NLC NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

CITIES STRONG TOGETHER

STATE OF THE CITIES
2023

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LEAGUE
OF CITIES

CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DATA

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Foreword

Our nation's local leaders showed incredible resilience and courage when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted everything three years ago.

The unprecedented federal support cities, towns and villages received from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) continues to provide essential funding that goes directly to our communities and shape local leaders' priorities. From this year's State of the City addresses, it is clear that city leaders are using these funds wisely and effectively to make our cities, towns and villages more livable and fairer for everyone.

In its 10th year, the 2023 State of the Cities report highlights the major issues facing municipal governments across the country using various data sources. This year's findings are consistent with previous ones – with the support of federal funds, local leaders are eagerly continuing to work to improve their communities.

This year, mayors have once again made it clear that infrastructure is a top priority, as they see a pressing need to upgrade roads and bridges, water systems and broadband access. With federal and state grant programs available in the BIL to fund these demands, municipal governments across the country have been applying for, receiving, and investing in these resources to fully bring their communities into the 21st century.

Mayors are not only focused on rebuilding the physical infrastructure of their communities, but also on boosting their economic growth by investing in downtown development and revitalization projects. They are also working to strengthen relationships between police and their communities while also focusing on improving municipal finances to sustainably hire and retain city employees.

This year's report shows that our cities, towns and villages are making strategic investments in programs and services that ensure that today's communities are places that benefit *all* of their residents. We hope this year's findings not only paint a clear picture of local leaders' priorities today but can help inform their municipal strategies moving forward.

CLARENCE E. ANTHONY
CEO and Executive Director
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Introduction

In its 10th year, the State of the Cities report explores U.S. municipalities' most urgent challenges and their leaders' main objectives and strategies for improving the quality of life of their residents. To answer these questions, the authors examined data extracted from State of the City speeches given by mayors from a sample of U.S. cities, census data on U.S. cities and sentiments of residents in cities across America.

The five sections of the report focus on the top five themes that emerged from the annual mayoral speeches: Infrastructure, Budget/Management, Public Safety, Economic Development, and Housing. For each theme, we provide an overview of the main topics discussed by the mayors, as well as some examples and statistics that illustrate their perspectives and challenges.

WA, United States
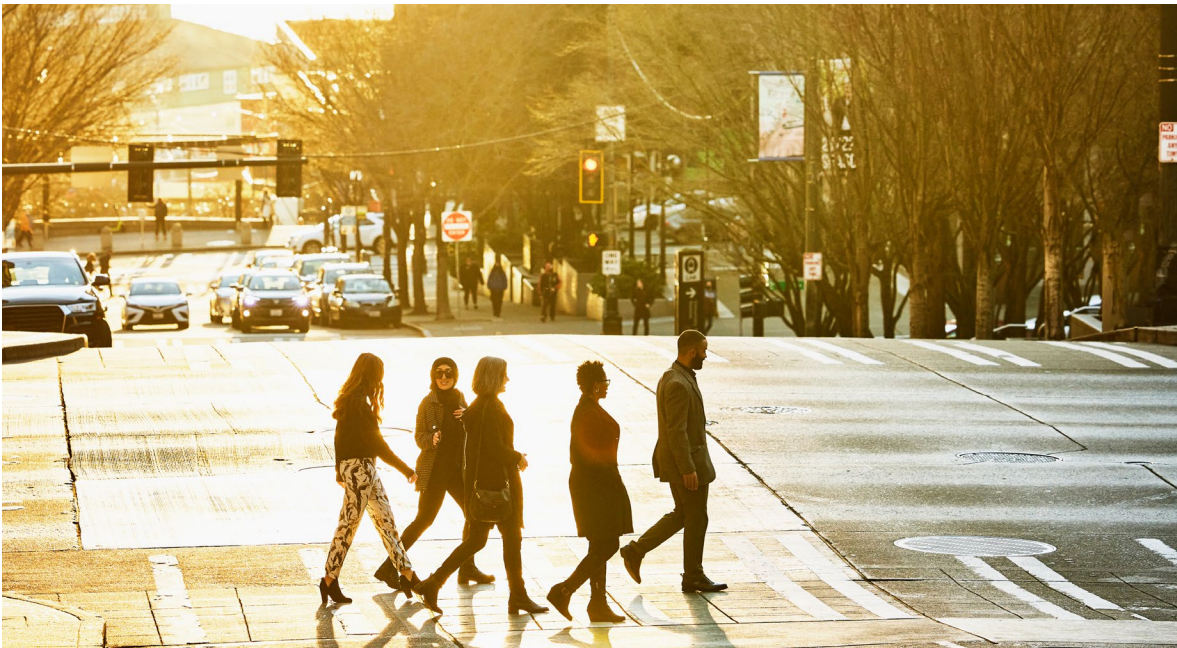
Mayors have once again made it clear that infrastructure is a top priority

TOP MAYORAL PRIORITIES IN 2023

Data collected from annual State of the City addresses show that infrastructure was the most dominant theme, taking up 32% of the total speech time, followed by Budget/Management with 17%, Public Safety at 12%, Economic Development with 11%, and Housing with 8%. The remaining themes were Education, Health and Human Services, and Energy and Environment. The following sections will provide more details about the top five themes and their subthemes.

FIGURE 1

Mayoral Priorities in 2023

Budgets and Management
Infrastructure
Public Safety **Housing** Data and Technology
Economic Development
Health and Human Services
Energy and Environment
Education

Source: Content Analysis of Mayoral Speeches Given between January-April 2023
Figure Note: Percentages denote the average portion of State of the City addresses dedicated to each topic. Values smaller than 5 are not reported by topic. See Appendix A for more detail.

Infrastructure secured a top spot, showing that mayors are concerned about the quality and maintenance of public facilities and services, such as roads, bridges, water systems, and transportation networks.

Analyzing a sample of mayoral speeches from different cities across the United States, **infrastructure** issues accounted for almost a third of the total speech content. With infrastructure securing a top spot, the data shows that mayors are concerned about the quality and maintenance of public facilities and services, such as roads, bridges, water systems, and transportation networks.

Another essential topic that mayors frequently discuss is **budget and management** issues, representing about 17% of the speech content. Mayors are challenged to balance their cities' financial needs and priorities, especially in times of economic uncertainty or crisis. The importance of budget and management issues may also be related to the recent influx of federal funds through BIL[1] and the American Rescue Plan Act[2] (ARPA). These dollars have created additional demands for fiscal accountability which mayors are directly addressing by prioritizing budget and management.

Public safety is also common in mayoral speeches, occupying about 12% of the speech content. Mayors address various aspects of public safety, such as crime prevention and reduction, police reform and accountability, emergency preparedness and response and fire protection. Mayors also consistently express their support and gratitude for public safety personnel who serve their communities.

Emergency medical services

Other topics mentioned in speeches include economic development, health and human services, and housing issues. **Economic development** issues comprise about 11% of the speech content; mayors are focused on promoting job creation, business growth, innovation, and tourism in their cities.

Health and human services issues account for about 9% of speech content, with mayors emphasizing the importance of providing residents with quality health care, education, social services, and recreation opportunities.

Housing issues comprise about 8% of mayoral speeches; as mayors address the challenges of ensuring affordable, accessible, and safe housing for all.

