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Special Report #8

Recycling Survey Spring 2005

A survey conducted in collaboration with



Gotham Gazette
New York City News and Policy

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Introduction and Background

This Special Report discusses findings of an eTownPanel online survey -- conducted in collaboration with Gotham Gazette -- about recycling in New York City. Gotham Gazette is a Web site published each weekday by the Citizens Union Foundation of the City of New York, a non-profit research and education affiliate of a good-government group that dates back to 1897. Gotham Gazette attempts to explain all the most important issues facing New York and New Yorkers. This survey focuses on identifying important attitudes and behaviors in recycling in New York City and the nation.

Methodological Note. The survey was conducted in June 2005, and included online responses from 1,974 eTownPanelists. 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, the results are weighted by gender, race, and age (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.

Findings

This section focuses on the findings of the survey with regard to household recycling in New York City and the nation. The data for the nation and New York City residents are weighted to reflect the general population (see methodological note above). This section also reports the views of residents of New York City and the nation on recycling at the workplace. Other findings include people's perception of local governments' commitment to recycling and the amount of effort employed by local government to educate the public about local recycling laws.

Awareness of Recycling Program

As Figure 1 shows, over 60 percent of New York City residents said they were familiar with New York City's recycling program. Approximately 15 percent said they were not at all familiar. The findings for the nation closely resemble those of New York City.

Figure 2 shows that over 60 percent of New York City residents have read very little or nothing at all regarding New York City's recycling rules. By contrast, the figure shows that over 70 percent of respondents in the nation have read a considerable amount more on their recycling rules.

Reported Participation

The survey asked respondents about their own household recycling habits. As Figure 3 shows, over 80 percent of households in New York City report that they separate garbage for recycling. The national data reveal participation that is more modest with nearly 35 percent of US households reporting not separating household garbage at all.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of household garbage that is separated for recycling – over 65 percent of New York City residents report separating more than half of their household garbage for recycling. The nationwide figures by contrast only show 50 percent of residents separating more than half of their household garbage. The figure also reveals a four-fold disparity between New York City and the nation in the number of households that report no separation of household garbage at all.

Local government's perceived role

The survey asked respondents about their perception of local government's efforts and commitment to recycling. Figure 5 shows that New York City residents are more skeptical than those elsewhere in the nation about local governments' commitment to recycling – In New York City, only 10 percent of residents, as opposed to 20 percent nationwide, believe that local government is very committed to recycling. Furthermore, nearly 40 percent of New York City residents, contrasted by only 27 percent nationwide, believe their local government is only somewhat committed to recycling.

Figure 6 deals with respondents' perception of local governments' performance in educating the public about their own recycling programs. 65 percent of New York City respondents reported that local government is doing a fair or poor job. The national figures show that 70 percent of respondents think the government is doing a good or excellent job.

Common misconceptions

Figures 7 and 8 show selected items that New Yorkers incorrectly categorize as recyclable or non-recyclable according to New York City's recycling laws. The figures also show the percentage of respondents who are unsure about the proper categorization according to the laws.

Change in recycling trend

Respondents were asked about the change over time in their recycling habits. Figure 9 shows that over 55 percent of New York City residents said they separate garbage more often than they did 5 years ago. The nationwide figure was well under 20 percent. Furthermore, only 6 percent of New York City residents, in contrast to 40 percent nationwide, reported that they separate their household garbage for recycling less often than they did 5 years ago.

Recycling at work

The survey asked respondents about recycling habits at work and their perception of their employers' commitment to recycling. Figure 10 shows that respondents in New York City and elsewhere the nation are in relative agreement about recycling habits at their place of work. Twenty five percent of respondents from both groups report that garbage is almost always separated for recycling.

Figure 11 shows a significant disparity between respondents in New York City and the nation – 7 percent of New York City residents, as opposed to 36 percent nationwide, report that their employer does an excellent job in encouraging recycling at the workplace. Forty percent of New York City residents, as opposed to 16 percent nationwide, believe their employer is doing a Poor job.

Composting

The survey asked respondents about the use of composting for recycling of household garbage – Figure 12 shows that only 7.5 percent of New Yorkers use composting as opposed to 18 percent of residents elsewhere in the nation.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from June 7 to June 14, 2005, and included responses from 1,974 US residents, 150 of whom live in New York City. 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, and age 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.¹

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

¹ 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. Income was not used as a weighting variable because of missing data and because of the difficulties comparing income across surveys.

FIGURE 1. How familiar would you say you are with the specifics of your local government's recycling program?

