

CLOSING THE  
RACIAL  
WEALTH  
GAP

2021 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS

SUPPORTED BY



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## INTRODUCTION

American cities are home to profound racial inequality. Many feature staggering racial wealth gaps — especially when comparing Black and white residents. In Washington, D.C., white households had a net worth that is 81 times greater than that for Black households in 2014.<sup>1</sup> That same year, the gap was similarly stark in Los Angeles, CA: while the median white household had a net worth of \$355,000, the median Mexican and Black household only had a median wealth of \$3,500 and \$4,000, respectively.<sup>2</sup> U.S.-born Blacks in the Boston metropolitan statistical area had a median wealth of merely \$8 in 2014, compared to white households' median wealth of \$256,500.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, the racial wealth gap persists across a variety of assets, including housing, businesses, and retirement accounts.<sup>4</sup>

The causes of the racial wealth gap are manifold. Many are historical, rooted in higher levels of government, or are otherwise outside of mayors' purviews. Nonetheless, there are important policy tools at the disposal of city governments that help to reduce the gap. Cities wield important powers over housing and small businesses, which might help to support Black and Latino households, and shrink the racial wealth gap. This year's Menino Survey of Mayors explores how mayors are approaching this critical national issue.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**A strong majority (67 percent) of mayors are worried about the racial wealth gap in their cities.** Leaders of bigger cities are significantly more concerned about the racial gap, as are their counterparts in less expensive cities. There is a large partisan divide: 80 percent of Democratic mayors are concerned about the racial wealth gap in their community, compared with 30 percent of their Republican counterparts.

**Mayors who believed that the racial wealth gap was a problem in their cities were almost unanimous in supporting generic racially targeted programs, such as support for Black and Latino small business ownership and homeownership.** However, only four in 10 mayors across the country were supportive of the idea of implementing specific programs, such as Evanston, IL's reparations program or Stockton, CA's universal basic income program.

**Mayors overwhelmingly (81 percent) believe that access to capital disproportionately burdens small business owners of color.** Mayors are most enthusiastic about using technical assistance to address small business racial gaps in their communities: 48 percent selected it as one of the two tools they most support using, while 31 percent selected the municipal procurement process and 26 percent selected direct financial assistance in amounts less than \$20,000.

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1 Kijakazi, K., R.M. Brooks Atkins, M. Paul, A. Price, D. Hamilton, W.A. Darity. "The Color of Wealth in the Nation's Capital." Urban Institute, Duke University, The New School, and the Insight Center for Community Economic Development (November 2016): <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/85341/2000986-2-the-color-of-wealth-in-the-nations-capital.pdf>.

2 De La Cruz-Viesca, M., Z. Chen, P. Ong, D. Hamilton, W.A. Darity. "The Color of Wealth in Los Angeles." Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco (2016): [http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/besol/color\\_of\\_wealth\\_report.pdf](http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/besol/color_of_wealth_report.pdf).

3 Munoz, A.P., M. Kim, M. Chang, R.O. Jackson, D. Hamilton, and W.A. Darity. "The Color of Wealth in Boston." Duke University, The New School, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (March 25, 2015): <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/one-time-pubs/color-of-wealth.aspx>.

4 Weller, C. and R. Figueroa. "Wealth Matters: The Black-White Wealth Gap Before and During the Pandemic." Center for American Progress (Jul. 28, 2021): <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/wealth-matters-black-white-wealth-gap-pandemic/>.

**Almost every mayor identified a lack of personal wealth or assets as a major barrier for their cities' small business owners of color — and one key contributor to this is the ongoing housing crisis and the high costs of housing.** Majorities of mayors of both parties agree that housing programs should emphasize the goal of homeownership over renting, but Republicans agreed at a higher rate (73 percent) than Democrats (55 percent).