Many of these issues have featured more prevalently in previous years. Over the last decade, infrastructure, economic development, budget and management, public safety and housing were among the top issues for cities nationwide (See Appendix B for more detail).

In the remainder of this report, the significant categories highlighted in mayoral speeches this year are discussed in more detail using a large sample of census data (See Appendix A for research methodology).

The importance of budget and management issues may also be related to the recent influx of federal funds through BIL and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

Pedestrians in New York, NY
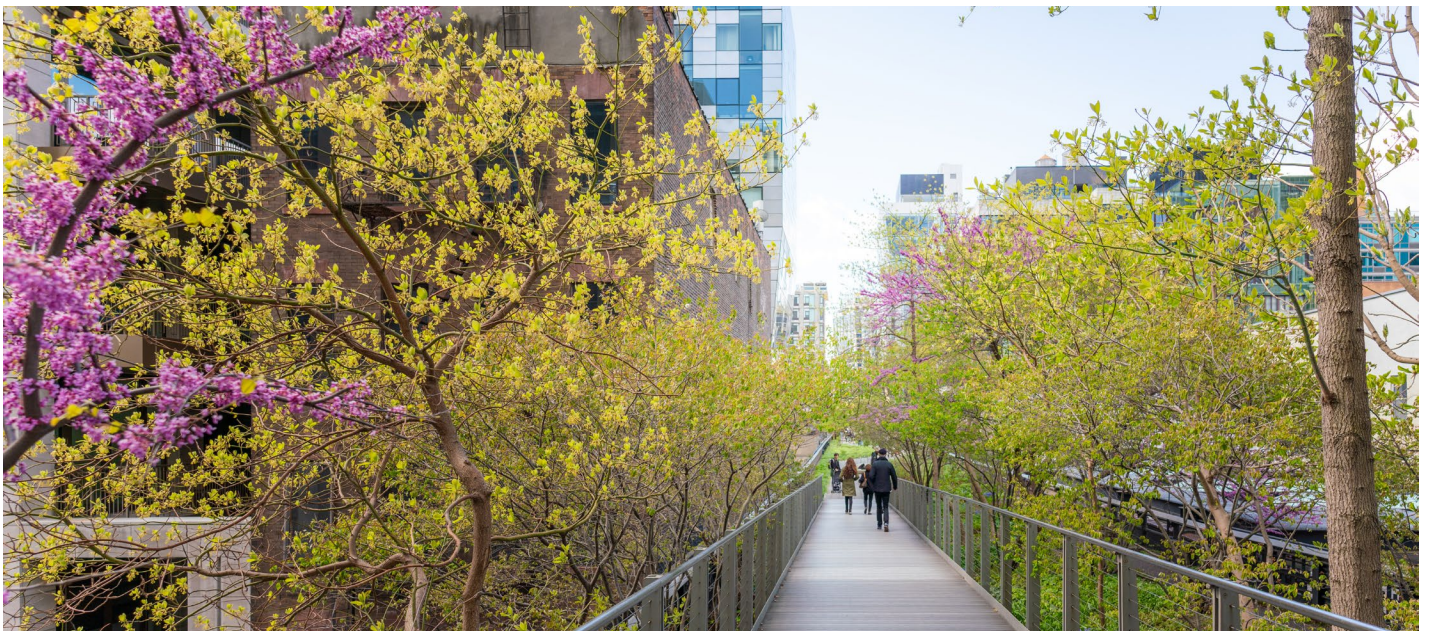
INFRASTRUCTURE

El in Philadelphia, PA

nfrastructure has remained a top priority for cities over the last few years. The U.S. economy relies on a vast network of roads and bridges, freight rail and ports, electrical grids and broadband networks. Many current systems were built decades ago; economists say that supply chain and construction delays combined with rising maintenance costs are holding economic performance back.[3] Moreover, residents are already experiencing what civil engineers have warned for years: many bridges are structurally deficient,[4] water systems pose risks to public health, and levees are vulnerable to climate change.[5] Investing in new infrastructure and adequately funding the maintenance of current infrastructure would stimulate the economy, increase efficiency and reliability, lower transportation costs and create jobs.[6] The deterioration of bridges, roads, tunnels, and railways has significant impacts on American cities.

Given the current fiscal uncertainties facing cities, towns and villages across the country, federal funding sources like BIL play a critical role in shaping the future of American infrastructure.

With 140,000 miles of track in the U.S. crossing through thousands of cities, towns and villages, rail safety is a concern for residents in communities of all sizes. Every day in the U.S., an average of three trains derail, with as many as half potentially carrying hazardous substances. See our interactive map to learn more about rail safety where you live and connect with your legislators to advocate for rail safety:
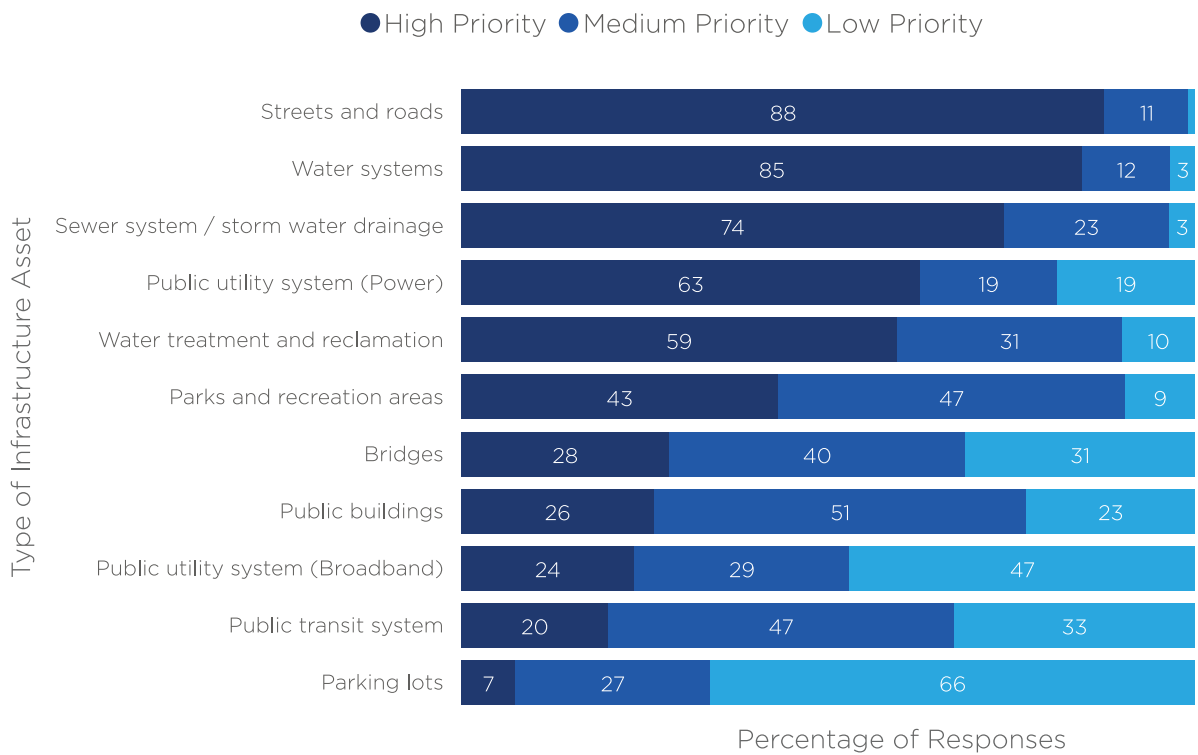
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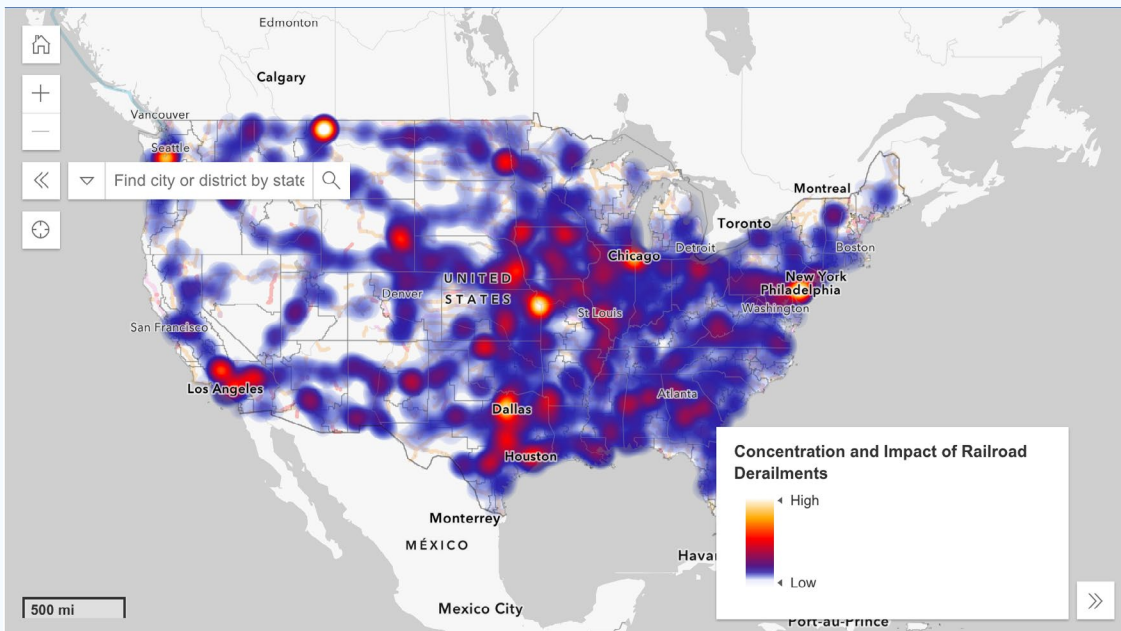
Click on image for interactive experience

