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Special Report #10

Satisfaction with Local Parks 2005

A survey in collaboration with



February 2006

Introduction and Background

This Special Report discusses findings of an eTownPanel online survey, conducted in collaboration with New Yorkers for Parks, about people's use of and satisfaction with parks. New Yorkers for Parks serves as an independent watchdog for the people of New York and their parks, working to ensure greener, cleaner and safer parks for all New Yorkers.

This survey replicates a previous survey completed in November, 2004 (see eTownPanel Special Report #5).¹ As before, the survey focused on frequency of park use, how parks are used, ratings of park conditions and park financing.

Methodological note: The survey was conducted from September 23 through November 11, 2005, and included online responses from 1,818 US panelists, 141 of whom live in New York City. The panelists were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research; they are not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger population. However, results are adjusted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City. See the methodology section at the end of this report for more details.

Findings

The findings below are reported separately for the nation as a whole and for New York City and are weighted to better reflect the general population (see methodological note above). This section begins with general perceptions of local parks. It then focuses on how often parks are used, and what local parks are used for. The report concludes with the conditions of local parks and the question of park financing.

Satisfaction with local parks

Figure 1 compares New York City and the rest of the nation in terms of an overall index of satisfaction with local parks. The index ranges from 0-100 and is based on three questions designed to measure overall satisfaction with local parks.² Similar to last year, results show that average NYC respondents are less satisfied with their parks compared to the nation as a whole. The satisfaction for all respondents dropped, but only very slightly, from last year.

¹ Available at www.ETownPanel.com/SpecialReports.htm

² The three questions asked about overall satisfaction with the local park, and compares this satisfaction level with both expectations of parks in the neighborhood and the ideal local park.

Park usage

Just as last year's survey showed, New York City respondents used their local park more frequently than their nationwide counterparts (please see **Figure 2**). A plurality of New York City residents (24 percent) responded that they used their neighborhood park "more than once a week." As opposed to only 12 percent of nationwide respondents. If they didn't use the park more than once a week, 65 percent of New York City residents responded that they use their park at least a few times a month, as opposed to only 45 percent of nationwide respondents. The most frequent response for panelists throughout the nation was "A few times a year" at 35 percent.

Figure 3 illustrates that, by and large, New Yorkers and the rest of the nation, use parks for the same types of activities, which is similar to what was reported in last years survey. Last year's survey reported that New Yorkers use parks for "relaxation" much more than nationwide panelists. This is not the case this year. Respondents nationwide and in New York both responded that they use their parks for relaxation the same amount. Nationwide, parks are used more for family outings and nature-enthusiast activities than in New York City. New York City residents, however, do use the park more for passive recreation, concerts and special events than the nationwide respondents.

Conditions of local parks

Similar to last year's survey, New Yorkers rated all features listed on the survey lower than their nationwide counterparts. However, the only features that did not see an average score of "good" or better for the nation were "drinking fountains". This is better last year than when "drinking fountains" and "bathrooms" received below a "good" from the nation. In addition to "drinking fountains", the other features not receiving an average of "good" or better from New York City residents were "bathrooms" and "active recreation space." This is an improvement from last year where four of the factors received less then "good" from New York City Residents. For the complete features and their average score, please see **Figure 4**.

When asked if their parks were "Crowded, Noisy, Dirty, Unsafe, Closed," the average scores for both groups were just above "Sometimes." However, the exception to this is New York City residents who reported that their parks are "More then sometimes" crowded. This is worse than last year when none of the average scores for both groups reached above "Sometimes." These results are found in **Figure 5**. In all categories, New York City panelists indicated they experienced these undesirable conditions more often than the rest of the nation.