**Concerns about housing prices, development, and the racial wealth gap are closely tied to gentrification and its potential effects on minority residents.** When asked to define gentrification in a single sentence, almost two-thirds of mayors mentioned displacement of current residents and one-third mentioned increased prices. On potential consequences of gentrification, two-thirds of mayors are very concerned about landlords raising rents beyond what current housing tenants can afford, and just over half were very concerned about developers replacing the current housing stock with more expensive units.

**Mayors recognize widespread discrimination in their communities.** Strong majorities believe that homeless, Black, Latino, and transgender people experience at least a moderate amount of discrimination in their cities. Virtually no mayors believe that white people or Christians experience more than a little discrimination in their cities.

## METHODOLOGY

We invited mayors of all cities over 75,000 residents to participate in the Menino Survey of Mayors. Each mayor received an invitation at their official email account, as well as follow-up phone calls. We spoke with 126 mayors between June and August 2021 about a variety of topics including closing the racial wealth gap, housing and homelessness, and COVID-19 recovery. The overwhelming majority of interviews were conducted over the phone. Mayors' responses and participation remain anonymous, to ensure they can speak freely about a wide range of issues. As Table 1 shows, the sample of participating cities closely mirrors the broader population on traits including size, racial demographics, housing prices, and geographic distribution.

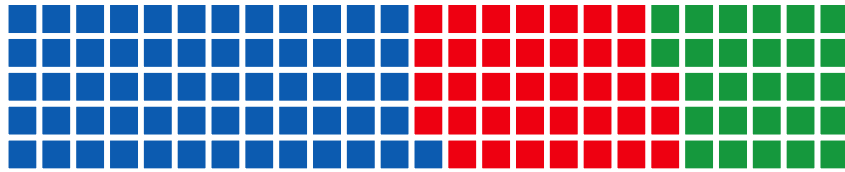
**Table 1. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All U.S. Cities with Populations >75,000**

	Surveyed Cities	All Cities
Number of Cities	126	494
Average Population	222,446	223,766
Average Percent White	53%	48%
Average Percent Black	17%	15%
Average Percent Hispanic	19%	26%
Average Percent Asian	7%	8%
Average Median Housing Price	\$294,587	\$314,417
Region	% of Sample	% of Cities
Midwest	21%	16%
Northeast	12%	9%
South	34%	35%
West	33%	40%

Source: 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), published by the U.S. Census Bureau.

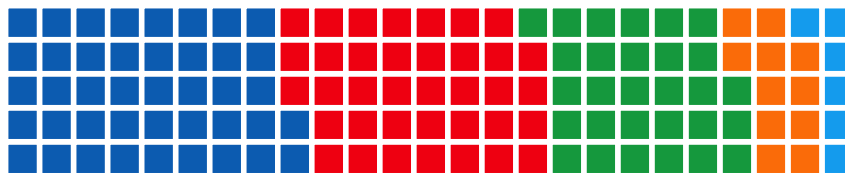
**Figure 1. Demographics of Surveyed Mayors**

Professional Background



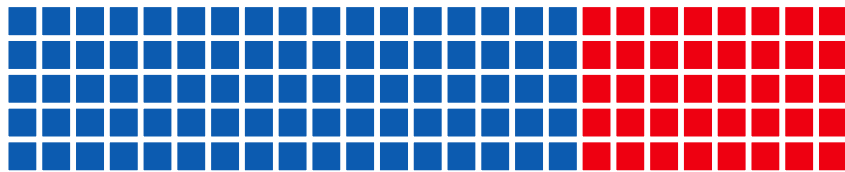
Other 48% ■  
 Law 30% ■  
 Business 22% ■