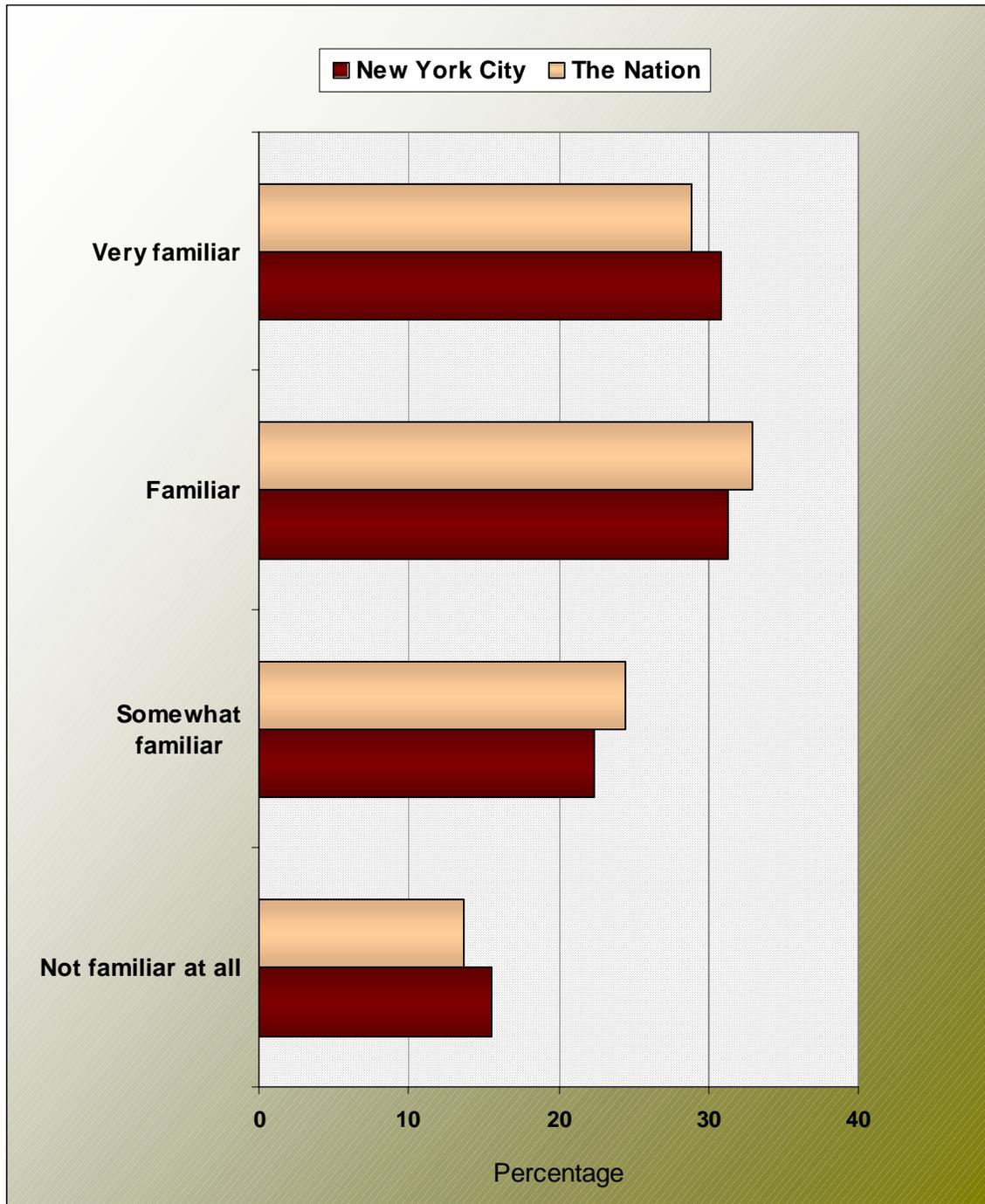


FIGURE 2. How much have you heard or read lately about your local government's recycling rules?

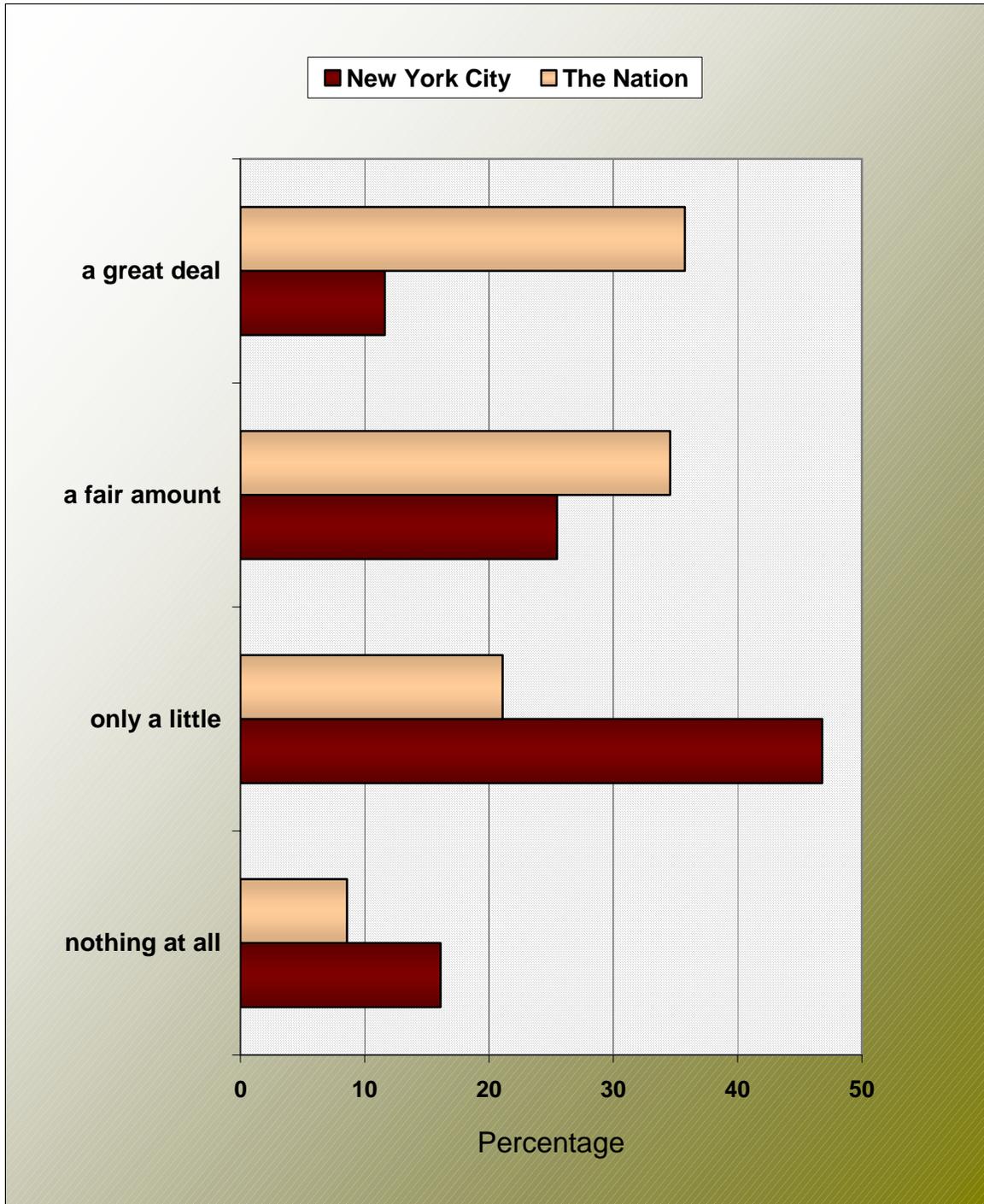


FIGURE 3. How often does your household separate garbage for recycling?

