

Unlocking Housing Supply: Mayors' Views on the Politics of Housing

2025 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

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INTRODUCTION

In their bestselling book, *Abundance*, journalists Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson argue that America is unaffordable because we have made it too difficult to build.¹ Onerous permitting processes and land use regulations have contributed to an undersupply of housing, which has placed reasonably priced housing out of reach for millions of Americans. The problem, they argue, is particularly acute in blue cities more amenable to ample regulations. Their work popularizes a wide body of economics research that has thoroughly documented the relationship between land use regulations and high housing costs.^{2,3}

Public opinion research suggests that the [general public largely does not know about or buy into this supply-focused](#) conceptualization of housing markets.⁴ Survey research shows that Americans often do not believe that increasing the housing supply will reduce housing prices. We know relatively little, however, about whether local public officials have similar views about housing markets⁵ — and, more broadly, the policy solutions they believe will best address rising housing prices. The officials' perceptions and preferences are critical because shaping development and land use policy is one of the core functions of local government.

This year's Menino Survey of Mayors tackles these important issues. We asked mayors about their perceptions of the causes of the housing crisis, and what policies they believe will reduce the price of housing in their communities. We also asked them about the political challenges they face when attempting to build new housing.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

A growing majority of mayors believes that increasing the supply of housing will reduce costs.

Relative to four years ago, a higher proportion of mayors believe that increasing the supply of market-rate housing will reduce housing prices.

Mayors are less consistent in their support of policies that would increase the housing supply.

While some supply focused reforms are supported by substantial majorities, others like standardizing building codes, eliminating single-family zoning, and dramatically reforming public meeting processes are not.

Democratic mayors are more likely to: (1) Believe that increasing the supply of housing will reduce costs and (2) Support a variety of regulatory measures that would streamline the building process.

These findings run contrary to many popular media accounts contending that blue cities and states are uniquely prone to such governance failures.

1 Klein, Ezra, and Derek Thompson. *Abundance*. New York: Avid Reader Press, 2025.

2 See for example Glaeser, Edward L., and Joseph Gyourko. 2025. "America's Housing Supply Problem: The Closing of the Suburban Frontier?" *NBER Working Paper* No. 33876. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w33876>.

3 Clifford, Liz, Seva Rodnyansky, and Dennis Su. "Austin's Surge of New Housing Construction Drove Down Rents." Pew, March 18, 2026. <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2026/03/18/austins-surge-of-new-housing-construction-drove-down-rents>.

4 Elmendorf, Christopher S., Clayton Nall, and Stan Oklobdzija. 2025. "The Folk Economics of Housing." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 39 (3): 45-66. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.20241428>.

5 Though see Been, Vicki, Ingrid Gould Ellen, and Katherine M. O'Regan. 2025. "Supply Skepticism Revisited." *Housing Policy Debate* 35 (1): 96-113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2024.2418044>.

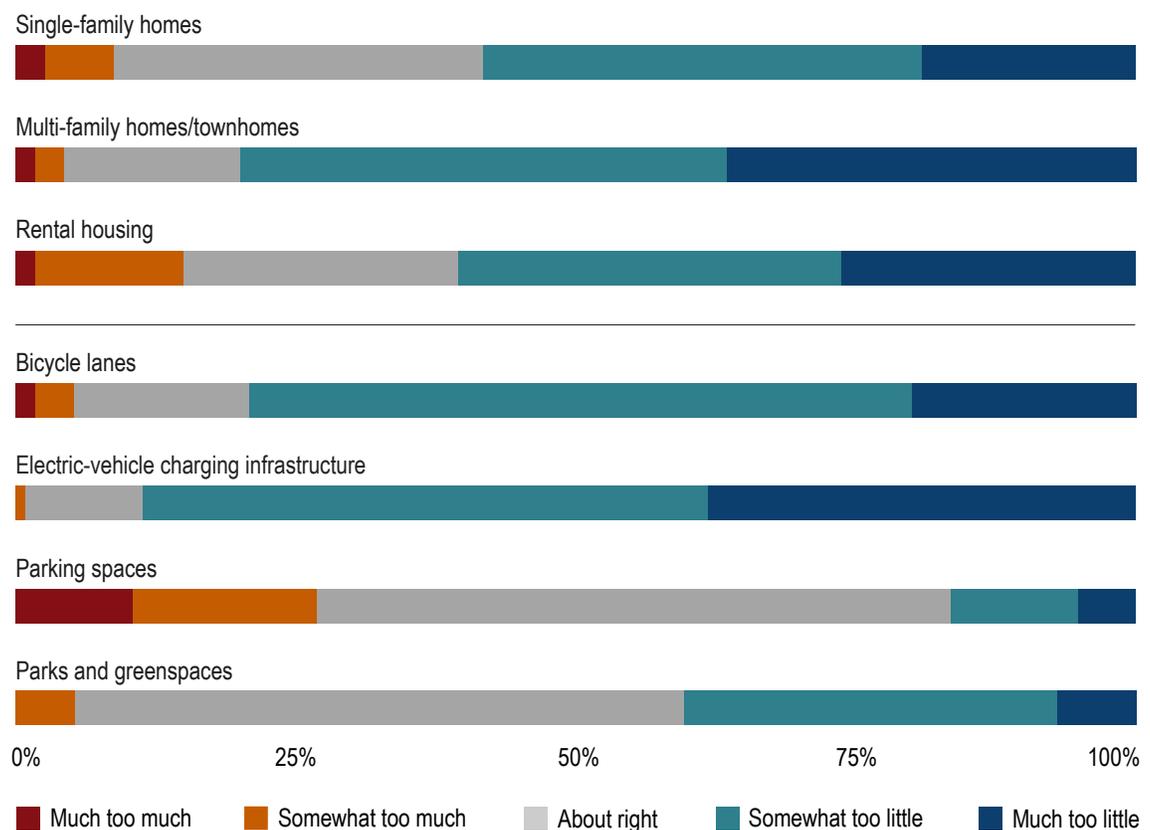


PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL HOUSING MARKET CONDITIONS

The vast majority of mayors, 80 percent, believe that their cities have too little multifamily housing. A smaller majority, 61 percent, think their city has too little rental housing. These views align with economics research which shows that the failure to build enough housing has contributed to America’s growing housing crisis.

Figure 1. Perceptions of Local Supply: Housing, Infrastructure, and Amenities

Do you think your city has too much, too little, or the right amount of the following?



Mayors’ views also reveal a strong attachment to single-family homes, consistent with the American public more broadly. Fifty-eight percent of mayors think their cities have “too little” single-family housing; only nine percent think their city has “too much.”⁶ This perspective is consistent across partisan lines and somewhat less aligned with the broader research community’s focus on rental and multifamily supply. For example, one mayor of a northeastern city with older housing stock said that single-family is “*dangerously too little.*” On the other hand, another mayor said that their city needs “*more housing in general*” but that “*proportionately they have somewhat too much single family.*”

⁶ This statistic is not simply driven by mayors believing there is too little housing of all types: 60 percent of mayors who said there was too little multifamily housing also said there was too little single-family housing.



A majority of mayors, 57 percent, think their cities have the right amount of parking. While some mayors may be comfortable with America’s notorious oversupply of parking,⁷ others may have responded this way because they recently reformed their parking minimums to reduce the amount of parking required in their city.

