2015
STATE OF THE CITIES

2015

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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 and Applied Research provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities.

About the Authors

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

On an annual basis, mayors give State of the City speeches to provide perspective to their residents on how the city is faring, where it is headed, and priorities for the future. The National League of Cities (NLC) publishes its State of the Cities report to provide a comprehensive analysis of city trends based on these mayoral addresses. With the growing centrality of cities, these speeches – our mayoral voices – provide a unique window into contemporary conditions and the future direction of our country.

Throughout this last year, cities have been the focus of looming societal issues surrounding race, equity and opportunity. From Ferguson, Mo. and New York City to Baltimore and other cities throughout the nation, long-standing tensions are rising to the fore - between opportunity and lack of opportunity, between black and white, between community members and those donned with protecting the peace. Mayors are grappling with how to help mend these tensions and create opportunity-filled, socially cohesive, safe places for all, now and into the future.

The 2015 NLC State of the Cities report reveals how mayors view their role in moving their communities forward, from serving as conveners for open dialogues about structural problems to providing the political courage to tackle these issues and to ensuring holistic and inter-connected solutions. Here are a few examples of the sentiments expressed in 2015 mayoral State of the City addresses:

Kansas City Mayor
Sly James

Photo credit: John Sleezer/Kansas City Star, 2015.

THE TROUBLES WE'VE WITNESSED IN FERGUSON, MISSOURI have placed a strong focus on the issues we still have to overcome as a nation and right here in Kansas City. Ferguson reminded me of the emotions that this city and the entire nation experienced when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. I was also reminded that strong communities overcome adversity not by violence, but by upholding strong virtues. Last November I asked that our community, rather than fight with our fists, fight to eliminate the conditions that led to the death of Michael Brown. That is the opportunity that events like Ferguson present to us – to have an open dialogue about race and community relations in our City."

— MAYOR SLY JAMES, **CITY OF KANSAS CITY, MO**

THIS IS A HISTORIC MOMENT IN AMERICA and in Seattle as we confront the issue of race. We must acknowledge how far we have come, but this is the side of the mountain, not the summit. The poet Maya Angelou said: "History despite its wrenching pain, Cannot be unlived, and if faced with courage, need not be lived again."

— MAYOR ED MURRAY, **CITY OF SEATTLE**

THESE PROBLEMS ARE INTER-CONNECTED. Because when we address poverty, it will move the needle on education and violence in our communities. When we provide opportunities to young men and boys of color and help them stay out of trouble, we increase the likelihood that they will graduate high school, go on to higher learning and get a job and be a productive Philadelphian. When we keep kids in school, good schools, we reduce the chance of them ever committing a crime or perpetuating the cycle of poverty."

— MAYOR MICHAEL NUTTER, **CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

Mayors are the leaders who shoulder many of our nation's most critical problems and from whom solutions can arise. NLC stands ready to support city leaders in their efforts to help mend the nation, and through this annual analysis of mayoral priorities, spotlight challenges, opportunities, and progress in our cities. Whether through their roles in economic development, public safety or education, this year's report highlights ways local governments are providing the leadership needed to create more equitable communities.

Our State of the Cities 2015 analysis is derived from 100 cities, and represents a diverse cross-section of population sizes and geographic regions (see tables 1 and 2). We begin by assessing the extent to which mayors devote a significant portion of their speeches to certain topics (see Coding Guidelines, page 29, for full explanation). We then identify common narratives around these topics to better understand the evolution of critical issues and how they are being addressed. This annual report provides a baseline for other studies of municipal issues and a benchmark for the consistent measurement of emerging trends.

Table 1: Sample breakdown by region

Region	Number of speeches
West	25
Midwest	25
Northeast	25
South	25
Total:	**100**

Table 2: Sample breakdown by population

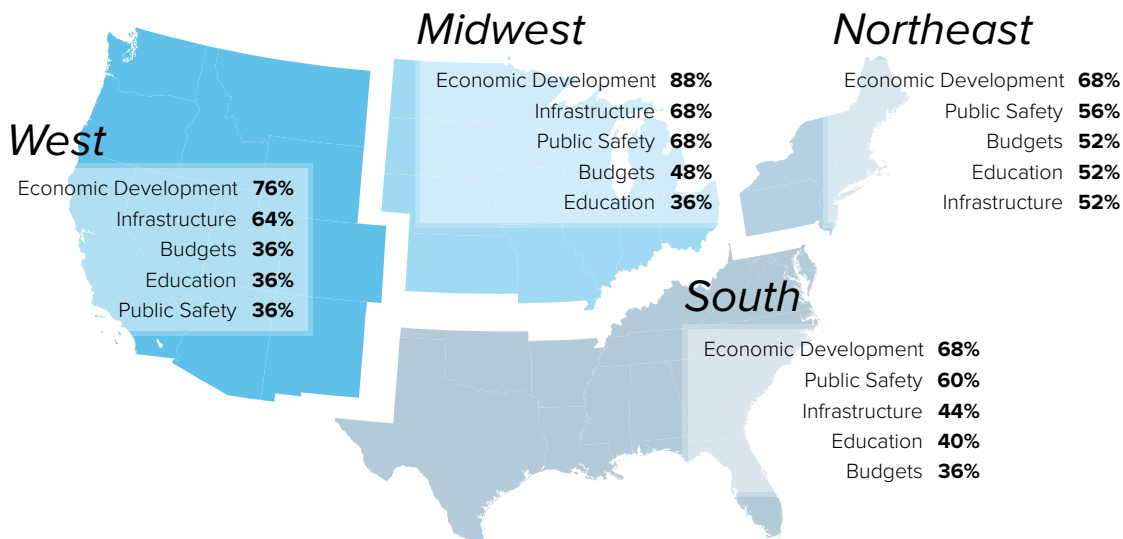| Population	Number of speeches
<50,000	25
50,000-99,999	25
100,000-299,999	25
300,000+	25
Total:	**100**

This year's analysis reveals:

For the second consecutive year, economic development was the most commonly addressed topic in mayoral speeches, with three out of four speeches (75 percent) in this year's sample devoting significant coverage to the issue. Issues concerning infrastructure (57 percent), public safety (55 percent) and budgets (43 percent) were also commonly addressed. The scope of these topics has shifted slightly over the past year. When speaking about economic development, for example, subtopics such as workforce development and income inequality received greater attention in 2015 than in 2014, reflecting the accelerating national discourse on issues of equity and opportunity.

Table 3: Key research findings

Topic	% Significant Coverage
Economic Development	75
Infrastructure	57
Public Safety	55
Budgets	43
Education	41
Housing	28
Data/Technology	21
Environment/Energy	16
Demographics	11
Health Care	9

Coverage of top line issues didn't vary significantly by region, although differences emerge in the way these issues play out and are addressed within regions. For example, within infrastructure, mayors in the West were more likely to discuss bikes and bike lanes than those in other regions, whereas mayors from cities in the Midwest, often with aging infrastructure, were more likely to discuss sewers.

Table 4: Rank by region (significant coverage)

Midwest

Economic Development	**88%**
Infrastructure	**68%**
Public Safety	**68%**
Budgets	**48%**
Education	**36%**

Northeast

Economic Development	**68%**
Public Safety	**56%**
Budgets	**52%**
Education	**52%**
Infrastructure	**52%**

West

Economic Development	**76%**
Infrastructure	**64%**
Budgets	**36%**
Education	**36%**
Public Safety	**36%**

South

Economic Development	**68%**
Public Safety	**60%**
Infrastructure	**44%**
Education	**40%**
Budgets	**36%**

The amount of attention an issue received depended on the size of the mayor's city. For example, mayors from the largest cities were much more likely than those from smaller cities to discuss demographics, economic development, housing and education in their speeches. Infrastructure and budget issues were the most commonly covered topics by mayors from mid-sized cities, and public safety was a chief concern of mayors from small cities.

Table 5: Rank by population (significant coverage)

	<50,000	50-99,999	100-299,999	300,000+
#1	Public Safety (**60%**)	Econ. Dev. (**80%**)	Econ. Dev. (**80%**)	Econ. Dev. (**92%**)
#2	Infrastructure (**52%**)	Infrastructure (**68%**)	Public Safety (**56%**)	Education (**68%**)
#3	Econ. Dev. (**48%**)	Budgets (**56%**)	Infrastructure (**52%**)	Infrastructure (**56%**)
#4	Budgets (**44%**)	Public Safety (**48%**)	Education (**48%**)	Public Safety (**56%**)
#5	Education (**16%**)	Education (**32%**)	Housing (**28%**)	Housing (**52%**)

TOPIC BREAKDOWNS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development and expanding economic opportunity continues to be at the forefront of mayors' agendas. In particular, minimum wage increases were viewed by many as necessary to combat poverty and economic inequality. With key successes this year in cities like San Francisco, other cities rallied behind a minimum wage increase.