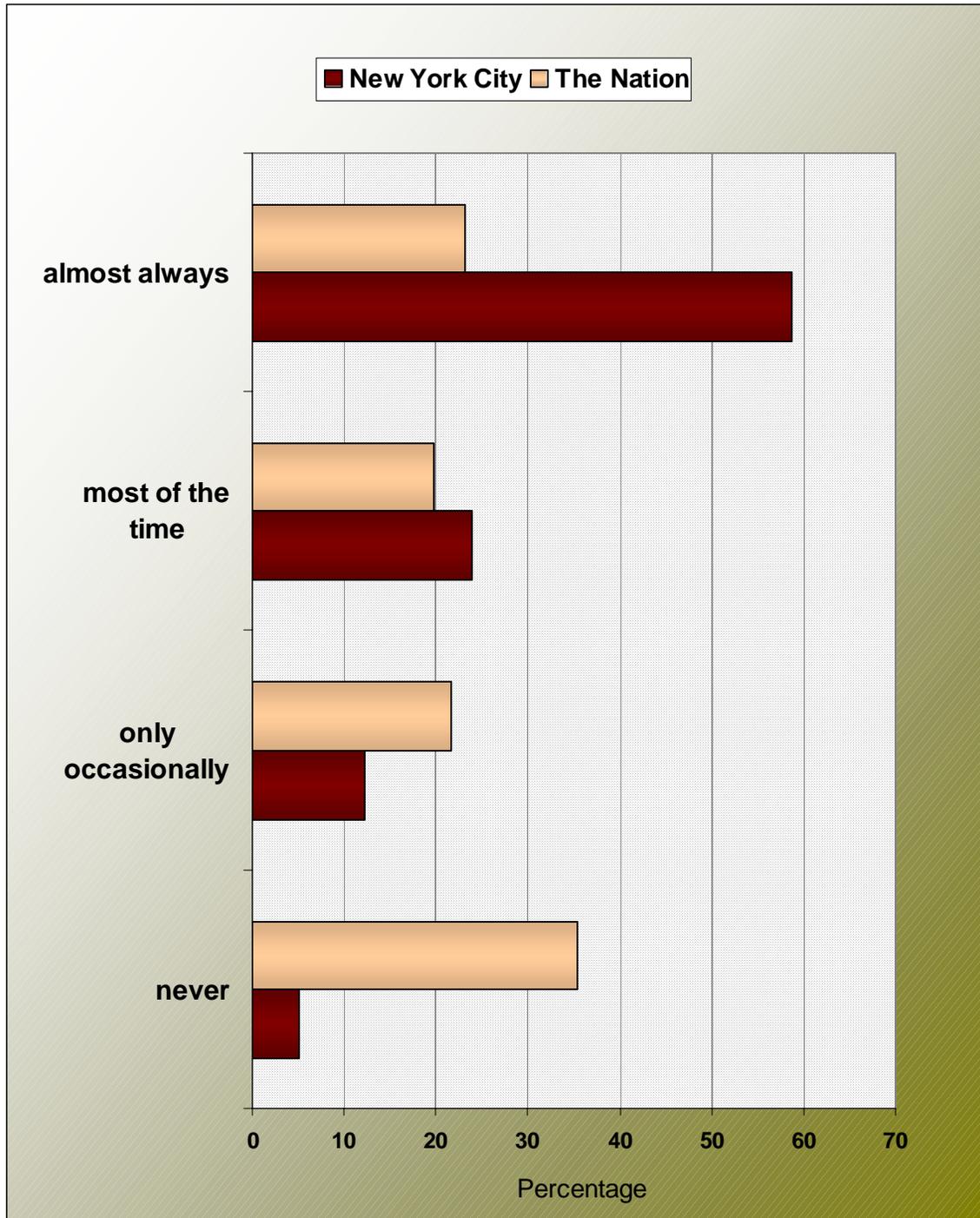


FIGURE 4. What percentage of your household garbage do you separate for recycling?