Democratic mayors were more likely than Republican ones to say that their cities had too little multifamily housing and rental housing. While 69 percent of Democratic mayors believe their cities have “somewhat too little” or “much too little” rental housing, only 30 percent of Republican mayors believe their cities have “somewhat too little” rental housing, and none said their city has “much too little.” Indeed, while partisan gaps in housing policy are generally more muted than other policy domains, Democratic mayors tend to be more supportive of higher density housing across multiple question items. Views about single-family housing did not vary across party lines.

While these data show the vast majority of mayors worried about undersupply, it is also instructive to understand that some mayors took a dissenting position and worried about over supply, or rapid supply increases on policy grounds. While far from a majority position, one said “when you’re building housing at a rate that’s faster than job growth, you are going to have declining housing prices eventually and that leads to all kinds of bad stuff that people aren’t talking about today.” This mayor attributed these concerns to a subset of markets saying “it probably won’t happen in [a lot of major metros], but can certainly happen here.”

VIEWS OF CITY HOUSING LEADERS

Table 1. Most-Cited Cities for Housing Affordability Responses

In recent years, many cities have faced a housing affordability crisis. Which cities or mayors, other than your own, do you think are doing the best job of responding to housing affordability problems in their city?

Housing challenges are affecting cities of all types across the country. As in past surveys, we asked mayors to identify other cities they view as models — specifically, which cities are “doing the best job of responding to housing affordability problems.” Mayors named 180 cities in total; 65 distinct cities — representing the full spectrum of sizes and regions — were cited at least once.

Two cities stand out from the rest: Austin and Minneapolis were each named by 15 mayors. These two cities recently (and prominently) reformed their zoning (and consequently produced more housing). For example, one mayor lauded Austin but also noted it was a very different market which would limit the relevance of some lessons: “Austin is crushing it with respect to housing, but they are a city of a million and we’re a city of 300,000. Some of the strategies they use (and the ability to create new neighborhoods), isn’t possible here. Our market doesn’t have that strength.”

San Diego and Atlanta were the third most cited with six each. Twelve cities were mentioned by at least three mayors. Several places that were frequently cited [in a prior, more general “learning from other cities” question](#) — including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia — were mentioned only a few times as models for responding to housing affordability problems.⁸

Cities named at least three times by other mayors

Minneapolis, MN	15
Austin, TX	15
San Diego, CA	6
Atlanta, GA	6
Nashville, TN	4
Columbus, OH	4
Seattle, WA	3
San Antonio, TX	3
Portland, OR	3
Phoenix, AZ	3
Houston, TX	3
Boston, MA	3

⁷ Shoup, Donald C. 2011. *The High Cost of Free Parking: Updated Edition*. New York: Routledge.

⁸ Einstein, Katherine Levine, and David M. Glick. 2016. 2015 Menino Survey of Mayors: Final Report. Edited and contribution by Katharine Lusk. Boston University Initiative on Cities. <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2020/12/Menino-Survey-of-Mayors-2015-Final-Report.pdf>.

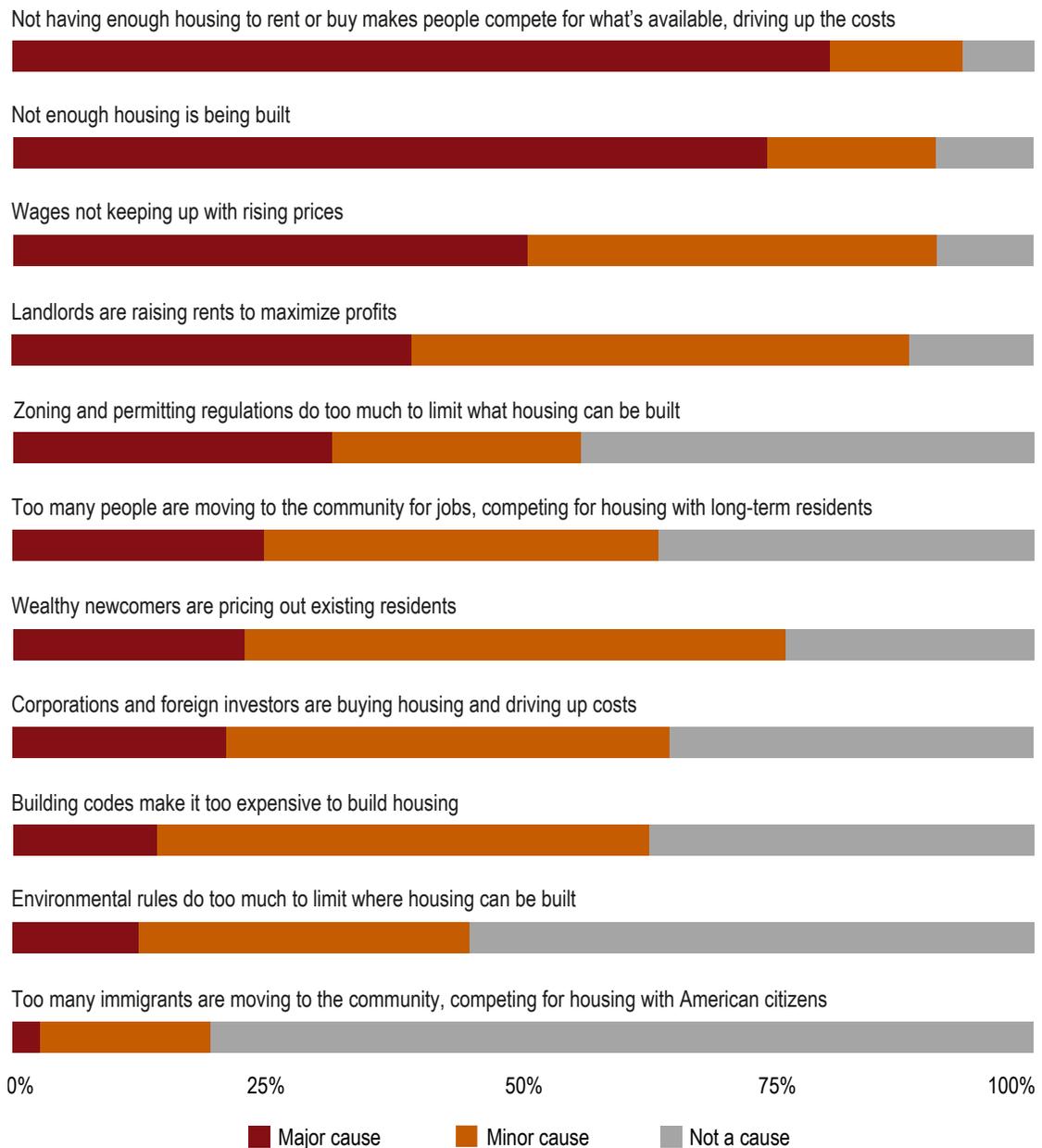


BELIEFS ABOUT HOUSING MARKETS

Strong majorities of mayors believe that an inadequate supply of housing is a major cause of the housing crisis. Seventy-four percent say that “not enough housing” being built is a “major cause” of the increasing cost of housing in their cities, and an even larger proportion say competition for too few available options to rent or buy is a major cause. As one mayor put it, reflecting this focus on macro supply constraints: *“The biggest cause is the lack of supply. The rest don’t rise to that.”*

Figure 2. Perceived Causes of Rising Housing Costs

Please indicate the extent to which each of the following is a cause of the increasing cost of housing in your city. Or, is the cost of housing not increasing in your city?