Highest Degree



JD 33% ■  
 Other 29% ■  
 BA 23% ■  
 MBA 10% ■  
 PhD 5% ■

Gender



Male 67% ■  
 Female 33% ■

Party



Democrat 66% ■  
 Republican 18% ■  
 Other 16% ■

Race



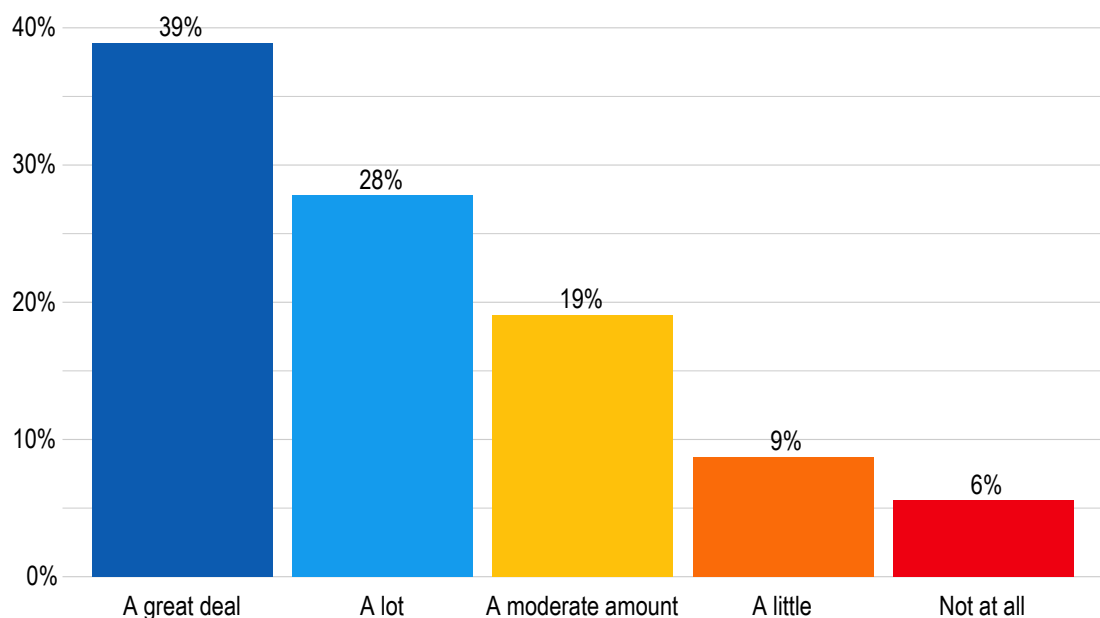
White 79% ■  
 Black 12% ■  
 Latino 6% ■  
 Other 2% ■  
 Asian 1% ■

## THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP AND LOCAL POLICY

Throughout the country, a strong majority (67 percent) of American mayors are worried about the racial wealth gap in their cities. This proportion stays similar regardless of the racial demographics in the mayor's city, however there are notable distinctions along other dimensions. Mayors of bigger cities are significantly more concerned about the racial gap, as are their counterparts in less expensive cities.<sup>5</sup> Only 26 percent of mayors of smaller cities expressed significant concerns about the racial wealth gap, compared with 58 percent of mayors of larger cities. Similarly, 52 percent of mayors of cities with lower housing costs strongly worried about the local racial wealth gap; only 32 percent of mayors of more expensive cities felt similarly. These findings are perhaps counterintuitive, as higher housing cost cities are typically sites of greater inequality across a variety of dimensions.<sup>6</sup>

### Figure 2. Racial Wealth Gap Concern

Many studies have highlighted a sizable and persistent wealth gap in the United States and in many American cities, with Black and Latino residents' wealth lagging that of White and Asian people. How concerned are you about a racial wealth gap in your city?