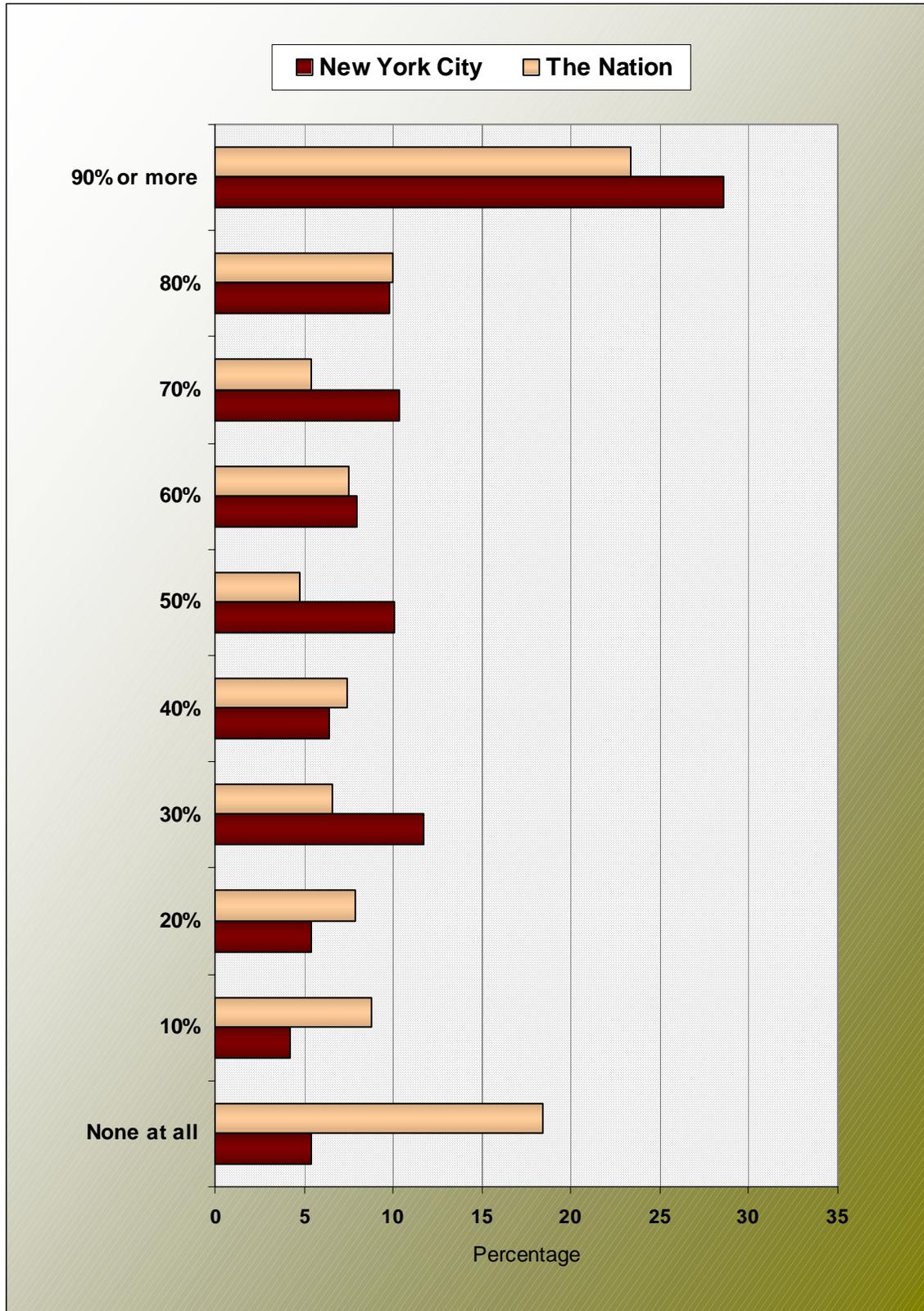


FIGURE 5. How committed would you say your local government is to recycling?

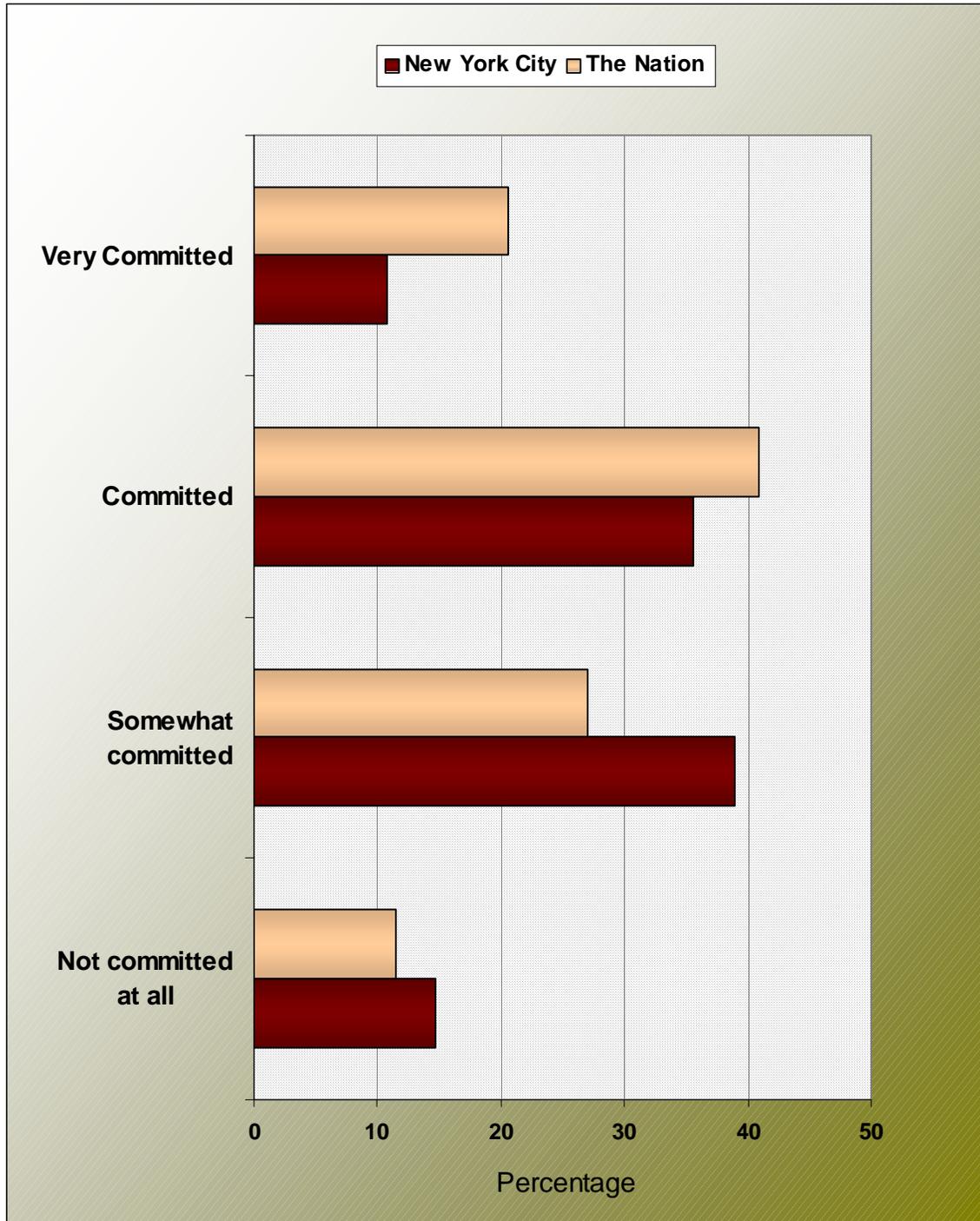


FIGURE 6. How would you rate your local government's performance in educating the public on the specifics of its recycling program?