CAUSES OF INADEQUATE HOUSING SUPPLY

Yet while mayors largely align on these supply issues, far fewer attribute inadequate supply to well-established policy causes. This gap suggests a disconnect between mayors' perceptions of market-level supply pressures and their beliefs about the policy drivers and remedies.

Only about one-third of mayors identify zoning and permitting regulations as a "major cause" of the housing crisis, and 14 percent point to building codes or environmental rules. Those figures are notably low, though several mayors noted recent reforms that changed their assessments. One mayor who called zoning and permitting "minor" clarified that "they recently changed their land use code" and prior to this update would have considered them a "major cause." Conversely, a smaller but noteworthy number of mayors warned that building codes are "turning into a major cause."

In comparison, a higher percentage of mayors (though still only 21 percent) cite corporations and foreign investors as a "major cause" of the increasing cost of housing in their city. A larger share, 39 percent, highlight landlords seeking profits as a major cause of rising housing. Both of these cited causes stand in contrast with a wide consensus in economics research. As the percentages show, these views were not universal: several mayors aggressively objected to the focus on these types of mechanisms. Speaking of landlords raising rents, one said it is "not a cause, [it is] a consequence."

Several results in this section stand out for the magnitude of partisan splits. Nearly all Democratic mayors (86 percent) said that not enough housing being built is a "major cause" of increasing housing costs in their cities. This near universal consensus meant that Democrats were nearly 50 percentage points more likely than their Republican counterparts to believe that not building enough increases housing prices.

Figure 3. "Not Enough Housing is Being Built," by Party

Please indicate the extent to which each of the following is a cause of the increasing cost of housing in your city. Or, is the cost of housing not increasing in your city? [Not enough housing is being built]

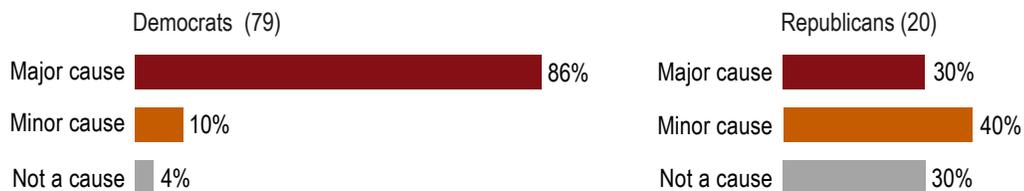


Figure 4. "Not Having Enough Housing to Rent or Buy Makes People Compete for What's Available," by Party

Please indicate the extent to which each of the following is a cause of the increasing cost of housing in your city. Or, is the cost of housing not increasing in your city? [Not having enough housing to rent or buy makes people compete for what's available, driving up the costs]

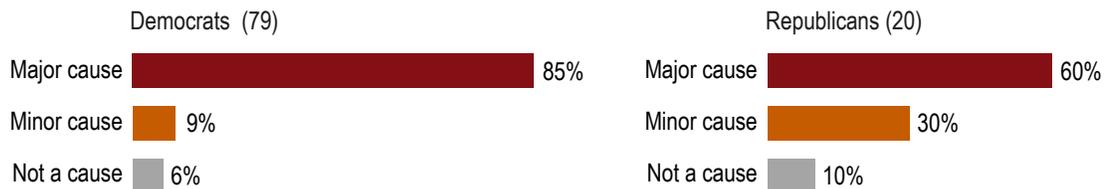




Table 2. Perceived Major Causes of Rising Housing Costs

Please indicate the extent to which each of the following is a cause of the increasing cost of housing in your city. Or, is the cost of housing not increasing in your city? [Note: Percent saying “Major Cause” overall and by party.]

	All	Democrat	Republican	Difference
Overall Supply Shortages				
Not having enough housing to rent or buy makes people compete for what’s available, driving up the costs	80	85	60	25
Not enough housing is being built	74	86	30	56
Supply Side Issues: Regulatory				
Zoning and permitting regulations do too much to limit what housing can be built	31	41	5	36
Building codes make it too expensive to build housing	14	13	10	3
Environmental rules do too much to limit where housing can be built	12	10	10	0
Demand Side Issues				
Wages not keeping up with rising prices	50	60	15	45
Too many people are moving to the community for jobs, competing for housing with long-term residents	25	22	30	-8
Wealthy newcomers are pricing out existing residents	23	25	20	-5
Too many immigrants are moving to the community, competing for housing with American citizens	3	3	5	-2
Ownership Issues				
Landlords are raising rents to maximize profits	39	44	35	9
Corporations and foreign investors are buying housing and driving up costs	21	20	25	-5

In some cases though, we see little evidence of a partisan divide — itself a notable result in the context of high levels of national polarization. The partisan gap was smaller on the related macro-supply question of whether “not having enough housing to rent or buy makes people compete for what’s available, driving up the costs.” On that question, nearly all Democratic mayors (85 percent) said it was a major cause, compared with 60 percent of Republican mayors.



Democrats were also much more likely to identify income-side problems. Sixty percent of Democratic mayors (versus 15 percent of Republicans) said “wages not keeping up” was a major contributor to housing affordability problems.

On this and other similar questions, we cannot parse the extent to which these beliefs about housing supply and demand follow from partisanship, ideology, different conditions on the ground, or other factors.

Three of the items in this section focus on regulatory challenges to housing supply. On two of these — items about building codes and environmental regulations as challenges — Democrats and Republicans provided similar answers. On both, only about 10 percent in each party call them a major cause of rising housing costs. But opinions diverge on zoning and permitting: 41 percent of Democrats see these regulations as a major source of cost increases, compared with just five percent of Republicans.

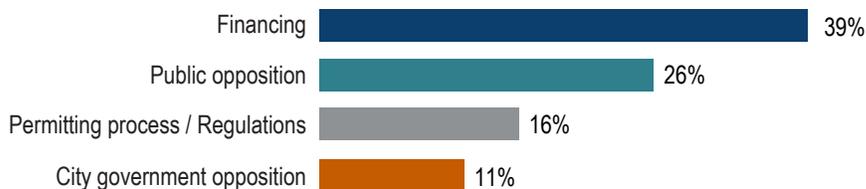
On a number of other items, Democrats’ and Republicans’ perceptions of housing affordability sources were very similar.

On a number of other items, Democrats’ and Republicans’ perceptions of housing affordability sources were very similar. These items include things like wealthier residents pricing people out, landlord profiteering, and corporations and foreign investors buying up properties. Notably, almost no mayors of either party saw “too many immigrants competing” for scarce housing as a major source of affordability challenges (three and five percent respectively). As one mayor observed, immigrants are an “*economic driver in our community.*” Another said “*residents would say major cause [...] but it’s also why we’re thriving. I say not a cause.*”

These closed-ended responses capture mayors’ perceptions of the general challenges affecting housing costs in their cities. We also asked mayors about obstacles to housing development using an open-ended prompt, inviting them to recall a project they considered feasible and beneficial but that ultimately proved impossible to build, and to identify the main factor that caused its demise. We coded those responses; roughly 40 percent cited financing, 25 percent cited public opposition, and 16 percent cited permitting or regulatory issues.

