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Special Report #1

Neighborhood Problems and Quality of Life

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Introduction and Background

This Special Report discusses findings of an eTownPanel online survey -- conducted in collaboration with Citizens for NYC -- about neighborhood problems and quality of neighborhood life. Citizens for NYC is a nonprofit organization that stimulates and supports self-help and civic action to improve the quality of life in New York City neighborhoods. The survey focused on identifying the most important problems facing people in their neighborhoods, and the findings are used by Citizens for NYC to fund neighborhood groups in the city to address these problems.

Methodological Note. The survey was conducted in February and March, 2004, and included online responses from 539 eTownPanelists plus 128 members of Citizens for NYC, many of which completed a paper version of the questionnaire, for a total sample of 667. eTownPanel surveys are based on an online panel of volunteers and not a random sample. Strictly speaking, therefore, the results are not statistically projectable to a larger population. However, some of the results are weighted by gender, race, age, and region (using US Census information) to better reflect the population of New York City and the nation.

Findings

The findings below are reported separately for three groups: the nation as a whole, New York City residents, and New York City neighborhood leaders. The data for the nation and New York City residents are weighted to reflect the general population (see methodological note above). The results for New York City neighborhood leaders, who head citizen groups in the city working on neighborhood issues, represent a subset of all New York City residents and are unweighted. This section focuses on rankings of various neighborhood problems. It also reports on perceived change in neighborhood problems and what agencies and officials citizens turn to for help with these problems.

Neighborhood problems

As **Figure 1** shows, the top neighborhood problems for respondents nationwide are dangerous intersections, drugs and drug dealing, pot holes, too much growth or overbuilding, and traffic congestion. The means on a 7-point scale (from 1=no problem to 7=very big problem) are at most about 3, suggesting that many respondents saw these issues as only minor problems in their neighborhoods.

Figure 2 shows the results for New York City residents. In contrast with the national results, the means for New York City problems are much higher, with most over 3 and many over 4. The top rated problems are litter or garbage, street noise, vandalism or graffiti, dangerous intersections, and soot or air pollution. Traffic congestion and drugs or drug dealing also appear high on the list.

Figure 3 shows results for a subset of New York City residents who are leaders of neighborhood associations. Although many of the top problems are the same as for New York City resident in general, the priorities are somewhat different for neighborhood leaders. The leaders rate dangerous intersections as the top problem, followed by vandalism or graffiti, street noise, traffic congestion, and litter or garbage.

Are problems getting better or worse?

The survey asked respondents if the neighborhood problems listed above were, in general, getting better or worse over the last few years. As **Figure 4** shows, respondents nationwide appear to see their neighborhood problems as mostly staying about the same. New York City residents, as indicated in **Figure 5**, are more likely to report that neighborhood problems are getting better. Similarly, the perspective of neighborhood leaders in New York City, shown in **Figure 6**, also suggests that problems have improved.

Working with agencies and officials

Respondents were asked how often they worked with various agencies or officials concerning neighborhood problems. As **Figure 7** shows, people nationwide work most often with the police and schools, followed by town councils, fire departments, and mayor's office. In New York City, as **Figure 8** demonstrates, people work most often with the police, their community boards, the city council, and the parks department. **Figure 9** shows that New York City neighborhood leaders work much more frequently with these agencies and officials than ordinary New Yorkers, as might be expected.

About eTownPanel. eTownPanel is a university-based, nonprofit project that aims to expand the potential of the Internet as a tool for measuring the quality of life in communities across the US and for providing citizen-driven feedback on the performance of local governments. eTownPanel also serves as a cost-effective research tool for local nonprofit organizations and government agencies that seek to understand what citizens think about important local issues. The project currently focuses on New York City but will soon include additional cities and towns from across the US.