Financing of local parks

Nationwide panelists tend to approve of "general government spending" and "renting out space" as top ways to finance their local parks. New York City Residents approve of "general government spending" and "private donations" as their top ways to finance their parks. These results differ from last year where Nationwide and New York City residents alike thought "Renting out space for private events" and "Concession revenue" were the top ways to finance their local parks. As you can see from **Figure 6**, New York City residents no longer think that "renting out space for private events" is a good way to finance their parks. Both groups were also less likely to approve of "user fees" to finance neighborhood parks. Last year both groups were less likely to approve "general government spending" and this year it was reported as the top source of financial support

for all respondents. **Figure 6** lists all the financing mechanisms on the survey and the average response scores.

The overwhelming majority of respondents felt that the city or local parks department should maintain their local parks, 88 percent of New York residents and 85 percent of nationwide panelists. See **Figure 7** for more details.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from September 23 through November 11, 2005, and included online responses from 1,818 US panelists, 141 of whom live in New York City. The panelists were recruited using the Internet and other sources to participate in online research; they are not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically projectable to the larger population. However, results are adjusted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the US and New York City.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the survey respondents, both weighted and unweighted, and compares this profile to data from the US Census. As the unweighted results in Table 1 show, respondents nationally are disproportionately white, female, and in the 25 to 44 age group. Respondents nationally over-represent the Northeast and under-represent Blacks, Hispanics, those 65 and older, and those in the lowest income group. The unweighted results, by design, more closely mirror the Census figures nationally. The unweighted New York City respondents, compared to Census figures for New York City, are again disproportionately white and female, and they under-represent Blacks, Hispanics, those 65 and older, and the lowest income group. By design again, the weighted results bring the profile of New York City respondents into line with Census figures for the city (except for income, which was not a weighting variable). The following results in this report for both New York and the nation are all weighted results.

The weighting procedure involved two steps. First, weights were constructed to bring the sample into geographic balance based on the population of Census regions. This geographic weight was then applied to the data, and new weights were calculated to align the sample to the Census in terms of gender, race, and age. This weighting procedure was carried out separately for New York City and the nation. Income was not used as a weighting variable because of missing data and because of the difficulties comparing income across surveys.

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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. Overall index of neighborhood park satisfaction (0-100 scale)

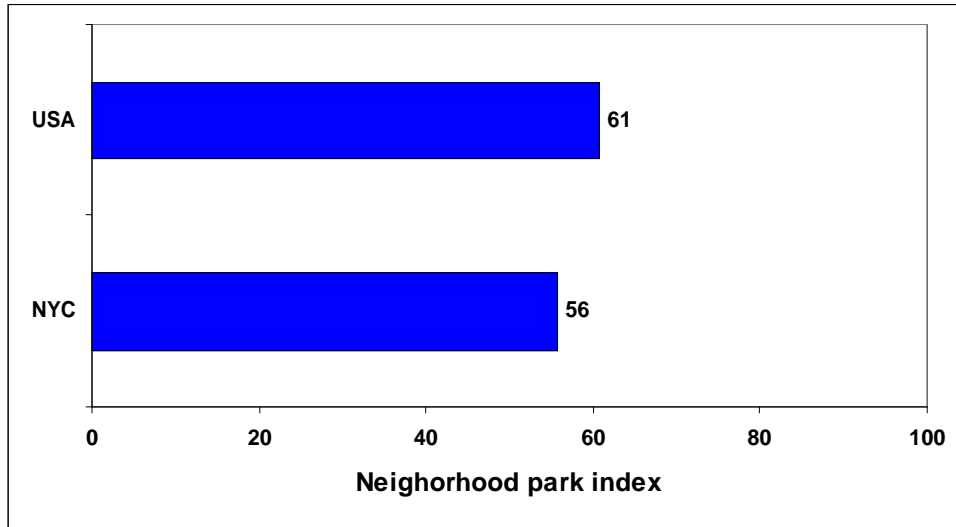


Figure 2. How often do you use your local park?