Figure 5. Reasons Promising Projects Failed

Can you share an example of a housing or infrastructure project in your city that seemed feasible and would have benefited your community, but ultimately was impossible to build?





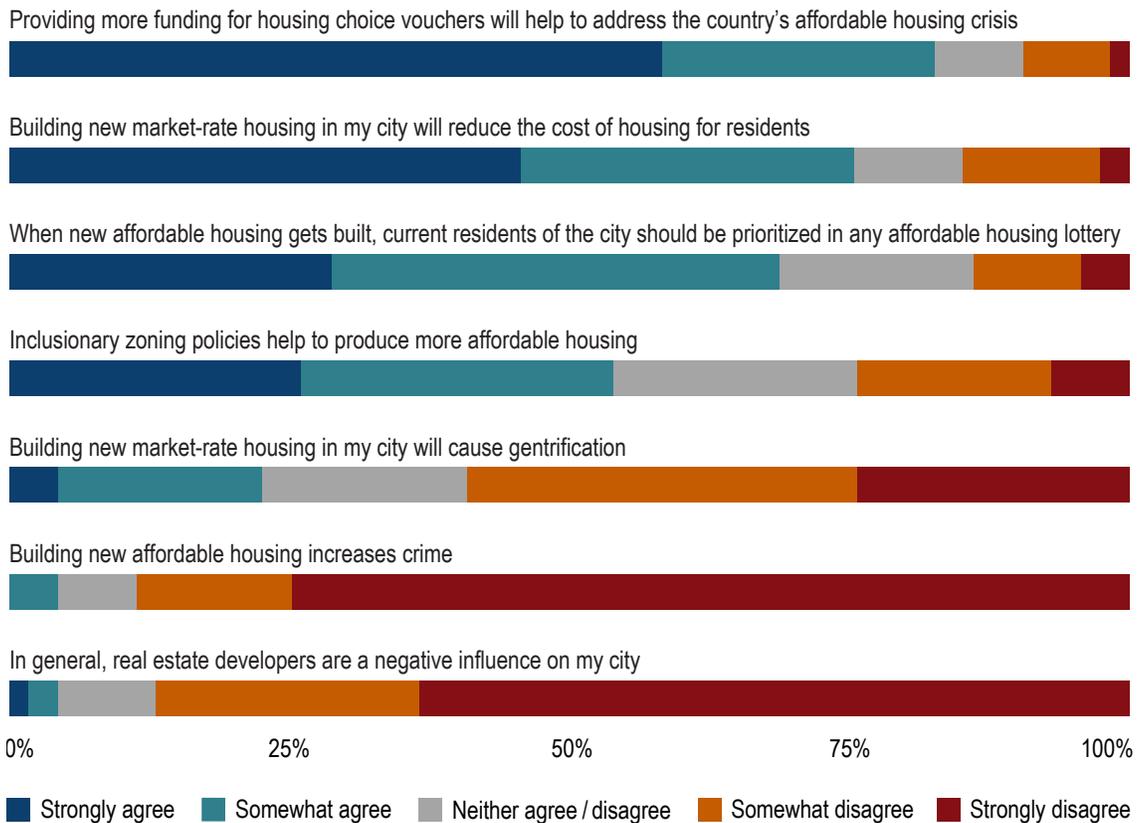
THE EFFECT OF POLICY CHOICES ON HOUSING MARKETS

When we asked mayors more broadly about the relationship between policies and housing markets, majorities of mayors also hold views that accord with economics research on housing markets.⁹ The vast majority do not believe that building new affordable housing increases crime. Moreover, a strong majority of mayors also believe that building new market-rate housing in their city will reduce the cost of housing for residents.¹⁰

These findings mark a notable increase from the previous two years we have asked this question (2021 and 2023), suggesting a potentially important role for public education on housing markets. In 2021, about 60 percent of mayors agreed or strongly agreed that building more would reduce prices with fewer than 30 percent strongly agreeing. In 2025, 75 percent agree or strongly agree, with more than half strongly agreeing.¹¹

Figure 6. Views on the Effects of Policies on Housing Markets

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.



9 Freedman, Matthew, and Emily G. Owens. 2011. "Low-Income Housing Development and Crime." *Journal of Urban Economics* 70 (2-3): 115-131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2011.04.001>.

10 Glaeser, Edward L., and Joseph Gyourko. 2025. "America's Housing Supply Problem: The Closing of the Suburban Frontier?" *NBER Working Paper* No. 33876. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w33876>.

11 Einstein, Katherine L., David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2026. "Survey of Mayors Data Portal." <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/data/>. Accessed on March 3, 2026.



Figure 7. Perceptions of Market-Rate Housing's Effect on Housing Cost, 2021-2025

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: *Building new market-rate housing in my city will reduce the cost of housing for residents.*

There are also significant, and somewhat counterintuitive, partisan differences in the response to this question. Compared to Republicans, Democratic mayors are significantly more likely to believe that increasing the supply of market-rate housing will reduce the cost of housing; this partisan gap is consistent with the party gaps on the supply questions reported above (Figures 3 and 4), but runs contrary to some popular narratives¹² that focus exclusively on Democratic cities' lack of concern to supply issues.

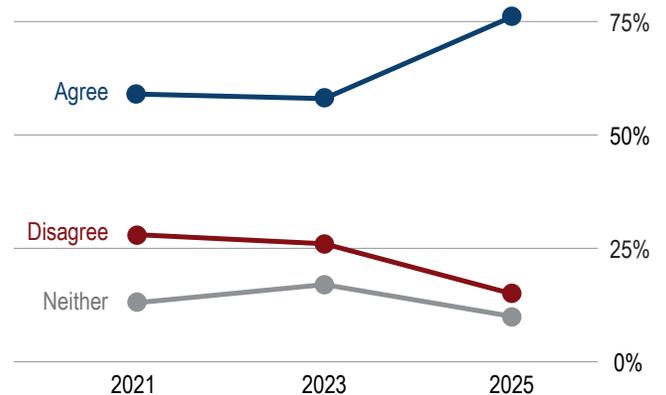
Mayors at least somewhat endorse supply-oriented explanations for the housing crisis. They also strongly support demand-side solutions to the housing crisis — namely providing prospective homeseekers with more resources to buy or rent homes. The area of strongest mayoral agreement among the questions asked in Figure 6 was on housing choice vouchers: an overwhelming majority of mayors agreed that increased funding for housing choice vouchers would help address the country's affordable housing crisis. Some housing policy researchers show that such funding, in the absence of robust housing supply increases, may actually exacerbate the housing crisis by increasing demand without a compensating growth in supply.¹³

While the [general public abhors developers](#),¹⁴ mayors largely see them as a positive or neutral presence. Strong majorities of mayors of both political parties disagree that developers are a negative influence in their cities; fewer than 10 percent agree or strongly agree. As one mayor explained their response, *"it's a political problem. No one likes developers, but they build."* Another said *"they're not perfect but they're trying."*

HOMELESSNESS

Mayors are evenly divided as to whether they believe that homelessness is first and foremost a housing affordability problem. In fact, nearly identical proportions (between 20 and 25 percent) strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement that *"homelessness in my city is first and foremost a housing affordability problem."* A somewhat higher percentage (10 percentage points) disagree relative to when we asked this question in 2021 (the same percentage of mayors agree; fewer mayors adopted the neutral position).