For more information visit www.ETownPanel.com or email info@ETownPanel.com

FIGURE 1. The Nation: Neighborhood problems (in rank order)

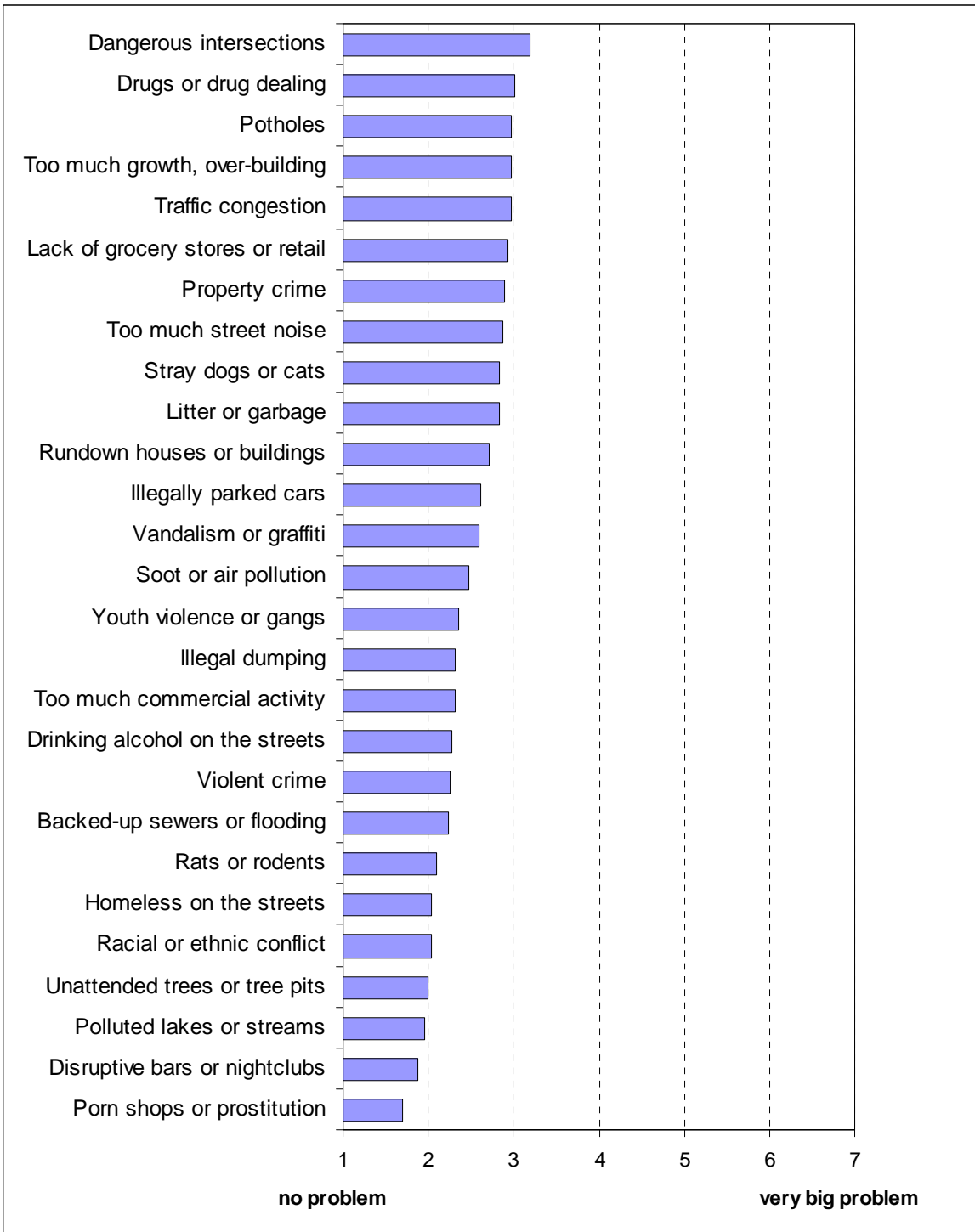


FIGURE 2 New York City: Neighborhood problems (in rank order)

