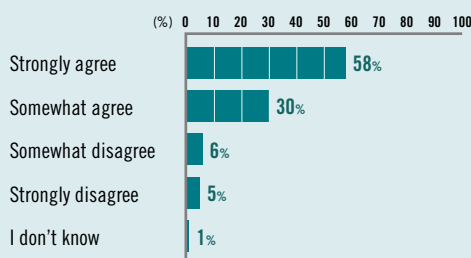
Ninety percent also support beefing up job-training programs and efforts to refer needy New Yorkers to jobs, and 49 percent thought this would be an “extremely effective” idea (41 percent think this would be a “somewhat effective” idea). Likewise, 57 percent think expanding and improving child care services so that mothers can more easily take jobs would be “extremely effective” (34 percent said “somewhat effective”). And 41 percent say that providing money management and credit counseling would be “extremely effective” in preventing homelessness (42 percent said “somewhat effective”).

Large majorities of New Yorkers think “some” or “nearly all” shelters are unsafe, but they think there will always be a need for them

Thinking about emergency homeless shelters, how many of the shelters do you think are unsafe and unsanitary?



There will always be “street people” who need shelters, no matter what the city does



One Queens resident suggested a “reward system,” under which “if you complete this series of training or education or rehab, you get moved into a different tier of room. You complete another series of moving yourself forward, [and] maybe [you] move into another tier.”

To better address some of the causes of homelessness, New Yorkers strongly favor options beyond housing help: 90 percent want to make sure that drug and/or alcohol treatment will be immediately available to anyone who needs them (55 percent say it would be “extremely effective;” 35 percent say it would be “somewhat effective”). Similarly, 92 percent support providing more mental health care for anyone who needs it (54 percent say it would be “extremely effective;” 38 percent say it would be “somewhat effective”). When asked about such publicly subsidized treatment and counseling programs, 53 percent say that they should be used “often,” and 34 percent say “sometimes.” Finally, 76 percent support expanded family-planning services so that “women don’t have children they can’t care for” (36 percent say it would be “extremely effective;” 40 percent say it would be “somewhat effective”). One Queens focus group participant creatively suggested that tax breaks be given to psychologists and social workers who assist the homeless. Several respondents also called for greater information, advocacy and communication about issues related to homelessness.

The public supports solutions such as these, but policy makers should recognize that New Yorkers are somewhat skeptical about the ability of government and the private sector to deliver them effectively. “Ineffective city policy,” a phrase used by one focus group participant, is cited by many who feel that city government is not doing the right things to ameliorate homelessness. As noted previously, when asked if they felt that the government would come to their aid if they fell on hard times, one-quarter of New Yorkers are confident that the government would be there for them.

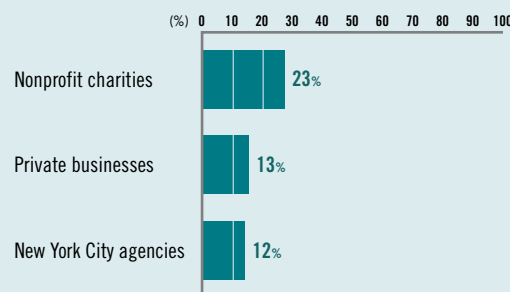
Solutions (continued)

Only 12 percent express “a lot of confidence” that New York City government agencies would run such programs well, with another 44 percent voicing “some confidence.” Forty-one percent have little (28 percent) or no (13 percent) confidence. However, these low confidence levels are similar for most potential providers. Almost identical levels of confidence—13 and 42 percent—are expressed about private businesses running programs for the homeless. Nonprofit charities are held in somewhat higher esteem, with 23 percent saying that they have a lot of confidence in their ability to serve the homeless, and 49 percent expressing some confidence. It should be noted that public cynicism towards government agencies and businesses is a common theme in many surveys of the public—not just those concerning homelessness.

Decision makers should be cautioned that public support for change and for helping the homeless will likely only accompany solutions that include strong oversight and accountability measures. As discussed previously, survey respondents are concerned about abuse of social services, so the public wants to ensure that programs are not vulnerable to fraud.