Democratic mayors are significantly more likely to agree with this perspective. Over 30 percent of Democrats "strongly agree" compared to zero Republicans. In contrast, nearly half of Republicans strongly disagree compared to just 10 percent of Democrats.



12 See for example Klein, Ezra. 2023. "The Problem With Everything-Bagel Liberalism." *The New York Times*, April 2, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/02/opinion/democrats-liberalism.html>.

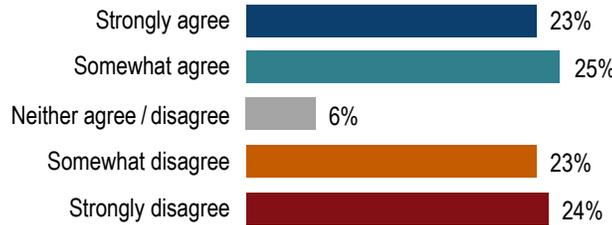
13 Carozzi, Felipe, Christian A. L. Hilber, and Xiaolun Yu. 2024. "On the Economic Impacts of Mortgage Credit Expansion Policies: Evidence from Help to Buy." *Journal of Urban Economics* 139: 103611. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2023.103611>

14 Einstein, Katherine Levine, David M. Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2022. "Developing a Pro-Housing Movement? Public Distrust of Developers, Fractured Coalitions, and the Challenges of Measuring Political Power." *Interest Groups & Advocacy*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-022-00159-y>.



Figure 8. Homelessness as a Housing Affordability Problem

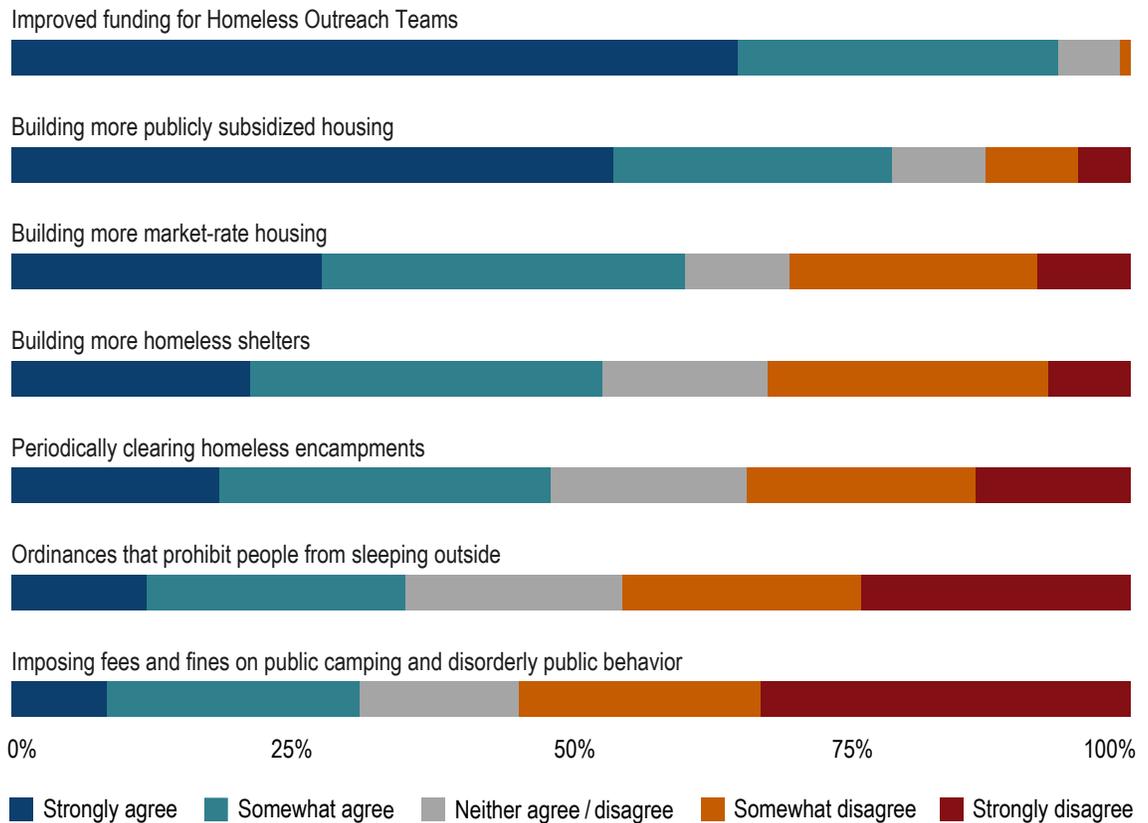
Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with this statement: Homelessness in my city is first and foremost a housing affordability problem.



In terms of potential policy remedies, mayors largely connect housing supply — especially the subsidized housing supply — with homelessness. A strong majority of mayors believe that building more subsidized housing will help to reduce homelessness in their city, while a slightly smaller majority feel the same about market-rate housing. Importantly, though, these responses are not the items with the most consensus: 94 percent of mayors agree that improving funding for Homeless Outreach Teams would reduce homelessness in their cities, suggesting the strongest support for social-service oriented approaches to homelessness policy.

Figure 9. Strategies for Reducing Homelessness

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree: The following will help to reduce homelessness in my city:





HOUSING POLICY PREFERENCES

Mayors largely (though certainly not universally) perceive supply and demand imbalances in their housing markets and connect them to rising costs. We turn now to their housing policy preferences and how they align with these views on housing markets. These housing policy preferences exist in a world of sensitive politics and public opinion.

“It’s not as controversial to fund housing, but it is controversial to imagine where it might be placed.”

As we detail below, housing and housing supply related issues came up over and over again as the issue that divides mayors’ cities. Indicative of some of these sentiments, one mayor said, *“housing may be the most contentious overall issue [...] we’re in the midst of some very contentious discussions on the council right now related to zoning and land use issues, and I think that’s where you see this happen. It’s not as controversial to fund housing, but it is controversial to imagine where it might be placed.”*

Strong majorities of mayors at least somewhat support policies that would make it easier to build more multifamily housing either by altering zoning and land use regulations or by reforming the local permitting process. Some of these policies (e.g., allowing city staff to approve new housing permits that comply with all existing rules) have strong bipartisan support with about 70 percent of mayors from both parties reporting “strong support.” While a bit of a colorful outlier, one mayor said *“we need to move to an as of right machine.”* However, even on this 70/30 question there are also strong dissenters. One mayor said they *“strongly oppose allowing staff to make those decisions.”*

Other items reflect more polarization; 80 percent of Democratic mayors strongly support allowing underused commercial property to be converted to housing, compared with 25 percent of Republican mayors. Democratic mayors also strongly endorse (by more than a 50 percentage point margin) allowing multifamily housing by right in any existing city neighborhood, but Republican mayors oppose such a reform (by a 30 percentage point margin).

Allowing more apartments near transit is very popular across party lines; nonetheless, there are still sizable partisan differences, with nearly all Democrats (91 percent) strongly supporting this policy, compared to 63 percent of Republicans.

