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Special Report #15

Satisfaction with Local Parks 2006

A survey in collaboration with



December 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 two previous surveys. The first was completed in November 2004¹ and the second was complete in February 2006². 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 November 4 through December 10, 2006, and included online responses from 1,990 US panelists, 213 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.

Methodology

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of survey respondents, both weighted and unweighted, and compares this profile to data from the US Census. The unweighted results in Table 1 show that respondents nationally are disproportionately white, female, reside in the Northeast, and are 25-64 years old. Respondents nationally under-represent African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics; those whose annual income ranges from \$50,000 to \$74,999, and those in the lowest income group; those who are 18 to 24 years old, and those 65 years or older. The weighted results, by design, more closely mirror the Census figures nationally.

The unweighted data for New York City respondents, when compared to Census figures, are again disproportionately White and female, over-representing those 45 to 64 years old, and those in the highest income group. New York City respondents under-represent African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics; those 18 to 24 years of age, and those 65 years older; those in 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 is not a weighting variable). The results in this report for both New York City and the nation are all weighted results.

The weighting procedure involves two steps. First, weights are constructed to bring the sample into geographic balance based on the population of Census regions. This geographic weight is then applied to the data. Next, new weights are calculated to align the sample to the Census in terms of gender, race, and age. This weighting procedure is carried out separately for New York City and the nation. Income is not used as a weighting

¹ Special Report #5 is available at <http://www.ETownPanel.com/results.htm>

² Special Report #10 is available at <http://www.ETownPanel.com/results.htm>

variable because of missing data and because of the difficulties comparing income levels across surveys.

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.³ Similar to last year, results show that NYC respondents are less satisfied with their local parks when compared to respondents nationwide. Results also show that satisfaction with local parks among all respondents rose very slightly from last year.

Park usage

Just as the last two Park surveys showed, New York City respondents use their local park more frequently than respondents nationwide (please see **Figure 2**). For example, 22.0 percent of New York City residents reported that they use their neighborhood park “more than once a week” compared to only 10.6 percent for respondents nationwide. Additionally, 27.3 percent of New Yorkers indicated that they use their local park “about once a month” compared to 18.6 percent of respondents elsewhere. 48.6 percent of respondents nationwide reported using their local park either “a few times a year” or “never or almost never” compared to 27.0 percent of New Yorkers.

Figure 3 illustrates that, by and large, New Yorkers and the rest of the nation use parks for the same types of activities similar to those reported in last year’s survey. Respondents reported using parks for relaxation, meeting friends, for family outings, concerts and special events, and for active and passive recreation.

Conditions of local parks

Similar to results from the previous two iterations of this survey, New Yorkers rated all features of their local parks lower than their counterparts nationwide. Both groups of respondents gave an average score of “good” to “only fair” when rating features like “drinking fountains” and “bathrooms”. Other features, which include “playgrounds, active and passive recreation space, pathways, and sitting areas,” received an average rating of between “good” to “very good” from New Yorkers -- Respondents nationwide rated these features slightly higher. For the complete list of features and their average score, please see **Figure 4**.

When respondents were asked if their local parks are “Crowded, Noisy, Dirty, Unsafe, or Closed,” New Yorkers rated their local parks less favorably than respondents across the

³ The questions asked about overall satisfaction with the local park and compared respondents’ satisfaction level with both expectations of parks in their neighborhood and the ideal local park.

nation. When compared with responses from last year's survey results⁴, today New Yorkers report improving conditions in their local parks in the areas listed in **Figure 5**, while respondents nationwide indicate a slower rate of improvement in these areas.

Financing of local parks

Figure 6 shows that "general government spending", "private donations" and "concession revenue" receive the highest approval rating, both nationwide and in New York City, as means for garnering financial support for local parks. For New Yorkers, these results resemble those from last year. However for panelists nationwide, results differ in that "renting out space for private events" ranked second in approval as a means of raising financial support for local parks⁴.

Just as in previous years, the most recent survey results show that the overwhelming majority of respondents think that the "city or local parks department" should maintain local parks: 88 percent of New York City residents and 85 percent of nationwide panelists. See **Figure 7** for more details.

