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Special Report #4

Neighborhood Problems and Quality of Life

A survey conducted in collaboration with



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Introduction and Background

This Special Report discusses findings of an eTownPanel online survey -- conducted in collaboration with Citizens for NYC -- about neighborhood problems and quality of neighborhood life. Citizens for NYC is a nonprofit organization that stimulates and supports self-help and civic action to improve the quality of life in New York City neighborhoods. This survey replicates a previous survey completed earlier in 2004 (see eTownPanel Special Report #1).¹ As before, the survey focuses on identifying the most important problems facing people in their neighborhoods, and the findings are used by Citizens for NYC to fund neighborhood groups in the city to address these problems.

Methodological Note. The survey was conducted in August and September, 2004, and included online responses from 1232 eTownPanelists plus 148 members of Citizens for NYC, many of which completed a paper version of the questionnaire, for a total sample of 1380. eTownPanel surveys are based on an online panel of volunteers and not a random sample. Strictly speaking, therefore, the results are not statistically projectable to a larger population. However, some of the results are weighted by gender, race, age, and region (using US Census information) to better reflect the population of New York City and the nation. More detailed information on methodology is presented at the end of this report. A comparison of respondent characteristics with US Census figures appears in **Table 1**.

Findings

The findings below are reported separately for three groups: the nation as a whole, New York City residents, and New York City neighborhood leaders. The data for the nation and New York City residents are weighted to reflect the general population (see methodological note above as well as the Methodology section at the end of this report). The results for New York City neighborhood leaders, who head citizen groups in the city working on neighborhood issues, represent a subset of all New York City residents and are unweighted.

This section focuses on rankings of various neighborhood problems. It also reports on perceived change in neighborhood problems and what agencies and officials citizens turn to for help with these problems. The results of this survey are similar to the prior survey, but there are some changes in the rankings of neighborhood problems and other results. Some of these changes are undoubtedly seasonal, as this survey was completed in late summer (August-September 2004) while the prior survey was completed in late winter (February-March 2004). In addition, this survey reflects a much larger sample size (a total of 1380 in this survey, compared to 667 in the prior survey).

¹ Available at www.etonpanel.com/SpecialReports.htm

Neighborhood problems

As **Figure 1** shows, the top neighborhood problems for respondents nationwide are dangerous intersections, lack of public transportation, and too much street noise. This is followed by too much growth, traffic congestion, potholes, noisy neighbors, property crime, and drugs. The means on a 7-point scale (from 1=no problem to 7=very big problem) are at most a bit above 3, suggesting that many respondents saw these issues as only minor problems in their neighborhoods.

Figure 2 shows the results for New York City residents. In contrast with the national results, the means for New York City problems are much higher, with most over 3 and many at or above 4. The top rated problems are too much street noise, litter or garbage, dangerous intersections, and traffic congestion. The rise of street noise to the top of the list in this survey (it was in second place in the previous survey) most likely reflects the seasonal difference in the data collection periods.

Figure 3 shows results for a subset of New York City residents who are leaders of neighborhood associations. Although many of the top problems are the same as for New York City resident in general, the priorities are somewhat different for neighborhood leaders. In particular, the leaders give a somewhat higher priority to too much growth or over-building and especially illegal conversions or code enforcement as top problems in their neighborhoods.

Are problems getting better or worse?

The survey asked respondents if the neighborhood problems listed above were, in general, getting better or worse over the last few years. As **Figure 4** shows, respondents nationwide appear to see their neighborhood problems as mostly staying about the same. New York City residents, as indicated in **Figure 5**, are more likely to report that neighborhood problems are getting worse. The perspective of neighborhood leaders in New York City, shown in **Figure 6**, suggests a more divided view about whether neighborhood problems are getting better or worse.