Figure 10. Support for Housing Policy Reforms

Please indicate your level of support for each policy reform.

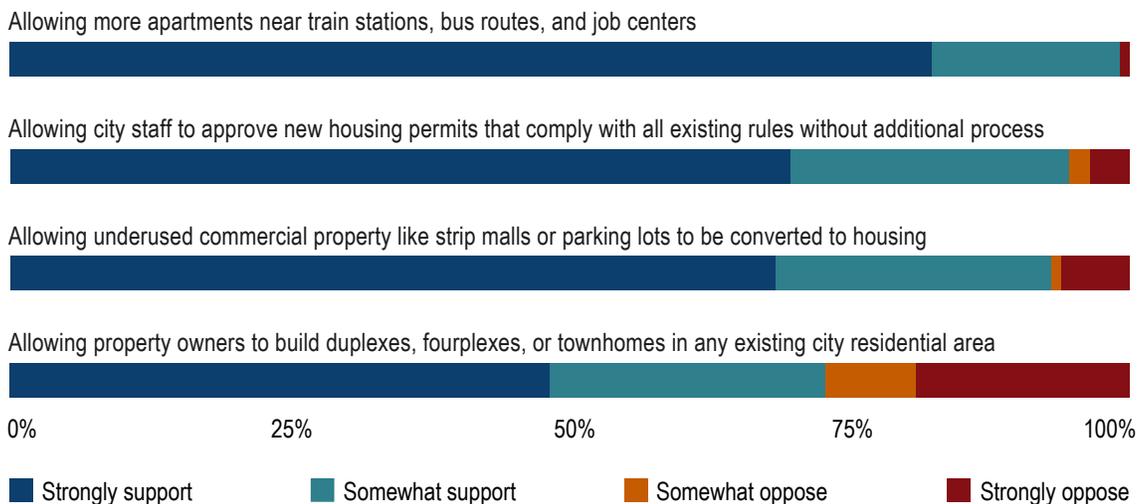




Table 3. Support for Housing Policy Reforms, by Party

Percent saying “Strongly Support” and “Somewhat Support” overall and by party.

	All	Democrat	Republican	Difference
Allowing more apartments near train stations, bus routes, and job centers	82	91	63	28
Allowing city staff to approve new housing permits that comply with all existing rules without additional process	70	71	70	1
Allowing underused commercial property like strip malls or parking lots to be converted to housing	68	80	25	55
Allowing property owners to build duplexes, fourplexes, or townhomes in any existing city residential area	48	61	16	45

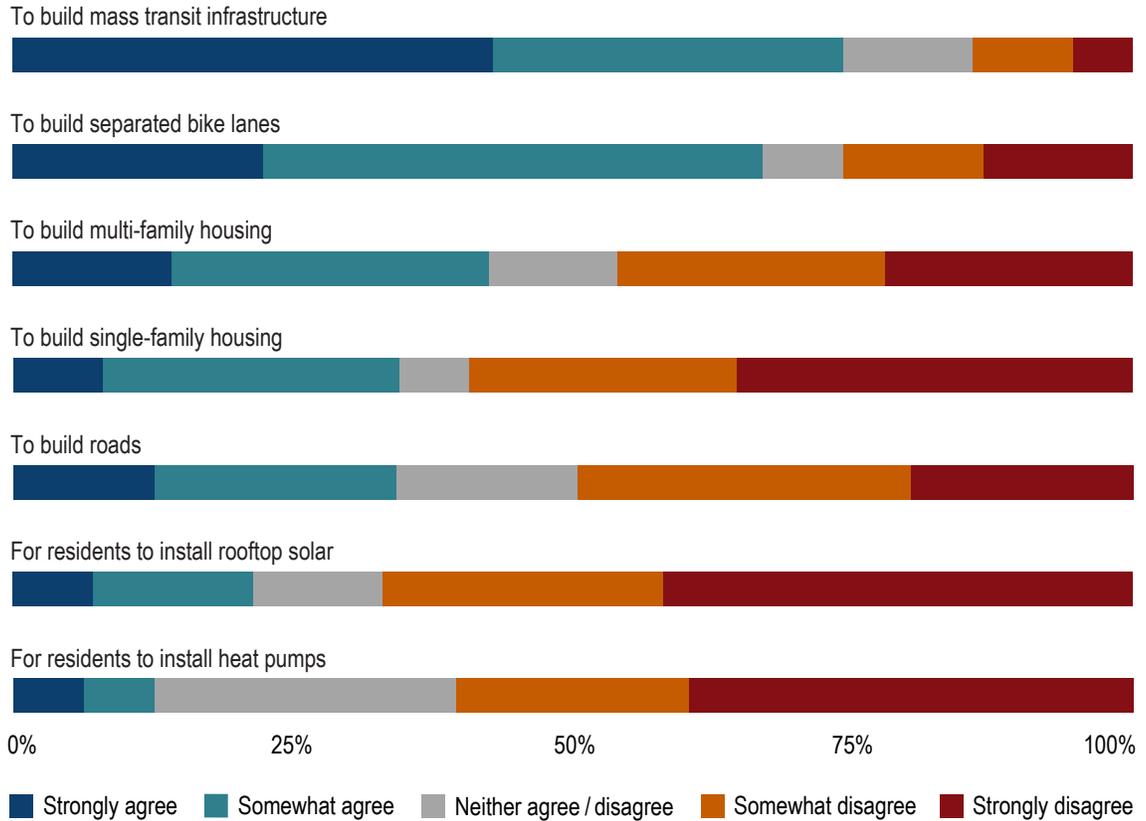
But, majorities of mayors in both parties do not believe it is too hard to build multifamily housing (although a slight majority of mayors from higher-cost cities do view multifamily construction as too hard.) In general, mayors do not perceive major differences in the difficulty of building multifamily housing relative to single-family housing. Forty-two percent agree or strongly agree that building multifamily housing is “too hard,” compared with 35 percent for single-family housing.

While mayors are more divided in their views on the challenges of housing development, they largely agree on barriers to building transportation infrastructure. Strong majorities believe it is too difficult to build mass transit infrastructure and bicycle lanes. Thus, while they see the supply of housing as inadequate, many mayors do not believe the construction process is the primary pain point preventing the development of new housing.



Figure 11. Perceived Difficulty of Building in Cities

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. In my city, it is too hard:



Mayors are reluctant to adopt some of the more aggressive policy measures that states and cities have adopted to ease multifamily development. We asked about two relatively recent legislative changes that other states have made. On the first — eliminating single-family zoning and allowing duplexes by right, as in Oregon and Montana — a plurality of mayors strongly opposes the change in their states. These responses are essentially unchanged from 2023 when we last asked this question, though 2025 shows slightly more strong support.¹⁵ One mayor explained their opposition, stating “because of local control, and because I do think that there’s something to having some single-family neighborhoods rather than a blanket policy.” This comment is representative of a considerable number of opposing mayors’ views as many invoked “local control.”

