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Special Report #5

Satisfaction with Local Parks

A survey in collaboration with



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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 advocate for the people of New York and their parks by raising awareness about parks, serving as an independent watchdog for more equity and efficiency in parks and creating public discussion regarding various park issues. The survey focused on frequency of park use, ways parks were used, rating of park conditions and park financing.

Methodological note: The survey was conducted from September 9 through October 9, 2004, and included online responses from 1,726 panelists, 184 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.

Overall 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.¹ The index results show that the average national respondent was slightly more satisfied with their local park than the average New York City respondent.

Park usage

New York City respondents used their local park more frequently than their nationwide counterparts (see **Figure 2**). A plurality of New York City residents (28 percent) responded that they used their neighborhood park "More than once a week" opposed to only 12 percent of nationwide respondents. The most frequent response for panelists throughout the nation was "A few times a year" at 32 percent.

¹ The three questions asked about overall satisfaction with local parks, a comparison with expectations, and a comparison with one's ideal local park.

Figure 3 illustrates that, by and large, New Yorkers and the rest of the nation use parks for the same types of activities, with a few, notable exceptions. New Yorkers use parks for “Relaxation” and “Concerts/special events” much more than nationwide panelists. Nationwide, parks are used more for family outings.

Conditions of local parks

New Yorkers rated all features listed on the survey lower than their nationwide counterparts. The only features that did not see an average score of “Good” or better for the nation were “Drinking Fountains” and “Bathrooms.” In addition to these two features, the other features not receiving an average of “Good” or better from New York City residents were “Playgrounds” and “Active recreation space.” For the complete features and their average score, please see **Figure 4**.

When asked if their parks were “Crowded, Noisy, Dirty, Unsafe, Closed,” 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 witnessed these undesirable experiences more so than the rest of the nation.

Financing of local parks

Nationwide panelists and New York City residents alike tended to approve of “Renting out space for private events” and “Concession revenue” as the top ways to finance their local parks. Both groups were also less likely to approve of “General government spending” and “User fees” to finance neighborhood parks. **Figure 6** lists all the financing mechanisms on the survey and the average responses.

The overwhelming number of respondents felt that the city or local parks department should maintain their local parks, 81 percent of New York residents and 79 percent of nationwide panelists. See **Figure 7** for more details.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from September 9 through October 9, 2004, and included online responses from 1,726 panelists, 184 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 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)

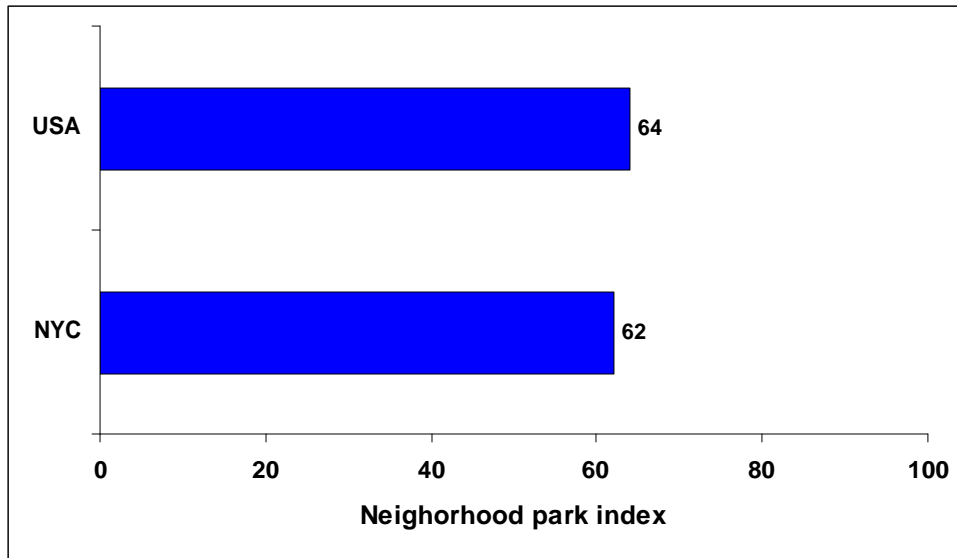


Figure 2. How often do you use your local park?