Working with agencies and officials

Respondents were asked how often they worked with various agencies or officials concerning neighborhood problems. As **Figure 7** shows, people nationwide work most often with their parks and recreation department and the police, followed by schools and the town councils. The rise of parks and recreation to the top of the list (it was only seventh in the previous survey) again likely reflects the fact that this survey was done in summer when parks are most heavily used. In New York City, as **Figure 8** demonstrates, people work most often with the police, their community boards, the parks department, and the city council. **Figure 9** shows that New York City neighborhood leaders work much more frequently with these agencies and officials than ordinary New Yorkers, as might be expected, yet they work primarily with the same agencies or officials.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from August 20 through September 12, 2004, and included responses from 1380 US residents, 276 of whom live in New York City. Of those in New York City, 148 completed paper questionnaires in response to a mailing done by Citizens for NYC. The panelists are part of the eTownPanel project and were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research, including web directory listings, Google ads, Craigslist postings, and announcements sent via email to membership lists of various nonprofit organizations in New York City that have partnered with eTownPanel over the years. It is important to point out that the panel of respondents is not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger population. However, results are weighted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City. Both national and New York City weights were constructed using simple post-stratification methods.²

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the survey respondents, both weighted and unweighted, and compares this profile to data from the US Census. As the unweighted results in Table 1 show, respondents nationally are disproportionately white, female, and in the 25 to 44 age group. Respondents nationally over-represent the northeast somewhat and under-represent blacks, Hispanics, those 65 and older, and those in the lowest income group. The weighted results, by design, more closely mirror the Census figures nationally. The unweighted New York City respondents, compared to Census figures for New York City, are again disproportionately white and female, and they under-represent blacks and especially Hispanics as well as those 65 and older and the lowest income group. By design again, the weighted results bring the profile of New York City respondents into line with Census figures for the city (except for income, which was not a weighting variable). The results in this report for both New York and the nation are all weighted results. The results for NYC leaders are unweighted.

About eTownPanel. eTownPanel is a university-based, nonprofit project that aims to expand the potential of the Internet as a tool for measuring the quality of life in communities across the US and for providing citizen-driven feedback on the performance of local governments. eTownPanel also serves as a cost-effective research tool for local nonprofit organizations and government agencies that seek to understand what citizens think about important local issues. The project currently focuses on New York City but will soon include additional cities and towns from across the US.

For more information visit www.ETownPanel.com or email info@ETownPanel.com

² The weighting procedure involved two steps. First, weights were constructed to bring the sample into geographic balance based on the population of Census regions. This geographic weight was then applied to the data, and new weights were calculated to align the sample to the Census in terms of gender, race, and age. This weighting procedure was carried out separately for New York City and the nation. Income was not used as a weighting variable because of missing data and because of the difficulties comparing income across surveys.

TABLE 1. Comparison of weighted and unweighted respondent characteristics with US Census figures

	The Nation			New York City		
	Census	Weighted	Unweighted	Census	Weighted	Unweighted
Northeast	19.0	20.9	24.7	100.0	100.0	100.0
South	35.6	35.9	31.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Midwest	22.9	20.1	22.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
West	21.9	23.1	21.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
White, non-Hispanic	69.1	71.1	85.3	35.0	33.8	60.5
Black or African American	12.3	12.0	5.0	24.5	22.0	18.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.7	5.4	4.2	9.7	11.9	3.8
Hispanic or Latino	12.5	8.6	2.6	27.0	27.7	9.8
Other	2.4	2.9	2.9	3.8	4.6	7.1
Male	49.0	48.2	23.4	49.0	50.1	36.4
Female	51.0	51.8	76.6	51.0	49.9	63.6
18 to 24 years	13.4	13.9	9.2	13.1	10.4	4.5
25 to 44 years	40.7	42.6	57.7	43.5	47.5	36.5
45 to 64 years	29.6	30.9	30.8	27.9	30.4	41.7
65 years and over	16.7	12.6	2.3	15.5	11.6	17.3
Less than \$25,000	28.7	17.5	14.8	34.9	12.8	12.7
\$25,000-\$49,999	29.3	35.8	36.4	25.7	29.6	29.6
\$50,000-\$74,9999	19.5	26.1	28.1	16.7	32.4	23.9
\$75,000 or more	22.5	20.6	20.7	22.7	25.1	33.8

Note: Census figures from American FactFinder, 2000 Census Quick Tables, available at www.census.gov.
Weighted results reflect post-stratification adjustments for region, race, age, and gender.