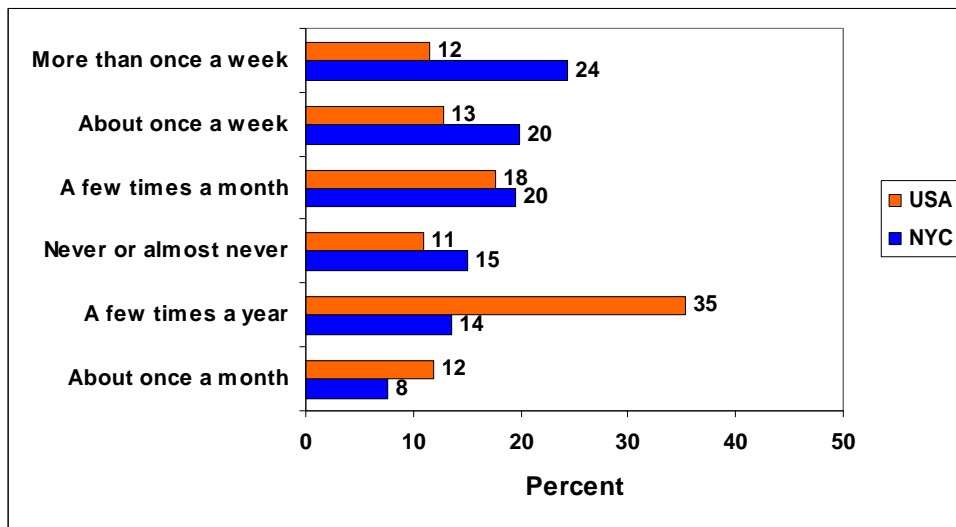


Figure 3. What do you use parks for?

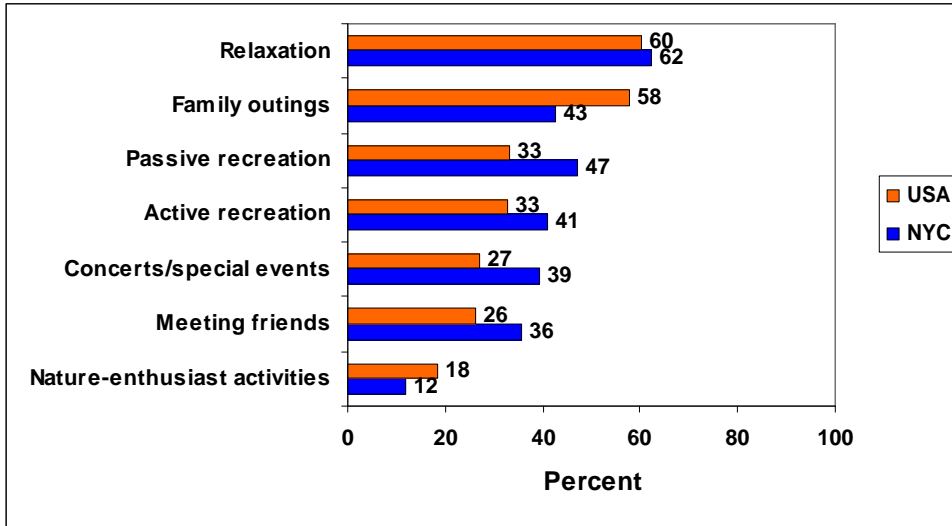


Figure 4. Please rate the following features of your local parks?