Concentration and Impact of Railroad Derailments

◄ High

◄ Low

These vital transportation networks are essential for economic growth, social mobility, environmental sustainability, and public safety. Pavement and bridge conditions directly affect vehicle operating costs, with deteriorating pavement and bridge decks increasing vehicle wear and tear. While there have been improvements in pavement and bridge conditions, to improve the nation's infrastructure there is still work to be done.[7] According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), U.S. infrastructure received a grade of C-minus in 2020, with bridges and transit scoring even lower at D and D-minus, respectively.[8]

FIGURE 2

Infrastructure Priorities in 2022

● High Priority ● Medium Priority ● Low Priority

Type of Infrastructure Asset	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Streets and roads	88	11	
Water systems	85	12	3
Sewer system / storm water drainage	74	23	3
Public utility system (Power)	63	19	19
Water treatment and reclamation	59	31	10
Parks and recreation areas	43	47	9
Bridges	28	40	31
Public buildings	26	51	23
Public utility system (Broadband)	24	29	47
Public transit system	20	47	33
Parking lots	7	27	66

Percentage of Responses

Source: Municipal Infrastructure Conditions in 2022. National League of Cities.

Investigating a sample of 395 cities, towns and villages, NLC's 2022 Municipal Infrastructure Conditions (MIC) report found that streets and roads are at the top of the infrastructure priority list for municipalities, followed by water, sewer, reclamation systems, and power utility systems[9]. On the other hand, bridges, seem to be of medium priority for municipalities in the sample.

City leaders nationwide are publicly stating the importance of infrastructure improvements in their communities. In his 2023 annual State of the City address, Mayor Harold Weinbrecht of Cary, North Carolina, lists a several infrastructure projects, including widening roads, improving bike lanes and pedestrian facilities, installing bus stop security lighting, and building pedestrian bridges, among other projects.

Storm Drain

Climate change poses a serious threat to the infrastructure of many American cities. Infrastructure is vital for the economic and social well-being of residents. Building climate-resilient infrastructure means designing and constructing assets and systems that can withstand and recover from the impacts of extreme weather events, such as floods, storms, droughts, heat waves and wildfires. According to the United Nations, infrastructure is responsible for 88 percent of the forecasted costs of adapting to climate change.[10] City leaders are at the forefront of the conversation, developing forward-looking plans for a more climate-ready infrastructure. This work includes addressing infrastructure for water, sewer, transportation and the like.

In Queen Creek, Arizona, Mayor Julia Wheatley highlighted several large-scale road improvement projects in her State of the City address, including constructing two new east-west connectors in the downtown area to create a *"vibrant and walkable downtown."*

ARPA & INFRASTRUCTURE

In her 2023 mayoral speech, Mayor Vivian Jones shared Wake Forest, North Carolina, used some of its ARPA allocations to address urgent stormwater projects, including Flaherty Park dam repairs and maintenance of the old water treatment plant, which will, in turn, enhance the city's parks and recreation programs by offering more recreational options at the reservoir.

Hydroelectric power station

Other municipalities focus on infrastructure and maintenance projects for water, sewer and stormwater facilities. Without proper maintenance, sewer lines can deteriorate, leak, crack or clog, leading to costly repairs, environmental damage, health hazards and poor water quality.

Failing water and sewer systems in American cities seriously threaten economic development, public health and city budgets.[11] Moreover, climate change exacerbates the problem by increasing the frequency and intensity of rainfall and flooding, which can overwhelm the sewage systems and cause sanitary-sewer overflows.[12] In El Dorado, Kansas, a recent water issue (where residents started to notice a change in the smell and color of the water in the city) is leaving residents without safe water for drinking and cooking. Residents have taken to social media to raise their concerns.[13]

In her 2023 mayoral speech, Mayor Cassie Franklin of Everett, Washington, laid out plans for the city to "*fully transition* [...] *buildings away from fossil fuels when possible, prioritizing buildings that present the greatest opportunity for greenhouse gas reductions.*"

Kingston, New York, has taken a similar approach. Mayor Steve Noble highlights city plans to solarize park facilities, including "*a $3.25 million investment in heating, cooling, and energy efficiency upgrades to Andy Murphy Center and City Hall, divesting from fossil fuels.*" The city also plans to launch *Kingston Community Energy*, advancing the city toward energy independence and resilience.

Building climate-resilient infrastructure is not only a matter of safety but also of affordability. Research has shown that investing in resilience can save money in the long term by preventing or reducing repair costs and losses from service disruptions.[14] Moreover, investing in climate-resilient infrastructure can create jobs, stimulate innovation and center environmental justice by ensuring access to essential services for all communities.

