

# State of the Cities 2017



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## About the National League of Cities

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

## About the Authors

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## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

Over the past year, all aspects of life seem to have become politicized, especially the way we think about cities. On the one hand, cities are drivers of creativity, productivity and growth. On the other, crime, affordability and racial and income disparities are very real problems. Which is right?

The reality is that both of these narratives are often true at the same time in the same city in different ways. As Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett stated in his 2017 State of the City address, “Despite our strong economic progress, we confront persistent challenges on a daily basis—concentrated poverty, violent crime, aging infrastructure and the nagging problems tied to the foreclosure crisis.” Although one characterization does not fit all, a common factor is that mayors have emerged as the nation’s leaders who are directly confronting—and often most

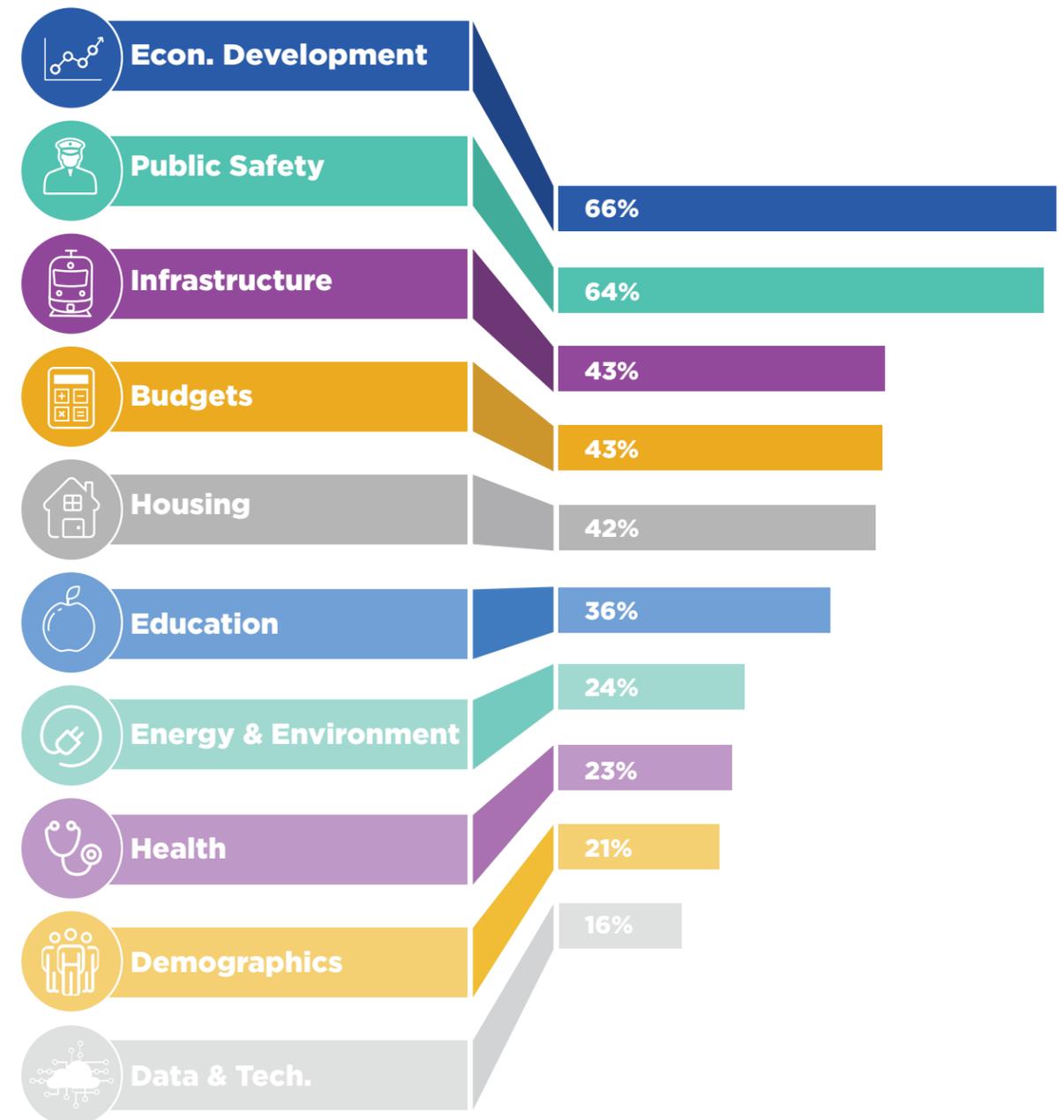
motivated to reconcile—all that is great and all that must be improved in our cities.

The State of the City speech is a reflection of the mayor’s priorities as well as the city’s accomplishments, challenges and roadmap for the future. National League of Cities’ annual State of the Cities report is a content analysis of mayors’ own words. It identifies both top-level issues, such as economic development and infrastructure, and specific policies, such as workforce training and transit in 120 mayoral speeches.

San Diego, CA Mayor  
Kevin Faulconer



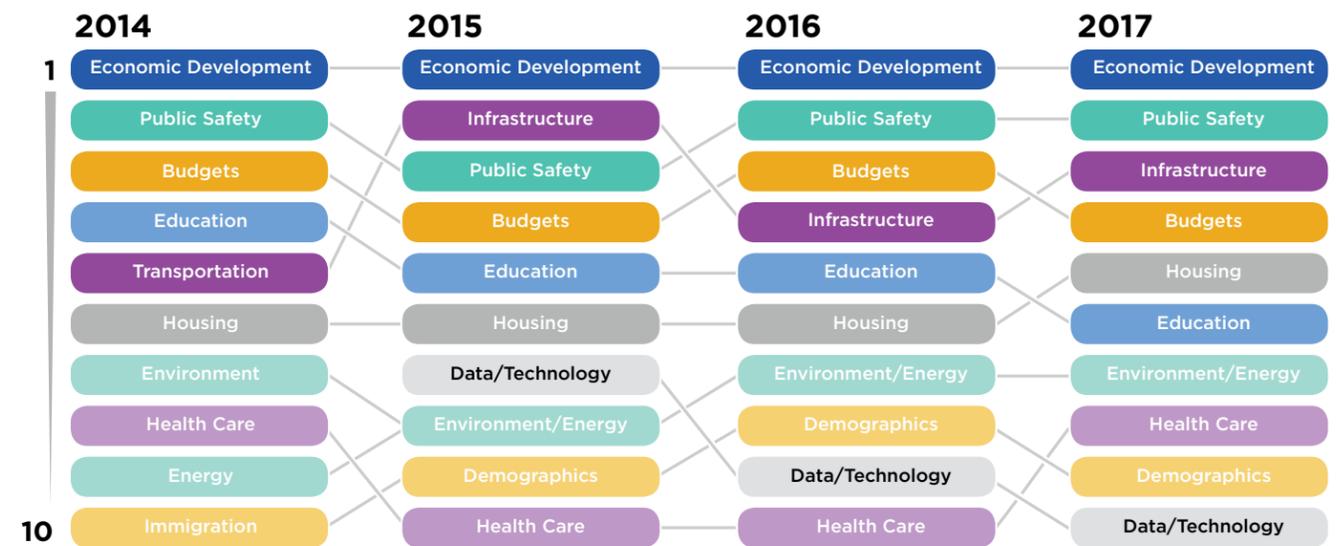
## Top 10 Issues



## Key Findings

- 1 The order and intensity of the 10 issues examined within mayoral speeches have remained relatively consistent over the past four years and fall into three tiers or levels of coverage within speeches: first-tier topics of economic development and public safety; second-tier topics of infrastructure, budgets, housing and education; and third-tier topics, such as health, environment, human rights and innovation.
- 2 Positive growth, both fiscally and economically, is trending, with mayors commonly touting what businesses have chosen to call their communities home, how many jobs were created in the last year, how many properties were developed and how much reserve funds have grown.
- 3 Public safety, housing and education receive more significant coverage in speeches of mayors in large cities; budget issues are covered more by mayors in the Northeast than in other regions.
- 4 When examining specific policies and programs, which we call subtopics, the core fundamentals of local government, such as police and fire protection, road paving and job creation, are consistently mentioned in mayors' speeches—no matter the size of the community.