While the public does not have much confidence that anyone can run supportive housing well, charities are favored to manage them

% who have a lot of confidence that the following institutions will run supportive housing well and ensure that people would be well supervised:



Afterword

New Yorkers do not think that people deserve to be out on the streets or that homelessness is entirely the person's fault

As New Yorkers perceive, the causes of homelessness are multifaceted and complex. Some have to do with controversial policy decisions such as the deinstitutionalization of many of the mentally ill. Others have been a function of a changing economy—one in which a “rising tide” no longer “lifts all boats” and socioeconomic inequality has grown substantially since the 1970s, driven by governmental and business policies as well as by competition from global challengers. Widespread societal ills such as alcoholism, drug addiction, teen pregnancy, broken homes and family violence are also seen as prime causes.

New Yorkers, among others, debate the very definition of being homeless. Business cycles and government policies at the federal, state and city levels also have contributed to ebbs and flows in the (apparent) prevalence of homelessness in New York and throughout America.

New Yorkers recognize homelessness as a serious problem, as the survey and focus groups underlying this report indicate. They relate homelessness to broader problems of poverty, a perceived waning of economic opportunity, an increased divide between the “rich” and the “poor” and the growing lack of affordable housing for many New Yorkers.

Based on their understanding of the extent, causes and severity of the problem, combined with emotions ranging from empathy to fear, many New Yorkers are both strikingly compassionate toward the homeless (and willing to back up their compassion with tax dollars) and scared that the economic conditions of early-21st-century New York make them vulnerable to becoming homeless themselves.

They generally view the condition of homelessness fatalistically, as something beyond one's control that could befall many of them. The awareness that socioeconomic and psychological factors—not moral failings—are the causes of homelessness and their sense of personal vulnerability suggest that New Yorkers generally do not blame the

homeless for their fate and want to help them in constructive ways.

Yet feelings and perceptions are complex. Many are unlikely to picture themselves as similar to the homeless, but rather see that life can be hard, cruel and capricious and that many people find it tougher to cope with hard times. Nonetheless, they still do not think that people deserve to be out on the streets or that homelessness is entirely the person's fault.

Yet New Yorkers are realistic about the circumstances of homelessness and homeless services. They are not naive about the potential to cheat the system and believe in personal responsibility and social reciprocity. They want to help some more than others and expect that the homeless should meet certain requirements in exchange for taxpayer-funded programs. New Yorkers' limits to compassion, their pessimism about eradicating homelessness completely and their relative lack of faith in public and private entities to “solve” this problem are big—but not insurmountable—obstacles to publicly supported governmental action. These findings, discussed earlier, are reasons for officials to think carefully about policy options.

New Yorkers, like most Americans, are a can-do, solutions-oriented people. To them, homelessness is not an intractable problem. While the city's residents are divided over whether sufficient expenditures and effort could prevent and eliminate homelessness, or whether some homeless people always will be with us regardless of the best policies and the most abundant funding streams, New Yorkers think that it is the right thing for the city to take more action and do believe in many potential ways to address the problem successfully, including strategies for preventing homelessness in the first place.

This study has illustrated that New Yorkers believe that a multitrack approach must be taken and are open to a number of policy options upon

Afterword (continued)

New Yorkers believe that a multitrack approach must be taken and are open to a number of policy options upon which city leaders could embark

which city leaders could embark. Supportive housing, rental subsidies, job training, better education, safer shelters, mental health and substance abuse treatment and financial and psychological counseling are all supported by substantial majorities of the city's residents. Many also believe that the homeless should be required to demonstrate responsibility by participating in job counseling and other initiatives—a belief that is neither unreasonable nor incompatible with aggressive public policy to reduce the incidence of homelessness.

New Yorkers' sophisticated recognition of the problem, their empathy, their fears and their support for greater public assistance are findings that should be a clarion call to policy makers to act—soon and decisively. New Yorkers are far from callous or selfishly wanting to reduce their tax burden at the expense of social services for the needy, but instead they care deeply about the neediest citizens in their midst.

For many New Yorkers, the continued suffering of the city's homeless conflicts with core American values. And to their great credit—they want to make their city, and our society, consonant with its basic principles.

Overall, New Yorkers want to help their less fortunate compatriots, they are open to multiple approaches and they are willing to pay for it. While their compassion and commitment are grounded in realism, they support—and want—the assistance of city and other public, private and nonprofit entities that seek to aggressively address, and redress, the causes and consequences of homelessness.