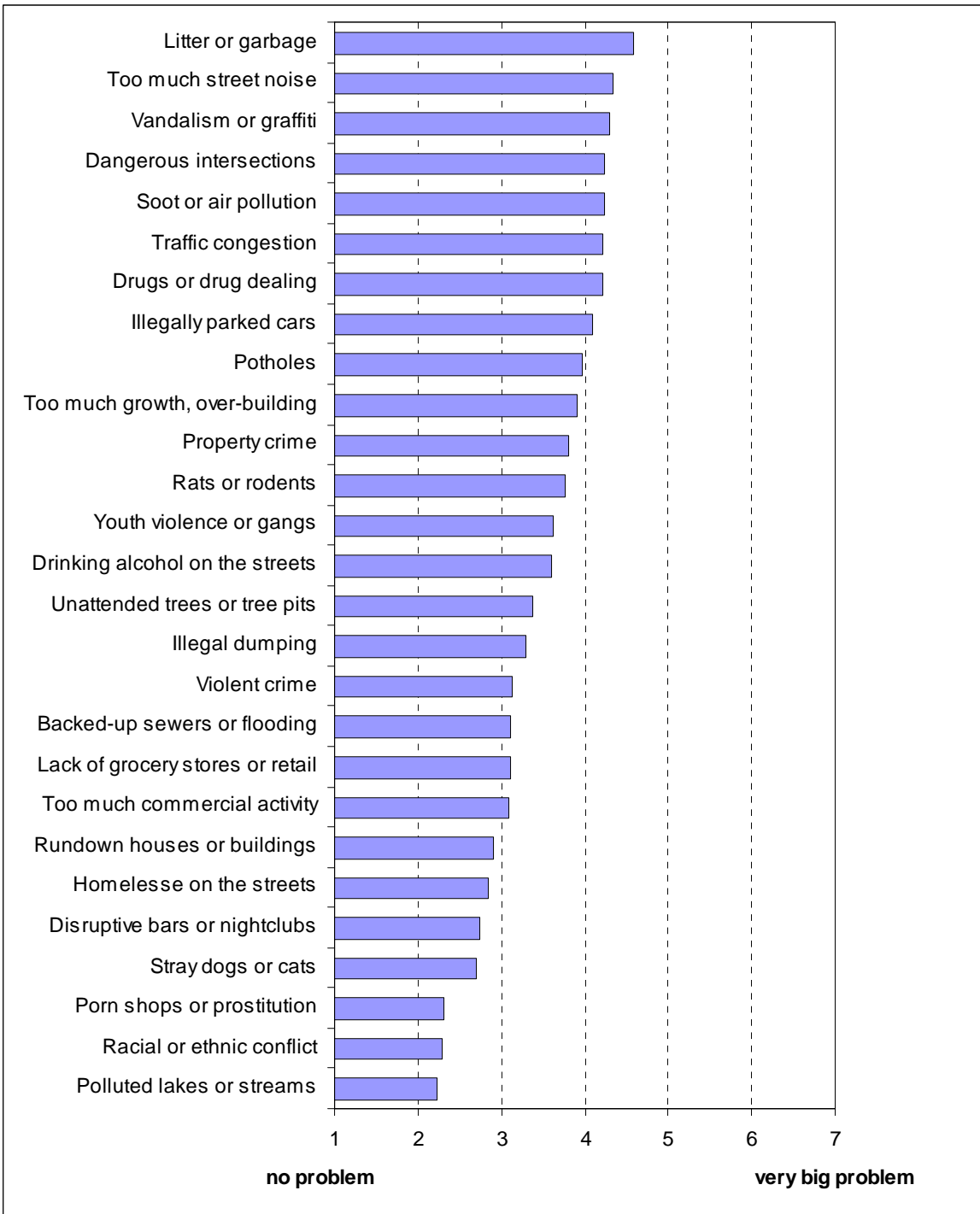


FIGURE 3 NYC Neighborhood Leaders: Neighborhood problems (in rank order)