FIGURE 1. The Nation: Neighborhood problems (in rank order)

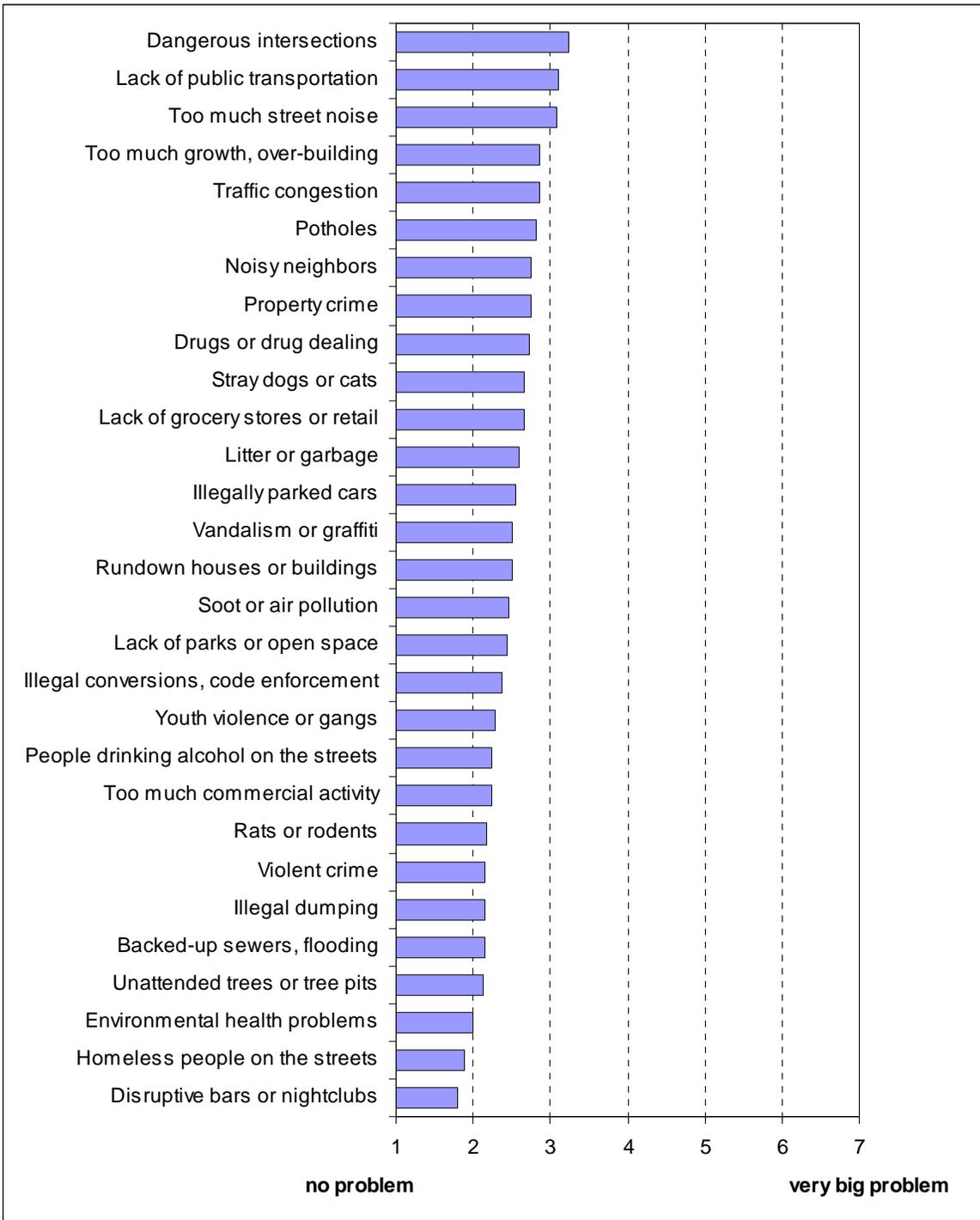


FIGURE 2 New York City: Neighborhood problems (in rank order)