BUDGET & MANAGEMENT

U.S. Treasury Building, Washington DC

Although not likely[15], the US economy is still facing the risk of recession due to a combination of factors, such as high inflation, tight monetary policy, and a credit crunch in the last year. Some cities may be more vulnerable than others to these shocks, depending on their economic structure, fiscal health, and policy responses.

A potential recession and elevated inflation[16] can have significant impacts on American cities and their budgets. A recession may reduce the tax revenues of cities from income and sales taxes as unemployment rises and consumer spending falls[17]. Inflation may increase the costs of public services and pensions, as well as erode the purchasing power of residents[18]. Financial system lending has declined after several major banks failed earlier this year. Consumer spending, which has been the main driver of the economy, has slowed down in the face of higher prices and interest rates. Business investment has also declined as firms face uncertainty and lower demand. Some economists expect the economy to contract as soon as the current quarter or the next one[19]. Therefore, cities need to prepare for the possibility of a recession and continued inflation by exploring other sources of revenue, adopting more conservative budgets, building up rainy-day funds, and diversifying their revenue sources.

These concerns have led city leaders to focus on financial infrastructure and management as they look forward. For example, in the process of hiring a new city manager that shares his visions for the city, Mayor Neal E. McIntyre of Fernley, Nevada, mentioned in his 2023 mayoral speech that he *"will not stop fighting for* [the city's] *fair share of C-tax."* [20] He said that in moving forward, the city will make sure that the amount of C-tax generated by Fernley is calculated accurately by the state. Additionally, the mayor noted the city is currently embarking on a revenue and expenditure study to understand the community's needs and stabilize the city's budget.

Cities need to prepare for the possibility of a recession and continued inflation by exploring other sources of revenue, adopting more conservative budgets, building up rainy-day funds, and diversifying their revenue sources.
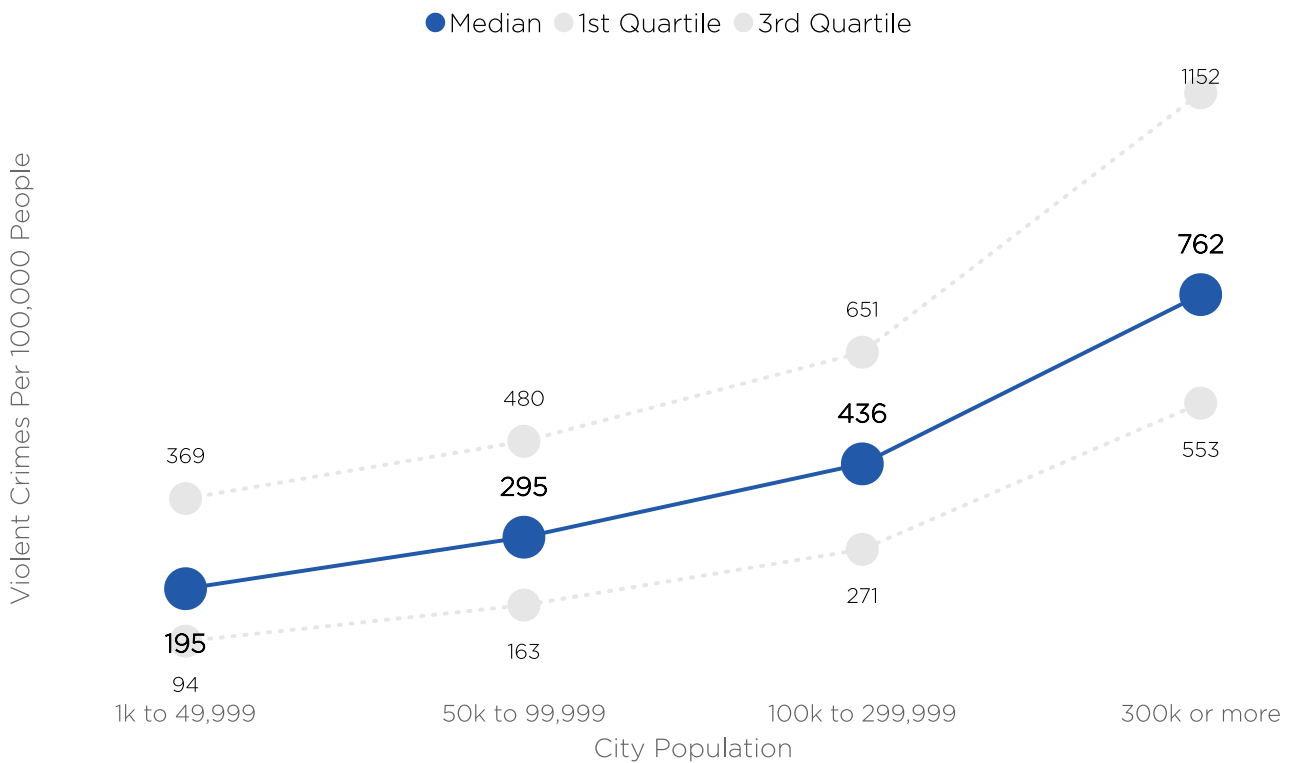
PUBLIC SAFETY

Police Officers in Grand Central Terminal, NY

P ublic safety is a vital concern for all communities across the United States. Ensuring public safety in American cities is complex and multifaceted, involving various actors, institutions, and policies. One of the most pressing public safety issues is gun violence, which claims the lives of tens of thousands of Americans every year and disproportionately affects communities of color. In response to these concerns, NLC created the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force to provide a space for local leaders to engage in dialogue and develop recommendations to help cities create a new vision for community safety.

Figure 3 (below) shows larger cities have higher violent crime rates than cities with smaller populations. The size of a municipality can also affect the management of public safety agencies, including law enforcement.

FIGURE 3

Median Crime Rates By Size of City (2021)

Median   1st Quartile   3rd Quartile

A survey conducted by NLC among its members – to understand how they govern public safety and law enforcement programs and their main concerns– shows different levels of authority for rural, suburban and urban municipalities. Of the 202 responses from local officials, the majority indicated they have authority in approving the annual budget and hiring and termination of law enforcement executives. while the minority have authority in establishing training standards and regulating use of force requirements. However, other governing functions, such as negotiating union contracts, regulating the use of force requirements, and establishing training standards, varied significantly depending on whether the municipality is rural, suburban, or urban.[21]

Another public safety issue is police-community relations. According to data collected in 2022 from government social media and local media organizations, ZenCity found that most of the discourse about violence, crime, and general public safety is negative, indicating low satisfaction and trust among residents.[22] Learn more about ZenCity in *Appendix C*.

This year, Tacoma, Washington, convened a gun violence reduction event on May 25th and 26th. In her 2023 mayoral address, Mayor Victoria Woodards highlighted the Together We End Gun Violence Conference where, the Alliance for Gun Responsibility, regional, and state partners "*convene community members, national experts, and state, county, and city officials to identify and amplify community-led solutions to gun violence reduction in Washington State.*" As NLC president, one of Mayor Woodards' top priorities is to connect with subject matter experts from across the nation on violence intervention and learn about the resources and lessons that can enhance work in this space at the local level of governance.

Jamestown, NY

Like Tacoma, Jamestown, New York, has instituted several plans to increase general public safety, including hiring new officers, approval of gun task force officers, which aims to decrease the overall gun violence in the city, as well as appointing a "quality-of-life" officer whose main tasks will be dealing with nuisance complaints plaguing citizens, mentioned Mayor Eddie Sundquist in his 2023 mayoral speech.