Top 10 issues over the last four years



In addition to these key findings, it has become apparent that mayors are expanding what is possible within their leadership roles. They are helping to increase access to affordable child care services and after-school programs, passing paid leave and minimum wage ordinances, and working to create welcoming and equitable communities for all residents. Equity, in particular, is woven into all policy areas—from workforce development to youth outreach to access to internet—with some mayors also addressing poverty and racial disparities head-on.

Quite often, though, city efforts to expand the social safety net are those areas most prone to federal budget cuts and state preemption of local authority. Mayors spoke of being challenged by, yet committed to overcoming, the uncertainty and withdrawal of urban support by federal and state governments.

“When someone attacks local control, what they are attacking is our ability to make choices about the direction of our own communities. Fundamentally, disrespect for local control is grounded in a lack of trust in citizens’ abilities to hold their own local elected officials accountable,” said Mayor Ken Shetter of Burleson, Texas. In acting on behalf of their communities, mayors are exploring legal and legislative measures to “continue to adhere to the ideals that have long made [our city] a national beacon of tolerance, diversity, inclusivity, and hope,” said Mayor E. Denise Simmons of Cambridge, Mass.

These sentiments are precisely why mayoral State of the City speeches are so important. They reveal how mayors are leading on complex issues and managing the interconnectedness of their communities to ensure prosperity, fairness and resilience.

“It is in cities and towns across America that the most sensitive and important issues actually play out, from police-community relations to the development of our infrastructure.”

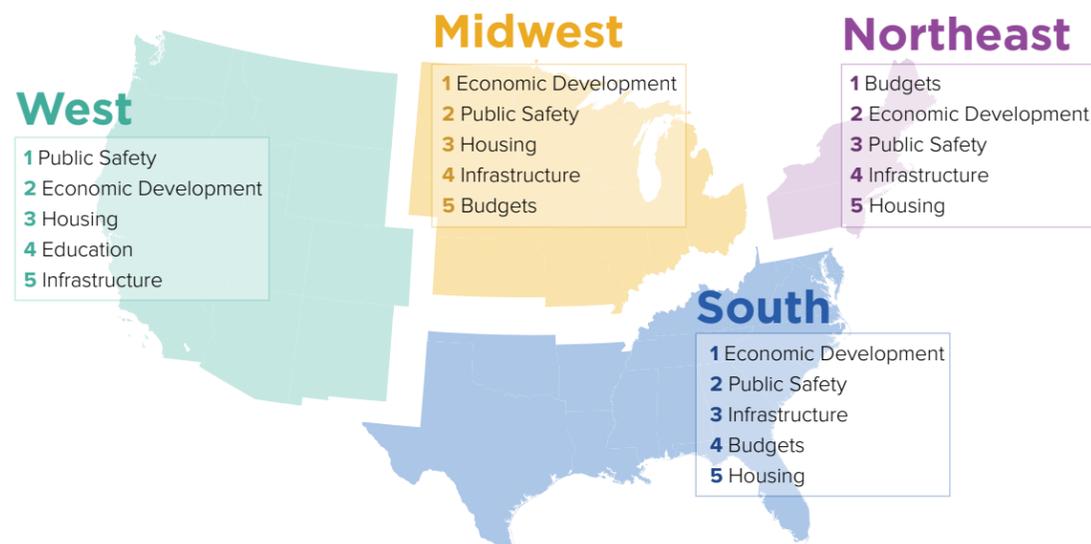


Mayor Pete Buttigieg  
South Bend, IN

Rank by population (top 5 significant coverage)



Rank by geographic region (top 5 significant coverage)



Washington, DC Mayor  
Muriel Bowser



Credit: Drew Angerer/Getty Images, 2017



**You can't have a recovery that includes everyone if there aren't jobs available for everyone willing to work.**

**Mayor Mike Duggan**  
Detroit, MI

## Topic Breakdowns





# Economic Development

Each year, economic development is the most discussed topic in mayors' addresses.

## Positive growth

Mayors often begin their addresses by sharing measures of economic growth, such as jobs created and developments built. In 2017, many mayors reported that wages and employment rates have risen to levels not seen since the Great Recession or even earlier. Lexington, Ky., Mayor Jim Gray and Salem, Mass., Mayor Kim Driscoll said that unemployment had fallen to rates not seen since the early 2000s. Jersey City, N.J., Mayor Steven Fulop celebrated a 25-year low in his city's unemployment rate saying, "the result of a deliberate process of working together with businesses to bring jobs and stability back to Jersey City."

Because not all of this growth has been equal among or within cities, economic inclusiveness is a major priority for some mayors. In Texas, Mayor Steve Adler stated that while the citywide employment is near 3 percent, the rate for Austin's African-Americans is nearly 10 percent. "Most of the jobs created in recent years do not pay a living wage, and our middle class is shrinking," he said. To address these issues, the city established an Equity Office.

## Workforce development

In light of equity issues, cities are also rethinking how to use economic development funds. Mayors spoke about investing in residents through workforce development initiatives. In Lynchburg, Va., where the State of the City address focused entirely on ending intergenerational poverty, Mayor Joan Foster and Vice Mayor Treney Tweedy discussed the mismatch between jobs and skills. "We are reaching out to our public schools, institutions of higher learning and nonprofits to work together to strengthen already-existing workforce development opportunities," Tweedy explained.

Cities are committed to developing the skills of their residents. In his speech, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan announced an online platform to link job seekers to employers and the relevant training programs hosted by Detroit at Work. In the fast-growing technology field, Kansas City, Mo., and Buffalo, N.Y., are connecting residents with coding schools and helping them enter the field. And Evanston, Ill., is continuing its partnership with Northwestern University in support of a skilled trades apprenticeship program. "To date, the program has a 100 percent employment rate," Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl reported.

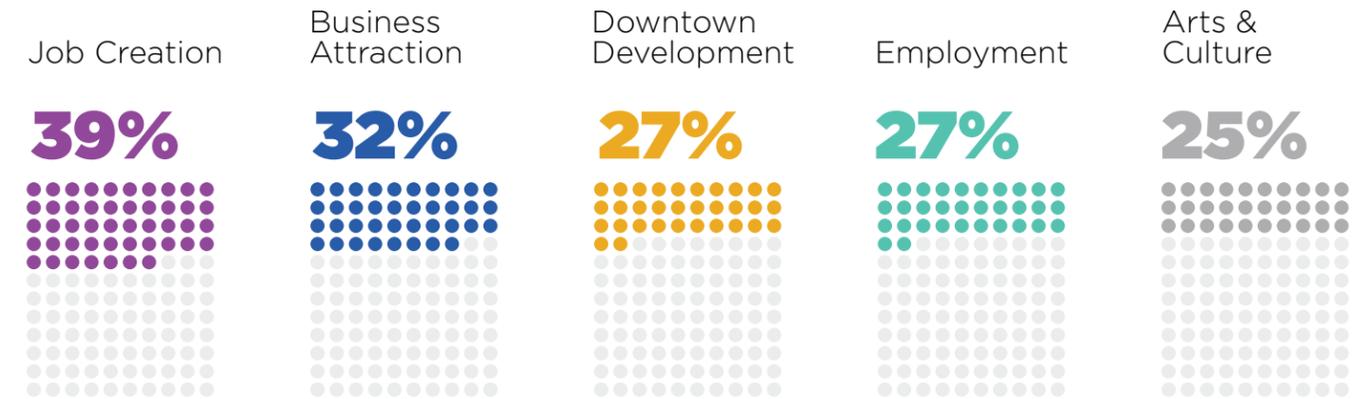
# 66%

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



## TOP 5

### ECON. DEVELOPMENT SUB-TOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.



*Like it or not, how our downtown looks and feels is a direct reflection on our city at large.*

**Mayor Glenn Elliott**  
Wheeling, WV



Cities are investing in public safety infrastructure and human capital.

### Increasing police force capacity to address crime

Officer recruitment and training was top of mind for many mayors this year. Increased revenues and better city finances have helped cities enlarge their police forces or return to fully staffed levels. Cities such as Plano, Texas, and Reno, Nev., have added dozens of new police officers in order to be more responsive and help prevent crime. In Hartford, Conn., Mayor Luke Bronin announced that, thanks to the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grant, his city was able to begin a multiyear recruiting effort. “And we’ve worked hard to recruit a police force that better reflects the community it serves,” said Bronin.