Is it contradictory to think of the homeless population mostly in terms of adult men with substance abuse and mental problems and at the same time believe that the problems of homelessness are largely beyond one's control? Is it contradictory to say that government and other potential homeless service providers are not worthy of a high level of trust to fix the homeless problem and yet still believe that we should be

investing more through that same government to make things better? How is it possible to be happy to spend more of our own tax dollars on a problem that many of us don't even believe will ever be solved? Yes, New Yorkers' feelings about the homeless are complex, but they are not confused. They believe that we have an obligation to try, even if homelessness is with us always. They say we should prioritize our resources to focus on prevention, while never forgetting those whose circumstances or proclivities elude our preventive efforts. Sometimes New Yorkers see ourselves in the eyes of those who have become homeless and sometimes we don't. But as long as homelessness exists, New Yorkers say, we have not lived up to the ideals of our nation.

Methodology

The findings in “Compassion, Concern and Conflicted Feelings” are based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,002 adults living in New York City. Interviews were conducted between October 11 and 22, 2006. The survey was preceded by five focus groups.

The Telephone Survey

The study was conducted by telephone among a representative sample of 1,002 adults 18 years and older living in the five boroughs of New York City. The margin of error for this study is plus or minus three percentage points for this portion of the sample. Please note that the margin of error is higher when comparing percentages across subgroups.

The sample was based on an RDD design, which draws numbers from all existing telephone exchanges in the five boroughs of New York City, giving all phone numbers, listed and unlisted, a proportionate chance of being included. Respondents were randomly selected within the household, using the last birthday method, and were offered the option of being interviewed in Spanish. The overall sample results were weighted demographically and geographically to census data for New York City.

As in all surveys, question-order effects and other non-sampling sources of error can sometimes affect results. Steps were taken to minimize these issues, including pre-testing the survey instrument and randomizing the order in which some questions were asked.

The survey instrument was designed by Public Agenda, and Public Agenda is solely responsible for all analysis and interpretation of the data. Survey Sampling, Inc. supplied the sample, and surveys were fielded by Blum & Weprin Associates, Inc.

The Focus Groups

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying the public’s attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from participants in these focus groups were important to the survey design, and actual quotes were drawn from the focus groups to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the surveys. All focus groups were moderated by Public Agenda senior staff. Five focus groups were conducted with participants from each of the boroughs in New York City: Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island.

Full Survey Results

The findings in this study were based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,002 adults living in New York City. Interviews were conducted between October 11 and 22, 2006. The margin of error is plus or minus three points. Responses from participants living in Staten Island are not reported here, because there were too few of them to make statistically significant comparisons against respondents from other boroughs.

	Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
2 What do you think is the most important problem facing New York City today?					
Affordable housing	12	8	14	18	9
Terrorism	11	12	10	8	13
Crime/gangs/violence	11	13	15	5	10
Education	11	9	10	14	9
Cost of living	10	10	9	12	9
Transportation/traffic	5	2	4	7	6
Homelessness	5	9	4	5	4
Poverty	4	6	5	4	2
Development/growth/overcrowding	3	2	2	3	5
Health care (cost/accessibility)	3	1	3	1	5
Jobs	3	2	4	2	3
Dissatisfaction with government/politics	3	7	1	3	2
Drug/alcohol addiction	2	2	3	3	1
Littering/pollution	1	1	2	1	1
Budget/taxes	1	1	1	2	1
Police/justice system	1	1	2	—	2
Other	7	7	7	6	8
No problem	*	1	—	1	1
Don't know	6	8	5	5	9
3 How big of a problem is homelessness for the United States today?					
A big problem	78	88	76	77	75
A small problem	15	8	15	17	18
Not a problem	1	2	1	—	2
Don't know	5	1	8	5	6
4 How big of a problem is homelessness in New York City today?					
A big problem	81	90	79	84	77
A small problem	14	7	12	14	19
Not a problem	2	2	3	*	*
Don't know	3	1	6	2	3
5 Please tell me which statement comes closest to your own views, even if neither is exactly right:					
There are things in society we can change to prevent homelessness	42	31	42	52	41
There will always be people who for whatever reasons end up homeless, on the streets	45	52	48	31	49
Both	11	15	8	15	9
Don't know	2	2	2	3	2

6 When you think of most of the people who are homeless, how often do you think of the following?

Adult men

Almost always
Frequently
Occasionally
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

Total (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
31	28	36	24	31
43	45	38	53	41
17	16	20	15	18
5	8	3	5	7
2	3	2	*	2
1	—	1	1	2

Alcoholics and drug addicts

Almost always
Frequently
Occasionally
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