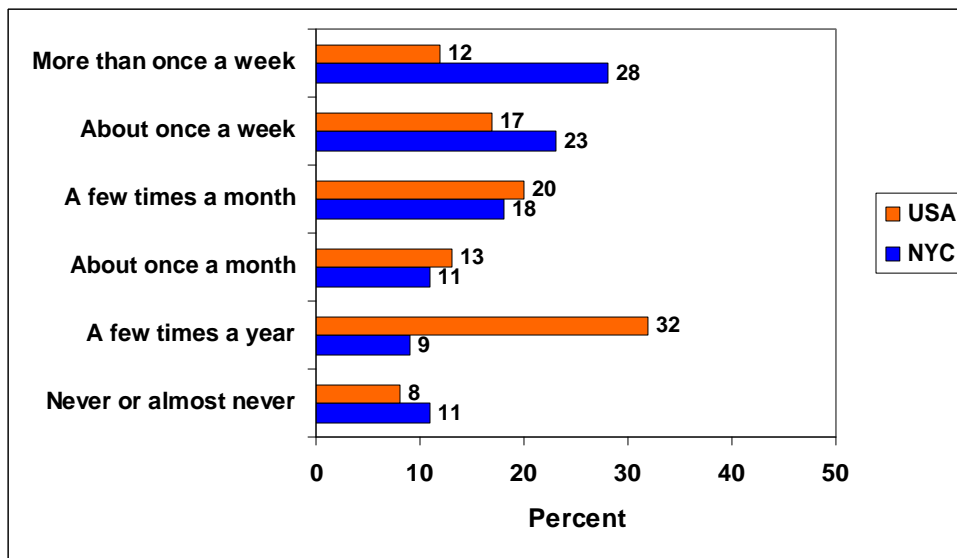


Figure 3. What do you use parks for?

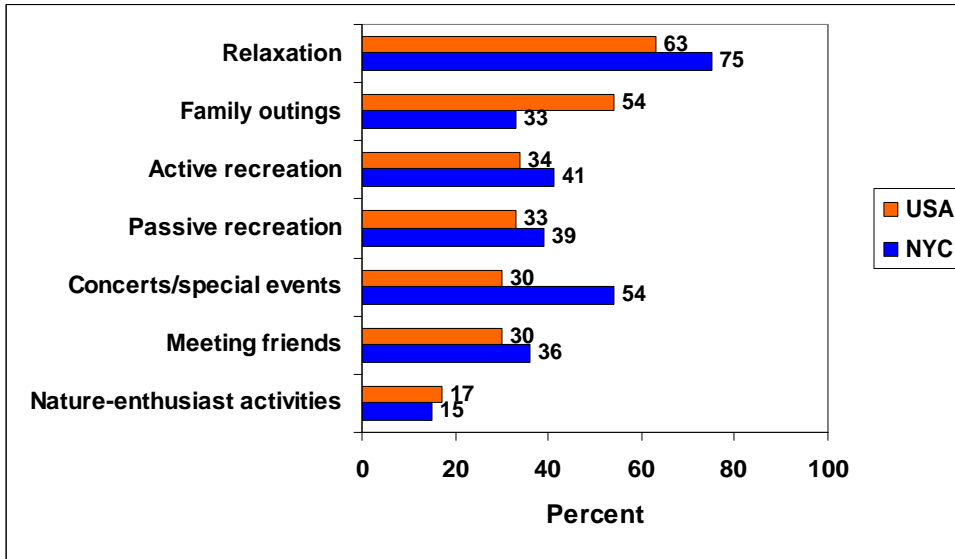


Figure 4. Please rate the following features of your local parks?