### Transparency, use of force and body cameras

Across the country, tensions between police officers and the communities they serve are coming to light. Mayors are responding to these concerns. In her speech, Salt Lake City, Utah, Mayor Jackie Biskupski stated, “While police officers continue to receive de-escalation training, a team of 25 officers will receive world-class implicit bias training.” Biskupski continued, “This team will be charged with training fellow officers on the new techniques and practices they learn.” In addition to training, cities continue to equip their police forces with body cameras to foster transparency and trust. “We have purchased body cameras and developed policies to protect officers and the public,” noted Omaha, Neb., Mayor Jean Stothert.

### 911/Emergency response infrastructure

A number of mayors noted an increase in calls to emergency dispatch systems. Even more commented that these systems need critical upgrades. “We have hired more than forty 911 dispatchers since last January and completely overhauled our broken dispatch system,” said San Diego, Calif., Mayor Kevin Faulconer. The city now answers 90 percent of calls in under 10 seconds. “Our calls to 911 are wildly out of proportion to our population, which compromises emergency services for everyone,” said Washington, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, who suggested that the city employ nurses at call centers to decide when an ambulance is necessary.

# 64%

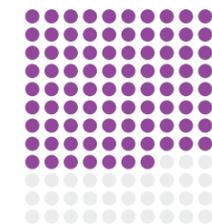
of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of public safety issues.



## TOP 5 PUBLIC SAFETY SUB-TOPICS

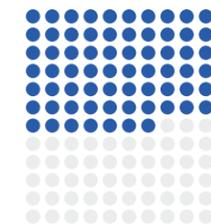
Police Department

### 73%



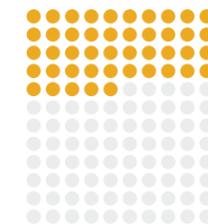
Fire Department

### 56%



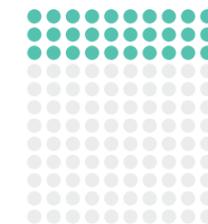
Crime Rate

### 38%



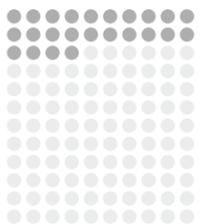
Officer Recruitment & Training

### 25%



Community Policing

### 20%



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.



*The nation saw much division over the past year and police and race relations were often the center of attention.*

**Mayor Nancy McFarlane**  
Raleigh, NC





# Infrastructure

**B**etter city finances are leading to infrastructure improvements.

### Aging infrastructure

With improved city finances, cities can now afford to address maintenance issues with roads and other infrastructure. Better finances also mean better credit ratings, making borrowing for improvements less expensive. In Atlanta, where the bond rating moved up to AA+, Mayor Kasim Reed plans to reduce the city's \$900 million backlog of infrastructure projects by half and to invest \$2.6 billion in an expansion of its regional transit system. "We will connect our neighborhoods and workers to our job centers in ways that we did not think possible just 24 months ago," said Reed.

Some mayors noted upcoming investments in aging infrastructure such as bridges, sewers and recreational facilities. "The combination of improved tax values, new growth and additional tax dollars will provide opportunities to address aging infrastructure in our city, revitalize neighborhoods and enhance our community amenities," noted Rowlett, Texas, Mayor Todd Gottel. In Scottsdale, Ariz., Jim Lane discussed the importance of funding: "We as individuals may only use a few roads, or this neighborhood park, but as a community of 240,000 people and millions of visitors, our infrastructure gets used by lots and lots of people all the time."

### Active transportation

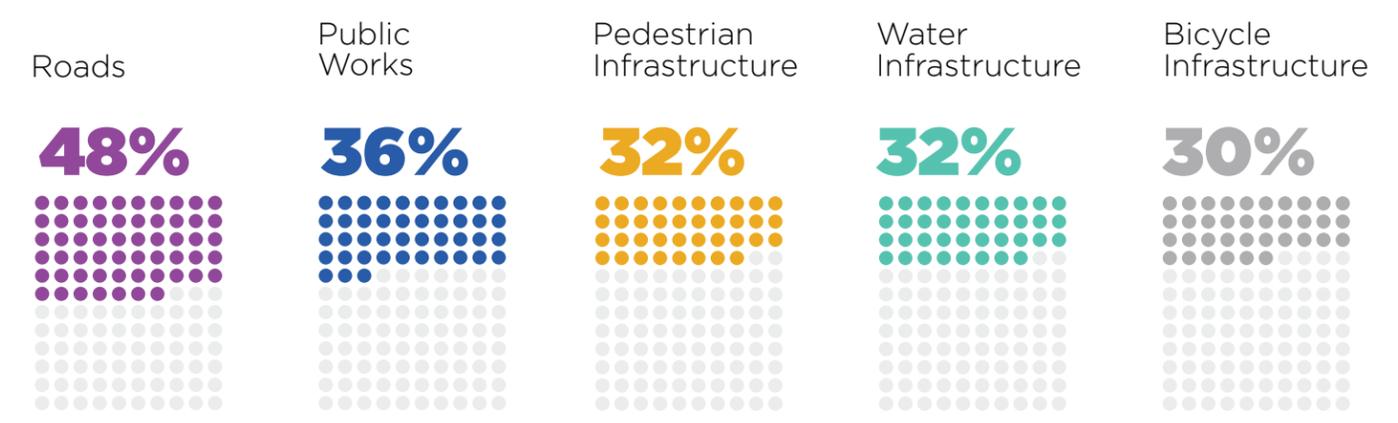
Active transportation infrastructure—from bike lanes to sidewalks to hiking trails—continues to be a popular issue. "In addition to our work on roads and public transit, we have also emphasized infrastructure improvements for bicycles and pedestrians, with the adoption of a new city bike share program," said Charleston, S.C., Mayor John Tecklenburg. These projects are intended to attract residents, improve health and spur commerce. "Smart cities are bright, walkable cities, where people feel safe to walk to neighborhood venues to shop or be entertained," Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh said regarding a sidewalk lighting project. These projects are also popular with residents. In Fort Wayne, Ind., Mayor Tom Henry noted how "more than 560,000 people biked, walked and ran on our trails in 2016, a record year." And in Wilmington, N.C., residents said their number one priority was to make the city "more walkable and bikeable," according to Mayor Bill Saffo.

# 43%

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



## TOP 5 INFRASTRUCTURE SUB-TOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.



*For too long, we have failed to plan and we've been locked in a constant process of waiting until things break before we fix them.*

**Mayor Jorge Elorza**  
Providence, RI



**M**ayors focus on planning for the future amid grant funding concerns.

### Growing reserves

After years of slow recovery, cities are much more stable fiscally. “This is the first time since 2007 that we are above our reserve policy of 15 percent of general fund annual expenditures in reserve,” said Folsom, Calif., Mayor Andy Morin. In Fall River, Mass., Mayor Jasiel Correia reported, “One year ago, the city had \$500,000 in stabilization funds while comparable cities had millions, and I am proud to tell you that we have over \$4 million in stabilization with a plan to have \$10 million by 2021.” Growing reserves allow cities to prepare for the next downturn. “We all know that the economy fluctuates,” said Columbus, Ohio, Mayor Andrew Ginther. “While we are strong, I am committing to increasing our Rainy Day Fund to \$80 million by 2020.”

Having saved, cities can now spend. Carson City, Nev., Mayor Bob Crowell noted how the presence of strong reserves “gives us some options as we look at recapitalizing city assets from buildings and grounds to the sheriff’s office and fire department.” And again, improved finances lead to improved credit ratings, making borrowing less expensive. “Moody’s rates the city at A1 and Standard & Poor rates us as AA-,” said Crowell. “That rating is important as it affects the rate the city is charged when we issue bonds.”