In New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio said "nothing does more to address income inequality than actually raising people's incomes," adding that the New York state's minimum wage proposal was insufficient. Mayor de Blasio said he would fight for a city-wide minimum wage increase to $13 per hour in 2016 while indexing the minimum wage so that it would reach a projected $15 an hour by 2019, explaining "it's difficult to overstate the positive impact this would have on working New Yorkers."

In Columbia, S.C., Mayor Steve Benjamin sadly noted that over 24 percent of Columbia citizens live in poverty and that a "single mother making minimum wage spends roughly a third of her annual income just on childcare." Benjamin called on city council to support his request to raise the minimum wage for city employees to more than $10.10 per hour.

Another common theme in mayor's speeches this year was the importance of restoring downtowns, which add greatly to the long-term economic and social viability of their cities. In Wichita, Kan., Mayor Carl Brewer said that downtown revitalization has been one of his top priorities since taking office in 2007, and that the city created a "downtown master plan," worked with the Wichita Downtown Development Corporation and other partners, and leveraged nearly $300 million of private sector investment in redevelopment projects. The strategy was a success; Brewer said "today, there are dozens of new places to live, work, shop, and eat downtown" and that the revitalization was one of his proudest achievements.

Mayor Jean Stothert of Omaha, Neb., noted that the city will partner with the NLC-ULI Daniel Rose Center to explore development options for downtown, saying "we see great potential for business, entertainment and residential development in this area." Many mayors, including those from Nashua, N.H., Summit, N.J., and Wheeling, W.Va., spoke about the importance of a robust placemaking and business attraction strategy for downtown development and the recent successes they had experienced in this regard.

75%

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

TOP 5
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Business Attraction — **42%**

73% — Jobs

Workforce Development — **33%**

35%

42%

Small Business

Downtown Development

OTHER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUB-TOPICS

Unemployment	32%	Minority/Women Owned Businesses	9%
Entrepreneurship	27%	Minimum Wage	8%
Business Growth	17%	Ports	8%
Poverty	15%	Incubators	8%
Tourism	14%	Income Inequality	7%
Wages	11%	Accelerators	5%

Trade	5%
Foreign Dir. Invst.	4%
Innovation Districts	3%
Economic Gardening	1%
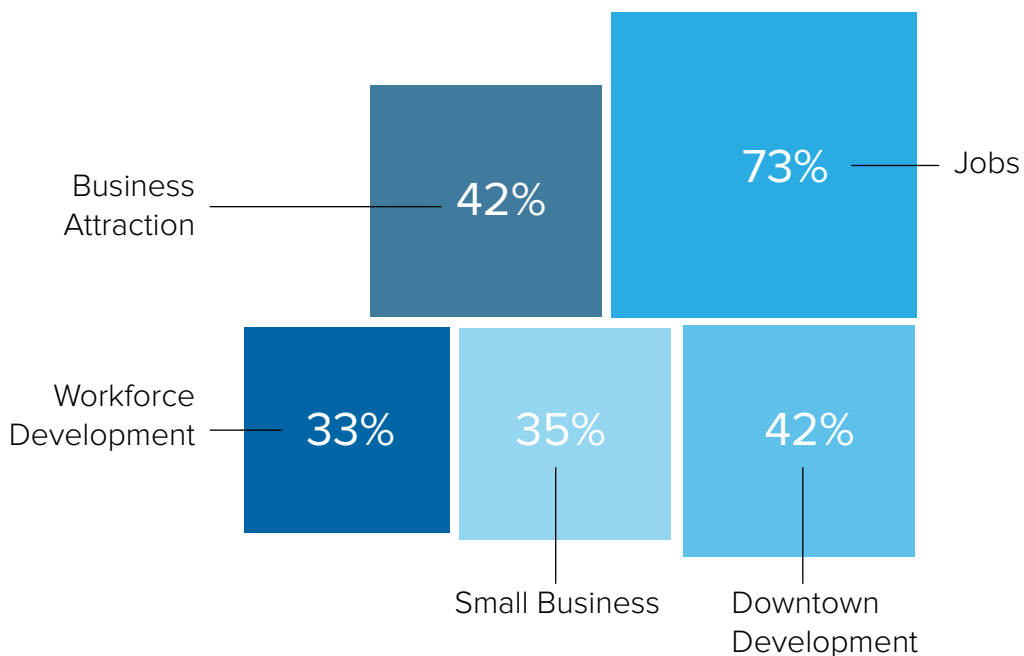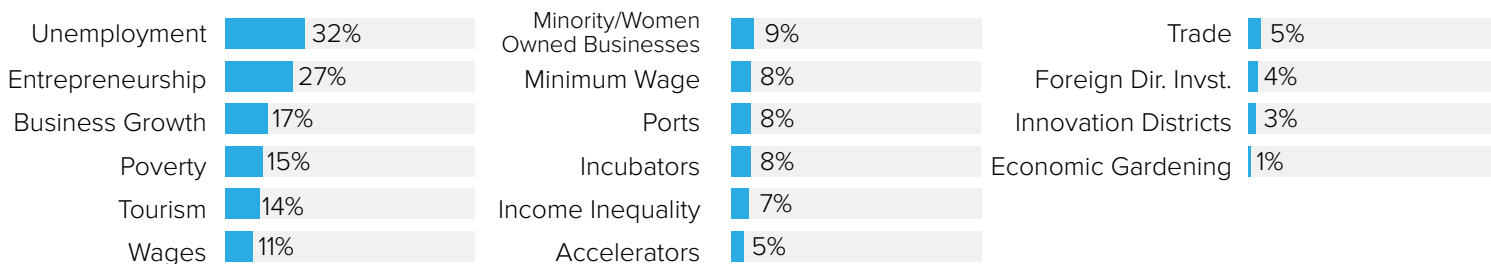
> **"At the top of our priorities is ensuring that we have the most talented and best-trained workforce in the nation."**

Mayor Ivy Taylor
San Antonio, TX

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INFRASTRUCTURE

City infrastructure – which includes roads, bridges, and public transportation, and water and sewer systems – is central to the well-being of cities. Mayor Richard David of Binghamton, N.Y., described infrastructure as "the true foundation of our community." In their State of the City addresses, mayors commonly prioritized infrastructure investments and detailed innovative policies designed to update infrastructure to meet 21st century needs.

Many of these policies addressed internet and broadband issues. Mayor Jim Gray of Lexington, Ky., noted that Lexington was working with the University of Kentucky to expand access to affordable broadband, and said that "we must really become a gigabit city… knowledge and ideas are what power today's information economy, and knowledge and ideas are carried on fiber." In Atlanta, Mayor Kasim Reed announced a new partnership with Google Fiber and said that a fiber-optic network would be installed throughout the city, which he said would expand access to high-speed internet, provide a boost to start-ups and entrepreneurs, and further Atlanta's "global reputation as a technology leader." Mayors from Huntington, W.Va., Morganton, N.C., and New Haven, Conn., among others, also announced new internet and broadband-related initiatives.

Mayors frequently saw increased investment in, and expansion of, trains and light rail as essential to creating a modern multi-modal transportation system. In Honolulu, Mayor Kirk Caldwell said that "rail is about giving people a choice to get out of their cars and travel quickly and efficiently," and is essential for Honolulu to become a "true capital of the Pacific Basin." Caldwell called for an extension to the excise tax to pay for a new 26-mile railway, which had run intro financial troubles. Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker said he would continue to fight for expanded train service and for trains to run more frequently and for longer hours, both for environmental and fairness purposes. Becker said that increased public transit choices such as trains provide "more people access to schools, jobs and downtown events" and that "if we want a city that treats people fairly, we have to make sure there are opportunities for everyone to get around." The recent Amtrak train crash in Philadelphia is expected to only increase the emphasis mayors place on trains and light rail initiatives in the future.