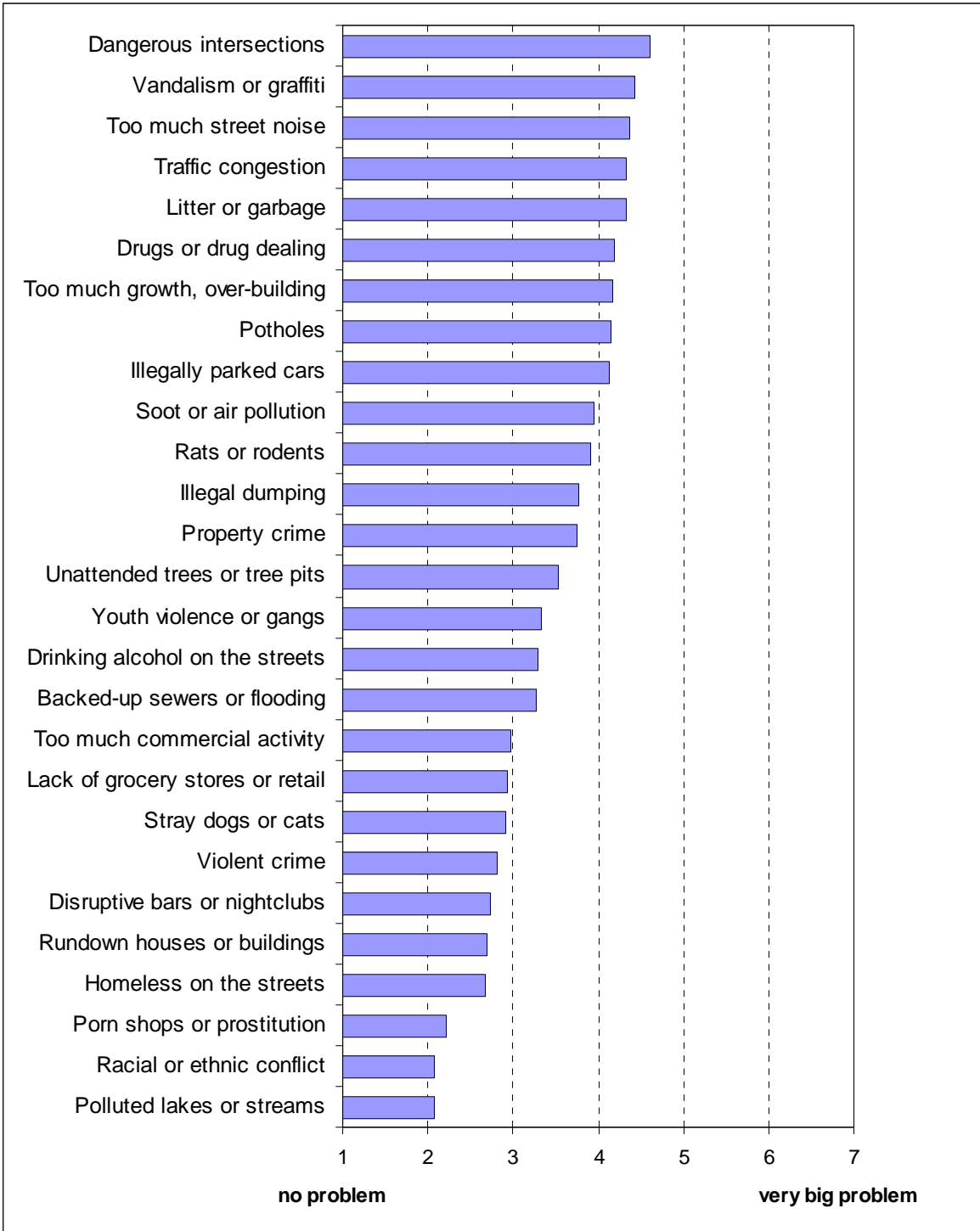


FIGURE 4 The Nation: Perceived change in neighborhood problems

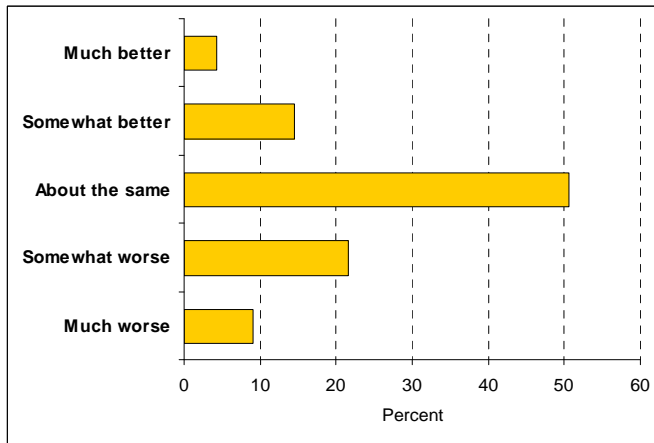


FIGURE 5 New York City: Perceived change in neighborhood problems

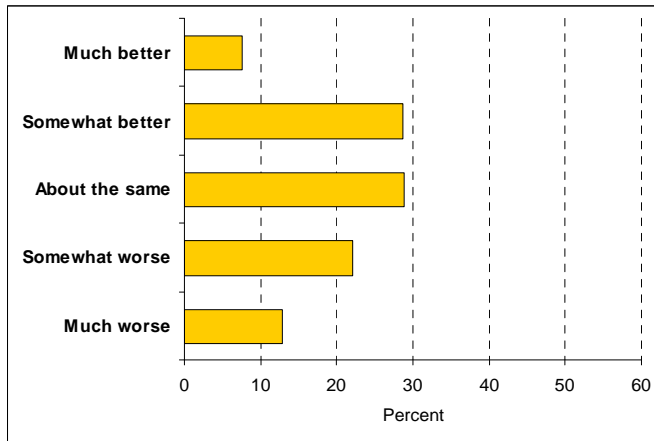


FIGURE 6 NYC Neighborhood Leaders: Perceived change in neighborhood problems

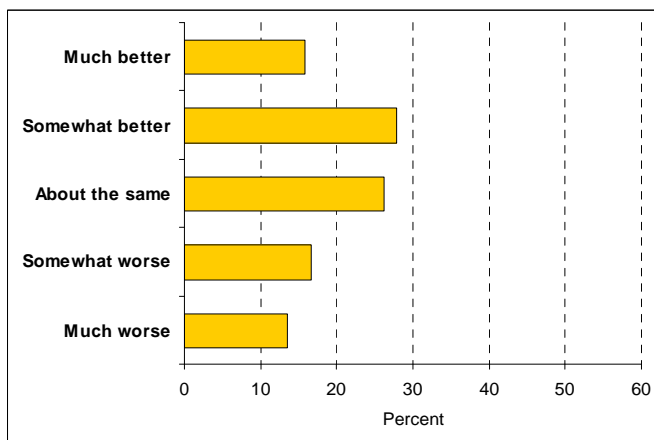


FIGURE 7 The Nation: Frequency of dealing with various agencies concerning neighborhood problems (in rank order)