### Reliance on state and federal grants

While cities generate most of their own revenue, they rely on both the state and federal support, and are thus susceptible to fluctuations in grant funding and other intergovernmental aid. Las Cruces, N.M., Mayor Ken Miyagishima blamed “irresponsible tax cuts by the last two state administrations” for “a severe and continuing budget crisis, sharply restricting state investment in our city and region.” As Tucson, Ariz., Mayor Jonathan Rothschild noted, “On the subject of state-shared revenue, good partners don’t threaten to pull their funding if they don’t get their way on everything.” And caps on local revenues make it difficult for cities to respond to both changes in state funding and the demands of the local economy. “We must change the state funding formula that no longer favors Baltimore because of the wealth growth in our city, and it does not address the widening poverty gap,” said Mayor Catherine Pugh.

# 43%

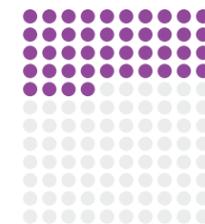
of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of budget issues.



## TOP 5 BUDGET SUB-TOPICS

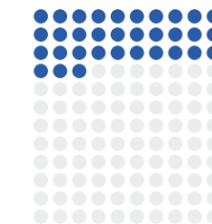
Revenues

### 37%



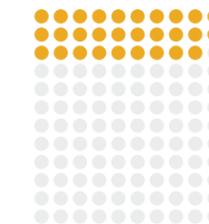
Credit Rating

### 28%



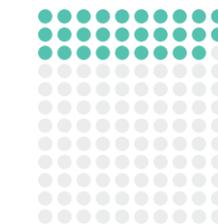
Grants & Aid

### 24%



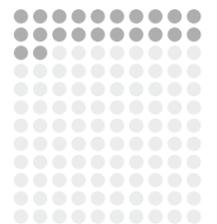
Property Tax

### 24%



Reserve Funds

### 18%



*Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.*



*If we are to thrive, we must invest.*



**Mayor Michael Purzycki**  
Wilmington, DE



# Housing

**A**ffordable housing, homelessness and zoning ordinances are top of mind for mayors.

## Affordable housing

Cities, especially the largest ones, still grapple with the need to provide affordable housing. “This affordability crisis threatens who we are, threatens the very soul of this city,” said New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, who thereby announced “a mansion tax” on home sales over \$2 million, which he estimates will generate \$336 million to provide affordable housing for senior citizens. In Raleigh, N.C., Mayor Nancy McFarlane reported on a plan to partner with local nonprofits to build more affordable housing and “ensure that people have options in housing choices.”

Rising prices affect working families as well as the least fortunate. “We need to ensure [that] the cooks who are making our meals at our favorite Long Beach restaurants, and the workers who are caring for our seniors and cleaning our hotel rooms, continue to have the opportunity to live in our city,” said Long Beach, Calif., Mayor Robert Garcia.

Additionally, homelessness also continues to be a concern for cities. As Anaheim, Calif., Mayor Tom Tait noted, “We are challenged to bring a balanced approach to this problem, an approach that both effectively and respectfully improves the lives of the homeless, and . . . addresses the impact on our neighborhoods, parks and local businesses.” To this end, cities are collaborating with nonprofits to provide essential services to homeless individuals and ease their transition to stable housing.

## A closer look at zoning

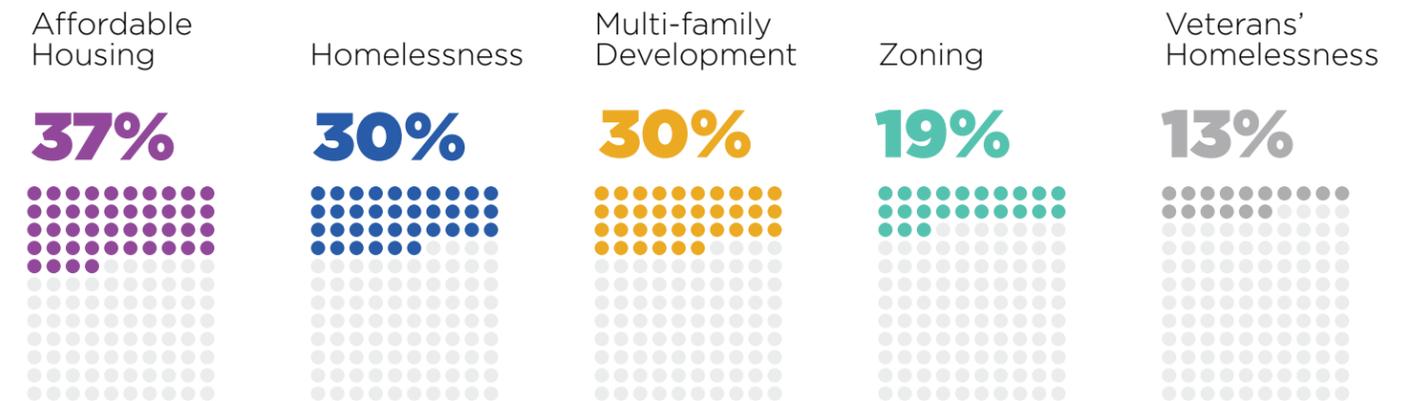
One way to address affordability is to allow more units to be built. Mayor Lucy Vinis of Eugene, Ore., announced plans to address “what is known as missing middle housing”—that is, “apartments and townhouses that meet our need for denser development and can begin to fill our affordability gap.” Another tactic is to mandate the amount of affordable housing that must be built. Accordingly, Mayor Setti Warren of Newton, Mass., announced the passage of two ordinances: “one to increase the number of locations where accessory apartments are allowed by right and another that includes changes to inclusionary zoning to ensure that developers looking to build in Newton create a higher percentage of affordable and middle-income units in their projects.”

# 42%

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



## TOP 5 HOUSING SUB-TOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.



“The single greatest issue we are facing is the availability of affordable housing.”

**Mayor E. Denise Simmons**  
Cambridge, MA



# Education

Cities are devoted to preparing the workforce of the future.

## After-school education

Lacking direct oversight of their local school systems, many cities instead coordinate programs that engage children outside of normal school hours. “We know that if we are going to truly excel as a city, then we need a framework for our young people to excel in now and equip themselves to be future leaders,” said Little Rock, Ark., Mayor Mark Stodola, announcing a \$5.5 million yearly investment in youth intervention and prevention programs.

In Biddeford, Maine, Mayor Alan Casavant noted, “I believe that this city, and the state of Maine, must begin investigative dialogues to determine the feasibility of expanding options for kids after school.” These programs can both enrich the learning experience for struggling students and divert their attention from more dangerous behaviors. “The added stability that such programming can offer our students, as well as the building of self-confidence and self-esteem, will pay dividends in the future lives of these individuals,” said Casavant.

## Career readiness programs

Several cities have created summer internship and job programs to prepare youth for their careers, exposing thousands of students to work experiences ranging from city hall to public works or even private enterprise. In Jersey City, N.J., Mayor Steven Fulop spoke about the city’s Summer Works Initiative: “Programs such as this give young people in our communities a chance to explore different career paths and learn crucial skills that will help to move them forward.”

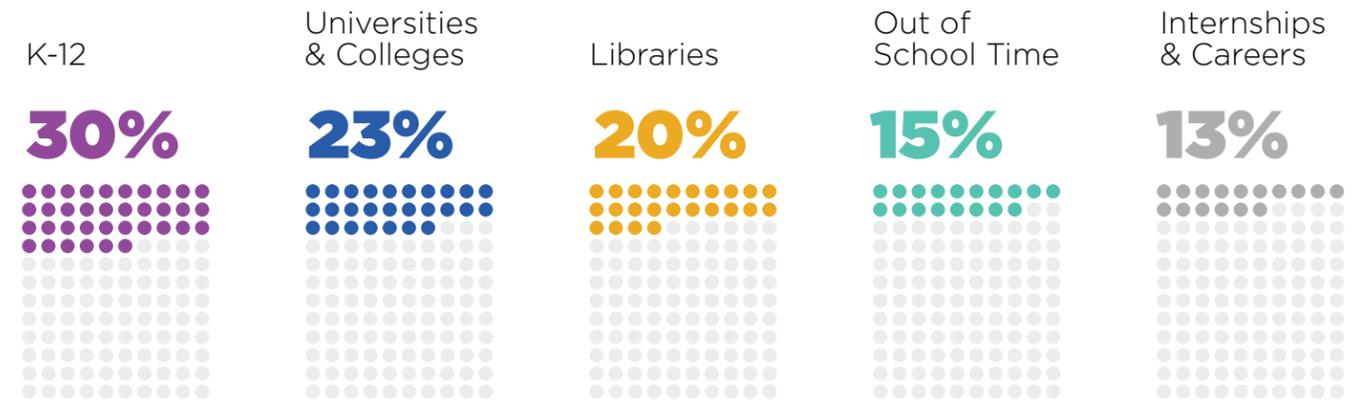
Referring to the 12,500 applicants for Baltimore’s Youth Works program this past summer, Mayor Catherine Pugh said, “If we don’t employ our youth, the drug dealers will.” To be successful, these programs require collaboration between cities, nonprofits and businesses. “This year we’re expanding our summer youth employment program, Hire KC Youth, from City Hall to citywide,” announced Kansas City, Mo., Mayor Sly James. “Under the leadership of the Kansas City Social Innovation Center and the Full Employment Council, more kids will have access to meaningful workplace experiences during the summer and beyond.”