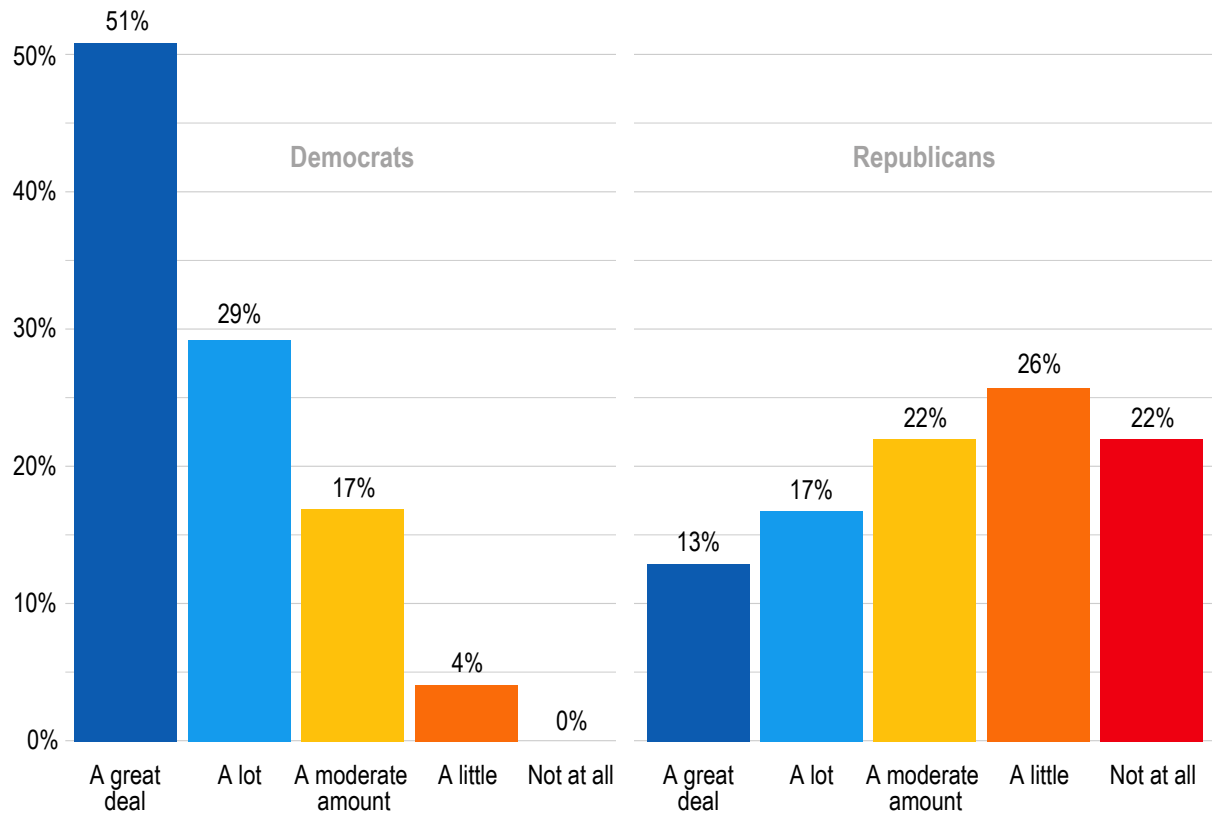


The starkest division, though, is along partisan lines. Eighty percent of Democratic mayors were concerned about the racial wealth gap in their city, compared with only 30 percent of their Republican counterparts — a 50 percentage point gap. Twenty-two percent of Republican mayors said they were not worried *at all* about their city's racial wealth gap. No Democratic mayors shared this view.

<sup>5</sup> We define city size using the median population of our survey sample, 117,000 people. More and less expensive cities are defined as having housing prices greater or less than the median housing price in our survey sample, \$245,150.

<sup>6</sup> Florida, R. "Blue-Collar and Service Workers Fare Better Outside Superstar Cities." Bloomberg CityLab (May 21, 2019): <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-21/housing-costs-drive-inequality-in-superstar-cities>.

**Figure 3. Racial Wealth Gap Concern, by Party**



Among those mayors who were worried about the racial wealth gap, overwhelming majorities were supportive of targeted programs supporting their Black and Latino constituents.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the only programs which garnered any opposition were those related to homeownership; even there, opposition was minuscule, comprising a mere two percent of mayors. Notably, this support *only reflects the views of mayors who believe that the racial wealth gap is a problem in their communities*. Mayors who do not share these concerns are likely less apt to endorse racially targeted policies.