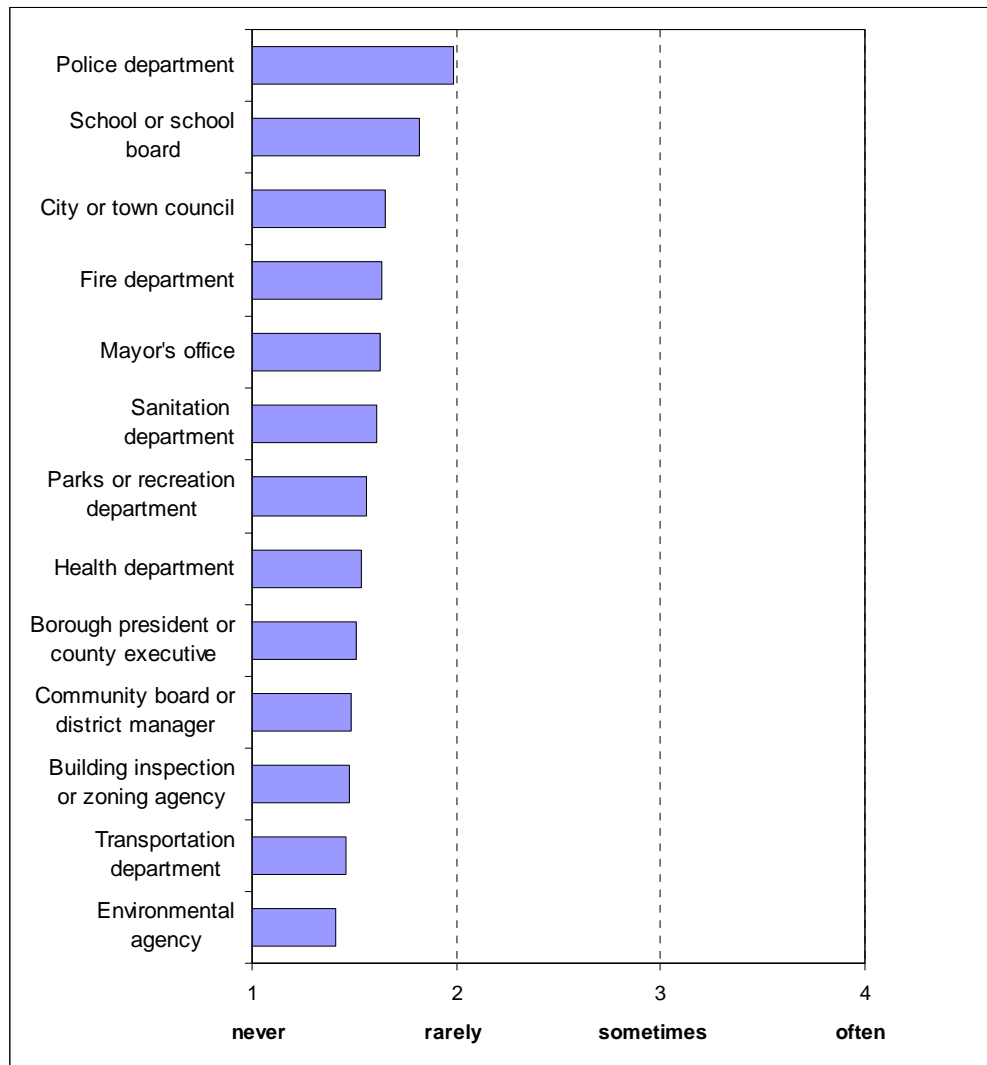


FIGURE 8 New York City: Frequency of dealing with various agencies concerning neighborhood problems (in rank order)