# 36%

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



## TOP 5 EDUCATION SUB-TOPICS



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.



“When the children of our city are safer because our Stay and Play program has provided a safe haven from the gangs and guns and the violence on the streets, Tampa wins.”

**Mayor Bob Buckhorn**  
Tampa, FL



**M**ayors recognize the impact of climate change and the need to be resilient.

### Resilient communities

Cities are leading the charge to build sustainable communities. In some areas, the desire to become resilient against the effects of climate change is not just a desire but a necessity. “Sea level rise and extreme weather events are creating challenges that our city simply cannot solve with its existing practices and procedures,” said Mayor John Tecklenburg of Charleston, S.C, where the new position of director of emergency management and resilience will coordinate with city departments to address these challenges.

West Palm Beach, Fla., Mayor Jeri Muoio announced that improvements to energy efficiency and plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions earned her city a 4-STAR rating from the STAR Community Rating System, “the nation’s leading program for evaluating local sustainability.” And Columbia, S.C., Mayor Steve Benjamin announced city plans “to give away 1,000 [water-conserving] rain barrels, which keeps approximately 50,000 gallons of rainwater from otherwise flooding into our streets, potentially damaging our infrastructure, homes and businesses.”

### Renewable energies

Cities from coast to coast are embracing clean and renewable energy sources to reduce their carbon footprints. Such sources “now make up more than 40 percent of San Diego Gas and Electric’s grid,” said Mayor Kevin Faulconer. San Diego is one of several cities that has or intends to become entirely reliant on renewable energy.

These projects benefit not only the environment but also city finances. “In January, the city’s long-planned solar energy project began installation of a 2.1-megawatt solar array on several city facilities,” announced Troy, N.Y., Mayor Patrick Madden. “We expect this to be up and running within a few short months, generating recurring savings on our energy bills.”

Other cities are helping businesses and households become less dependent on fossil fuels. In New Haven, Conn., Mayor Toni Harp announced that “the permitting process has been streamlined to accommodate more than 600 solar-power installations,” making it easier for developers to promote sustainability.

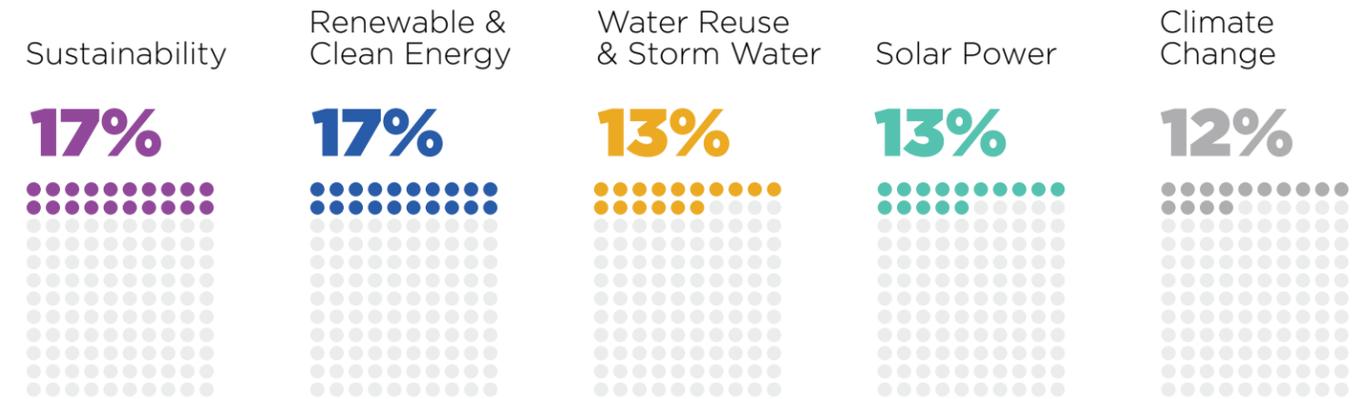
# 24%

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



## TOP 5

## ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY SUB-TOPICS



*Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.*



*We are America’s climate champion, with a target date of 2050 for going 100 percent carbon-neutral.*

**Mayor Martin Walsh**  
Boston, MA



# Health Care

Mayors are addressing the opioid crisis and creating a culture of health.

## Opioids: From recognition to remediation

The opioid crisis continues to be a major topic of concern. “While life is good for many in our community, others live in a state of despair and often turn to devastating substances to fill the emptiness in their lives,” said Cave Junction, Ore., Mayor Daniel Dalegowski, who hopes the city can “obtain grants towards better treatment and resources for those who have fallen under the spell of addiction.”

While last year mayors were discussing policies for action, this year they are assessing implementation. “Every day Dayton EMS and police officers are saving lives through the use of Narcan,” said Mayor Nan Whaley of Dayton, Ohio. In Duluth, Minn., where opioid deaths have doubled over recent years, Mayor Emily Larson announced that “local health care systems are collaborating to decrease the number of prescriptions and the quantity of opioids provided by doctors, as well as developing shared emergency room policies that help curb ‘doctor shopping’ for painkillers.”

## Culture of health

A major focus in the field of public health is how environment—where people live—affects health outcomes. For Mayor Greg Fischer of Louisville, Ky., that means “physical health, mental health and environmental health.” Louisville released its Urban Heat Management Study to study air pollution and extreme temperatures, as well as programs to plant more trees and discourage e-cigarette usage. Scottsdale, Ariz., Mayor Jim Lane discussed how his city has leveraged a robust bioscience industry to improve recreational amenities, such as trails and parks, to create a healthy community.

In some cities, access to nutrition can be difficult to come by. Binghamton, N.Y., is among a handful of cities that are addressing their food deserts. “The city has stepped up in new ways, spearheading the Fresh Mobile Market . . . to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables across the North Side,” said Mayor Richard David. “While the program started small, it has distributed more than 28,000 pounds of produce and served more than 3,100 customers since last summer.”

# 23%

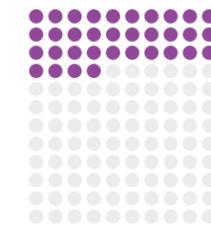
of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of health care issues.



## TOP 5 HEALTH CARE SUB-TOPICS

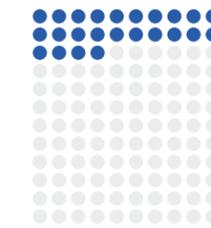
Parks & Recreation

### 28%



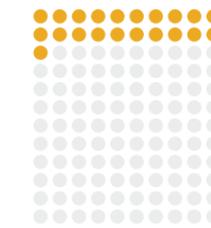
Substance Abuse

### 20%



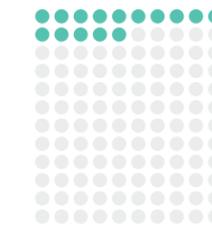
Opioid Addiction

### 18%



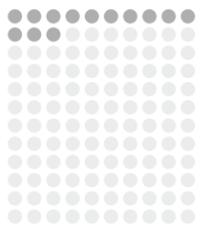
Hospitals & Clinics

### 13%



Access to Nutrition

### 11%



Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.