31	37	34	26	28
36	35	34	41	38
24	20	23	24	25
6	5	3	5	8
1	—	2	2	1
2	3	3	2	*

The mentally ill

Almost always
Frequently
Occasionally
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

31	35	36	29	26
35	19	35	43	35
21	24	17	24	21
7	14	3	3	11
4	6	6	*	4
2	2	2	1	3

Single mothers with children

Almost always
Frequently
Occasionally
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

20	32	22	11	18
29	37	30	32	22
31	18	25	38	41
14	7	16	15	15
3	3	3	4	1
3	2	3	*	3

The elderly

Almost always
Frequently
Occasionally
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

14	14	21	12	11
25	25	17	30	26
40	40	42	38	40
16	15	14	17	17
4	5	5	2	5
1	—	1	1	1

Teenagers

Almost always
Frequently
Occasionally
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

11	12	14	9	8
20	17	16	18	27
35	38	36	40	27
25	24	21	30	27
7	8	11	4	7
2	—	2	—	4

6 (continued) **When you think of most of the people who are homeless, how often do you think of the following?**

Veterans

Almost always
Frequently
Occasionally
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
11	15	10	11	8
26	28	26	33	19
35	34	33	28	42
16	15	17	16	18
6	5	7	7	6
5	3	6	5	5

13 **Of the groups we just discussed, which group is of the greatest concern to you personally?**

Single mothers with children
The mentally ill
The elderly
Teenagers
Alcoholics and drug addicts
Adult men
Veterans
Don't know/no opinion

34	34	33	35	37
16	13	15	21	15
14	12	14	12	15
12	13	13	10	14
9	12	9	9	8
5	6	7	2	3
4	4	4	4	4
5	6	5	8	4

15 **Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?**

People who live in crowded, squalid conditions are really homeless.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

27	33	29	25	26
23	23	22	27	20
27	19	27	30	29
18	21	21	14	19
4	5	2	5	6

People who live with relatives, but only because they can't afford to support themselves, are really homeless.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

23	32	20	22	23
18	13	18	20	21
26	24	25	31	25
30	28	36	23	30
2	1	1	3	1

Anyone living in temporary shelter, with no permanent address, is homeless.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

60	64	61	59	56
20	15	17	20	23
10	8	10	13	10
10	12	10	7	11
1	—	1	—	1

People sleeping the night on the street, in the subway or in a park are homeless.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

72	71	72	79	67
15	16	11	12	21
6	8	9	4	5
5	2	6	3	6
1	3	2	1	1

		Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
19	Are there a lot of homeless people in your neighborhood, some or none at all?					
	A lot	10	11	10	12	7
	Some	53	54	50	74	44
	None at all	33	32	34	11	45
	Don't know	4	3	5	3	4
20	Thinking back over the last five years, have the number of homeless people in NYC increased, decreased or stayed about the same?					
	Increased	43	54	41	38	41
	Decreased	16	19	16	14	13
	Stayed about the same	29	16	28	35	36
	Don't know	12	11	14	13	9
21	Proportionally speaking, does NYC have more or less homelessness than other cities?					
	More	55	63	54	47	57
	Less	12	9	12	16	11
	Same	10	10	9	9	12
	Don't know	23	18	25	28	20
22	How often, if ever, do you talk about homelessness with family and friends?					
	Frequently	18	21	22	13	16
	Occasionally	39	32	37	44	37
	Hardly ever	32	32	29	34	34
	Never	12	15	12	8	13
	Don't know	—	—	—	—	—
31	If it were proposed that a shelter for homeless people be located in your neighborhood, would that upset you a great deal, somewhat, a little bit or not at all?					
	A great deal	13	13	15	9	12
	Somewhat	21	18	23	20	20
	A little bit	16	15	13	19	18
	Not at all	48	53	46	49	48
	Don't know	2	1	2	3	2
34	How worried are you personally about the possibility of becoming homeless?					
	Very worried	15	24	15	13	15
	Somewhat worried	21	23	21	18	23
	Not too worried	22	21	20	26	20
	Not at all worried	41	32	42	43	42
	Don't know	*	—	1	—	*
36	If parents are homeless, should they be allowed to keep their children with them?					
	Yes	57	60	59	54	58
	No	31	30	29	32	30
	Don't know	12	10	11	14	11

	Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
37 Should parents be allowed to keep their children in a shelter?					
Yes	77	80	67	88	75
No	19	13	24	11	24
Don't know	4	7	9	1	1
38 To the best of your knowledge, is the city legally required to provide housing for the homeless or not?					
Yes	68	80	69	60	67
No	20	11	20	28	21
Don't know	11	9	11	12	11
39 Recognizing that not every single one can be the most important reason, please tell me how important you think the following is for homelessness:					
Housing prices being too high					
Most important	26	32	25	27	26
Very important	42	48	43	33	49
Somewhat important	21	13	21	25	17
Not too important	7	4	6	10	5
Not at all important	3	2	4	3	2
Don't know	1	—	1	2	1
People being evicted because of bankruptcy from medical problems or job loss					
Most important	25	22	31	19	25
Very important	38	44	32	36	43
Somewhat important	29	30	26	38	24
Not too important	4	1	5	4	5
Not at all important	1	1	2	1	—
Don't know	3	2	3	3	2
Poor education and work skills					
Most important	24	21	30	15	27
Very important	40	38	36	49	41
Somewhat important	23	22	19	30	21
Not too important	8	7	11	3	7
Not at all important	4	11	2	2	3
Don't know	1	—	2	1	*
Drug and alcohol abuse					
Most important	22	25	18	22	22
Very important	51	57	54	52	48
Somewhat important	22	14	21	21	25
Not too important	3	2	4	2	2
Not at all important	1	1	2	2	1
Don't know	1	1	—	2	1
Too few good jobs					
Most important	21	23	24	14	24
Very important	36	41	39	31	32
Somewhat important	25	20	21	35	24
Not too important	13	10	12	13	13
Not at all important	5	7	2	6	6
Don't know	2	—	2	1	1

39 (continued) **Recognizing that not every single one can be the most important reason, please tell me how important you think the following is for homelessness:**

The closing of mental health facilities

Most important
Very important
Somewhat important
Not too important
Not at all important
Don't know

Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
20	17	22	22	19
48	49	48	46	48
24	27	21	25	27
4	3	6	3	4
2	1	3	2	—
2	3	*	3	2

Domestic abuse

Most important
Very important
Somewhat important
Not too important
Not at all important
Don't know

18	14	19	11	22
46	60	46	43	43
28	25	26	35	25
5	1	3	7	8
1	1	3	1	1
2	—	3	3	1

People lacking motivation

Most important
Very important
Somewhat important
Not too important
Not at all important
Don't know

16	18	19	11	15
28	38	29	22	27
32	22	26	37	38
17	17	18	22	12
6	4	6	6	7
2	1	3	2	—

Too many single mothers

Most important
Very important
Somewhat important
Not too important
Not at all important
Don't know

15	22	17	14	8
32	38	27	28	38
27	21	26	22	37
16	13	17	22	10
8	2	10	11	6
2	4	2	3	1

40A In your opinion, do you think most homeless people are:

Homeless through their own fault and responsible for their own situation
Homeless because of circumstances beyond their control
Don't know

24	24	24	22	24
67	71	67	68	65
8	5	9	9	10

40B Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Everyone has a basic right to shelter, even if it has to be funded by the government.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

70	74	72	68	67
20	16	20	21	23
4	4	2	5	6
4	2	3	5	4
1	3	1	1	*

40B (continued) **Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

**As long as there are Americans who are homeless,
our nation has failed to live up to its ideals.**

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
48	57	48	50	43
24	22	24	24	27
14	8	16	14	14
11	10	10	9	14
2	2	2	2	2

**Homeless people who are mentally ill should be in hospitals
for the mentally ill—even if they don't want to be.**

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

60	60	63	51	63
18	19	16	21	18
11	5	10	12	14
6	9	7	9	3
4	6	4	5	2

**Unfortunately, some people try to take advantage of the city
in order to get better housing.**

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

46	51	46	44	42
29	28	27	30	33
10	7	10	10	10
10	10	10	10	10
5	4	6	6	4

**46 Do you think there are jobs available for most homeless people
who really want to work or not?**

Yes
No
Don't know

50	46	50	41	57
44	50	43	52	37
6	4	8	7	6

**48 As a taxpayer, do you approve or disapprove of having your tax dollars
used to help pay for housing for the homeless?**

Strongly approve
Somewhat approve
Somewhat disapprove
Strongly disapprove
Don't know

53	55	55	60	48
32	27	30	29	37
6	5	5	4	7
7	9	8	6	6
2	3	2	1	1

**49 If you were making up the NYC budget this year, would you increase
spending on programs for the homeless, decrease spending for
programs for the homeless or keep spending the same for this?**