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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

⁴ Special Report #10 is available at <http://www.ETownPanel.com/results.htm>

Table 1. Demographic profile of survey respondents (percents)

	The Nation (n=1777)			New York City (n=213)		
	Census	Weighted	Unweighted	Census	Weighted	Unweighted
Northeast	19.0	20.8	29.5	100.0	100.0	100.0
South	35.6	33.6	29.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Midwest	22.9	22.2	24.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
West	21.9	23.3	16.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
White, non-Hispanic Black or African American	69.1	70.9	83.9	35.0	44.8	70.3
Asian or Pacific Islander	12.3	11.4	7.2	24.5	18.3	13.2
Hispanic or Latino	12.5	10.1	3.7	27.0	20.7	7.1
Other	3.7	5.2	3.1	9.7	11.2	3.8
Female	2.4	2.5	2.2	3.8	5.0	5.7
Male	51.0	52.0	73.4	51.0	53.8	63.8
Female	49.0	48.0	26.6	49.0	46.2	36.2
18 to 24 years	13.4	14.5	6.1	13.1	15.4	4.8
25 to 44 years	40.7	40.4	49.9	43.5	48.3	38.5
45 to 64 years	29.6	31.3	40.0	27.9	24.8	51.9
65 years and over	16.7	13.7	3.9	15.5	11.5	4.8
Less than \$25,000	28.7	16.6	14.5	34.9	10.3	9.9
\$25,000-\$49,999	29.3	35.4	33.9	25.7	37.4	24.9
\$50,000-\$74,9999	19.5	28.0	28.7	16.7	20.2	24.9
\$75,000 or more	22.5	20.0	22.9	22.7	32.1	40.3

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.

Figure 1. Overall index of neighborhood park satisfaction (0-100 scale)

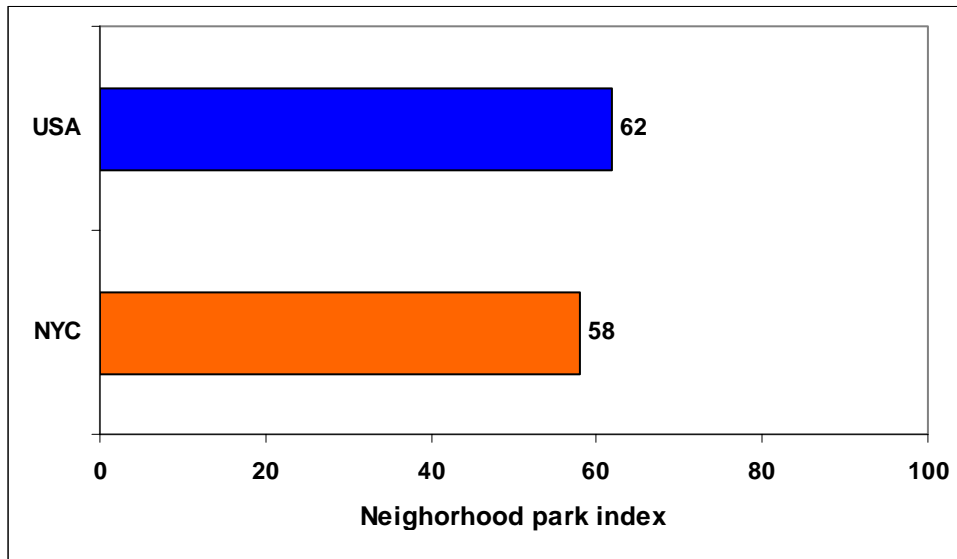


Figure 2. How often do you use your local park?