## Healthy communities lead to a thriving city.

**Mayor Catherine Pugh**  
Baltimore, MD





# Demographics

**M**ayors countered national fervor with positive statements about their communities.

## Embracing diversity

Many mayors contrasted the nation's discordant politics with the consensus building within their cities. In Seattle, Mayor Ed Murray addressed the issue directly: "The people, not the president, will decide who we are as a nation." In that spirit, some mayors noted the welcoming nature of their communities. "We now have a variety of cultures and languages with residents from throughout the U.S., South America, Europe, Eastern Europe, Canada, and the Middle East," said Mayor Bud Scholl of Sunny Isles Beach, Fla. "This cultural diversity is one of the most prominent and defining features of our city's identity." Similarly, Mayor Toni Harp of New Haven, Conn., said she was "proud and grateful to lead a government and city staff that serves residents, businesses, colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, visitors and others, regardless of skin tone, national heritage, cultural background, language spoken, economic standing, religious affiliation or sexual preference."

## Welcoming immigrants

Some mayors highlighted their city's positive relationship with immigrants and refugees. Said Mayor Martin Walsh, "We don't just welcome immigrants in Boston, we help them thrive." In Michigan, Mayor Mike Duggan announced that Detroit now offers municipal IDs for those lacking documentation: "We've welcomed more than 50 Syrian refugee families . . . and they've come here with nothing but acceptance because that's who we are as a city."

Some mayors even reaffirmed their city's sanctuary status for undocumented immigrants. "We are . . . committed to protecting the rights of our immigrants, the underserved, and every single person whose contributions have been discounted or dismissed for way too long," said Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser. In Austin, Texas, Mayor Steve Adler explained the importance of a trusting relationship between immigrants and law enforcement. "Our public safety officers do what they do because they believe it makes us safe. If the federal immigration service wants someone held in our county jail because it thinks they're dangerous, all they have to do is to get a warrant. It's that easy."

# 21%

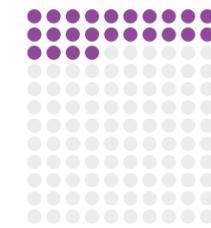
of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of demographics issues.



## TOP 5 DEMOGRAPHICS SUB-TOPICS

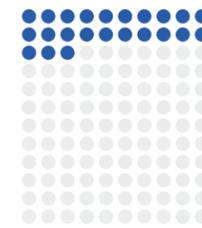
Diversity

### 20%



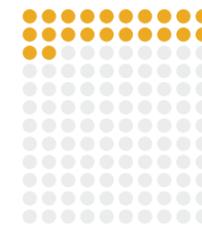
Youth

### 19%



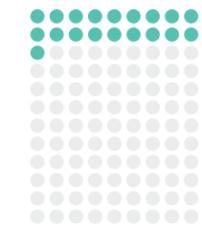
Veterans

### 18%



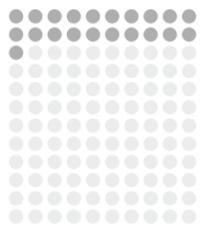
Seniors

### 18%



Immigration

### 18%



*Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.*



*We are truly a reflection of America. And that is an amazing thing.*



**Mayor Steve Ly**  
Elk Grove, CA



**T**echnology is becoming increasingly imbedded into city operations.

### Data governance

Cities are becoming more innovative when it comes to incorporating technology into government procedures. “You can apply for a building permit or license online through our Accella system, review our strategic plan and annual report cards, contact the Mayor’s Hotline, apply for our job openings, view city budgets and financial reports, and request public documents,” said Mayor Jean Stothert of Omaha, Neb., where residents can see finance data in a portal called “the city’s checkbook.”

In South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg emphasized the better decision making that comes from using performance data. Modeled on Baltimore’s CitiStat, South Bend’s SBStat guides management decisions, improving the quality and efficiency of city services.

### Access to internet and data

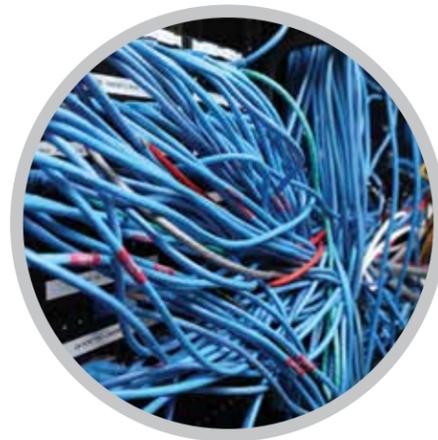
As data and technology become more essential to business and education, cities are implementing programs that expand access to underserved communities. “World-class digital connectivity is the 21st-century equivalent of the 20th century’s electricity and water,” said Bloomington, Ind., Mayor John Hamilton, who announced a public-private partnership to bring citywide, open-access, gigabit speed fiber network internet to city’s residents. In addition to broadband connectivity at all city facilities and parks, Fayetteville, Ark., Mayor Lioneld Jordan outlined “a digital inclusion plan to close the homework gap and provide affordable internet access to all.”

### Autonomous vehicles

Some cities are thinking about the prospects of driverless cars, trucks, and buses in the future. “Now, autonomous, self-driving vehicles hold the opportunity to supplement our existing transit network,” said Mayor Kevin Faulconer of San Diego, “and make getting around safer and more efficient.” Tampa, Fla., Mayor Bob Buckhorn announced that the city will install technology that will communicate with autonomous vehicles.

# 16%

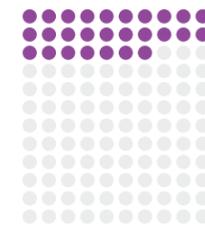
of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of data/technology issues.



## TOP 5 DATA/TECHNOLOGY SUB-TOPICS

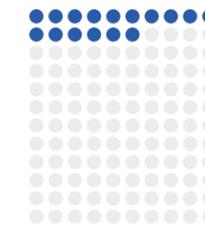
Data Governance

### 23%



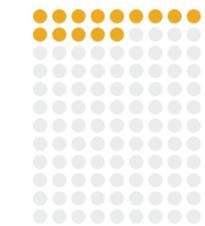
Public Safety Data

### 13%



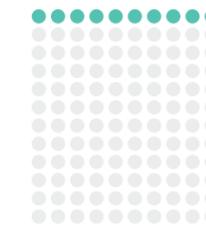
Tech Companies

### 13%



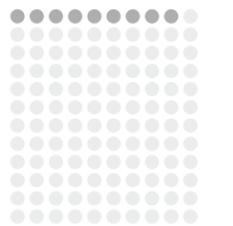
Open Data

### 8%



Social Media

### 8%



*Subtopic percentages are representative of all 120 speeches in the sample. For more subtopic data, see appendix.*



*Technology will continue to keep us better connected.*

**Mayor Harry LaRosiliere**  
Plano, TX

## Conclusion

**W**hile the national outlook in America has changed drastically in just a short period of time, one thing has remained constant: mayors are focused on lifting people up and achieving real results for their communities. Cities are where we come together to live, work and play. There isn't the luxury of vacillation or empty rhetoric: mayors fill the potholes, provide needed services to people and grow the economy.

It is in our cities where what's best about our country—innovative ideas, entrepreneurship and social dynamism—are incubated, implemented and elevated to the broader national consciousness. From New York to San Francisco and the small- and mid-size cities in between, the future is being forged by the thinkers and doers congregating in our city centers.

**Cities are leading the way.** In cities we find proactive policy prescriptions to alleviate challenges and elevate opportunities. This year's State of the Cities report raises some themes common to those we have noted in the past: economic development, public safety and infrastructure continue to be core issues. Cities are driving the nation forward, with an increased number of jobs and outsized economic growth providing the ability to make strategic investments in our urban cores. However, everything is not bright—there are serious challenges from housing affordability, crime and aging infrastructure—and mayors are concentrating on seeking solutions.

**Equity is a key concern in cities.** Mayors are focused on economic growth and inclusion. Across the country, city leaders are building equitable growth strategies that meet current needs and lay the groundwork for the fast-approaching future. However, not all of the growth that we have observed in communities has been equal. It is necessary to focus on economic inclusiveness, which was seen as a priority for a number of mayors in the report. Workforce development initiatives are being rethought and economic development funds are being shifted to alleviate challenges around skills gaps and increase the number of local small businesses—with a deliberate effort to uplift low-income residents, women and people of color.