Many cities are implementing reforms to improve transparency, accountability, and trust between police and the communities they serve. Some of these reforms include creating civilian-led crisis response teams, investing in community-based violence prevention programs, establishing independent oversight bodies, and collaborating with peers and experts.[23]

In his 2023 mayoral speech, Mayor Michael Boehm laid out Lenexa, Kansas Police Department's plan for improving police-community relationships. The mayor noted that the police department is taking a proactive approach to policing to deter crimes in the city.

Port Jervis, New York, is taking a rather innovative approach to policing and community relations. In his 2023 mayoral address, Mayor Kelly B. Decker noted that in 2023 the police department will continue to reform and collaborate as part of its public relations endeavors. Additionally, the city continues implementing less lethal technologies, namely *BolaWarp,* a remote restraint device that discharges a cord that restraints and immobilizes a fleeing suspect, significantly decreasing the chances of lethal and fatal injuries.

Another big issue for American cities, villages and towns is the retention and recruitment of a diverse public safety workforce, including police, as the municipal workforce sees increasing retirement rates and difficulty in recruitment. One way cities address this issue is by designing a user-centric process that provides one-on-one support, targeted assistance, and coaching for candidates from diverse backgrounds. Diversifying public safety personnel can reduce the dropout rate and increase the success rate of applicants who reflect the communities they serve. Cities are addressing this issue by creating a culture of inclusion and respect within their law enforcement agencies. This can foster a sense of belonging and commitment among officers from different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and other identities. By working on the culture, local leaders can help improve the morale, performance, and retention of officers who can enhance trust and collaboration with the public.[24, 25]

Related to the rebuilding of a public safety workforce is the public health and safety concerns related to the opioid and fentanyl epidemic. This epidemic directly impacts the public safety workforce as they are often first responders. The opioid and fentanyl epidemic has resulted in a surge in overdoses, deaths, and addiction among Americans of all backgrounds. Many cities struggle to cope with the demand for treatment and prevention services, and the impact on public health and safety. Some of the solutions that cities are pursuing include expanding access to medication-assisted treatment, distributing naloxone to reverse overdoses, creating safe injection sites to reduce harm, and an expansion of the public safety workforce to include crisis intervention experts.[26]

HOUSING

Homelessness and housing insecurity are among the top concerns for Americans today. Housing issues are a significant challenge for American cities today. The most pressing problems include affordability, supply, homelessness, evictions and displacement. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is need for 6.8 million affordable rental homes for low-income renters in the U.S.[27] According to the White House Council of Economic Advisers, the U.S. housing market is experiencing a severe shortage of available and affordable units, contributing to rising rents and home prices, increased homelessness, and reduced economic mobility.[28]

The extent of the housing supply gap is staggering. A report by *Freddie Mac* estimated that the U.S. needs about 3.8 million more housing units to meet the current demand [29], while another study by *Fannie Mae* projected a shortfall of 5.5 million units by 2030.[30] Moreover, the supply shortage is not evenly distributed across regions and income groups. Research by the *Pew Institute* found that low-income households are more likely to face housing cost burdens than higher-income households and that some metropolitan areas have much higher shares of cost-burdened renters and homeowners than others.[31]

NLC is working in partnership with the American Planning Association on a national campaign, the Housing Supply Accelerator, that brings together local governments, community planners, builders, financial institutions, housing policy associations and state and federal partners to develop, align and advance solutions for housing supply challenges at the local level.


New York, United States

Figure 4 illustrates the median housing costs as a percentage of income in cities, villages and towns across the country. As the figure shows, the Northeast and West census regions have the highest costs associated with homeownership, 18.3% and 18.4%, respectively. In contrast, the north central region cities have the lowest costs associated with housing at 15.8%.

The Northeast and West regions have higher population density, lower vacancy rates, and more restrictive land use regulations than the other regions, which limit the availability of new housing construction.[32] Therefore, the imbalance between supply and demand drives up the housing prices in these regions, leading to higher housing costs (as a percentage of income), and lower housing affordability levels.

FIGURE 4

Median Housing Costs As a Percentage (%) of Income In Cities By Region (2021)

North Central: 15.8

Northeast: 18.3

West: 18.4

South: 16.2
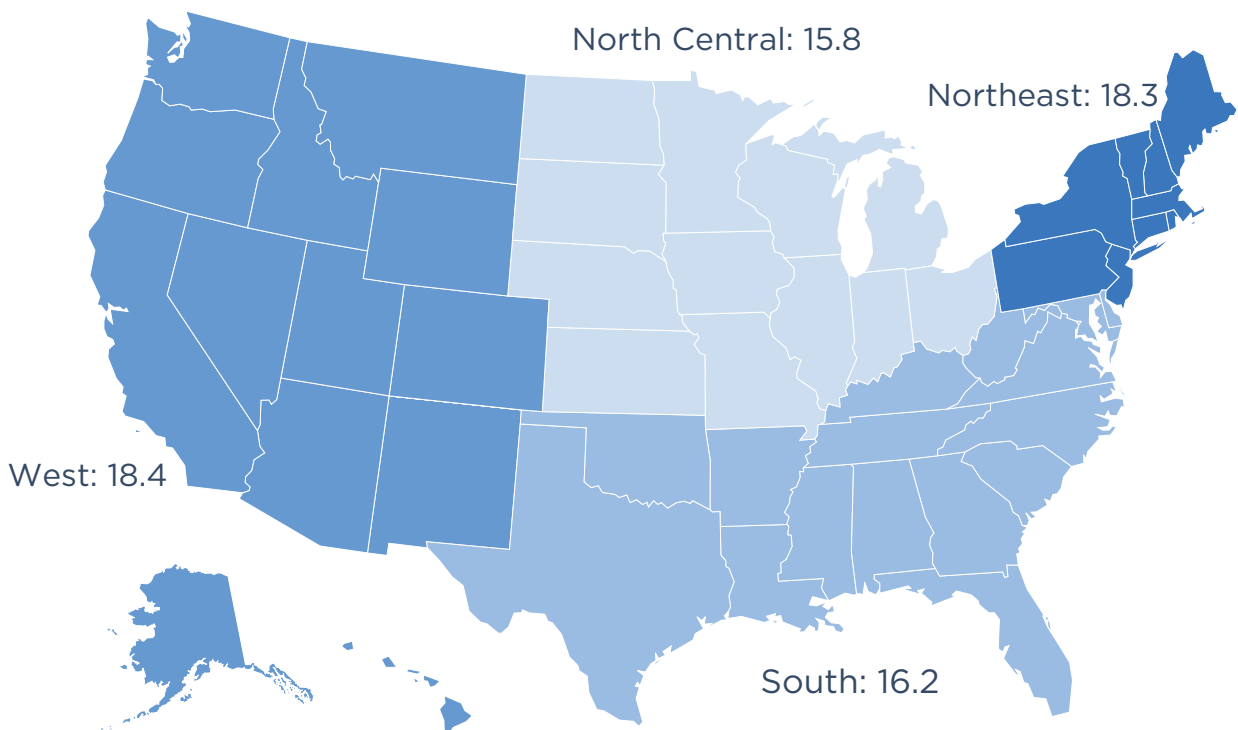
Source: Census data accessed through MySidewalk API https://catalog.mysidewalk.com/dimensions/30/

Boston, Massachusetts, is an example of a Northeast region city fighting against homelessness and seeking to improve housing affordability. Mayor Michelle Wu noted that the city will "*deploy every tool, every strategy, and every resource to create more housing that residents can actually afford.*" Additionally, the mayor emphasized the need for the city to close the racial wealth gap by boosting homeownership and reducing homelessness. Other plans Mayor Wu discussed in her annual address include directing the bulk of federal recovery dollars to housing efforts, discussing a "Home Rule"[33] status for rent stabilization with the city council to end rent gouging and protect families from eviction and displacement, as well as increasing mortgage assistance for residents.