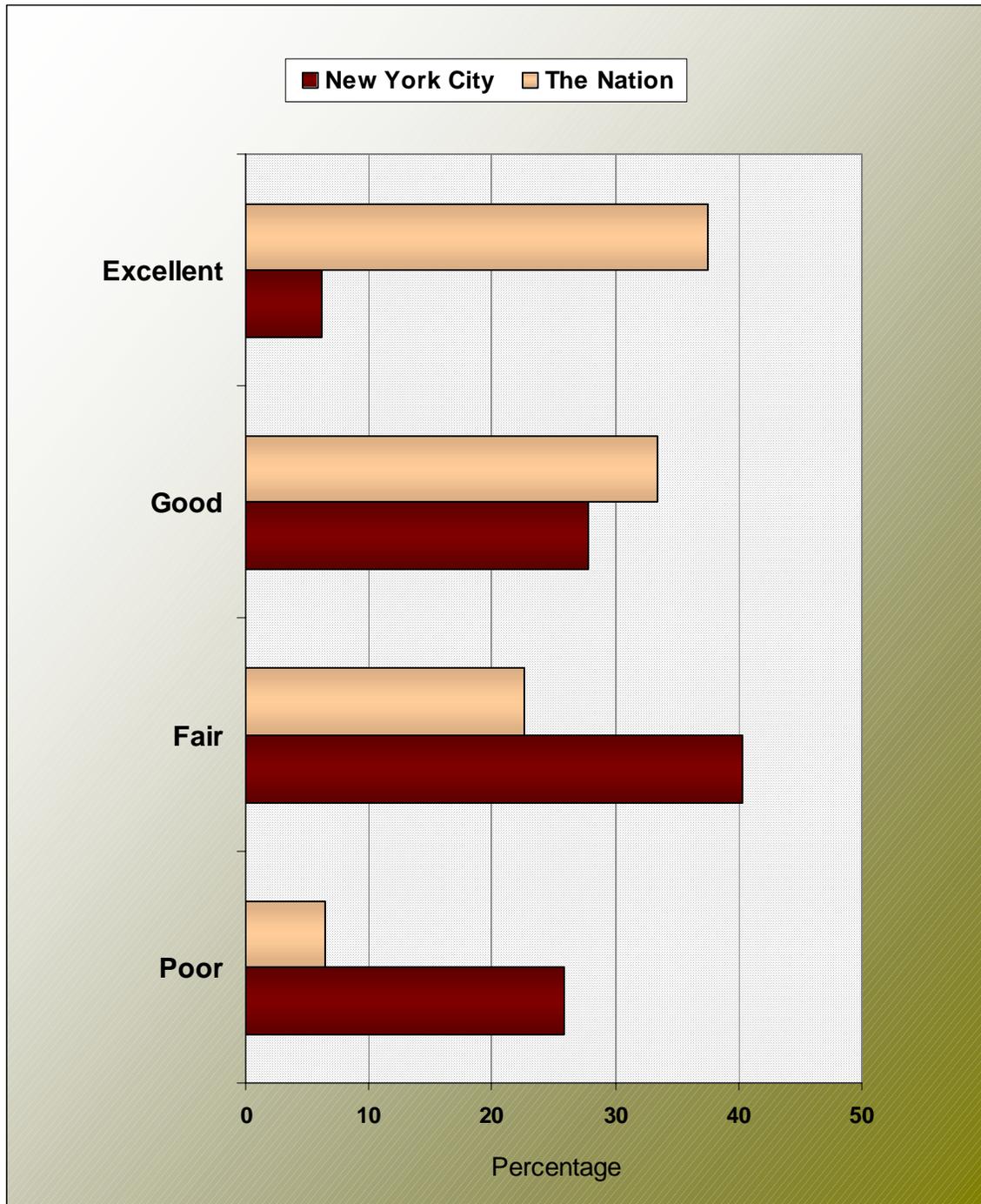


FIGURE 7. Items New Yorkers mistakenly believe are not recyclable according to New York City recycling laws