**Federal and state challenges continue to grow.** As our nation's mayors are working to create a fairer, more equitable America, they are meeting resistance from a federal administration keen on disparaging America's urban areas and state legislatures across the country wielding power to blockade city-led initiatives. Preemptive measures

and mismatched priorities are throwing roadblocks in the way of cities, but city leaders are still laser-focused on success with or without intergovernmental partners. Mayors will always lead, and they are working from the bottom up, not the top down, to make things happen.

**Mayors are champions for the future.**

While cities are the nation's laboratories for innovation and the economic engines that bring all the pieces together, there are at times challenging fractures in the larger civic puzzle. But through collaboration across the city—taking into consideration voices from the public, private and nonprofit sectors, as well as, and most importantly, the people—mayors are convening discussions around the key issues of our times, whether they be opioid

addiction, automation and workforce shifts, active transportation or transit shifts to come.

Beyond the here and now, mayors are cognizant of the tremendous challenges and opportunities ahead as disruption on the political and technological fronts continues to take hold. Local leaders know that the work they do affects people every day. Rather than dithering over basic governance at the federal level, mayors are instead focused on the possibilities surrounding innovations such as self-driving cars and the sharing economy. They are seeking to lift people up, not to pull support from the most vulnerable in society. We all need to invest in our future, fund scientific research, spur innovation, alleviate climate change and support cities. Mayors are doing just this. Everything starts in cities.

Gary, IN Mayor  
Karen Freeman-Wilson



Credit: Jason Dixon for National League of Cities

## Methodology

For the 2017 State of the Cities report sample, we included State of the City speeches with online transcripts given between January 1 and April 3, 2017. The 120 speeches were chosen to obtain a balanced sample from cities in each of the four population categories (less than 50,000, 50-99,999, 100-299,999, 300,000 or more) and four geographic regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, West). The variance of city population sizes and geographic regions ensures a diverse sample and allows for comparisons between categories, but owing to sample size limitations, findings cannot be generalized to all cities. The methodology used is similar to that used in 2015's analysis, which built upon the work of Sarah Beth Gehl and Katherine Willoughby, who conducted a content analysis of State of the State speeches in 2013.

### Coding Guidelines

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

Sample breakdown by region

Region	Number of speeches
Northeast	23
Midwest	22
South	28
West	28
<b>Total:</b>	<b>120</b>

Sample breakdown by population

Population	Number of speeches
Less than 50,000	28
50-99,999	18
100-299,999	34
300,000 or more	21
<b>Total:</b>	<b>120</b>

**AVERAGE POPULATION:** 271,291  
**MEDIAN POPULATION:** 114,684

Coverage by subtopic

Subtopic	Percent (%)	Major Topic
Police Dept.	73	Public Safety
Fire Dept.	56	Public Safety
Roads	48	Infrastructure
Job Creation	39	Economic Development
Crime Rate	38	Public Safety
Revenues	37	Budgets & Management
Affordable Housing	37	Housing
Public Works	36	Infrastructure
Business Attraction	32	Economic Development
Pedestrian Infrastructure	32	Infrastructure
Water Infrastructure	32	Infrastructure
K-12	30	Education
Homelessness	30	Housing
Multi-family Development	30	Housing
Bicycle Infra.	30	Infrastructure
Parks & Recreation	28	Health
Public Transit	28	Infrastructure
Credit Rating	28	Budgets & Management
Downtown Development	27	Economic Development
Employment	27	Economic Development
Arts & Culture	25	Economic Development
Officer Recruit./ Training	25	Public Safety
Grants/Intergovt'l Aid	24	Budgets & Management
Property Tax	24	Budgets & Management
Workforce Development	24	Economic Development
Infrastructure Financing	23	Infrastructure
Data Governance	23	Data & Technology
Universities & Colleges	23	Education
Parking & Vehicle Traffic	22	Infrastructure
Business Growth	21	Economic Development
Entrepreneurship/Startups	21	Economic Development
Diversity	20	Demographics
Tourism	20	Economic Development
Libraries	20	Education
Sustance Abuse	20	Health
Community Policing	20	Public Safety
Youth	19	Demographics
Small Business	19	Economic Development
Zoning	19	Housing
Reserve & Rainy Day Funds	18	Budgets & Management
Veterans	18	Demographics
EMS	18	Public Safety
Personnel Costs	18	Budgets & Management
Seniors	18	Demographics
Immigration	18	Demographics
Neighborhood Revitalization	18	Economic Development
Opioid Addiction	18	Health
Internet	18	Infrastructure
Bonds	17	Budgets & Management
Pensions	17	Budgets & Management
Sustainability	17	Energy & Environment
Clean/Renewable Energies	17	Energy & Environment
Police Tech & Infrastructure	17	Public Safety
Capital Projects	16	Infrastructure
Violent Crime	16	Public Safety
Manufacturing & Makers	15	Economic Development
Out of School Time	15	Education
Bus Transit	14	Infrastructure
Guns	14	Public Safety
Sales Tax	13	Budgets & Management
Public Safety Data	13	Data & Technology
Ed. Funding	13	Education
Internships/Career Readiness	13	Education
Water Reuse/Storm Water	13	Energy & Environment
Veterans' Homelessness	13	Housing
Tech. Companies	13	Data & Technology
Wages	13	Economic Development
Solar Power	13	Energy & Environment
Hospitals & Clinics	13	Health
Blight & Demolitions	13	Housing

# Appendix

## Coverage by subtopic

Subtopic	Percent (%)	Major Topic
Renovations/Home Improve.	13	Housing
Housing Shelters	13	Housing
Budget Transparency/ Data	12	Budgets & Management
Economic Inequity/Poverty	12	Demographics
Disaster Preparedness	12	Energy & Environment
Climate Change	12	Energy & Environment
Tax Expenditure & TIFs	11	Budgets & Management
Human Resources & Talent	11	Budgets & Management
Racial Inequity	11	Demographics
Population Growth	11	Demographics
Incubators & Coworking	11	Economic Development
LED Lighting	11	Energy & Environment
Access to Nutrition	11	Health
Single-family Development	11	Housing
Workforce Housing	11	Housing
Race/Diversity (iPublic Safety)	11	Public Safety
Talent Attraction/Retention	10	Economic Development
Rivers, Streams, & Lakes	10	Energy & Environment
Mental Health	10	Health
Ports	10	Infrastructure
Public Safety Funding	10	Public Safety
Minority/Women Owned Bus.	9	Economic Development
Pre-K	9	Education
School Infra. & Ed. Tech.	9	Education
Homeownership Assistance	9	Housing
Green/Sustainable Infrs.	9	Infrastructure
Police Mison. & Transparency	9	Public Safety
Gun Violence	9	Public Safety
Open Data	8	Data & Technology
Vocations/Apprenticeships	8	Education
Conservation	8	Energy & Environment
Energy Efficiency	8	Energy & Environment
Health Lifestyle	8	Health
Rail Transit	8	Infrastructure
Social Media	8	Data & Technology

Subtopic	Percent (%)	Major Topic
Ed. Access & Inequality	8	Education
Graduation	8	Education
STEM	8	Education
Recycling	8	Energy & Environment
Complete Streets/Vision Zero	8	Infrastructure
Drug Offences	8	Public Safety
Deficit	7	Budgets & Management
Access to Internet & Tech.	7	Data & Technology
Resiliency	7	Energy & Environment
Access to Healthcare	7	Health
Gangs	7	Public Safety
Emergency Preparedness	7	Public Safety
Autonomous Vehicles	6	Data & Technology
LGBT	6	Demographics
Charter Schools	6	Education
Brownfields	6	Energy & Environment
Refugees	5	Demographics
Trade & FDI	5	Economic Development
Smart Infrastructure	5	Infrastructure
Leadership & Governance	4	Budgets & Management
Income Tax	4	Budgets & Management
Achievement Gap	4	Education
Adult & Continuing Ed.	4	Education
Electric Utilities	4	Energy & Environment
Pollution	4	Energy & Environment
Sick & Family Leave	4	Health
Healthy Homes	4	Health
Rail	4	Infrastructure
Gun Control	4	Public Safety
Surplus	3	Budgets & Management
Smart Cities	3	Data & Technology
Innovation Districts	3	Data & Technology
CBA&s & PLAs	3	Economic Development
Community Schools	3	Education
Non-communicable Disease	3	Health