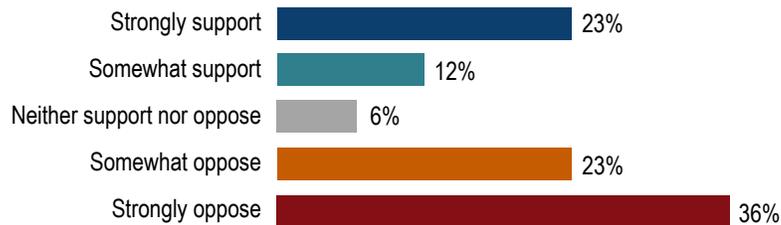
Republican mayors were particularly opposed: a mere five percent support eliminating single-family zoning, compared with 45 percent of their Democratic counterparts. Some mayors framed their objections as concerns about the loss of local control, while others outright rejected the policy.

¹⁵ Einstein, Katherine L., David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2026. “Survey of Mayors Data Portal.” <https://www.surveymayors.com/data/>. Accessed on March 3, 2026.



Figure 12. Support for Eliminating Single-Family Zoning

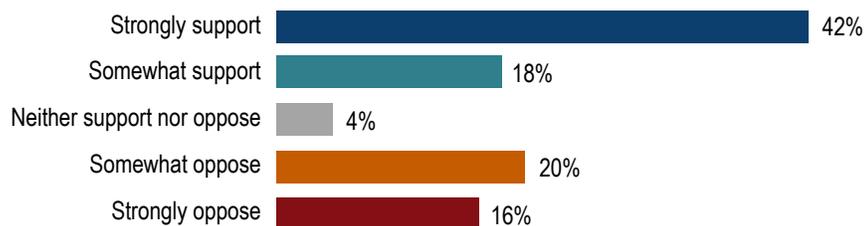
Oregon and Montana passed state legislation that required cities over a certain size (10,000 in Oregon and 5,000 in Montana) to eliminate single-family zoning and allow the development of duplexes by right. How supportive would you be of a similar policy in your state?



Considerably more mayors support allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) statewide like, for example, California and Oregon. A plurality of mayors strongly supports this policy, and a majority endorses it. These numbers are largely unchanged from 2023 when we asked this question immediately after the legislative changes it references.¹⁶ As with single-family zoning, there is a considerable partisan split: 68 percent of Democratic mayors support it, compared with 25 percent of Republican mayors. As with the zoning question, opponents emphasized concerns about “local control.” For example, and representative of many, one mayor believes that “ADUs can be important but they should have local control on it.” Another, focused more on policy concerns, said “personally, I wish we could find a hybrid to figure out how to make it happen. Concern is not the initial use of the ADU — because it’s the mother-in-laws, etc. But then it becomes a short-term rental, then a party house, and then a problem with the neighbors.”

Figure 13. Support for Streamlining ADU Permitting

California and Oregon passed state laws allowing property owners to construct Accessory Dwelling Units without going through a lengthy permitting process. How supportive would you be of a similar policy in your state?



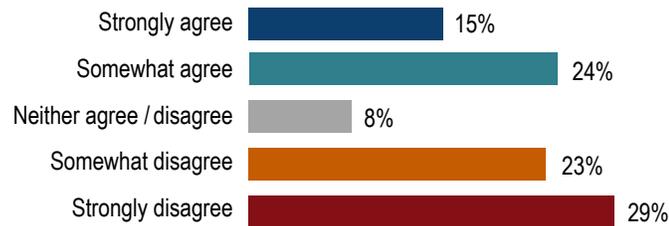
Mayors are evenly split about standardizing building codes if it means a loss of local control. Almost 40 percent of mayors support it, while 52 percent of mayors oppose. Democrats are significantly more comfortable with this standardization, with 47 percent endorsing it, compared with 30 percent of Republican mayors.

¹⁶ Einstein, Katherine L., David Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2026. “Survey of Mayors Data Portal.” <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/data/>. Accessed on March 3, 2026.



Figure 14. Support for State Standardization of Building Codes

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with this statement: State governments should standardize and simplify building codes even if it means local governments have less control over their own codes.



PUBLIC MEETINGS

Researchers have identified public meetings about housing developments as a potential contributor to rising housing costs.¹⁷ These meetings are disproportionately attended by older, homeowners who are often overwhelmingly opposed to the construction of new housing; they frequently become sites of conflict, contributing to project delays and higher development costs.

Only 44 percent of mayors think that public meetings make it harder to build housing.

Mayors recognize at least some of these problems: only a small minority believe that public meetings attract a representative subset of neighborhood views. But, strong majorities of mayors also somewhat contradictorily see these meetings as good sources of information about public perceptions and helpful tools for building trust between the community and developers.

A smaller majority believes that public meetings are a good source of new factual information for the government. Only 44 percent of mayors think that public meetings make it harder to build housing.

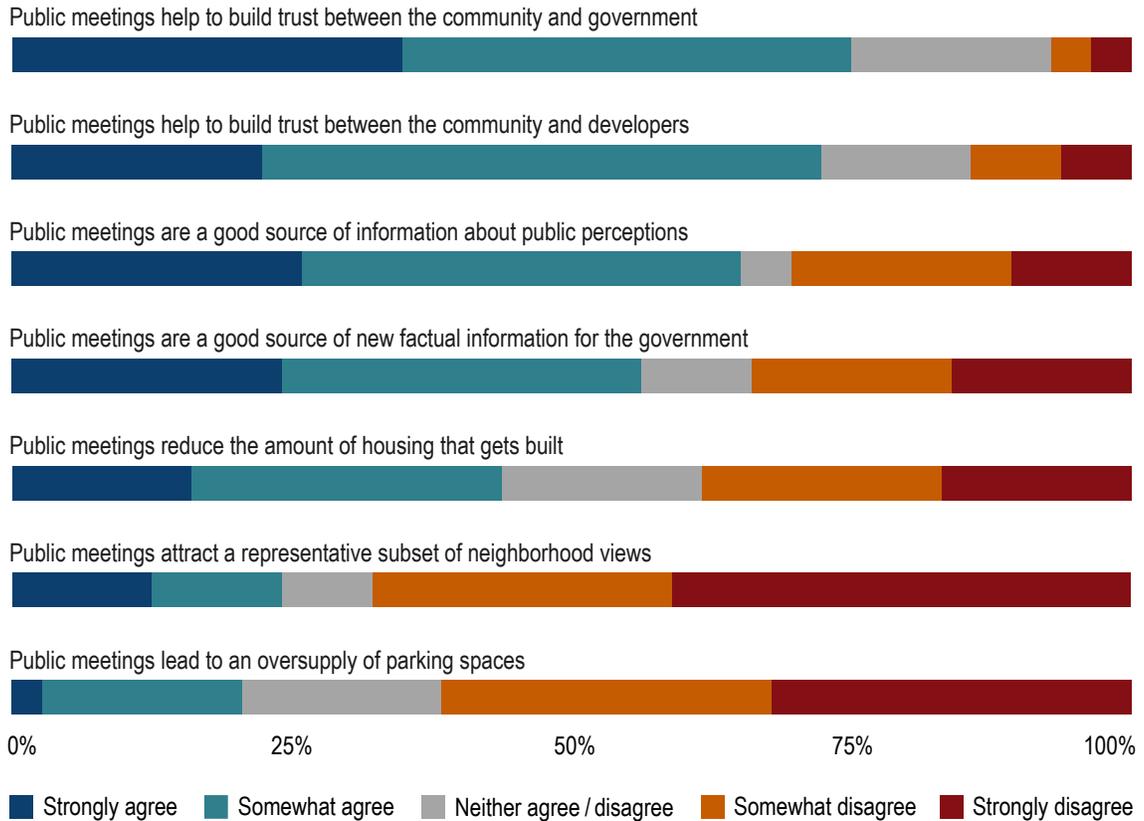
One mayor's comments captured some concerns about project-by-project meetings that many in the research and policy community share. Framing regulations as tools to provide predictability for developers, the mayor explained that *"the time to develop your policy conversations are not in the middle of a development review process, it's when you're adopting your comprehensive plan and your policy guiding documents. That's when the biggest components of public involvement are required. Because once you set the direction on the policy, the policy implementers and the policymakers should be able to approve based on what you adopted. The public gets very involved when they see a site plan, but when they should have been involved is when the zoning map and comp plan was adopted five, seven, 10 years ago."*

¹⁷ Einstein, Katherine Levine, David M. Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Figure 15. Role of Public Meetings in Development

Many cities use public meetings for a variety of purposes, including reviewing new building projects. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.