Kettering, Ohio, is another example of a city fighting homelessness. Mayor Peggy Lehner listed several housing programs the city has in the pipeline. These plans include a 50-unit, $11.5 million apartment building opening in 2023, affordable housing for a general workforce (i.e. The Loft), and affordable housing for seniors aged 55 and older (i.e. The Senior Village). The mayor said that Kettering's Community Development division will keep offering programs to help homeowners maintain quality housing and avoid foreclosure.

San Diego, California, has both short-term and long-term plans to tackle homelessness problems in the city. Mayor Todd Gloria mentioned that in the short-term, the city has secured a motel "*that will soon serve families experiencing homelessness.*" In the long-term, Mayor Gloria also noted that the city would invest more in other affordable housing projects through his "Bridge to Home" initiative to provide "gap-financing" for home builders to facilitate and expedite the development process.

In conclusion, cities across the country, both small and large, are investing in homelessness by providing short-term as well as more permanent housing solutions and support services to people experiencing homelessness.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Dayton, OH

Economic development continues to be a major topic of discussion for mayors. It is a vital component of urban planning and policy-making. The economic development of cities across the United States is not uniform. Some cities thrive with high incomes, advanced infrastructure and diverse opportunities, while others struggle with low wages, poor services and limited prospects. Governments across America are also struggling to recruit and retain government employees[34]. Economic development indicators are myriad.

Unemployment data can be a proxy to measure economic development reflecting the availability and quality of jobs in an economic region. A high unemployment rate indicates a lack of productive opportunities for the labor force, which can negatively affect the populations' income, consumption and well-being. On the other hand, a low unemployment rate suggests a high demand for labor and that workers can find jobs that match their skills and preferences. Therefore, unemployment data provides a picture of productivity, income and welfare.

FIGURE 5

Median Unemployment Rates (%) in Cities By Region (2022)

North Central: 4.5
Northeast: 6.5
West: 5.7
South: 4.6
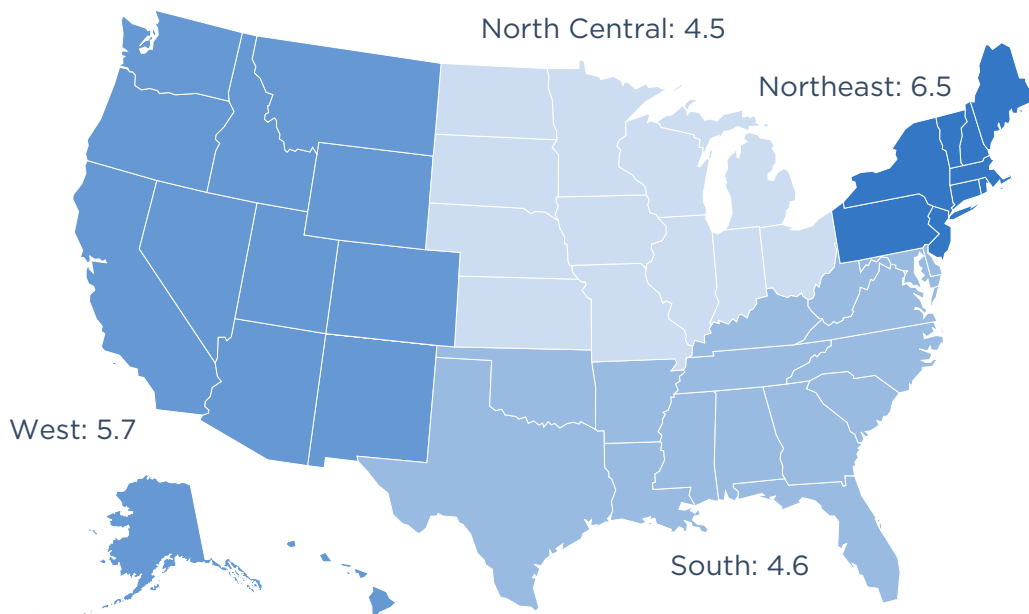
36%

positive sentiment and dialogue around parks, community and urban agriculture found by Zen City, using 2022 online data collected from city social media portals and local news agencies.

Using census data, Figure 5 compares the average unemployment rate in cities of different census regions. Municipalities in the Northeast and West census regions tend to have higher average unemployment rates. In contrast, cities located in the South and North Central regions seemingly have lower unemployment rates on average.[35] These differences may affect the resilience of the regional economies to external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation or a recession. The lower unemployment rates in the south and north-central regions may reflect their ability to adapt to changing economic conditions.
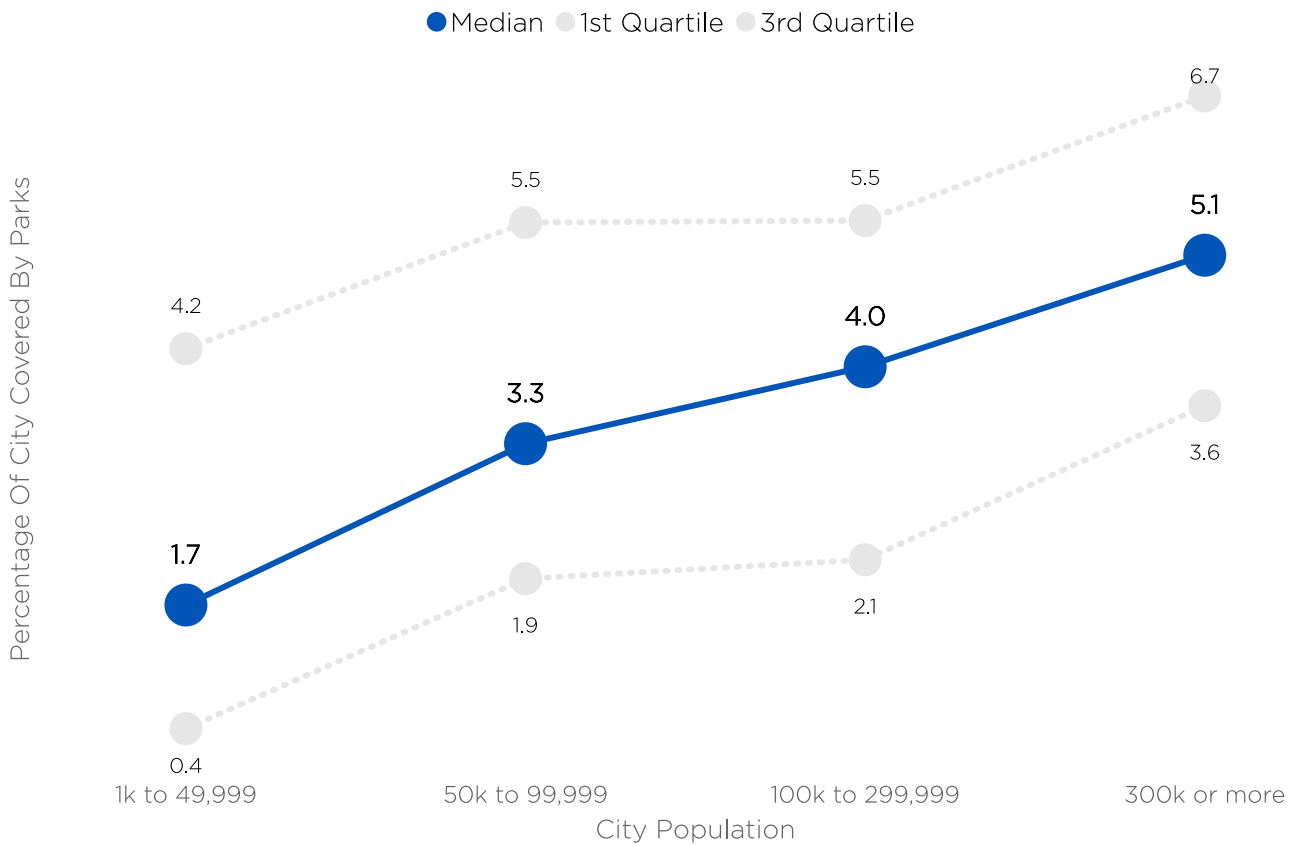
Another indicator of economic development is parks and recreation areas, which enhance residents' quality of life and a city's economy. They help attract and retain businesses and workers for growth and competitiveness. Based on NLC's ARPA Investment Tracker, many (92) large cities and consolidated city counties allocated nearly $496 million of their ARPA funds toward public spaces.