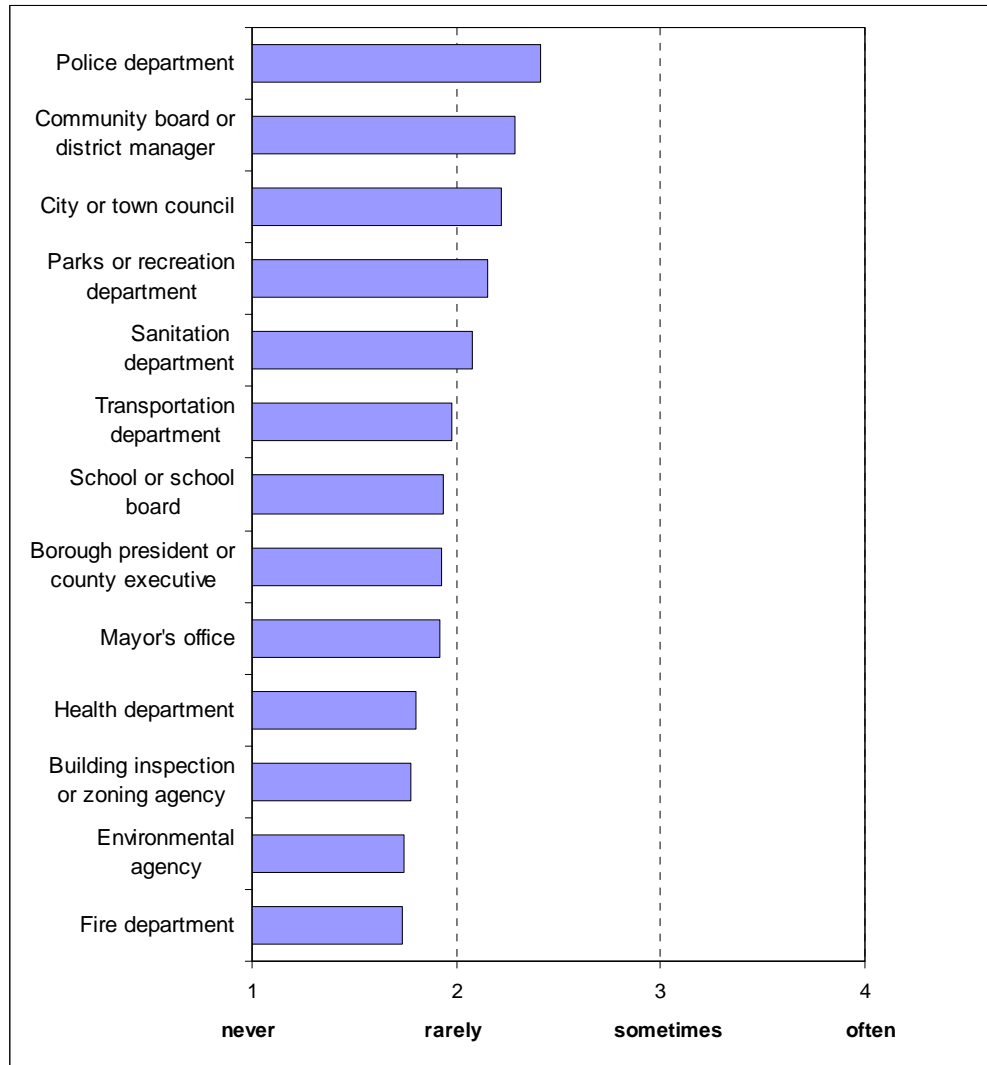


FIGURE 9 NYC Neighborhood Leaders: Frequency of dealing with various agencies concerning neighborhood problems (in rank order)