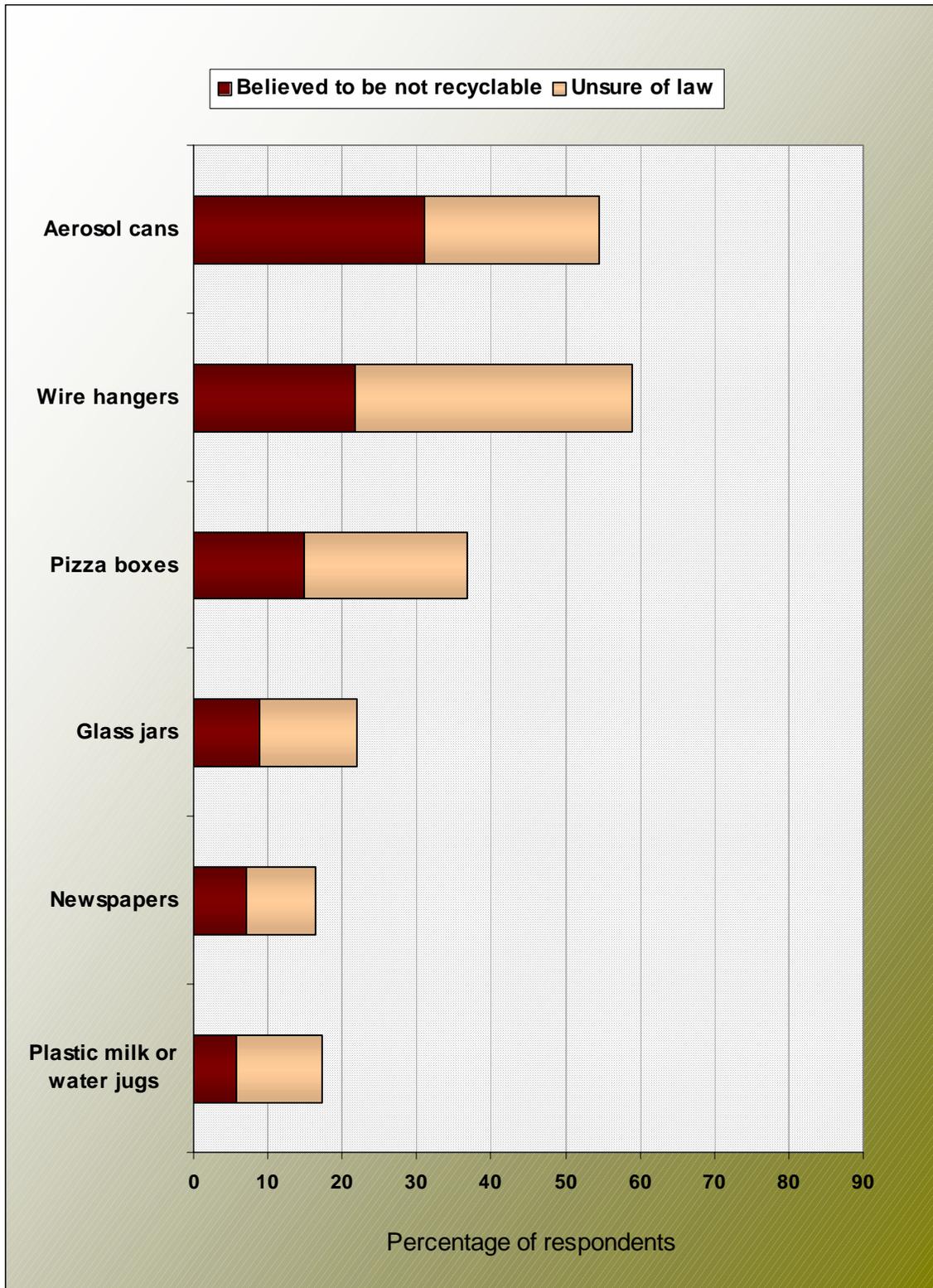


FIGURE 8. Items New Yorkers mistakenly believe are recyclable according to New York City recycling laws

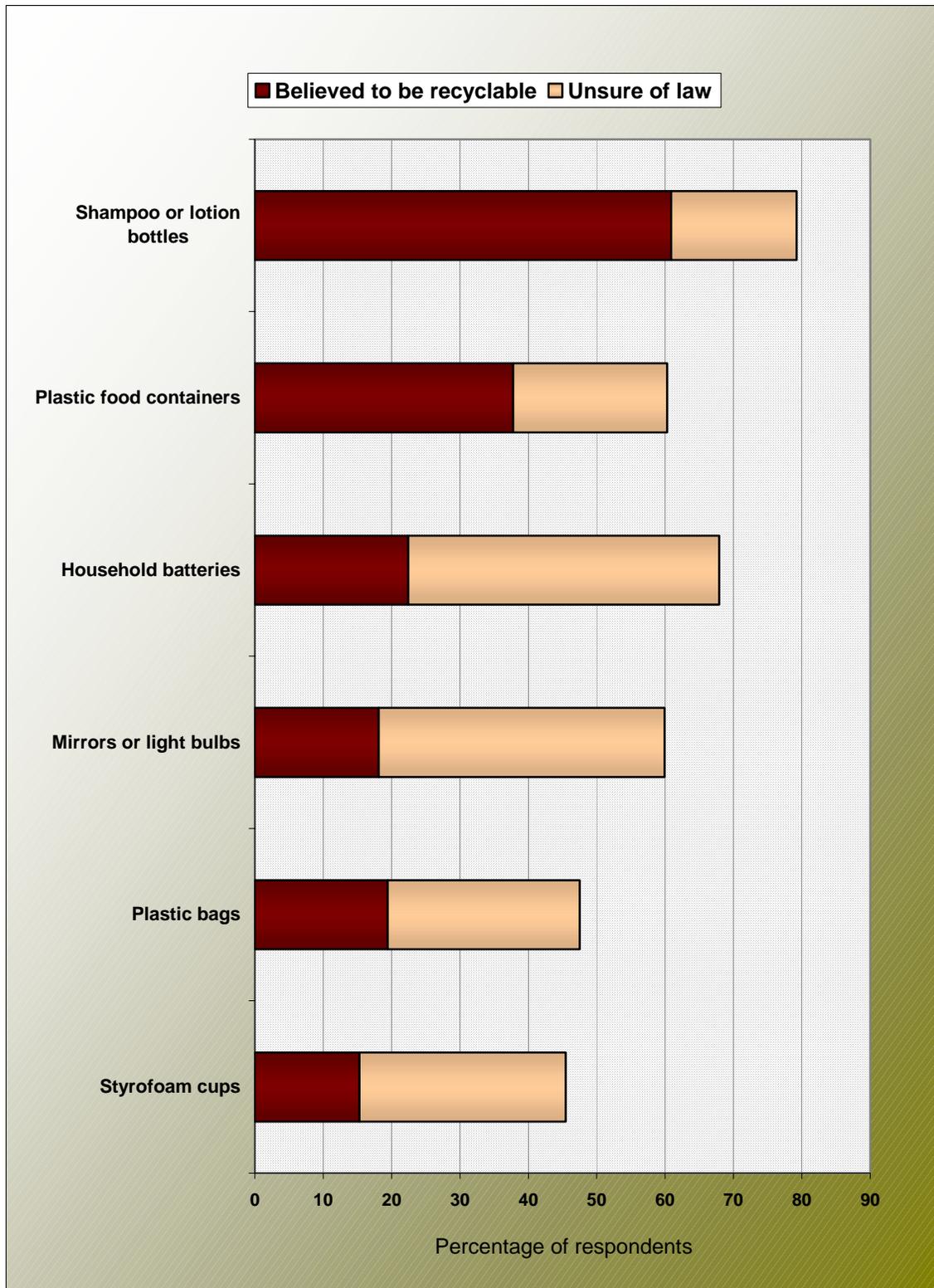


FIGURE 9. Would you say that you currently separate garbage for recycling more often, less often, or about the same as 5 years ago?