These facilities can be a good proxy to measure economic development in a city because they can influence various aspects of economic performance, such as business attraction and retention, job creation and income generation, innovation and entrepreneurship. Investing in park and recreation facilities and programs can be a wise strategy for fostering economic growth and competitiveness in a city.

According to a study by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and George Mason University's Center for Regional Analysis, 72% of communities use images of urban parks, public spaces, outdoor amenities, and recreational and cultural facilities in their economic development marketing materials[36]. These amenities can help create a positive image and reputation for a city, as well as increase the satisfaction and loyalty of existing residents and businesses. Additionally, they may serve as opportunities to creatively address environmental hazards and risks due to climate change by improving tree canopy cover.

Using census data, Figure 6 shows the percentage of a municipal jurisdiction covered by parks. As the figure indicates, larger cities in the sample tend to have higher percentages of their jurisdictions covered by parks and recreation areas. This may indicate higher levels of economic development in larger size municipalities because parks and recreation areas require land, resources, and maintenance that smaller municipalities may need help to afford.

FIGURE 6

Park Coverage by City Population (2018)

● Median ● 1st Quartile ● 3rd Quartile

Percentage Of City Covered By Parks

	1k to 49,999	50k to 99,999	100k to 299,999	300k or more
3rd Quartile	4.2	5.5	5.5	6.7
Median	1.7	3.3	4.0	5.1
1st Quartile	0.4	1.9	2.1	3.6

City Population

Source: National Neighborhood Data Archive. Accessed through MySidewalk API
https://catalog.mysidewalk.com/columns/57732/

CONCLUSION

Family walking down Michigan Avenue in Chicago

The State of the Cities report provides valuable insight into the current challenges and opportunities facing America's cities, towns and villages, and their visions and plans for the future. By analyzing a wide range of data, including the annual speeches of mayors from different sizes of municipal governments and regions, this year's report reveals the common themes and priorities that local leaders share, and the unique perspectives and solutions they bring to challenges. The report also highlights the importance of federal support and partnership for local governments, especially in times of crisis and recovery.

The report shows how mayors address key issues with innovative and collaborative approaches, leveraging the unprecedented funding opportunities from the American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act. We have also seen how mayors are striving to improve the quality of life and well-being of their residents, with a focus on equity, inclusion, and sustainability.

The State of the Cities report shows that our local leaders are resilient, optimistic, and determined to rebuild their communities better than before. They are also eager to work with their federal counterparts to advance their shared goals and interests.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methodology

This report analyzed 37 mayoral speeches and utilized publicly available Census data from MySidewalk[37]. Findings offer insights into mayors' priorities and regional variations. Additionally quantitative analysis explored indicators such as crime rate, unemployment rate, park coverage, cost of living, and home affordability.

Mayoral State of the City speeches:

The 2023 State of the City report is based on a comprehensive content analysis of 37 mayoral speeches delivered between October 2022 and April 2023.[38] These speeches represent cities of various population sizes and geographic regions, providing a diverse sample for analysis. The dataset includes cities from four population categories, namely below 50K, 50K - 100K, 100K - 300K, and above 300K, as well as four geographic regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West.

Qualitative content analysis identified plans, goals, and impacts for nine topics.[39] To conduct the analysis, the mayoral speeches were coded into nine predefined topics which encompassed various aspects of city governance and development including infrastructure, economic development, budgets and management, public safety, health and human services, housing, energy and environment, government data and technology, and education.

The coding approach focused on identifying statements regarding three key elements: specific plans, goals/objectives, or impacts for 2023 or the future. We excluded any content related to the mayor's summary of past project accomplishments.

Plans involve the mayors presenting a timeline, funding strategy, and overall roadmap for action regarding a particular topic. Objectives referred to the mayor's long-term and/or short-term planning goals for the city, while impacts represented the anticipated effects of policies, projects, and development plans on the city's future.

To quantify the emphasis placed on each topic, we calculated the word count for each topic as well as the total word count of the overall coded content in each speech within the remaining future-oriented text. We then determined the proportion of each topic by dividing its word count by the total number of coded words. This approach enabled us to gauge the relative importance of each topic in the 2023 state of the city mayoral speeches. A higher percentage indicated a greater emphasis on the topic, suggesting that more plans, goals, and impacts were associated with it. Conversely, a lower percentage indicated less frequent mention of the topic. If a topic had a percentage of 0, it indicated that the mayor did not address any plans, goals, or impacts related to that topic in 2023.

By employing this rigorous coding and analysis approach, we gained insights into the priorities and visions of mayors across different cities in 2023. The findings shed light on the topics that received greater attention and were deemed critical for the future development and well-being of these cities.

Census data (provided by mySidewalk):

Indicators from census data were chosen to capture key aspects of city conditions and provide a

comprehensive understanding of the selected areas and examined across population size and geographic regions. These datasets encompassed a range of relevant indicators, including violent and property crime rates, unemployment rates, percent area covered by parks, and median housing costs as a percentage of income. The analysis sought to identify any notable differences or commonalities between cities that could inform decision-making processes and city planning efforts.

It is important to note that the study's methodology relied on the data provided by MySidewalk, which may have inherent limitations. These limitations could include potential data gaps, reliability of the data sources, and potential variations in data collection methodologies across different regions. It is also of note that the census data are drawn from different time periods due to availability of data for various categories of indicators, in this analysis we use the most recent data for each topic available. Therefore, careful consideration of these factors is necessary when interpreting the findings.