57%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of infrastructure issues.
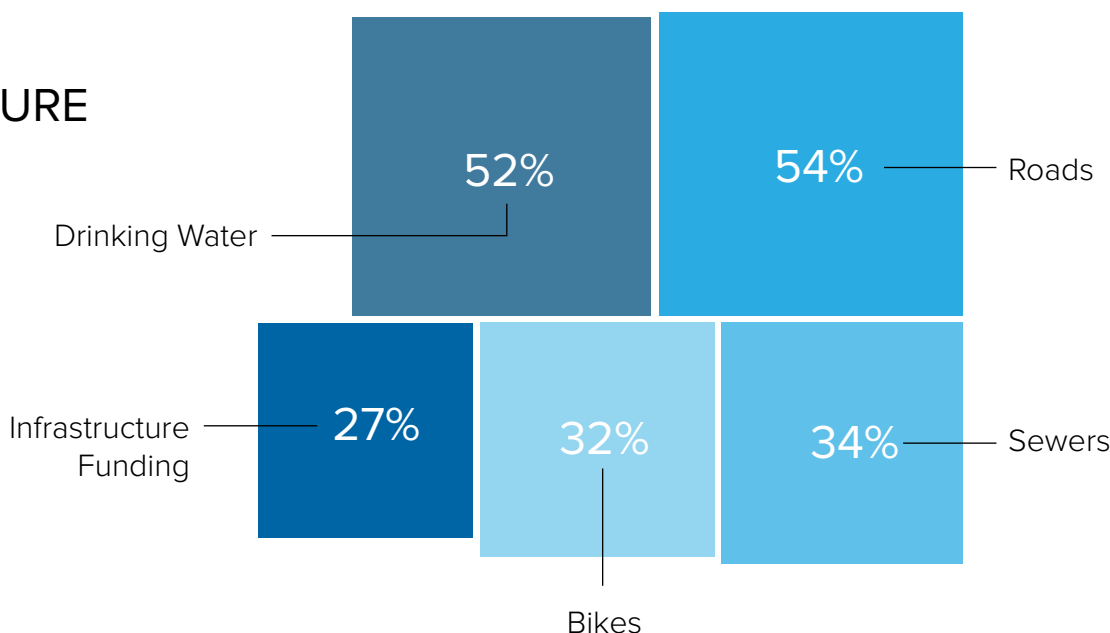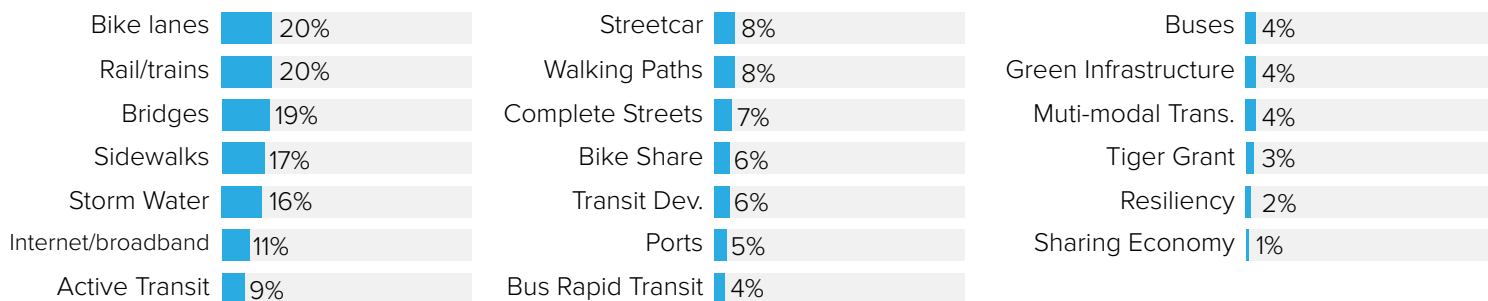
TOP 5
INFRASTRUCTURE SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Drinking Water — **52%**

54% — Roads

Infrastructure Funding — **27%**

32% — Bikes

34% — Sewers

OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE SUB-TOPICS

Bike lanes	20%	Streetcar	8%
Rail/trains	20%	Walking Paths	8%
Bridges	19%	Complete Streets	7%
Sidewalks	17%	Bike Share	6%
Storm Water	16%	Transit Dev.	6%
Internet/broadband	11%	Ports	5%
Active Transit	9%	Bus Rapid Transit	4%

Buses	4%
Green Infrastructure	4%
Muti-modal Trans.	4%
Tiger Grant	3%
Resiliency	2%
Sharing Economy	1%

> **Investing in infrastructure isn't a project or temporary initiative; it means creating a platform on which to build the future success of our community."**

Mayor Stephanie Miner
Syracuse, NY

Many mayors discussed public safety in the context of the relationship between police and the community. Grand Rapids, Mich., Mayor George Heartwell said that the recent violent incidents involving police interactions throughout the country have caused the world to look at America with "bewilderment, disgust, and anger." While Heartwell praised the Grand Rapids Police Department, he also said "we can always improve our operations and our relations with the community," and noted that racial equity was a priority. Heartwell advocated for a series of policing recommendations set to be considered by the city commission, including: placing an increased emphasis on police officers listening to, and building relationships with, the community; contracting for an independent review of racial disparities in arrests; requesting outside police agencies to conduct investigations in all cases where a police officer discharges a weapon; and having officers wear body cameras.

Other mayors echoed Heartwell's sentiments and potential solutions. Mayor Steve Williams of Huntington, W.Va., said that the city would be organizing a Community Coalition on Public Safety to help "bridge the divide between law enforcement and the black community," while mayors from Eugene, Ore., Lockport, N.Y., and San Diego, among others, said their municipalities were in the process of implementing officer-worn body cameras.

Additionally, gun violence continues to be a challenging issue for cities. Portland, Ore., Mayor Charlie Hales gave an impassioned argument for state legislation mandating universal background checks for all gun sales, mentioning that a high school student and former intern of his office was recently wounded by gunfire and that firearm homicide is the second leading cause of death among youth. Hales confidently stated that "together, this community and this legislature will do the right thing… for everyone at risk of gun violence." In Milwaukee, Mayor Tom Barrett lamented that far too much childhood trauma is caused by gun violence, and said "I will never accept the silent premise that gun violence in Milwaukee is inevitable." Barrett said that many guns used in Milwaukee crimes last year were purchased legally, and called on Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and the state legislator to "close loopholes and strengthen penalties" to keep weapons away from criminals.

55%

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

TOP 5
PUBLIC SAFETY SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Police Technology — **25%**

Community Policing — **29%**

Crime Rate — **49%**

80% — Police Dept.

56% — Fire Dept.
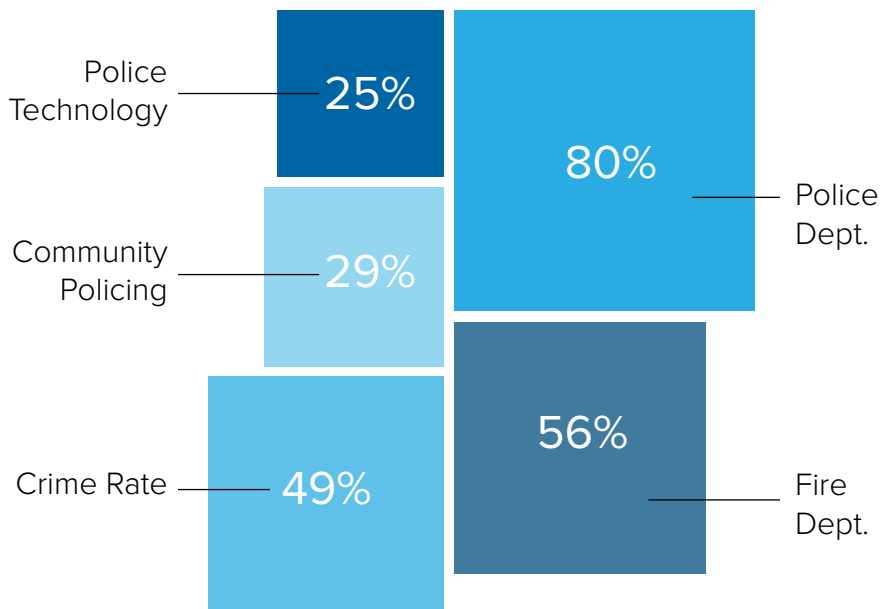
OTHER PUBLIC SAFETY SUB-TOPICS

Police Infrastructure 17%	Pub. Safety Fundng 11%	Emergency Prep. 7%
Body Cameras 15%	Criminal Justice 10%	Youth Violence 7%
Race Relations 14%	Drug Offenses 10%	Police Misconduct 6%
Corrections 13%	Gangs 9%	Domestic Violence 4%
Gun Violence 11%	Gun Control 9%	Mental Illness 4%

> **Making our community a safer place to live cannot be accomplished by police alone."**

Mayor Denis Law
Renton, WA

CRITURE • PUBLIC SAFETY • EDUCATION • ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT • ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY • HOUSING
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BUDGETS

Although city budgets took huge hits as a result of the recession, city leaders are expressing a renewed sense of optimism about their fiscal health. Many indicate that broader economic growth has translated to a strong tax base, enabling well-functioning government services and operations. Mayor Marty Walsh of Boston said that, due to the flourishing economy, the city was delivering "the best results ever in city services," and noted specific improvements in police effectiveness, crime rates, road and pothole maintenance, and the process of granting permits.