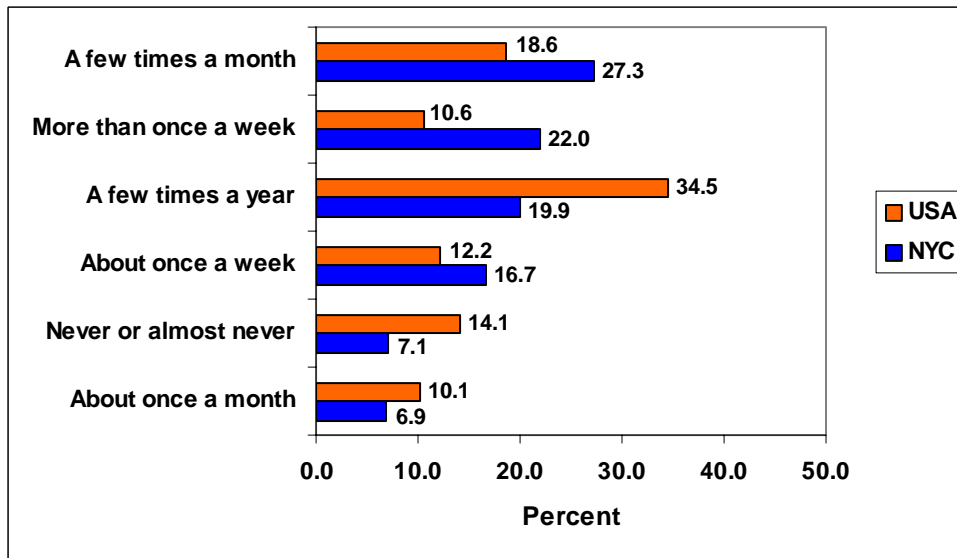


Figure 3. What do you use parks for?

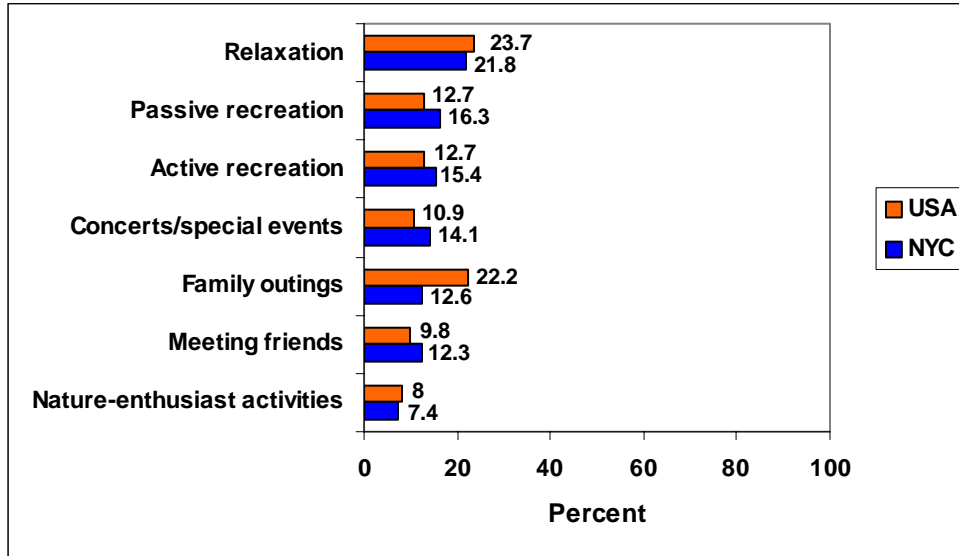


Figure 4. Please rate the following features of your local parks?

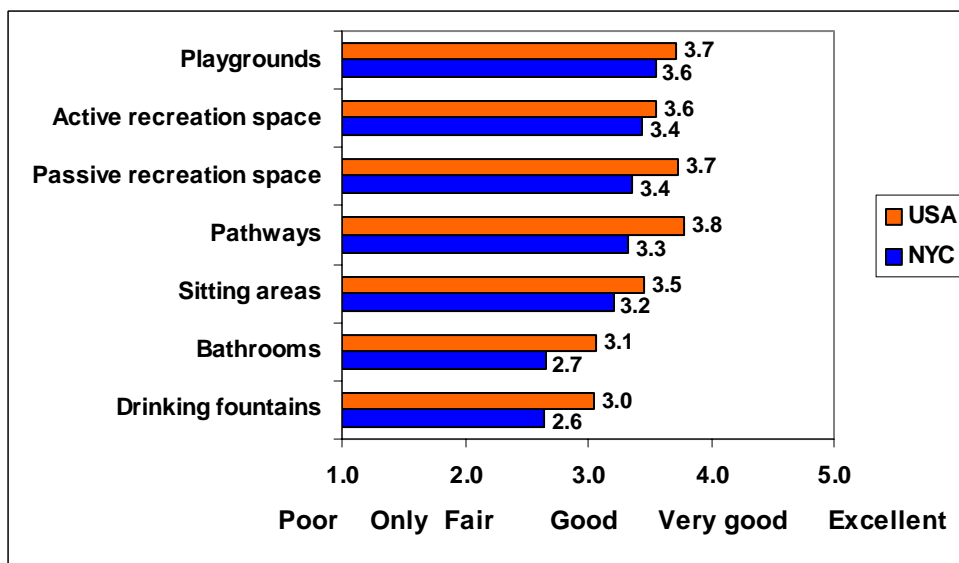


Figure 5. From your experience, how often is your local park . . .