These forums can also be divisive, reflecting broader challenges in city politics. Only two mayors told us that politics has become more civil in their city over the last 10 years. When we asked mayors an open-ended question about the main issues that divide their city, 30 percent cited housing — a striking number in light of the many other polarizing issues, such as immigration, that were top of mind of the mayors. One mayor said, “Our city is divided by NIMBYism.” Another observed, “I’m a blue city mayor in a blue state — our divisions aren’t along political lines. Our divides are generational, between people who have lived here a long time and more recent arrivals. Along those lines, the divisions are about housing — old timers say no (citing traffic, etc. — typical NIMBY issues), new [residents] say yes.”

POLICY LEARNING

Mayors’ views have evolved on housing policy: they are more likely than four years ago to believe that increasing the housing supply will reduce prices. This suggests that public officials can and do learn new things about pressing policy challenges, and use this information to change their perspectives. We asked mayors, “Has there ever been a time where you’ve seen evidence that changed your mind about a policy or political phenomenon? If so, what was the evidence and how did your perspective change?”



Many mayors focused on housing policy. One mayor explained, *“When I first started being attentive to housing affordability as a policy issue, I was probably more likely to favor things like rent control as tools, and I think a series of academic evidence and policy evidence suggested that increasing supply, rather than limiting price, is actually a far more effective way to add more overall housing affordability.”* Another said, *“I used to believe that we could write policy to drive more housing, and yet what is true is that the more complex the policy and regulations are, the more expensive it is to build, and the less housing we have. The data changed my mind on that one.”*

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Several mayors cited specific pieces of academic research. Multiple mayors highlighted studies from Pew as changing their views on housing. For example, one mayor said, *“Initially I wasn’t fully convinced that homelessness was a housing affordability problem until I saw the data that supported it. Seeing Pew data and local economists’ work clearly articulating the connection between housing affordability and homelessness challenges. What they’ve articulated is that development across all housing inventories — affordable, market rate, etc. — is necessary in order to combat*

homelessness. Initially, I wasn’t a fan of duplexes and fourplexes and ADUs for aesthetic and community character reasons, but now that I understand the economics, I believe it’s a supply problem. It’s been a dramatic shift since where I started.” Multiple mayors cited Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson’s ubiquitous *Abundance*. Another mayor even cited our book, *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America’s Housing Crisis*.

Mayors continue to identify learning needs for themselves and their constituents. We asked mayors what aspects of housing policy they would like to understand more deeply, and what they wish their residents better understood.

Mayors want to know how to overcome NIMBYism; how to address unsheltered homelessness; how to streamline their applications for federal grants; the effects of rent control; and how to fund/finance affordable housing, among other policies. Mayors wish that their residents better understood the complexities of housing markets. They want them to know that *“density is not a four letter word;” “you can’t pull a low rent unit out of a box;” “the only way through this crisis is more housing;”* and *“we haven’t built for 10 years, and now we’re catching up,”* among other issues.

CONCLUSION

Our survey reveals a number of formidable obstacles to implementing effective, durable housing policy reforms. Mayors do not always connect their understanding of housing markets with optimal policy solutions. They are still attached to local control of the permitting process. They also face formidable public opposition, and broader housing financing challenges.

But, the political landscape of housing policy reform looks very different than it did just a few years ago. Multiple states, including California, Montana, Oregon, and Massachusetts, have passed ambitious legislation aimed at increasing the housing supply. Multiple presidential administrations of both political parties have made housing supply an important part of their policy platforms. A growing number of mayors clearly link housing supply with housing prices.

Mayors’ responses suggest progress by housing advocates in educating policymakers about markets and reforms. Housing advocacy and effectively communicated research can shift perspectives on important policy views.



METHODOLOGY

We invited mayors of all cities over 75,000 residents to participate in the Menino Survey of Mayors. Each mayor received an invitation at their official email account, as well as follow-up phone calls. We spoke with 115 mayors between June and September 2025 about a variety of topics ranging from their perceptions of the causes of the housing crisis and which policies they believe would lower local housing costs, to the political challenges they face when attempting to build new housing. The vast majority of interviews were conducted in person or over the phone. Mayors' responses and participation remain anonymous, to ensure they can speak freely about a wide range of issues. As Table 4 shows, the sample of participating cities closely mirrors the broader population on traits including size, racial demographics, housing prices, and geographic distribution.

Table 4. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All US Cities with Populations >75,000

	Surveyed Cities	All Cities
Number of Cities	115	523
Average Population	211,757	219,013
Average Percent White	48.4	46.0
Average Percent Black	15.7	13.9
Average Percent Hispanic	23.5	26.4
Average Percent Asian	6.9	8.3
Average Median Housing Price	\$388,618	\$444,722
Region	% of Sample	% of Cities
Northeast	12.2%	9.2%
Midwest	20.0%	15.5%
South	37.4%	35.2%
West	30.4%	40.2%

Source: 2023 American Community Survey (ACS), published by the US Census Bureau.

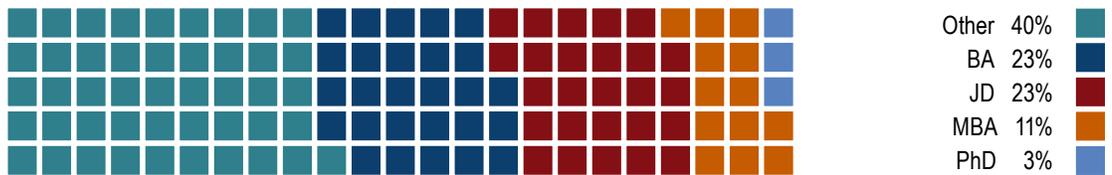


Figure 16. Demographics of Surveyed Mayors

Professional background



Highest degree



Gender



Party



Race



Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Boston University Initiative on Cities is a global urban research and policy center founded in 2014 to bridge academic research and real-world challenges. By connecting the interdisciplinary expertise of Boston University's faculty with policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders, the IOC works to advance more livable and resilient cities. The Menino Survey is named for the late Mayor Tom Menino, who co-founded the Initiative on Cities following 20 years as Mayor of Boston.

To learn more about the Menino Survey of Mayors, visit surveyofmayors.com