Several cities across the U.S. have piloted programs explicitly targeted towards the racial wealth gap. Two that have garnered attention and which we probed mayors about were Reparations (Evanston, IL) and Universal Basic Income (Stockton, CA).

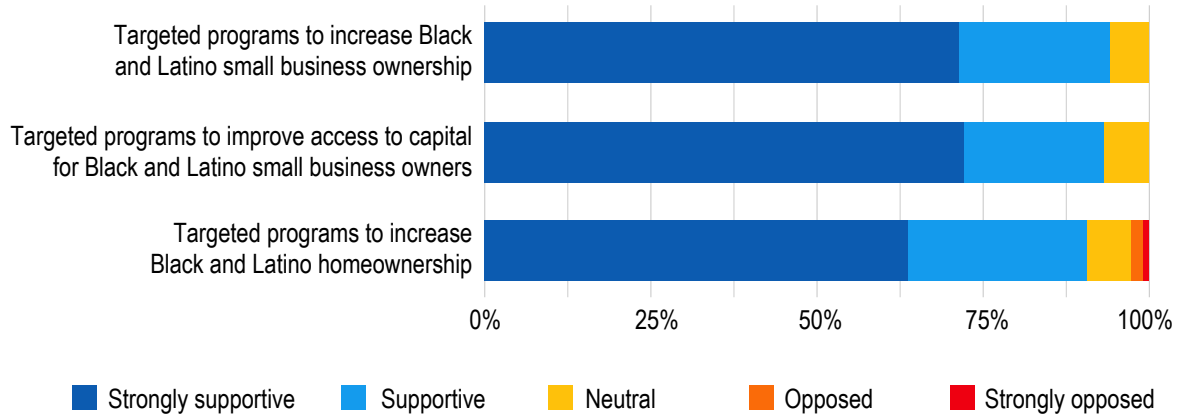
Evanston, IL’s reparations program offered \$25,000 in homeownership assistance for Black city residents and families.<sup>8</sup> While many mayors supported targeted programs for Black and Latino families, they were considerably more mixed about this reparations program. Only 41 percent of mayors were supportive of the idea of implementing Evanston’s initiative in their own communities. Partisan differences were again massive: no Republican mayors supported implementing a reparations program, compared with 56 percent of Democratic mayors. Still, even among Democratic mayors, support for the reparations program was far from uniform. Mayors of high and low housing cost cities, big and midsize cities, and more and less diverse cities all had remarkably similar preferences.

<sup>7</sup> Because this question only included mayors who were concerned about the racial wealth gap, it represents an overwhelming Democratic group of mayors. Consequently, we do not report cross-tabulations for this question due to small cell sizes.

<sup>8</sup> Evanston Local Reparations: <https://www.cityofevanston.org/government/city-council/reparations>