Increase
Keep same
Decrease
Don't know

62	66	64	65	56
27	22	28	20	33
4	4	5	3	4
7	8	3	12	8

**50 If the city were willing to spend whatever it thought necessary
to eliminate homelessness, do you think this could be accomplished
or not?**

Yes
No
Don't know

54	58	61	45	53
42	41	35	47	44
4	1	4	7	3

50B Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

In exchange for housing, the city is entitled to make demands on the recipients and should link benefits to desirable behaviors like getting training, a job and substance abuse or mental health treatment.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
72	80	71	71	71
24	15	25	23	26
1	1	1	3	1
1	2	1	2	1
1	2	2	1	1

As long as mental health services, affordable housing, job assistance and subsidized health care aren't available and provided to the most vulnerable in our communities, some New Yorkers will always end up on the streets.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

59	68	60	67	47
31	22	30	27	38
6	4	6	2	10
4	4	4	2	5
1	1	1	2	*

There will always be street people who need shelters, no matter what the city does.

Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Somewhat disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know

58	64	60	53	58
30	23	26	41	30
6	8	6	4	7
5	5	7	2	4
1	—	1	1	1

52 Thinking about emergency homeless shelters, how many of the shelters do you think are unsafe and unsanitary?

Nearly all of them
Some of them
Only a few
None
Don't know

29	36	32	25	27
40	36	39	46	40
10	12	8	7	12
1	1	*	1	2
19	15	20	21	19

53 If you had to choose, even if neither is exactly right, what should be the main priority of the NYC government in dealing with the issue of homelessness?

Intervening to keep individuals and families in permanent housing, with shelters only as a last resort
Doing what is necessary to ensure that the temporary shelters are clean and safe
Both
Don't know

48	50	51	50	44
38	38	36	36	40
12	10	10	12	15
2	2	3	1	2

54 If the city were to shut down most of the emergency homeless shelters tomorrow, keeping just a few key ones open in order to redirect funds to more permanent housing options, which comes closest to how you would feel?

That there would be people sleeping on the streets all over the city, making it a terrible place to live and visit
That the money would be better spent providing more permanent housing for the homeless and there would be fewer homeless people
Don't know

26	29	27	24	28
65	63	64	64	67
8	8	8	12	3

55 Do you think the following would be an effective way to prevent homelessness?

Improving public schools in low-income neighborhoods

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

Expanding and improving day care so more mothers can take jobs

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

Making sure that drug and alcohol treatment are available immediately to anyone who needs them

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

Providing more mental health care for anyone who needs it

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

Expanding job-training programs and referrals

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

Subsidizing more affordable housing

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

Providing financial assistance to people whose rents are becoming unaffordable

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

	Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
Extremely effective	58	59	58	53	59
Somewhat effective	30	27	25	37	31
Not too effective	4	6	5	3	4
Not at all effective	7	8	10	6	5
Don't know	1	—	2	1	1
Extremely effective	57	61	51	51	68
Somewhat effective	34	24	43	39	25
Not too effective	5	6	4	7	4
Not at all effective	2	3	1	3	2
Don't know	2	6	2	—	*
Extremely effective	55	58	51	51	55
Somewhat effective	35	29	35	43	33
Not too effective	5	6	4	3	7
Not at all effective	5	5	8	3	5
Don't know	1	1	1	1	—
Extremely effective	54	67	56	49	51
Somewhat effective	38	27	32	44	45
Not too effective	4	3	5	7	1
Not at all effective	3	2	6	—	3
Don't know	1	—	1	1	—
Extremely effective	49	49	53	45	53
Somewhat effective	41	37	40	47	38
Not too effective	7	8	6	7	4
Not at all effective	1	1	1	1	2
Don't know	2	5	1	—	2
Extremely effective	46	64	47	46	36
Somewhat effective	46	30	44	46	53
Not too effective	5	3	6	3	6
Not at all effective	2	1	2	4	2
Don't know	2	2	—	1	4
Extremely effective	43	48	42	46	41
Somewhat effective	42	40	40	37	44
Not too effective	9	6	9	9	11
Not at all effective	6	5	8	8	3
Don't know	1	1	2	1	—

55 (continued) **Do you think the following would be an effective way to prevent homelessness?**