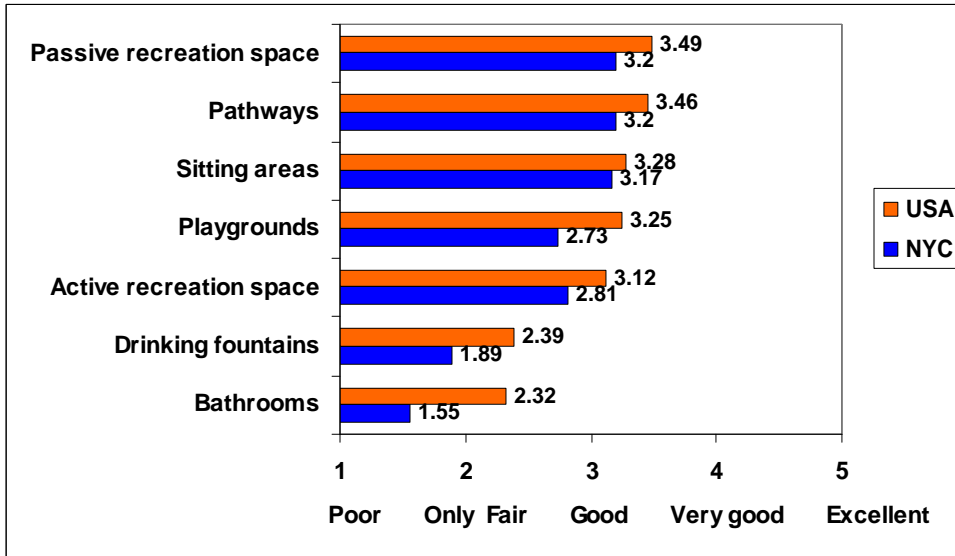


Figure 5. From your experience, how often is your local park . . .

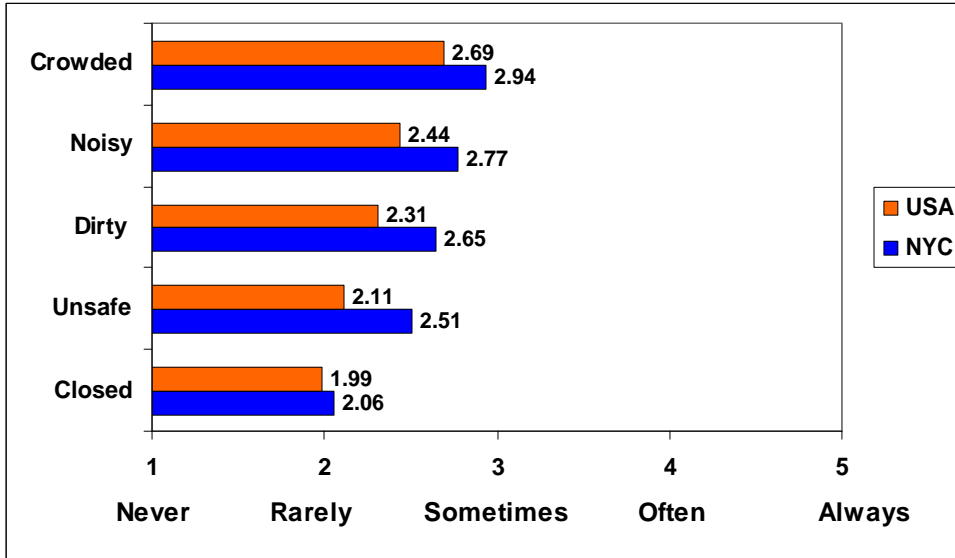


Figure 6. Do you approve, or disapprove, of local government relying on the following sources of financial support for parks?