Due to prudent fiscal management over the past few years, many cities have received increases in their municipal bond rating. This trend, combined with an environment of low interest rates, has spurred many cities to refinance their debt and, to a lesser degree, invest in much-needed capital infrastructure. In Lenexa, Kan., Mayor Mike Boehm praised the impact of the city's bonds being upgraded to the highest possible rating of AAA the previous year, saying "with superior ratings, we are able to issue public debt at lower interest rates to finance capital projects." Boehm noted that, due to the high bond rating, Lenexa had saved a quarter of a million dollars in interest costs during bond issuance. Mayors from Elkhart, Ind., Leawood, Kan., and Nashua, N.H., among others, also highlighted recent increase in their respective cities' bond ratings.

Now that immediate fiscal concerns and funding of day-to-day operations have become more manageable, mayors have turned their attention to longer-term challenges, like pensions, healthcare and other post-employment benefits. Mayor A C Wharton, Jr. of Memphis, Tenn., discussed the "tough choices" that the city had to make in the past year to addresses pension and other post-employment benefits liabilities, calling these liabilities "one of the biggest threats to the future of the city." To address the issue, Wharton said that the city council passed historic legislation to reform the city's healthcare and pension plans, bringing down liabilities and placing the city on a sustainable path for the future while maintaining service levels, avoiding mass layoffs, and continuing to provide affordable healthcare options for employees. As a result, Wharton proudly stated that Memphis is "at the top of the list of cities proactively dealing with fiscal challenges and changing our financial trajectory."

43%

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

TOP 5
BUDGET SUB-TOPICS

Reserves

Pension Reform

15% **17%** **38%** Sales Taxes

Bonds **30%** **32%** Propety Taxes

OTHER BUDGET SUB-TOPICS

Debt	14%
Deficit	10%
Health Care Costs	9%
Income Taxes	7%

Surplus	6%
Fed. Aid/Grants	5%
Transparency	4%
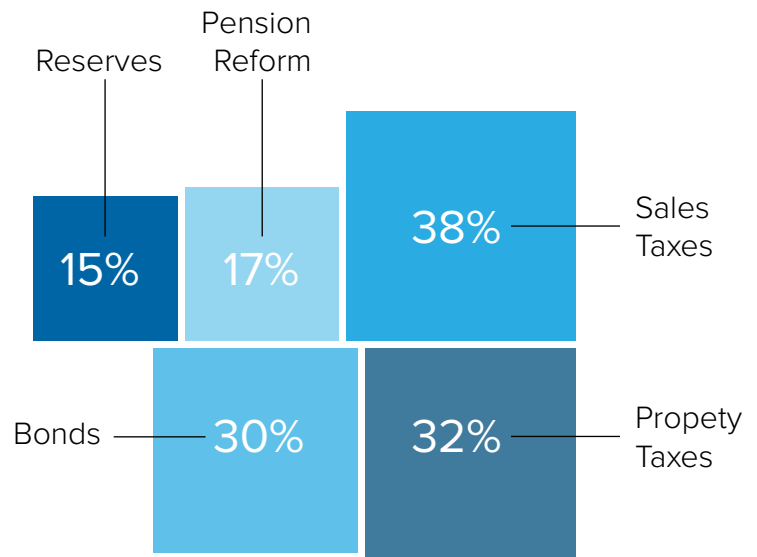
> **"** It is my firm belief that the **financial integrity** of any organization is the foundation upon which success is built.**"**

Mayor Adrian Mapp
Plainfield, NJ

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EDUCATION

While mayors recognize that quality education provides the foundation for successful communities, the racial achievement gap continues to be a persistent issue facing cities. Mayor Edward Murray of Seattle lamented the fact that about one quarter of African American and Latino students fail to graduate on time compared to eight percent of Caucasian students, saying that "we can no longer allow so many of our children to leave school unprepared for college, for work, or for life." Murray said that he would convene an education summit in the fall involving the city, school district, state, private sector, teachers and parents to "engage in frank and honest conversation" about the issue and "re-envision how a 21st Century urban public school system can work successfully for all students." In Elkhart, Ind., Mayor Dick Moore said that the city would partner with President Barack Obama's My Brother's Keeper program to provide greater educational opportunities to youth of color and ensure that "all young people can reach their full potential."

Another area in which the achievement gap manifests is through school discipline. Portland, Ore., Mayor Charlie Hales pointed out that, in 2013, four percent of white students in Portland Public Schools were suspended or expelled, compared to 17 percent of black students, and stated that "disproportionate discipline is where racial injustice begins." Hales applauded Portland Public Schools for setting a goal to reduce black male expulsion rates by at least 60 percent, and pledged the city's support toward this goal in partnership with the Black Male Achievement initiative.

One method of reducing suspensions and expulsions is adopting alternative disciplinary tactics. Mayor Toni Harp of New Haven, Conn., said that the city was transitioning to using restorative practices as a discipline method, which emphasizes that disruptive students should be held accountable, remain in school to face consequences, and develop relationships rather than being excluded from school — an action that only reinforces the achievement gap. Hart noted that suspension and expulsion rates have greatly decreased in New Haven over the past four years, and said that "restorative practices are the new frontier of public education."

41%
of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of education issues.
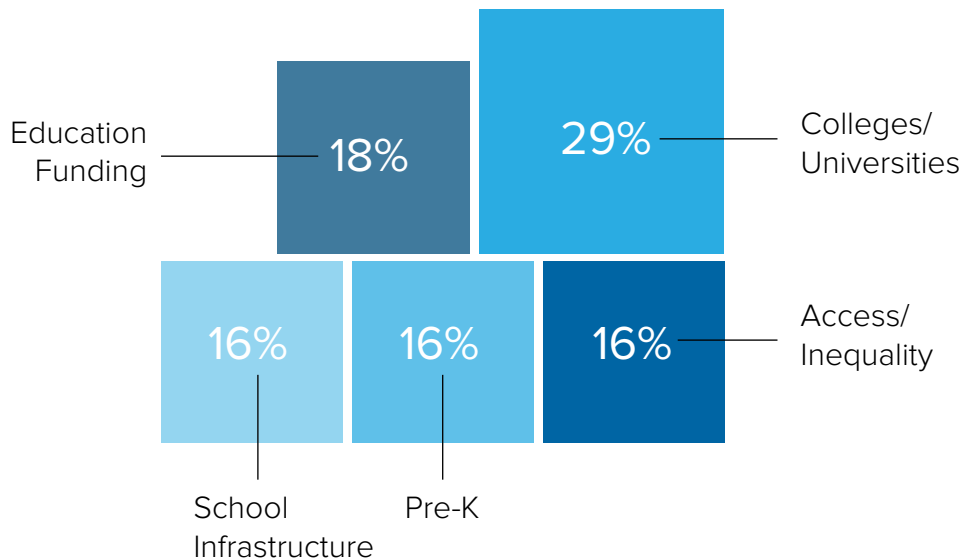
TOP 5
EDUCATION SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Education Funding **18%**

29% Colleges/ Universities

16% School Infrastructure

Pre-K **16%**

16% Access/ Inequality

OTHER EDUCATION SUB-TOPICS

School Safety	12%
Graduation Rate	12%
Achievement Gap	8%
Charter Schools	8%

Summer/After School	4%
Food	2%
Prison Pipeline	2%
School Disciplne	2%

> **Nothing will define a city more than the quality of the school system that services that community."**

Mayor William Healey
Canton, OH

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ENERGY ● EDUCATION ● HOUSING ● BUDGET ● DATA/TECHNOLOGY ● INFRASTRUCTURE ● ECONOMIC DEVEL

HOUSING

As cities continue to recover from the crash of the housing market in 2008, mayors are using innovative solutions to address housing-related challenges.