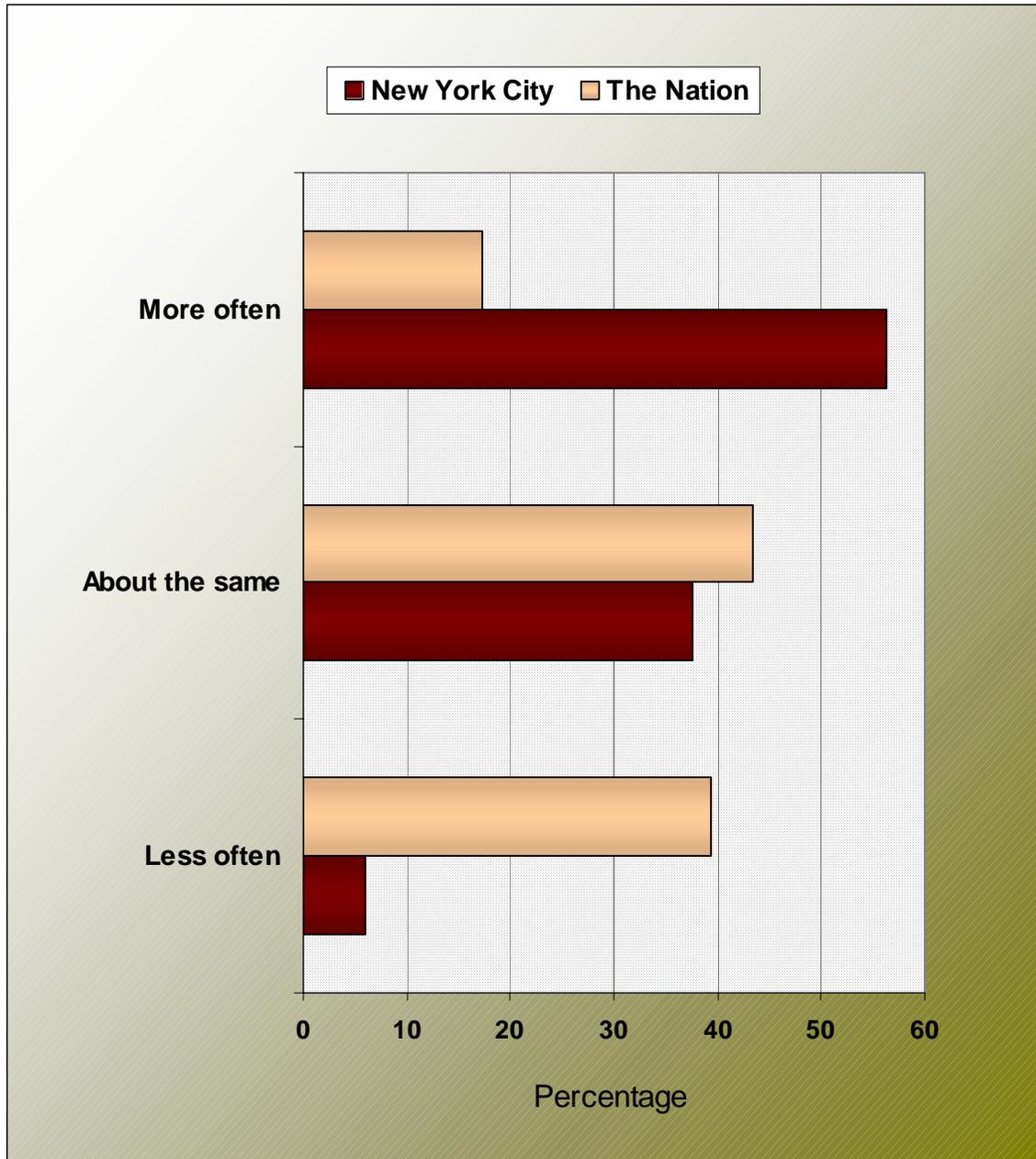


FIGURE 10. How often does garbage get separated for recycling at your place of work?