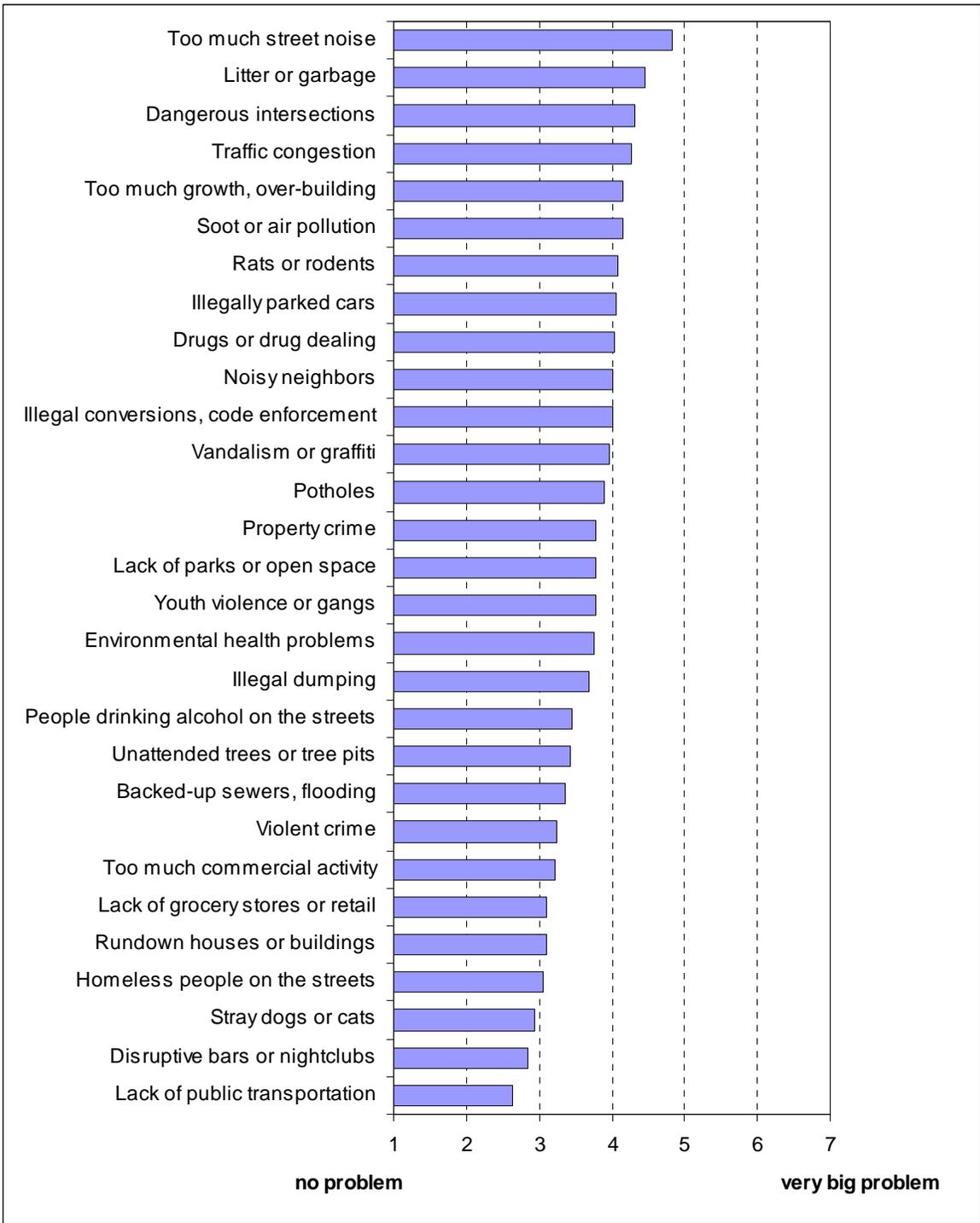


FIGURE 3 NYC Neighborhood Leaders: Neighborhood problems (in rank order)