Providing money management training and credit counseling

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
41	54	42	34	36
42	41	37	40	51
11	—	10	23	8
6	4	10	3	5
*	1	*	1	—

Expanding family-planning services so women don't have children they can't care for

Extremely effective
Somewhat effective
Not too effective
Not at all effective
Don't know

36	42	34	33	42
40	40	37	42	37
14	8	16	17	10
8	5	10	8	9
2	5	2	*	2

68 **As you may know, the city helps pay rent for some people having difficulty paying their rent, to keep them in homes of their own. Tenants who get this rental support have social workers who help them before they are evicted or help them get back into housing if they are evicted. Do you think this is an effective way to help prevent homelessness?**

Yes
No
Don't know

83	97	89	79	71
14	3	9	19	23
2	—	—	2	6

70 **If it were proposed that new or already existing apartments that received rental support be located in your neighborhood, would that upset you a great deal, somewhat, a little bit or not at all?**

Upset a great deal
Somewhat upset
A little bit
Not at all
Don't know

7	5	7	8	7
18	22	18	17	16
13	6	14	9	18
60	65	59	63	56
2	2	2	2	2

70A **What about placing mentally ill and addicted homeless people in publicly subsidized treatment and counseling programs? Should this be used often, sometimes, hardly ever or never?**

Often
Sometimes
Hardly ever
Never
Don't know

53	54	52	58	48
34	32	33	33	38
5	3	4	5	7
5	6	8	2	4
3	3	4	2	2

71 As you may know, supportive housing usually consists of individual units within a regular apartment building. It's called supportive housing because in addition to rental subsidies, it is permanent housing, which provides social services such as job training, alcohol and drug abuse programs, mental health treatment and social workers on-site. This gives homeless people a permanent place to live. Would you favor or oppose supportive housing for the homeless in New York City?

Yes

No

Don't know

Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
88	90	88	89	90
7	3	8	7	8
3	3	4	4	1

72 Please tell me how much confidence you have that private businesses would run them well and ensure that the people would be well supervised.

A lot of confidence

Some confidence

Not too much confidence

No confidence at all

Don't know

13	17	12	8	17
42	40	42	47	39
27	25	27	28	26
14	15	14	13	13
4	3	5	2	4

73 Please tell me how much confidence you have that nonprofit charities would run them well and ensure that the people would be well supervised.

A lot of confidence

Some confidence

Not too much confidence

No confidence at all

Don't know

23	24	24	19	24
49	47	47	55	48
17	22	15	15	18
8	5	9	7	8
2	1	4	3	1

74 Please tell me how much confidence you have that New York City agencies would run them well and ensure that the people would be well supervised.

A lot of confidence

Some confidence

Not too much confidence

No confidence at all

Don't know

12	16	11	11	10
44	38	46	45	47
28	28	24	31	27
13	16	14	9	13
3	1	5	3	2

75 If it were proposed that supportive housing for homeless people be located in your neighborhood, would that upset you a great deal, somewhat, a little bit or not at all?

A great deal

Somewhat

A little bit

Not at all

Don't know

8	10	8	7	10
20	20	21	18	20
18	11	20	19	18
52	57	49	53	50
1	1	1	3	1

76 As a taxpayer, please tell me whether you approve of having your tax dollars used to help pay for each of the following:

Treatment and services for people with AIDS

Strongly approve
Somewhat approve
Somewhat disapprove
Strongly disapprove
Don't know

Treatment and services for people who have a history of alcohol or drug abuse

Strongly approve
Somewhat approve
Somewhat disapprove
Strongly disapprove
Don't know

Treatment and services for people who struggle with mental illness

Strongly approve
Somewhat approve
Somewhat disapprove
Strongly disapprove
Don't know

Treatment and services for people coming out of prison

Strongly approve
Somewhat approve
Somewhat disapprove
Strongly disapprove
Don't know

Treatment and services for people with numerous children born to single parents

Strongly approve
Somewhat approve
Somewhat disapprove
Strongly disapprove
Don't know

83 Which of the following best describes your family's financial situation in the past few years:

You have had enough money to maintain your standard of living
You feel as if you have fallen behind
Don't know

84 Do you feel the government will help you and your family if you fall on bad times, or do you think you'll have only yourself to rely on?