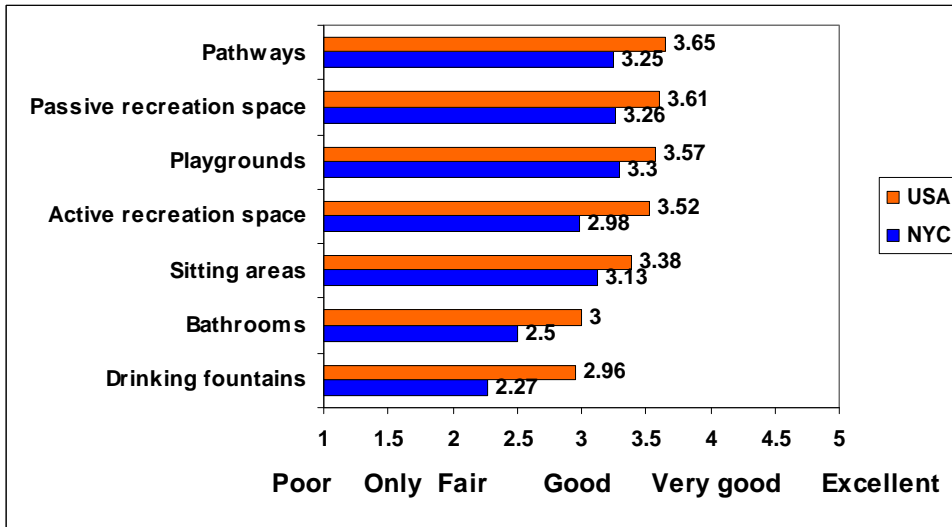


Figure 5. From your experience, how often is your local park . . .

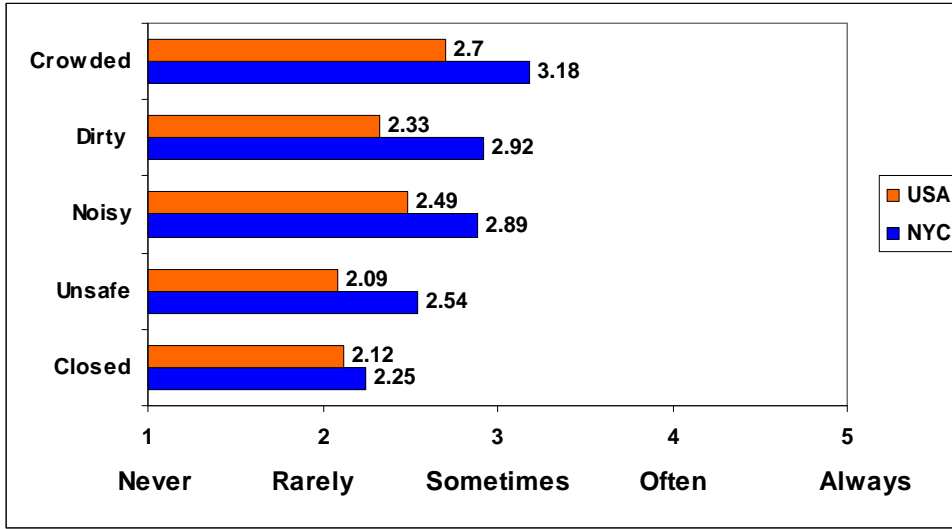


Figure 6. Do you approve, or disapprove, of local government relying on the following sources of financial support for parks?

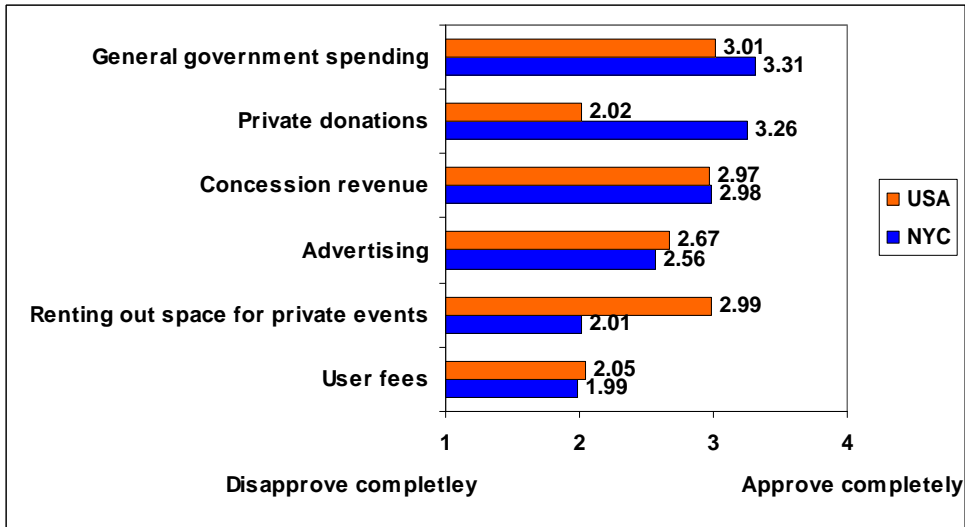


Figure 7. Who do you think should have primary responsibility for maintenance of your local park?