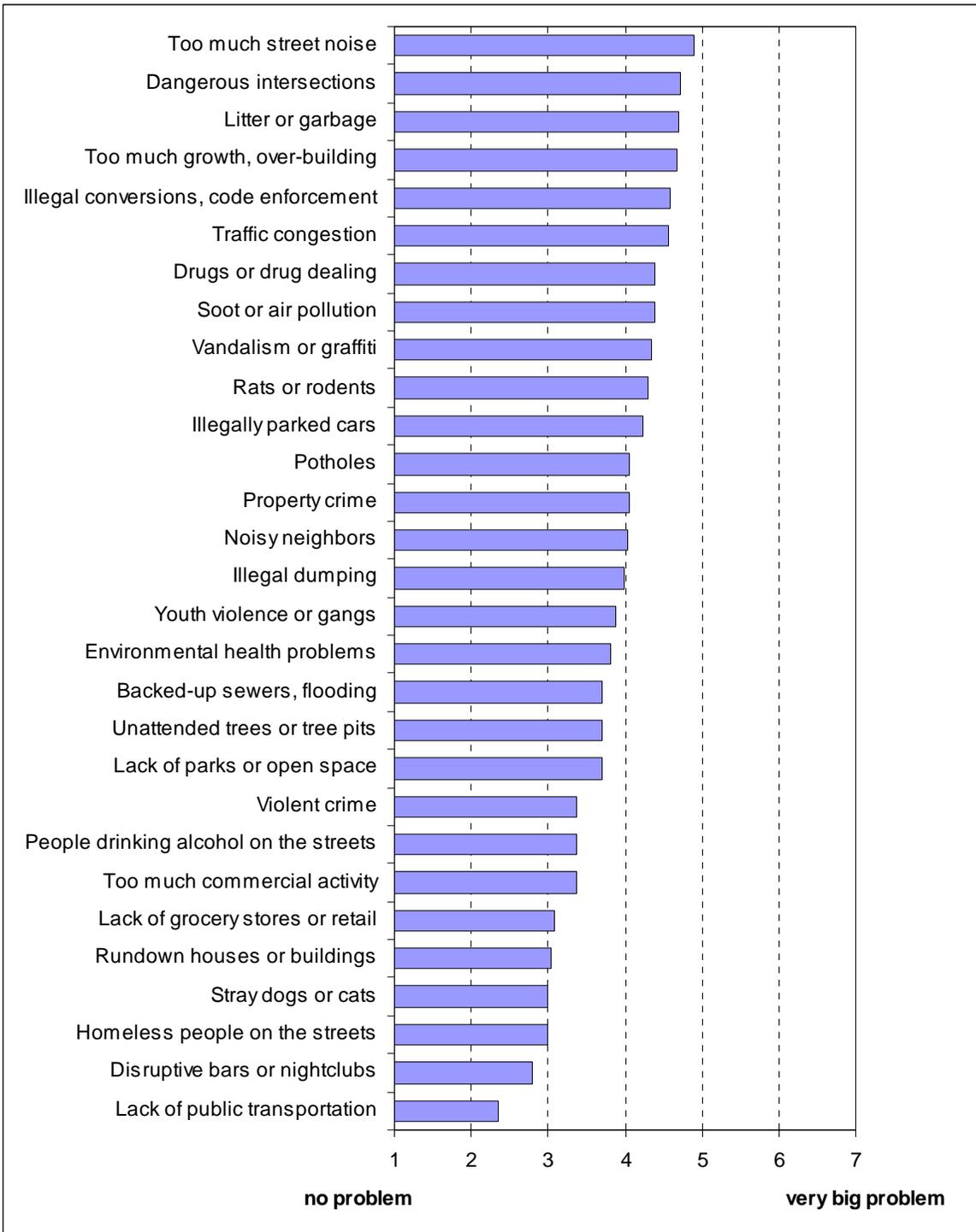


FIGURE 4 The Nation: Perceived change in neighborhood problems

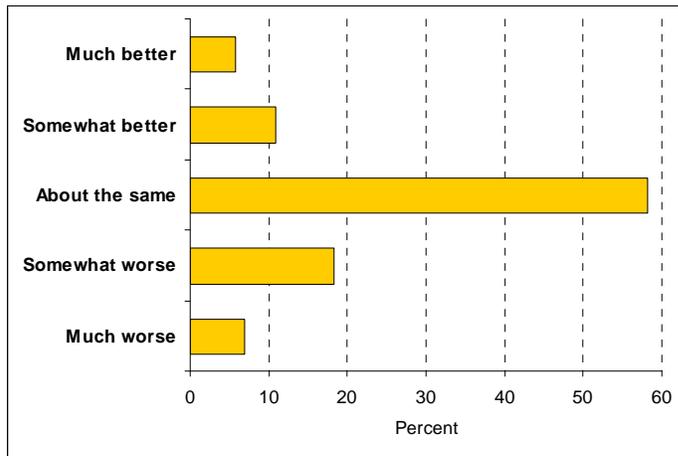


FIGURE 5 New York City: Perceived change in neighborhood problems

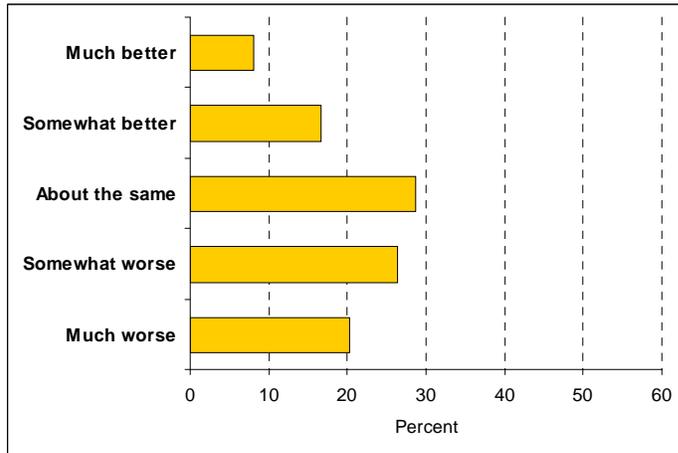


FIGURE 6 NYC Neighborhood Leaders: Perceived change in neighborhood problems

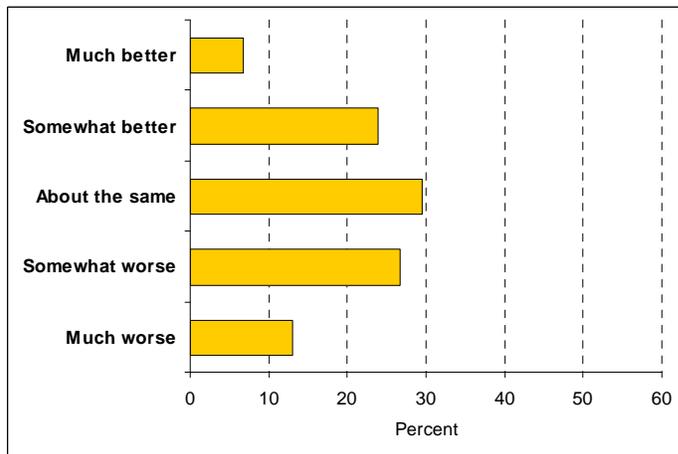


FIGURE 7 The Nation: Frequency of dealing with various agencies concerning neighborhood problems (in rank order)