Will help
Only self to rely on
Don't know

	Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
Strongly approve	63	64	61	73	59
Somewhat approve	27	27	26	23	30
Somewhat disapprove	4	2	4	2	6
Strongly disapprove	4	3	6	1	4
Don't know	2	2	3	*	1
Strongly approve	38	39	38	41	38
Somewhat approve	38	38	35	44	36
Somewhat disapprove	10	8	12	7	12
Strongly disapprove	11	11	14	7	11
Don't know	1	2	1	1	1
Strongly approve	63	67	60	68	62
Somewhat approve	31	26	34	26	32
Somewhat disapprove	2	1	2	3	2
Strongly disapprove	3	4	3	2	2
Don't know	1	1	*	*	1
Strongly approve	33	38	32	41	27
Somewhat approve	41	39	42	41	41
Somewhat disapprove	10	6	8	9	14
Strongly disapprove	12	11	14	6	14
Don't know	3	4	3	2	3
Strongly approve	40	45	40	42	38
Somewhat approve	33	30	33	32	33
Somewhat disapprove	10	7	10	10	12
Strongly disapprove	12	15	13	10	13
Don't know	4	2	4	5	4
You have had enough money to maintain your standard of living	58	48	54	62	61
You feel as if you have fallen behind	36	45	40	34	33
Don't know	3	2	4	3	3
Will help	26	30	25	21	31
Only self to rely on	67	63	66	73	63
Don't know	5	6	7	4	4

		Total (%)	Bronx (%)	Brooklyn (%)	Manhattan (%)	Queens (%)
85	Have you or has anyone in your immediate family ever received welfare or public assistance benefits?					
	Yes	35	48	37	31	27
	No	62	47	59	66	70
	Don't know	2	3	2	2	1
86	Have you ever had a close personal friend or relative who was or became homeless?					
	Yes	30	42	34	24	27
	No	68	55	64	74	71
	Don't know	1	1	2	1	*
87	In the last 12 months have you donated money to an organization that helps the homeless?					
	Yes	45	46	42	49	45
	No	53	52	56	50	54
	Don't know	1	—	1	*	1
88	In the last 12 months have you spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity focusing on the homeless?					
	Yes	17	23	18	19	13
	No	82	75	81	80	86
	Don't know	*	1	*	*	—
89	In the last 12 months have you directly tried to help a homeless individual or family?					
	Yes	47	50	50	47	44
	No	51	48	49	51	55
	Don't know	1	—	*	2	*
92	In the last 12 months have you contacted a public official about this issue?					
	Yes	9	15	8	7	9
	No	90	84	90	92	90
	Don't know	*	—	1	—	*
93	In the last 12 months have you called the police or the city about a homeless person who appeared sick or in trouble on the street?					
	Yes	11	15	11	11	10
	No	87	84	87	87	89
	Don't know	*	—	1	*	—

Characteristics of the sample

	Total (%)		Total (%)
Gender		Were you or your parents or your grandparents born in a country other than the United States?	
Male	46	Yes, respondent	25
Female	54	Yes, parents	32
Age		Yes, grandparents	32
18–29	20	No	34
30–49	41	Are you now registered to vote in your precinct or election district, or haven't you had a chance to register?	
50–64	23	Yes, registered	76
65+	16	No, not registered	21
Borough		Do you always vote in local elections—that is, elections for local office like mayor or city council—or do you sometimes miss one, rarely vote or do you never vote in local elections?	
Bronx	15	Always vote	48
Brooklyn	30	Sometimes miss one	22
Manhattan	22	Rarely vote	8
Queens	28	Never vote	20
Staten Island	5	How long have you lived in this neighborhood?	
Education		All of your life	13
Less than high school	8	Less than 1 year	6
High school graduate	24	1–5 years	21
Some college or trade school, no degree	16	6–10 years	17
Associate's or 2-year degree	9	More than that, but not all of your life	40
Bachelor's or 4-year degree	19	Due to housing costs, how likely is it that you might have to move from where you live now?	
Graduate degree	19	Very likely	16
Race		Somewhat likely	21
White	41	Not very likely	24
Black/African-American	24	Not at all likely	34
Hispanic	22	Do you or your family currently own your home?	
Asian	8	Own	33
Something else	5	Rent	67
Income			
\$15,000 or under	20		
\$15,001 to \$25,000	12		
\$25,001 to \$35,000	10		
\$35,001 to \$50,000	13		
\$50,001 to \$75,000	17		
\$75,001 to \$100,000	10		
\$100,001 to \$150,000	10		
\$150,001 to \$200,000	3		
\$200,001 or more	5		

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