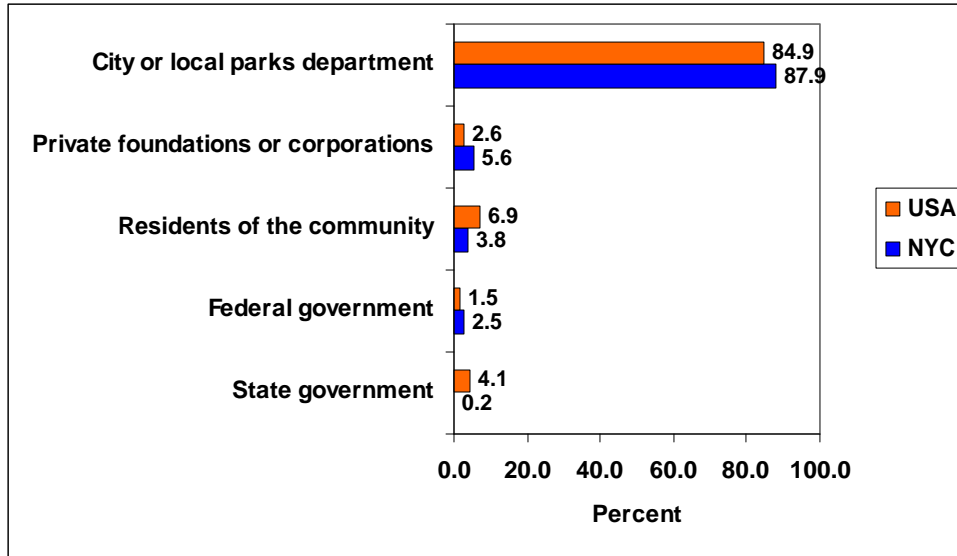


Table 1. Demographic profile of survey respondents (percents)

	The Nation (n = 1,818)			New York City (n = 141)		
	Census	Weighted	Unweighted	Census	Weighted	Unweighted
Northeast	19.0	20.9	26.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
South	35.6	35.9	31.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Midwest	22.9	20.1	24.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
West	21.9	23.1	18.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
White, non-Hispanic	69.1	71.4	86.5	35.0	32.2	70.9
Black or African American	12.3	11.7	5.4	24.5	26.8	9.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.7	3.1	3.3	9.7	12.7	6.4
Hispanic or Latino	12.5	11.5	3.3	27.0	24.5	7.8
Other	2.4	2.3	1.5	3.8	3.7	5.0
Male	49.0	50.0	25.2	49.0	55.5	34.3
Female	51.0	50.0	74.8	51.0	44.5	65.7
18 to 24 years	13.4	14.9	6.0	13.1	17.1	7.3
25 to 44 years	40.7	39.5	52.7	43.5	47.7	47.4
45 to 64 years	29.6	31.0	37.8	27.9	29.2	43.8
65 years and over	16.7	14.5	3.5	15.5	6.0	1.5
Less than \$25,000	28.7	17.5	14.2	34.9	14.9	11.5
\$25,000-\$49,999	29.3	37.4	36.9	25.7	31.3	25.4
\$50,000-\$74,9999	19.5	27.0	28.5	16.7	31.9	28.7
\$75,000 or more	22.5	18.1	20.4	22.7	21.8	34.4

Note: Census figures from American FactFinder, 2000 Census Quick Tables, available at www.census.gov.

Weighted results reflect post-stratification adjustments for region, race, age, and gender.