The issue of affordability continues to be at the forefront of mayor's housing-related efforts. Mayor Joseph Curtatone of Somerville, Mass., said that the effort to increase affordable housing was essential so that "our working middle-class is not squeezed out of the city," and highlighted a new zoning code which he said has some of the most "ambitious inclusionary housing requirements in the nation" and "includes requiring the creation of homes permanently affordable for middle-income households." New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio dedicated a large portion of his speech to affordable housing, saying that "nothing more clearly expresses the inequality gap… than the soaring cost of housing" and that his administration not only recognizes the need for more affordable housing but "demands" it. Mayor de Blasio said that the city would accomplish this through three main steps: mandating that affordable housing is a condition of development in areas re-zoned for residential use; keeping those who already have affordable housing in their homes; and creating more total affordable housing units by "adding density to appropriate parts of our city."

Mayors also commonly discussed issues relating to veteran homelessness. Mayors from Baton Rouge, La., Rockville, Md., and Binghamton, N.Y. announced that their cities had partnered with the White House on the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness initiative, and Mayor Richard David of Binghamton proudly noted that it took the city only one month after joining the initiative to find housing solutions for all of its identified homeless veterans. As Mayor David said, "I felt it was our moral duty to provide basic services for those who have served to protect our country." Mayor Kevin Faulconer of San Diego said that the city's previous approach to homelessness — setting up temporary tents during the winter months for homeless citizens — was insufficient, saying "we need a permanent, year-round solution." Faulconer said that this year the city would set up an indoor care center providing shelter and services year-round for up to 350 homeless citizens, with a particular focus on veterans.
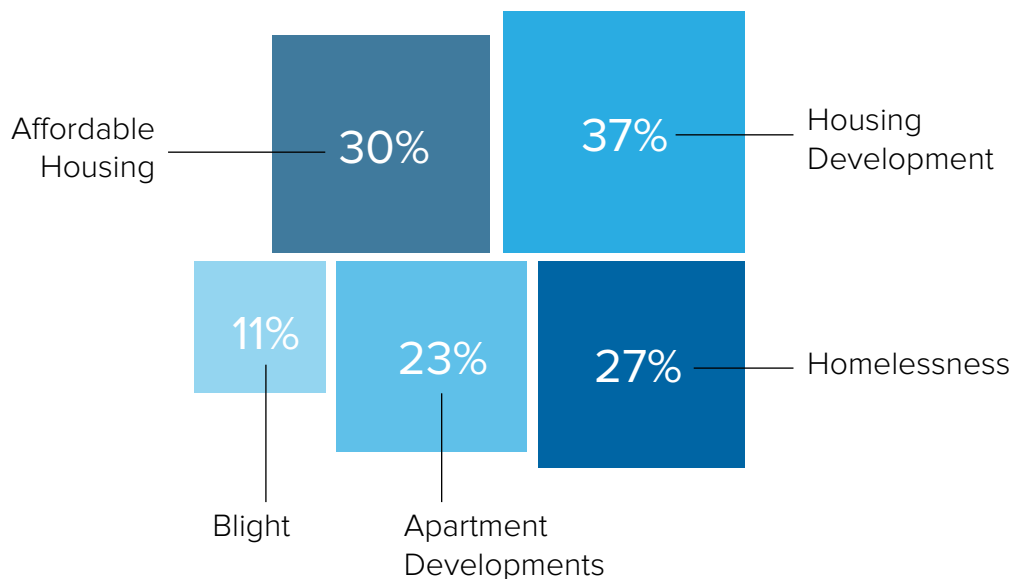
28%

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

TOP 5
HOUSING
SUB-TOPICS

Affordable Housing — **30%**

37% — Housing Development

11%

23%

27% — Homelessness

Blight

Apartment Developments

OTHER HOUSING SUB-TOPICS

Rentals	9%
Demolition	7%
Renovations	6%
Home Improvements	5%

Student Housing	4%
Foreclosures	3%
Gentrification	1%

> **Creating opportunities to attain pathways to the middle class means that we have to invest more in affordable housing."**
>
> Mayor Muriel Bowser
> Washington, DC

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DATA/TECHNOLOGY

Cities are increasingly utilizing data and technology to improve the quality of life of their residents. An emerging trend is the use of open data and the creation of open data portals, websites which store city-related datasets and make them publically available. Mayor Sly James of Kansas City, Mo., said that, because of the Open Data Ordinance passed last year and the creation of an open data portal, "an information search that used to mean a trip to City Hall is now available online from anywhere in the world, virtually instantly." Mayor James further stated that open data portals allow for an open, transparent government which is "fundamental to an efficient and effective democracy" and that cities' use of technology in general is allowing for increased citizen engagement. Mayor Tom Tait of Anaheim, Calif., also announced the launch of an open data portal in his speech, proclaiming that the portal will be a boon for businesses and will "create economic activity that we can't even foresee today." Mayor Ed Murray of Seattle also detailed a new budget-oriented data site that he lauded as a "leap forward" in budget reporting for the city.

Another trend in 2015 State of the City speeches was the use of data and technology to inform performance management processes for a variety of city functions. Mayor Setti Warren of Newton, Mass., said that since a data-driven web-based system for preventative infrastructure maintenance had been set up in 2010, over 32,000 maintenance requests had been entered and completed through a more frequent and efficient process. Due to this preventative work, Warren said "we were able to keep all of our buildings open and operational throughout this historic winter." Boston has also been adopting data-driven performance management processes, and in his speech, Mayor Marty Walsh announced the upcoming creation of a "Citywide Analytics Team" that he said would "bring the power of data to everything that we do." Walsh also said that Boston would create and launch more mobile apps to make city information and functions more accessible, including a "ParkBoston" app that allows users to pay for parking.

21%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of data/technology issues.
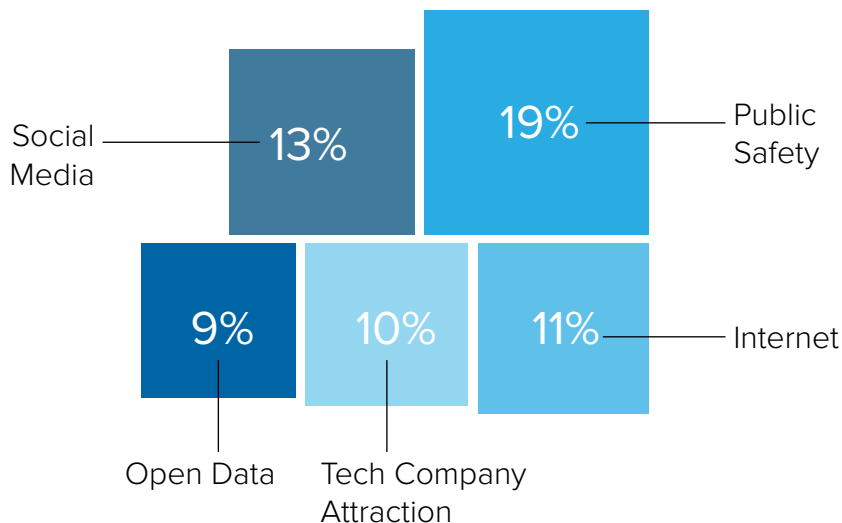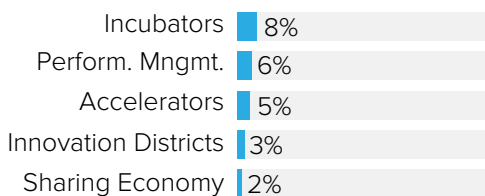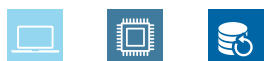
TOP 5
DATA/TECHNOLOGY SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Social Media — **13%**

19% — Public Safety

9%

10%

11% — Internet

Open Data

Tech Company Attraction

OTHER DATA/ TECHNOLOGY SUB-TOPICS

Incubators	8%
Perform. Mngmt.	6%
Accelerators	5%
Innovation Districts	3%
Sharing Economy	2%

"In today's globalized and high-tech world, innovation will decide the winners and losers in many different fields and industries."