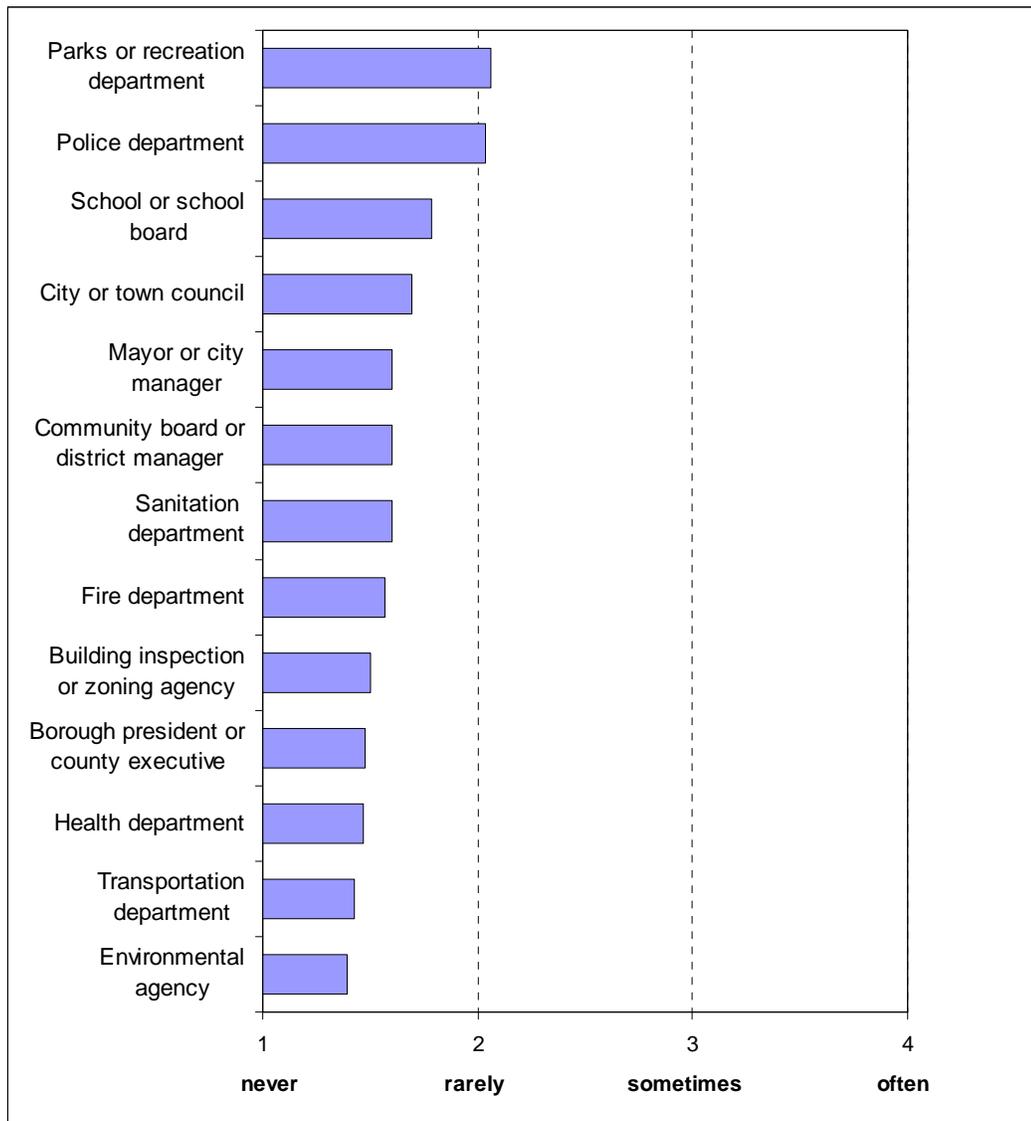


FIGURE 8 New York City: Frequency of dealing with various agencies concerning neighborhood problems (in rank order)