**Figure 4. Support for Programs to Reduce the Racial Wealth Gap**

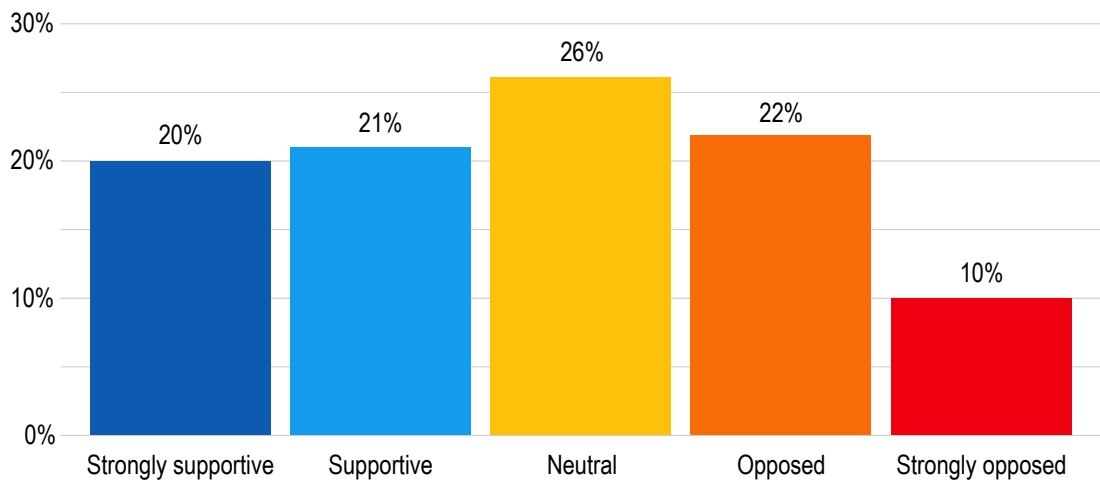
*How supportive are you of implementing the following programs to reduce the racial wealth gap in your city?<sup>9</sup>*



Mayors' views about Stockton, CA's Universal Basic Income<sup>10</sup> program were remarkably similar to their views about the Evanston program. In 2019, Stockton piloted a universal basic income program that provided a group of low-income residents \$500 per month for two years. Forty percent of mayors supported implementing a similar program in their cities, and some are already conducting related pilots as part of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income.<sup>11</sup> Once again, partisan differences were sizable: just four percent of Republicans were supportive of the program, compared with 54 percent of Democrats. There were no significant differences by city demographic traits. Among mayors who are concerned with the racial wealth gap, 28 percent supported both programs.

**Figure 5. Implementing Evanston's Reparations Program in Your City**

*Evanston, IL recently piloted a reparations program for Black city residents providing \$25,000 in homeownership assistance per individual/family. How supportive would you be of a similar program in your city?*



<sup>9</sup> Only asked of mayors who expressed concern about the racial wealth gap in their city.

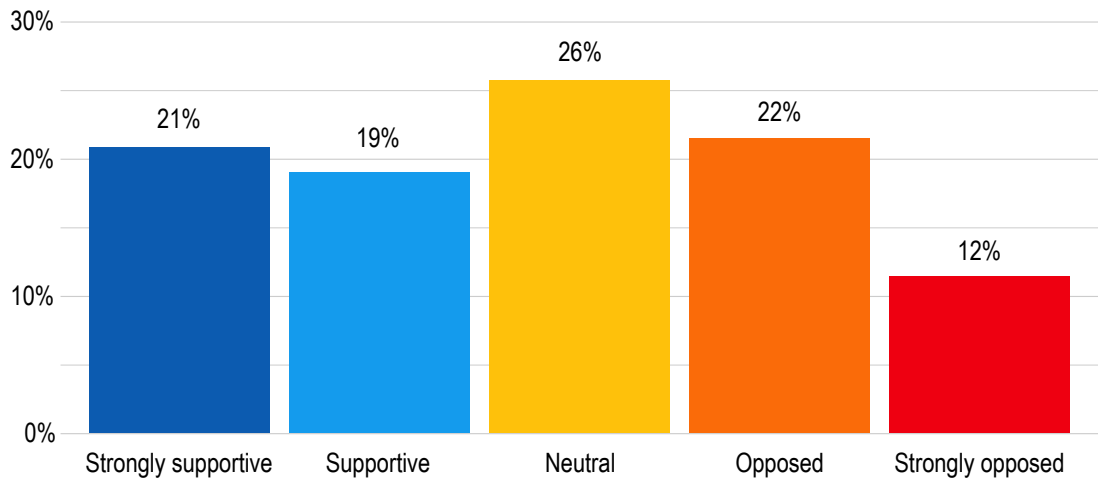
<sup>10</sup> Many policymakers and advocates (including in Stockton) call these initiatives "guaranteed income programs:" <https://www.stocktondemonstration.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Mayors for a Guaranteed Income: <https://www.mayorsforagi.org/>.