Mayor Jim Ardis
Peoria, IL

For mayors, the fight to combat climate change takes on new importance with each passing year. Mayor George Heartwell of Grand Rapids, Mich., said that his time serving on the White House Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience had "opened his eyes" to the environmental problems cities face as a result of global warming, and said he would set a goal for Grand Rapids to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions 20 percent below 2009 levels by 2030. To achieve this goal, Heartwell said the city would increase investments in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and bioenergy, and work with the West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum to help businesses become more environmentally friendly. Heartwell was happy to report a shift in popular understanding of the issue, and said "today most people understand that this threat is real" and believe "business and government ought to be doing all we can to reduce carbon output." Mayor Betsey Hodges of Minneapolis, Minn. echoed Heartwell's sentiments on the threat of global warming and announced the launch of the Minneapolis Climate Champs Challenge, in which the city will propose an environmental theme and particular goals each month, host activities, and provide resources to aid citizens in living more sustainably.

A central way to increase sustainability is to become more energy efficient, and a common solution to increase efficiency discussed by mayors was LED street lighting. Mayors from Binghamton, N.Y., Newton, Mass., and Honolulu, among others, said that their respective cities had completed, or were in the process of completing, a city-wide implementation of LED lights for public safety, efficiency and environmental reasons. Said Mayor Kirk Caldwell of Honolulu, "it's going to save a lot of energy and help us become more green and sustainable." Mayor Setti Warren of Newton estimated that the change would save the city more than $2 million in energy costs over the next 20 years.

16%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of environment/energy issues.
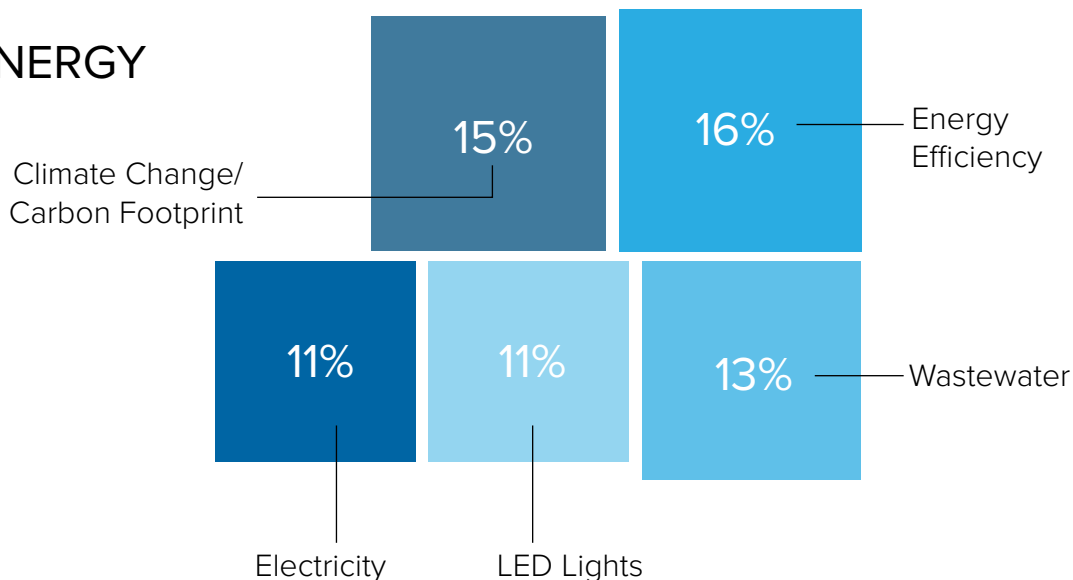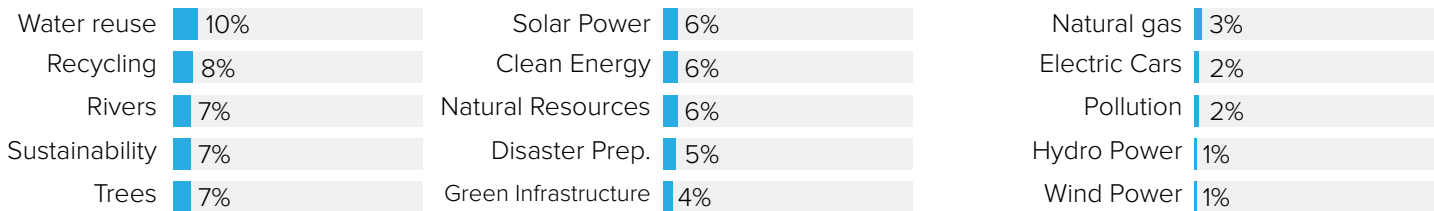
TOP 5

ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Climate Change/ Carbon Footprint **15%**

16% Energy Efficiency

Electricity **11%**

LED Lights **11%**

13% Wastewater

OTHER ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY SUB-TOPICS

Water reuse	10%	
Recycling	8%	
Rivers	7%	
Sustainability	7%	
Trees	7%	

Solar Power	6%	
Clean Energy	6%	
Natural Resources	6%	
Disaster Prep.	5%	
Green Infrastructure	4%	

Natural gas	3%	
Electric Cars	2%	
Pollution	2%	
Hydro Power	1%	
Wind Power	1%	

> **We know our collective future depends on our ability to have a planet — and a city — that can sustain life with clean air, clean water, nourishing food, and stable weather patterns."**

Mayor Betsy Hodges
Minneapolis, MN

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● ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY ● HOUSING ●
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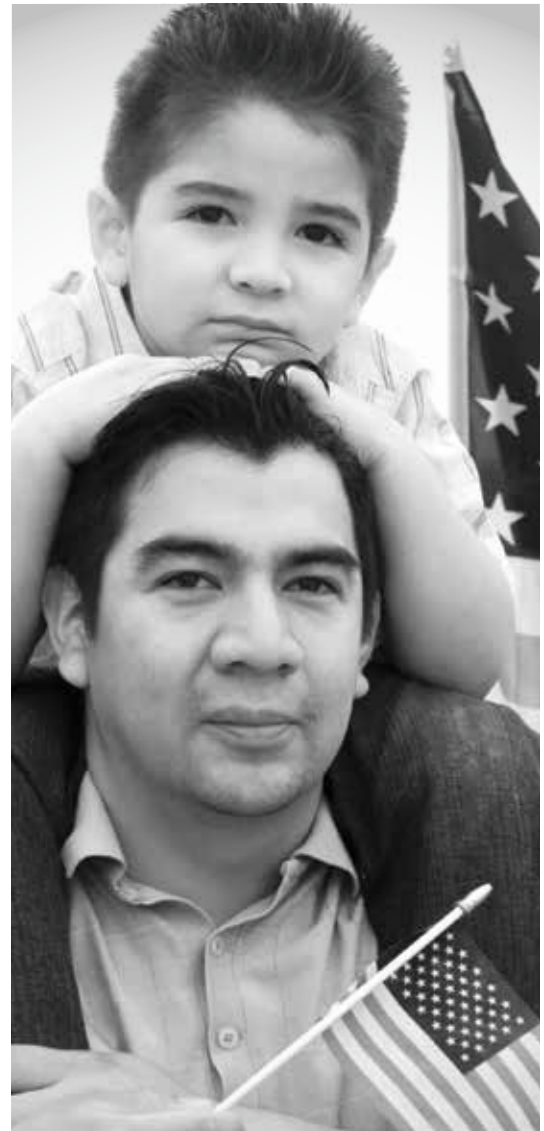
DEMOGRAPHICS

City-related issues involving population demographics include race relations, cultural diversity, sexual orientation and immigration. Mayors who addressed these foundational societal issues in their speeches generally took a leadership role in trying to develop more inclusive communities.

Immigration reform continues to be a politically contentious issue, and several mayors called for federal action to fix what Anaheim, Calif., Mayor Tom Tait called a "broken" system. The Anaheim city council recently unanimously voted for a resolution asking Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform, and Tait said that "there's an important moral dimension at play here" and "it's vital for any immigration legislation to enable people to come out of the shadows and fully pursue the American Dream for themselves and their families." In the absence of federal legislation — which, as New Haven, Conn., Mayor Toni Hart pointed out, cities would have a key role in implementing — mayors have found other ways to lead on this issue. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio touted the recent creation of the IDNYC identification card, which provides access to municipal services and facilities and is available regardless of immigration status, saying that over 180,000 New Yorkers had already made an appointment to get an ID within the first month of the program.