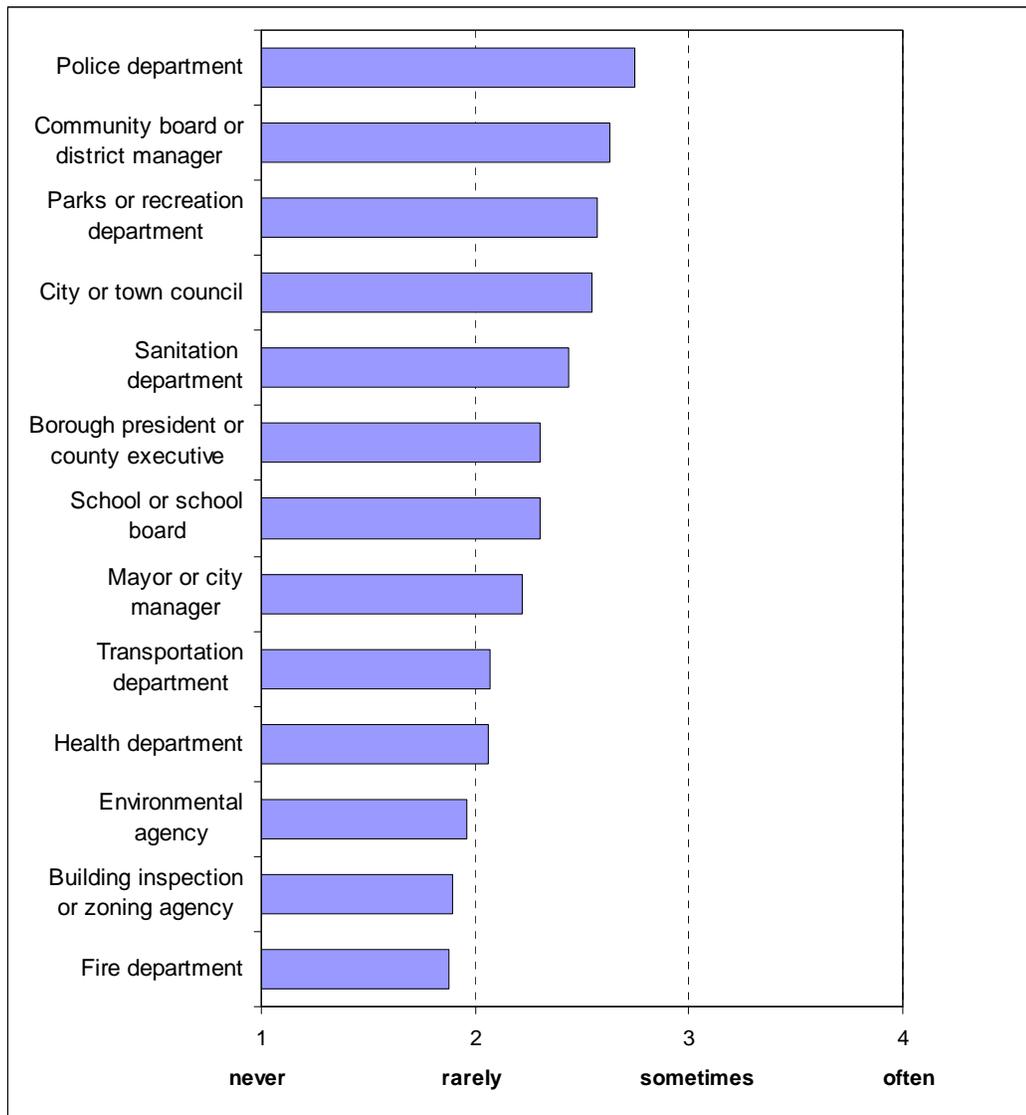


FIGURE 9 NYC Neighborhood Leaders: Frequency of dealing with various agencies concerning neighborhood problems (in rank order)