## Coverage by subtopic

Subtopic	Percent (%)	Major Topic
Rental Housing Assistance	3	Housing
Accessory Dwelling Unites	3	Housing
Infra. PPPs	3	Infrastructure
Justice Reform	3	Public Safety
Drones	2	Data & Technology
Communicable Disease	2	Health
Gentrification	2	Housing
Foreclosures	2	Housing
Student Housing	2	Housing
Ridesharing & TNCs	2	Infrastructure
Participatory Budgeting	1	Budgets & Management
School Safety	1	Education
Healthy Aging	1	Health
Short-term Rentals	1	Housing

## Cities in 2017 sample

City	Date of Speech	Mayor	City	Date of Speech	Mayor
Allentown, PA	1/26/17	Ed Pawlowski	Everett, WA	1/18/17	Ray Stephanson
Amsterdam, NY	1/17/17	Michael Villa	Fall River, MA	3/1/17	Jasiel Correia II
Anaheim, CA	2/7/17	Tom Tait	Fayetteville, AR	1/19/17	Lioneld Jordan
Asbury Park, NJ	2/8/17	Michael Capabiano	Folsom, CA	1/19/17	Andy Morin
Atlanta, GA	2/2/17	Kasim Reed	Fort Wayne, IN	2/15/17	Tom Henry
Austin, TX	1/28/17	Steve Adler	Glendale, AZ	3/2/17	Jerry Weiers
Baltimore, MD	1/16/17	Catherine Pugh	Gloucester, MA	2/28/17	Sefatia Romeo Theken
Bentonville, AR	1/24/17	Bob McCaslin	Grand Rapids, MI	3/2/17	Rosalynn Bliss
Bessemer, AL	1/30/17	Kenneth Gulley	Gresham, OR	3/22/17	Shane Bemis
Bethlehem, PA	3/9/17	Bob Donchez	Hartford, CT	3/13/17	Luke Bronin
Biddeford, ME	2/7/17	Alan Casavant	Henderson, NV	1/19/17	Andy Hafen
Biloxi, MS	2/1/17	Andrew "FoFo" Gilich	Honolulu, HI	2/16/17	Kirk Caldwell
Binghamton, NY	2/27/17	Richard David	Huntington, WV	2/15/17	Steve Williams
Bloomington, IN	2/16/17	John Hamilton	Irvine, CA	2/14/17	Donald Wagner
Boston, MA	1/17/17	Martin Walsh	Ithaca, NY	1/4/17	Svante Myrick
Buffalo, NY	2/21/17	Byron Brown	Jersey City, NJ	2/7/17	Steven M. Fulop
Burleson, TX	1/19/17	Ken Shetter	Kansas City, KS	3/28/17	Sly James
Cambridge, MA	2/1/17	E. Denise Simmons	Kettering, OH	1/25/17	Don Patterson
Carson City, NV	1/30/17	Bob Crowell	Kingston, NY	1/12/17	Steven Noble
Cave Junction, OR	1/9/17	Daniel Dalegowski	Kirkland, WA	1/12/17	Amy Walen
Centerville, OH	3/20/17	Brooks Compton	Lakewood, CO	3/9/17	Adam Paul
Charleston, SC	1/24/17	John Tecklenburg	Lansing, MI	3/14/17	Virg Bernero
Charlottesville, VA	1/17/17	Mike Signer	Las Cruces, NM	2/15/17	Ken Miyagishima
Chubbuck, ID	1/12/17	Kevin England	Lenexa, KS	2/15/17	Mike Boehm
Clarksville, TN	1/17/17	Kim McMillan	Lexington, KY	1/24/17	Jim Gray
Columbia, SC	1/31/17	Steve Benjamin	Little Rock, AR	3/29/17	Mark Stodola
Columbus, OH	2/24/17	Andrew Ginther	Long Beach, CA	1/10/17	Robert Garcia
Concord, CA	2/12/17	Laura Hoffmeister	Louisville, KY	2/2/17	Greg Fischer
Dayton, OH	2/22/17	Nan Whaley	Lynchburg, VA	3/6/17	Joan Foster
Detroit, MI	2/21/17	Mike Duggan	McAllen, TX	1/24/17	Jim Darling
Duluth, MN	3/20/17	Emily Larson	Memphis, TN	2/9/17	Jim Strickland
Elk Grove, CA	3/30/17	Steve Ly	Merced, CA	1/27/17	Mike Murphey
Emporia, KS	2/15/17	Jon Geitz	Mesquite, TX	1/26/17	Stan Pickett
Eugene, OR	1/9/17	Lucy Vinis	Milwaukee, WI	3/6/17	Tom Barrett
Evanston, IL	3/10/17	Elizabeth Tisdahl	New Haven, CT	2/6/17	Toni Harp

## Cities in 2017 sample

City	Date of Speech	Mayor	City	Date of Speech	Mayor
New Rochelle, NY	3/9/17	Noam Bramson	Toledo, OH	2/9/17	Paula Hicks-Hudson
New York, NY	1/13/17	Bill de Blasio	Troy, NY	2/2/17	Patrick Madden
Newton, MA	2/1/17	Setti Warren	Tucson, AZ	3/16/17	Jonathan Rothschild
Ocean City, NJ	2/23/17	Jay Gillian	Upper Arlington, OH	1/23/17	Debbie Johnson
Olean, NY	1/3/17	William Aiello	Valparaiso, IN	1/24/17	Jon Costas
Omaha, NE	2/17/17	Jean Stothert	Virginia Beach, VA	3/15/17	Will Sessoms
Overland Park, KS	2/22/17	Carl Gerlach	Vista, CA	1/23/17	Judy Ritter
Peoria, IL	2/1/17	Jim Ardis	Washington, DC	3/30/17	Muriel Bowser
Plano, TX	1/17/17	Harry LaRosiliere	West Palm Beach, FL	1/27/17	Jeri Muoio
Portland, ME	1/9/17	Ethan K. Strimling	Wheeling, WV	2/28/17	Glenn Elliott
Providence, RI	2/1/17	Jorge Elorza	Willmar, MN	1/17/17	Marv Calvin
Raleigh, NC	3/3/17	Nancy McFarlane	Wilmington, DE	3/16/17	Michael Purzycki
Ramsey, MN	1/14/17	Sarah Strommen	Wilmington, NC	1/30/17	Bill Saffo
Reno, NV	1/26/17	Hillary Schieve	Winter Park, FL	2/17/17	Steve Leary
Revere, MA	2/6/17	Brian M. Arrigo	Wylie, TX	2/28/17	Eric Hogue
Riverbank, CA	1/8/17	Richard O'Brien			*Denotes City Manager
Riverside, CA	1/19/17	Rusty Bailey			
Rock Island, IL	1/9/17	Dennis Pauley			
Roseville, MN	2/22/17	Dan Roe			
Rowlett, TX	1/17/17	Todd Gottel			
Saint Paul, MN	3/29/17	Chris Coleman			
Salem, MA	1/5/17	Kim Driscoll			
Salt Lake City, UT	1/31/17	Jackie Biskupski			
San Diego, CA	1/12/17	Kevin L. Faulconer			
San Francisco, CA	1/26/17	Edwin Lee			
San Jose, CA	2/11/17	Sam Liccardo			
Scottsdale, AZ	2/22/17	Jim Lane			
Seattle, WA	2/21/17	Edward Murray			
South Bend, IN	4/3/17	Pete Buttigieg			
St. Petersburg, FL	1/14/17	Rick Kriseman			
Sunny Isles Beach, FL	1/19/17	George "Bud" Scholl			
Surprise, AZ	2/22/17	Sharon Wolcott			
Syracuse, NY	1/12/17	Stephanie Miner			
Tacoma, WA	2/8/17	Marilyn Strickland			
Tampa, FL	4/3/17	Bob Buckhorn			

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LEAGUE  
OF CITIES

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