Community sentiment analysis (provided by ZenCity):

The third set of data used allowed us to examine residents' sentiments [40] toward key topics discussed in this report. We secured data from ZenCity on the following two topics: Public Safety and Economic Development during 2022 for 135 US cities. The variables used from the ZenCity database to account for the residents' sentiment toward Public Safety were "public violence and crime" and "general public safety" while the variables used to gauge sentiment towards Economic Development were "parks and community gardening" and "urban agriculture".

The data is collected from public forums like City's social media pages or local news organizations and decode the interactions in these forums according to topic and sentiment (positive, negative, or neutral). ZenCity defines sentiment as a measure of resident satisfaction on topics related to their community. It is important to note that measuring sentiment has its limitations due to the subjective element on the definition of sentiment. [41]

Sample of Cities by population:

For this report, we targeted all municipalities larger than 1000 in population. As shown in the table below, approximately half of all the governments were smaller than 1000 population. We did not include them in any of our analysis mostly due to lack of data availability.

Appendix Table 1

SAMPLE OF CITIES BY POPULATION

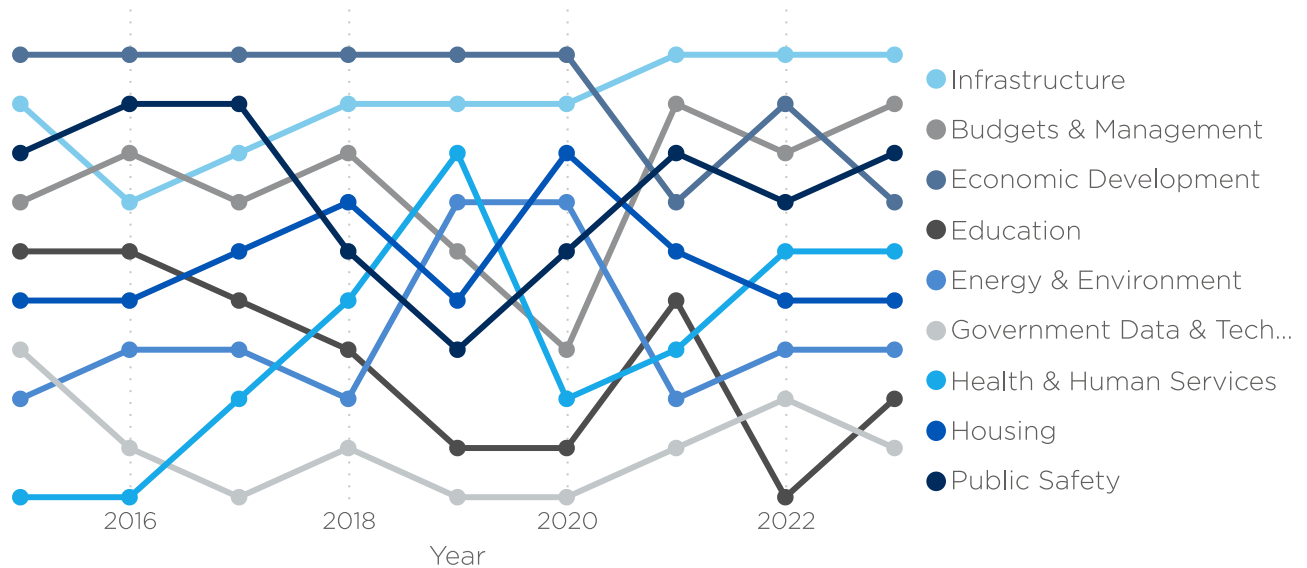| Population	Sum of Number of Cities
Less than 1k	15,915
1k to 49,999	14,825
50k to 99,999	530
100k to 299,999	263
300k or more	68

Source: All places available as defined by the geographies in mySidewalk WhereHouse API

Appendix B: Mayors' Priorities Over the Last Decade

NLC has conducted the State of the Cities report for 10 years. In this figure we provide the priorities of mayors in our sample across the decade.

Rankings of Priorities 2015–2023

Legend:
- Infrastructure
- Budgets & Management
- Economic Development
- Education
- Energy & Environment
- Government Data & Tech...
- Health & Human Services
- Housing
- Public Safety

X-axis (Year): 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022

Source: NLC State Of The Cities reports 2015-2023

Appendix C:
Learn more about our partners

MySidewalk

At mySidewalk, our mission is to democratize data storytelling and equip Changemakers like you with tools to build stronger communities. No matter which area you work in or the kind of community you serve, mySidewalk has the most relevant data from trusted sources and the tools that make it easy for you to tell powerful stories about missions that matter most to your community. WhereHouse is the most complete, consistent and connected community data library on the planet structured for search by who, what, when and where. Query from 4+ billion data values spanning 40 years, 450K geographies and 8K indicators that fit your compliance and regulatory environment. Learn more at mySidewalk.com.

ZenCity 360 – The Platform for Community Trust

In the creation of this report, Zencity proudly supported the National League of Cities by providing both resident sentiment analysis and national survey data. Sentiment Analysis was completed by Zencity's proprietary generative AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP) models designed to surface meaningful insights on civic issues from 135 communities. Zencity collected, sorted and anonymized the data from social media for these communities to recognize the main topics and assign positive/negative sentiment in the discussion – prioritizing by volume of conversations.

Zencity's National Survey digitally recruited 6,245 respondents to build a representative sample by matching respondent data to the U.S. Census Bureau's race, ethnicity, age, and gender distributions in each state. Rake-weighting was applied as a statistical safeguard to balance out any remaining discrepancies in distribution, so no demographic group is overrepresented or underrepresented in the final scores.

Learn more about mySidewalk here:

Learn more about Zencity here:

Endnotes

1   The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) is a legislation that authorizes funds for various infrastructure projects in the United States. It was passed by Congress on November 6, 2021, and signed into law by President Biden on November 15, 2021. The BIL provides $550 billion in new federal investment over five years for roads, bridges, transit, water, broadband, resilience, and other sectors. It is the largest long-term investment in the nation's infrastructure and economy in history.

2   The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) is a US$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill passed by the 117th United States Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden on March 11, 2021. The bill provides additional relief to address the continued impact of COVID-19 on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals, and businesses.

3   McBride, J., & Siripurapu, A. (2021). The state of U.S. infrastructure. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/state-us-infrastructure

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37 MySidewalk is a powerful software platform which merges, synthesizes and makes it easy to access many data sets including those that are available through the US Census, Department of Transportation and other sources. The benefit of using MySidewalk data is that the data from disparate sources has been matched by geography and across time, substantially cutting down on the preparation and cleaning necessary for analysis."

38 The mayoral speeches were collected from the "Sate of the City Address" speech that each mayor presented.

39 The nine topics for the quantitative analysis are: city governance and development (including infrastructure), economic development, budgets and management, public safety, health and human services, housing, energy and environment, government data and technology, and education.

40 ZenCity is a platform that collects and analyzes the sentiments of the residents so the government officials can identify priorities and make decisions based on the voices of their residents. The data is collected from public forums like City's social media pages or local news organizations and decode the interactions in these forums according to topic and sentiment (positive, negative, or neutral). ZenCity defines "sentiment" as a measure of satisfaction from the residents regarding topics related to their community (public safety, for example).

41 To know more regarding the work of ZenCity please review Appendix C.

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