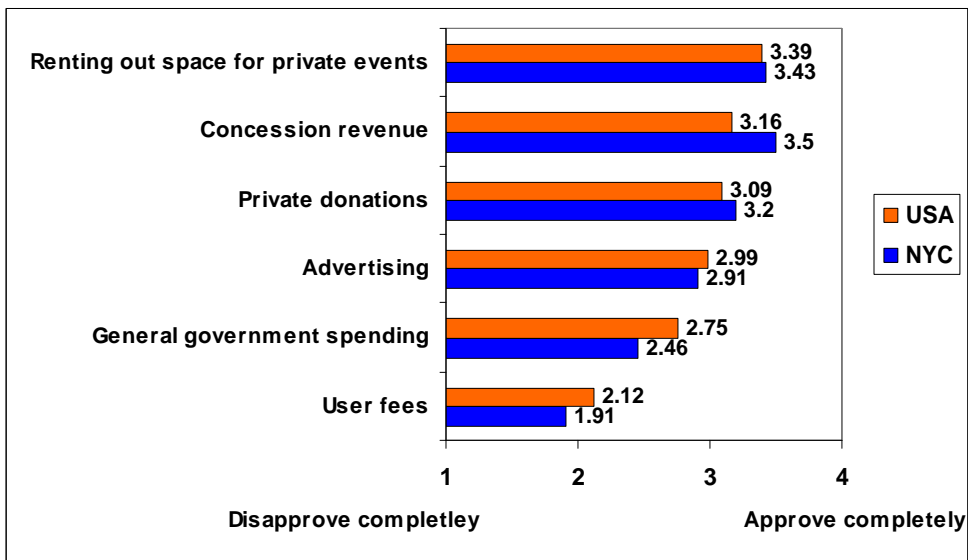


Figure 7. Who do you think should have primary responsibility for maintenance of your local park?

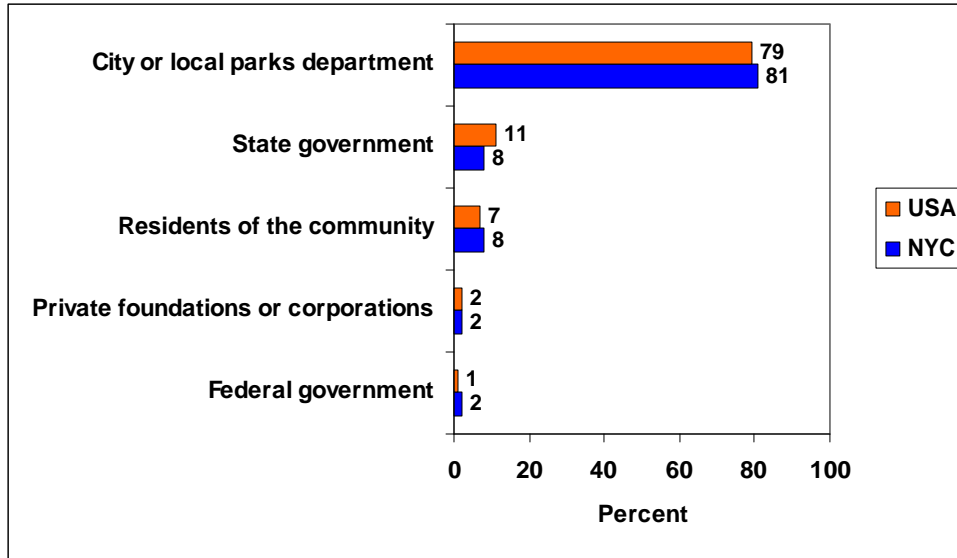


Table 1. Demographic profile of survey respondents (percents)

	The Nation (n=1726)			New York City (n=184)		
	Census	Weighted	Unweighted	Census	Weighted	Unweighted
Northeast	19.0	20.9	30.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
South	35.6	35.9	27.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Midwest	22.9	20.1	22.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
West	21.9	23.1	19.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
White, non-Hispanic	69.1	70.7	83.9	35.0	39.0	74.0
Black or African American	12.3	10.5	5.6	24.5	26.8	9.0
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.7	3.9	3.4	9.7	10.6	8.5
Hispanic or Latino	12.5	12.4	4.4	27.0	19.8	3.4
Other	2.4	2.3	2.7	3.8	3.8	5.1
Male	49.0	49.5	26.8	49.0	50.4	35.6
Female	51.0	50.5	73.2	51.0	49.6	64.4
18 to 24 years	13.4	15.8	9.4	13.1	18.1	8.9
25 to 44 years	40.7	41.9	56.7	43.5	49.0	50.3
45 to 64 years	29.6	31.8	31.3	27.9	25.6	36.9
65 years and over	16.7	10.6	2.5	15.5	7.3	3.9
Less than \$25,000	28.7	16.9	15.4	34.9	10.2	12.7
\$25,000-\$49,999	29.3	38.2	37.0	25.7	36.1	29.6
\$50,000-\$74,9999	19.5	26.0	26.9	16.7	19.7	23.9
\$75,000 or more	22.5	19.0	20.8	22.7	34.0	33.8

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.