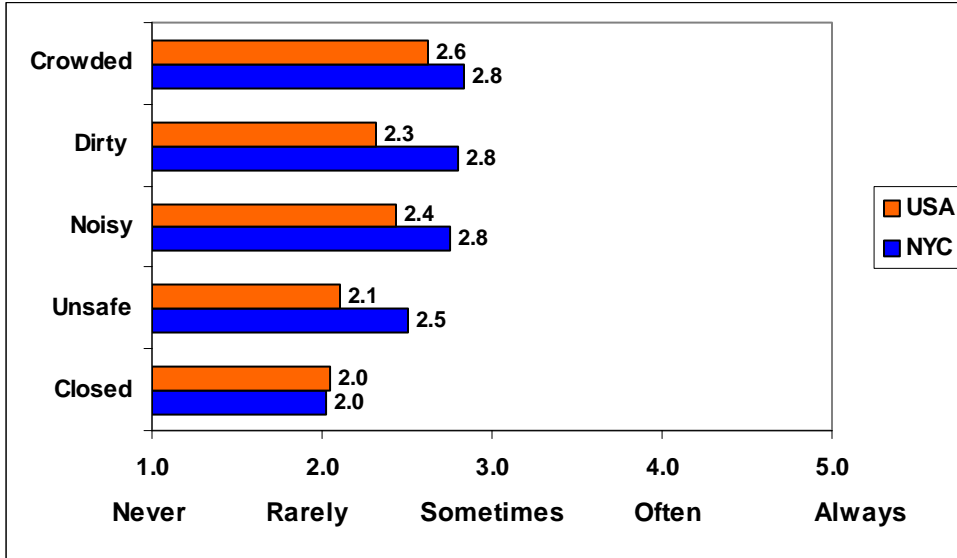


Figure 6. Do you approve, or disapprove, of local government relying on the following sources of financial support for parks?

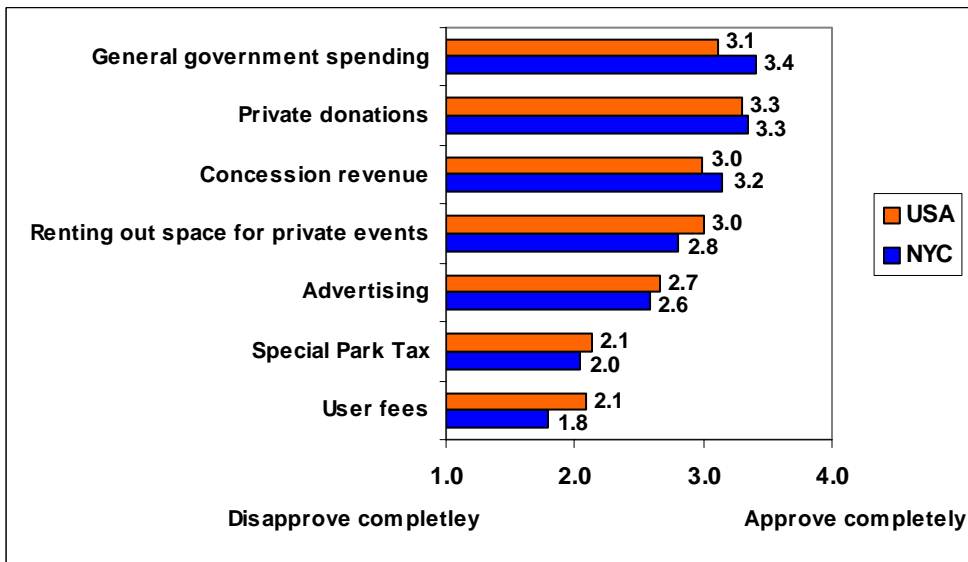


Figure 7. Who do you think should have primary responsibility for maintenance of your local park?