Mayors also highlighted efforts to support the LBGT community in their respective cities. Mayor Steve Benjamin proudly noted that Columbia had recently become the first city in South Carolina to extend full employment benefits to same-sex couples, while Mayor Steve Williams of Huntington, W.Va., said that he recently formed an LGBT advisory council as part of his vision for the city to "actively seek inclusiveness as we learn to stand as one people celebrating our differences."

11%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of demographics issues.
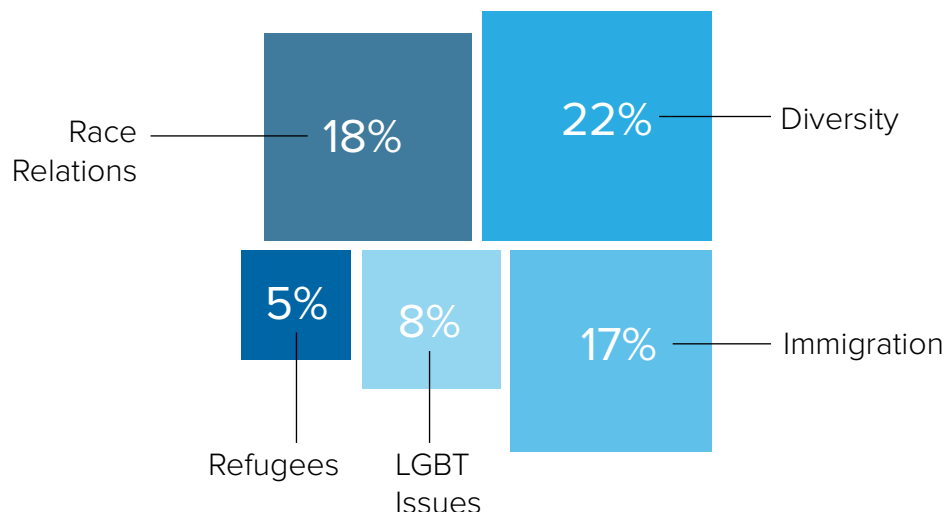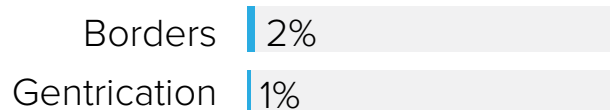
TOP 5
DEMOGRAPHICS SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Race Relations — 18%

22% — Diversity

5% — Refugees

8% — LGBT Issues

17% — Immigration

OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS SUB-TOPICS

Borders | 2%
Gentrication | 1%

> **Our great city is driven by a vision, a vision in which the contribution of every member of society, irrespective of race, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation is respected."**

Mayor George Hartwell
Grand Rapids, MI

INFRASTRUCTURE ● PUBLIC SAFETY ● EDUCATION ● ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ● ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY ● HOUSING
DEVELOPMENT ● ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY ● EDUCATION ● HOUSING ● BUDGET ● PUBLIC SAFETY ● INFRAST
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ENERGY ● EDUCATION ● HOUSING ● BUDGET ● DATA/TECHNOLOGY ● INFRASTRUCTURE ● ECONOMIC DEVE

HEALTH CARE

While health care policy is generally administered at the state or federal level, mayors can still play a role in improving health care options for their citizens.

Mayors from Bentonville, Ark., and Evanston, Ill., discussed the implementation of services designed to improve enrollment and compliance with the Affordable Care Act, while Mayor Steve Benjamin of Columbia, S.C., lamented the lack of progress to this end, saying "200,000 of our working men and women in South Carolina earning less than 100 percent of the federal poverty level, including tens of thousands in Columbia, have no access to healthcare because our state refuses to expand Medicaid." In contrast, Mayor Muriel Bowser of Washington, D.C. noted that "the way the District has embraced President Obama's health care law is a model for the nation" and that, due to the law, 93 percent of district residents currently have insurance. Bowser also noted the importance of preventative healthcare through an improved diet, and dedicated funds for a partnership of non-profits that distribute free vegetables in schools.

Mayors also commonly discussed the construction, renovation and technological upgrades of city hospitals and medical institutions. In Biloxi, Miss., Mayor A.J. Holloway detailed a three-year, $74 million renovation for a local medical center that will provide "state-of-the-art operating rooms" and new "hematology-oncology and dialysis suites," as well as emergency room renovations to the main city hospital. Mayor Andy Hafen of Henderson, Nev., lauded plans for a new hospital to open next year and praised the private medical colleges currently in Henderson. Hafen said that "we want to foster a world-class culture for medicine and health care by creating what we call the Henderson Healthcare Corridor" and that investment in health care will pay dividends for the city in a variety of ways, notably by enhancing economic development.

9%

of state of the city speeches included significant coverage of health care issues.
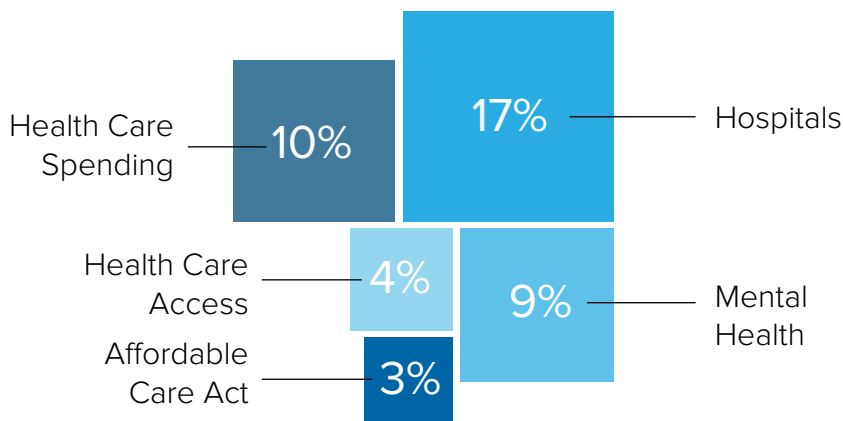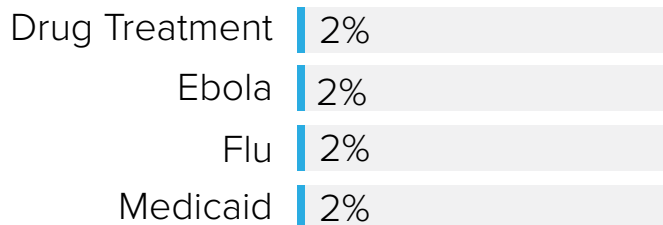
TOP 5
HEALTH CARE
SUB-TOPICS

NOTE: Subtopic percentages are representative of all 100 speeches in the sample.

Health Care Spending — **10%**

17% — Hospitals

Health Care Access — **4%**

9% — Mental Health

Affordable Care Act — **3%**

OTHER
HEALTH CARE SUB-TOPICS

Drug Treatment	2%
Ebola	2%
Flu	2%
Medicaid	2%

"Through fair and consistent union negotiations we have been able to keep the city's health care benefit costs stable."

Mayor Donnalee Lozeau
Nashua, NH

Conclusion

As the lifeblood of our democracy, cities are the foundation upon which we come together, lead and succeed. The world is watching how key social and economic issues are playing out in cities, and the nation will ultimately be defined by how mayors respond. Throughout our analysis this year, we note in many ways how mayors are answering this call.

Many are leading on solutions to difficult issues of race, equity and opportunity by adapting core areas of local government and applying an equity lens to policies, practices, and systems, including:

Raising the minimum wage.

Instituting community policing.

Providing access to affordable broadband and health services.

Ensuring greater educational opportunities for youth of color.

Using technology to increase engagement of all residents.

Cities are leading our country forward.

Local governments activate the change and innovation that creates more prosperous communities and meets the needs of future generations. From issues of economic development and infrastructure to public safety and more, mayors are at the forefront and exciting transformations are taking place in our nation's urban areas. State of the Cities provides the window into the core issues important to city leaders now and illuminates where we are headed next.

Methodology

For the 2015 State of the Cities report sample, we included nearly all State of the City speeches given between January 1st and March 31st, 2015 which had transcripts of the speech available online. The 100 speeches were chosen such that there were 25 speeches from each of four population categories (<50,000, 50,000-99,999, 100,000-299,999, 300,000+) and geographic region categories (Northeast, Midwest, South, West). The variance of city population sizes and geographic regions ensures a diverse sample and allows for comparisons between categories, but due to sample size limitations findings cannot be generalized to all cities.