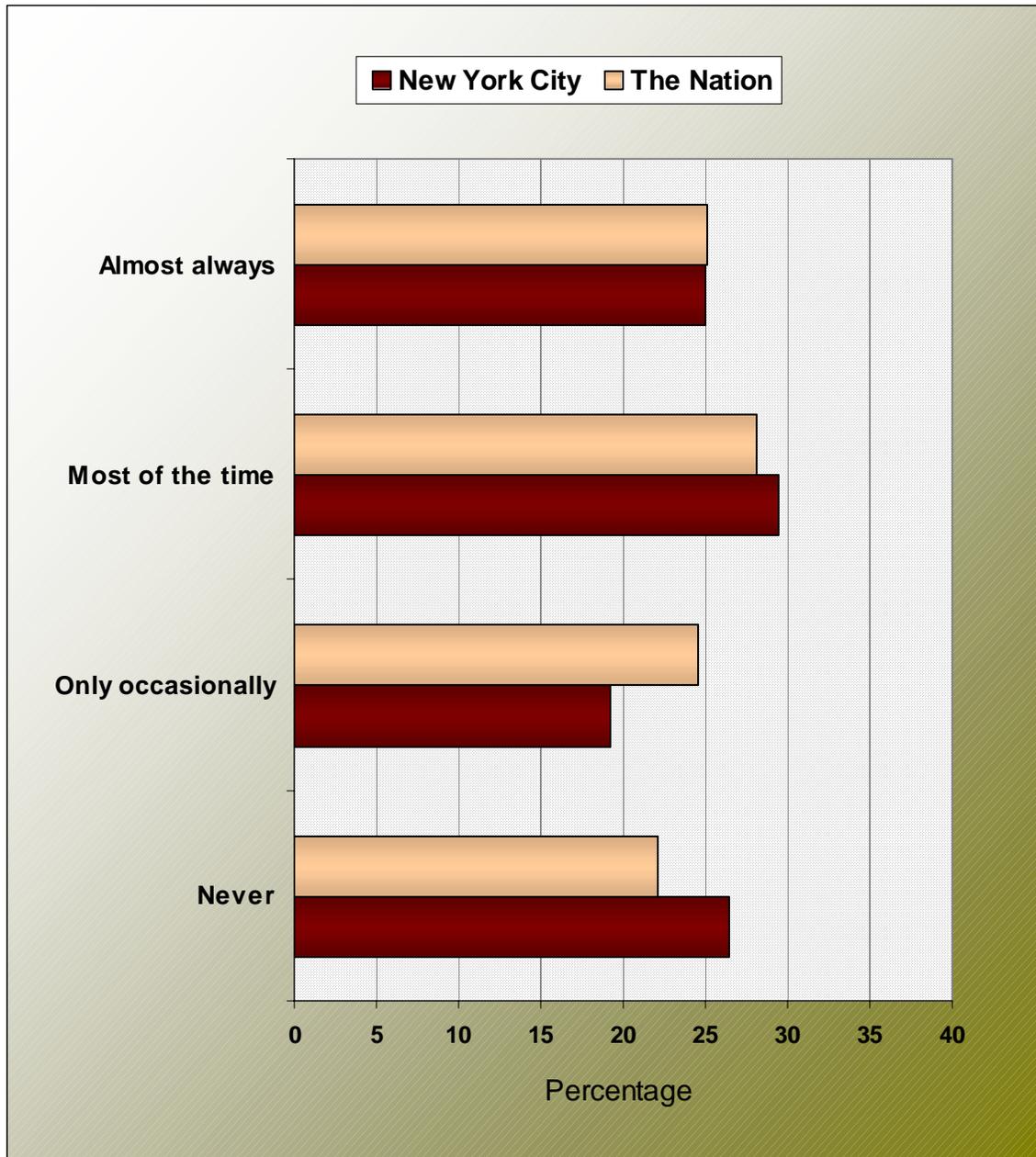


FIGURE 11. How would you rate your employer's efforts to encourage recycling at your place of work?

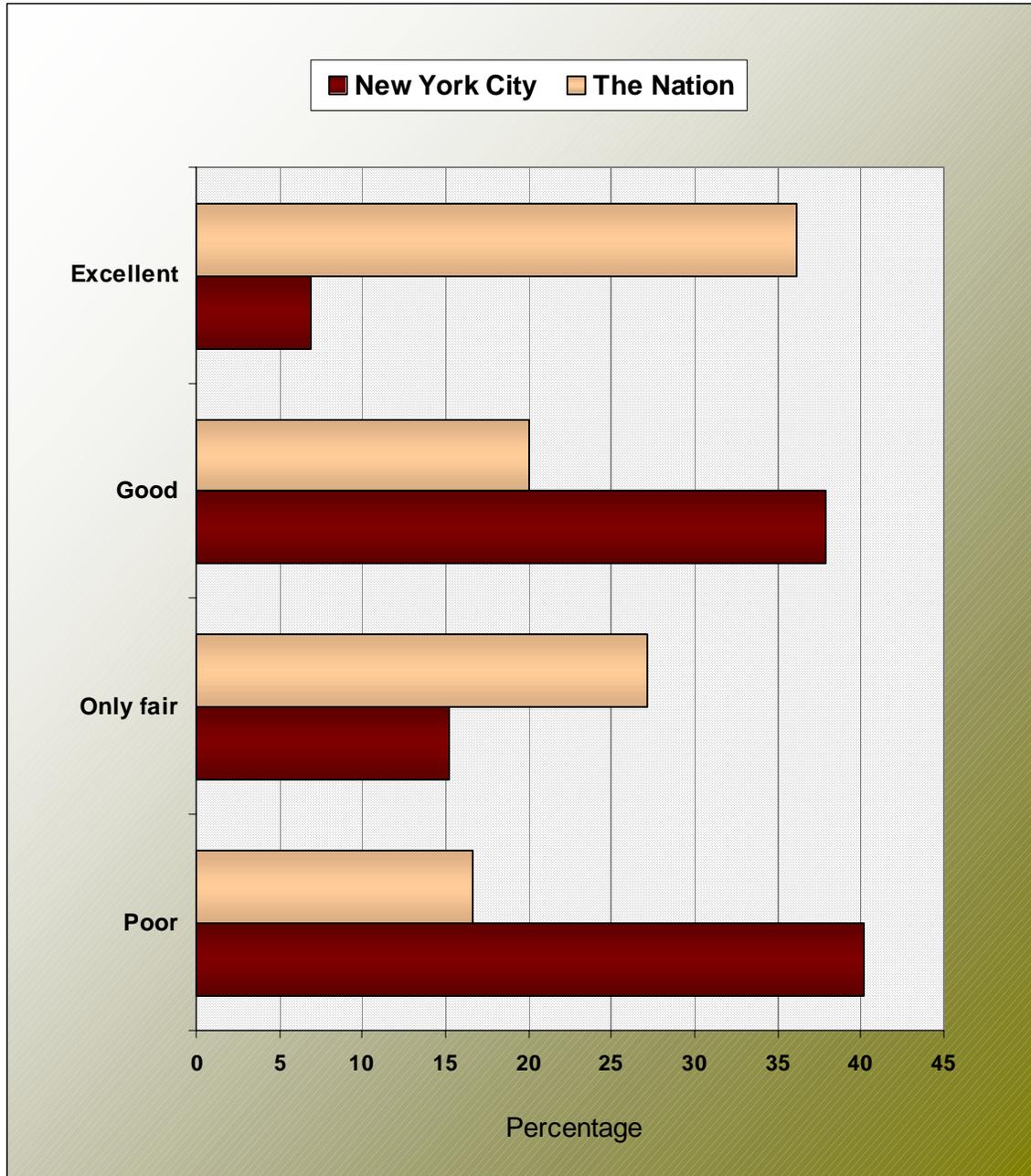


FIGURE 12. Do you use composting at all for any of your household garbage?