In constructing the content analysis, we created guidelines for coding each of the 10 major topics. During this process, we referred to the work of Sarah Beth Gehl and Katherine Willoughby, who conducted a content analysis of State of the State speeches in 2013. Through our content analysis, we were able to answer two main questions for each topic: the percent of speeches "covering" the topic and the percent with "significant coverage" of the topic. We also used the coding criteria for "covering" a topic to code for various subtopics within each topic, such as "Poverty" and "Workforce Development" within the Economic Development topic.

The 10 topics analyzed differed from those in the previous State of the Cities report. Upon further consideration, we decided to change the Transportation topic to Infrastructure, which included all transportation issues but also a wider range of issues such as sewers and internet/broadband. We also changed the Immigration topic to Demographics, which included race relations, LGBT, and diversity issues as well as immigration issues, and merged Environment and Energy into one topic. While these changes placed limitations on the extent to which comparison between the two years was possible, they set the foundation for a more robust analysis in future years.

Coding Guidelines

Level 1: Speech covered the topic. A speech was considered to cover a topic if the Mayor specifically discussed the topic as relevant to city operations and the budget going forward. The mayor needed to relay that the topic is an important item in next year's budget and policy direction. Just mentioning a topic like "economic development" in a speech did not classify the topic as being 'covered' by a mayor. A review by the mayor of past accomplishments in any particular issue area counts in the content analysis so long as the mayor suggested that the issue area would continue to be a priority in the future.

Level 2: Speech had significant coverage of topic. Speeches were considered to have significant coverage of a topic if the relevant section(s) met the Level 1 criteria and the Mayor dedicated at least three full paragraphs exclusively to the topic (or a roughly equivalent portion of text) and articulated issues relating to the topic in detail.

Appendix 1: 2015 research findings

Topic	Percent Significant Coverage	Percent Coverage	2015 Rank (Significant Coverage)	2014 Rank (Significant Coverage)
Economic Development	75%	93%	1	1
Infrastructure	57%	92%	2	5 (Transportation)
Public Safety	55%	94%	3	2
Budgets	43%	90%	4	3
Education	41%	78%	5	4
Housing	28%	75%	6	6
Data/Technology	21%	61%	7	N/A (Energy)
Environment/Energy	16%	49%	8	7 (Environment)
Demographics	11%	36%	9	10 (Immigration)
Health Care	9%	38%	10	8

Appendix 2: Cities in 2015 sample

City	Mayor	Date of Speech	City	Mayor	Date of Speech
Akron, OH	Don Plusquellic	3/20/2015	Hartford, CT	Pedro Segarra	3/9/2015
Anaheim, CA	Tom Tait	2/3/2015	Helena, MT	James Smith	1/26/2015
Atlanta, GA	Kasim Reed	2/4/2015	Henderson, NV	Andy Hafen	1/29/2015
Baltimore, MD	Stephanie Rawlings-Blake	3/9/2015	Hoboken, NJ	Dawn Zimmer	2/10/2015
Baton Rouge, LA	Melvin "Kip" Holden	1/9/2015	Honolulu, HI	Kirk Caldwell	2/24/2015
Beaverton, OR	Denny Doyle	1/15/2015	Huntington, WV	Steve Williams	2/17/2015
Bentonville, AR	Bob McCaslin	1/27/2015	Jamestown, NY	Sam Teresi	1/26/2015
Bethlehem, PA	Robert Donchez	2/18/2015	Kansas City, MO	Sly James	3/31/2015
Biloxi, MS	A.J. Holloway	3/12/2015	Lakewood, CA	Todd Rogers	1/26/2015
Binghamton, NY	Richard David	2/23/2015	Leawood, KS	Peggy Dunn	1/29/2015
Boston, MA	Marty Walsh	1/13/2015	Lenexa, KS	Mike Boehm	2/25/2015
Bowie, MD	Frederick Robinson	1/28/2015	Lexington, KY	Jim Gray	1/20/2015
Canton, OH	William Healey	3/18/2015	Lockport, NY	Anne McCaffrey	1/27/2015
Cedar Rapids, IA	Ron Corbett	2/25/2015	Memphis, TN	A C Wharton Jr	1/29/2015
Charleston, SC	Joseph Riley	1/27/2015	Meridian, ID	Tammy de Weerd	2/4/2015
Charlotte, NC	Dan Clodfelter	1/12/2015	Milwaukee, WI	Tom Barrett	3/9/2015
Chubbuck, ID	Kevin England	1/21/2015	Minneapolis, MN	Betsy Hodges	4/2/2015
Columbia, SC	Steve Benjamin	1/20/2015	Monrovia, CA	Mary Ann Lutz	2/9/2015
Cupertino, CA	Rod Sinks	1/28/2015	Morganton, NC	Mel Cohen	2/4/2015
Dayton, OH	Nan Whaley	2/11/2015	Nampa, ID	Bob Henry	1/21/2015
Durham, NC	William "Bill" Bell	2/19/2015	Naperville, IL	George Pradel	1/26/2015
Elkart, IN	Dick Moore	3/25/2015	Nashua, NH	Donnalee Lozeau	2/17/2015
Escondido, CA	Sam Abed	2/25/2015	New Brunswick, NJ	Jim Cahill	1/2/2015
Euclid, OH	Bill Cervenik	2/2/2015	New Haven, CT	Toni Harp	2/3/2015
Eugene, OR	Kitty Piercy	1/7/2015	New York, NY	Bill de Blasio	2/3/2015
Evanston, IL	Elizabeth Tisdahl	3/20/2015	Newton, MA	Setti Warren	3/16/2015
Fayetteville, AR	Lioneld Jordan	1/20/2015	North Ridgeville, OH	David Gillock	1/15/2015
Forest Grove, OR	Pete Truax	2/23/2015	Norwich, CT	Deb Hinchey	1/7/2015
Fort Wayne, IN	Tom Henry	2/11/2015	Oklahoma City, OK	Mick Cornett	1/14/2015
Gainesville, FL	Ed Braddy	1/28/2015	Omaha, NE	Jean Stothert	2/25/2015
Gloucester City, NJ	William James	1/9/2015	Peoria, IL	Jim Ardis	2/4/2015
Grand Forks, ND	Michael Brown	4/2/2015	Philadelphia, PA	Michael Nutter	1/29/2015
Grand Rapids, MI	George Heartwell	1/17/2015	Plainfield, NJ	Adrian Mapp	1/5/2015
Greenwood, IN	Mark Myers	2/10/2015	Pleasanton, CA	Jerry Thorne	2/19/2015
Harlingen, TX	Chris Boswell	1/30/2015	Portland, OR	Charlie Hales	1/30/2015

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APPENDIX

Appendix 2: Cities in 2015 sample

City	Mayor	Date of Speech
Providence , RI	Jorge Elorza	1/5/2015
Renton, WA	Denis Law	3/4/2015
Richmond, VA	Dwight Jones	1/29/2015
Rochester, MN	Lovely Warren	2/12/2015
Rochester, NY	Ardell Brede	1/5/2015
Rock Island, IL	Dennis Pauley	1/12/2015
Rockville, MD	Bridget Newton	1/29/2015
Rye, NY	Joe Sack	1/14/2015
Saginaw, MI	Dennis Browning	2/5/2015
Salem, MA	Kimberley Driscoll	1/5/2015
Salt Lake City, UT	Ralph Becker	1/14/2015
San Antonio, TX	Ivy Taylor	3/3/2015
San Diego, CA	Kevin Faulconer	1/14/2015
San Francisco, CA	Edwin Lee	1/15/2015
San Jose, CA	Sam Liccardo	1/6/2015
Savannah, GA	Edna Jackson	2/11/2015
Seattle, WA	Edward Murray	2/17/2015
Somerville, MA	Joseph Curtatone	1/19/2015
St. Marys, GA	John Morrissey	1/8/2015
Summit, NJ	Ellen Dickson	1/6/2015
Sunny Isles Beach, FL	George "Bud" Scholl	1/15/2015
Syracuse, NY	Stephanie Miner	1/29/2015
Tualatin, OR	Lou Ogden	1/29/2015
Tucson, AZ	Jonathan Rothschild	3/6/2015
Valparaiso, IN	Jon Costas	1/28/2015
Virginia Beach, VA	William Sessoms	3/4/2015
Washington, DC	Muriel Bowser	3/31/2015
Wheeling, WV	Andy McKenzie	2/24/2015
Wichita, KS	Carl Brewer	1/27/2015
Yuma, AZ	Doug Nicholls	2/4/2015