### Figure 6. Implementing Stockton's UBI Program in Your City

Stockton, CA recently piloted a Universal Basic Income program providing a group of low-income residents \$500 per month for two years. How supportive would you be of a similar program in your city?



Notably, mayors were considerably more supportive of generic racially targeted programs (see Figure 4) than of the specific policy proposals in Stockton and Evanston. Mayors who believed that the racial wealth gap was a problem in their cities were almost unanimous in supporting generic racially targeted programs, such as support for Black and Latino small business ownership and homeownership. Those same mayors were considerably more muted in their support for Stockton and Evanston's programs. Fifty-six percent of mayors who were concerned about the racial wealth gap supported Evanston's reparations program (10 percent of mayors who were not worried about their racial wealth gap evinced similar support). Similarly, 52 percent of mayors who were concerned about the racial wealth gap endorsed Stockton's program.

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*Mayors who believed that the racial wealth gap was a problem in their cities were almost unanimous in supporting generic racially targeted programs, such as support for Black and Latino small business ownership and homeownership.*

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Some mayors worried about the uncertain effects given the novelty of these programs. One southern mayor said, "I applaud [the mayors of Stockton and Evanston] for being willing to start something. But I don't know about the long-term impact." A midwestern mayor observed, "I'm not supportive of targeting by race, [I] would rather target for income...I'm highly supportive of home ownership assistance, but not reparations [...] Our city provides home ownership assistance, but doesn't call it that." Other mayors indicated that they had already followed in Stockton and Evanston's footsteps; one southern mayor looked forward to having more available data, "I am becoming a believer in the UBI concept, and I am looking forward to seeing how the Biden administration's Child Tax Credit program works out, which will give us data to support programs like UBI." They noted that they were also piloting a reparations program and were "still at the stage of going through the listening process and determining what our focus will be."

In short, majorities of mayors recognize a sizable racial wealth gap, and endorse a variety of policy solutions designed to redress it. They balk somewhat, however, at more specific policy proposals on reparations and universal basic income. What's more, they are cleaved by partisanship on many (though not all) racial issues — mirroring our national divide. We turn now to exploring two policy areas that play a critical role in driving (and potentially rectifying) the racial wealth gap: small business ownership and housing.

## RACIAL EQUITY AND LOCAL SMALL BUSINESS

Racial equity, or the lack thereof, in small business is closely tied to the racial wealth gap more broadly. The 2021 Menino Survey “Building Back Better” Report<sup>12</sup> showed that mayors see access to workforce and access to capital as the two biggest challenges facing small businesses in general. Seventy percent of mayors selected access to workforce and 43 percent selected access to capital as one of the top two barriers facing their small business communities. While most mayors believe that access to workforce challenges small businesses equally, over three quarters of them believe that access to capital is a disproportionately bigger barrier for small business owners of color.<sup>13</sup>

Mayors believe a number of factors contribute to racial gaps in entrepreneurs’ ability to access capital. Nearly all mayors who said access to capital is a source of inequity in general believe that lack of personal assets, credit scores, and limited networks for friends and family money are “major” contributors. For example, one mayor focused on structural wealth gaps said, *“it’s the resource problem of underlying racial inequities in wealth levels that makes it “easier” for white small businesses.”* Additionally, roughly three-quarters of mayors also see limited access to technical assistance, lenders’ inability to evaluate risk in minority communities, and lenders’ racial bias as major contributors to the capital access gap in their cities. Relatively fewer mayors, but still meaningful proportions, see less demand, the type of financial products available, or the industries in which minority businesses operate as major contributors.

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*...roughly three-quarters of mayors also see limited access to technical assistance, lenders’ inability to evaluate risk in minority communities, and lenders’ racial bias as major contributors to the capital access gap in their cities.*

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When it comes to remedying these problems, mayors are most enthusiastic about using technical assistance to address small business racial gaps in their cities. Forty-eight percent of mayors selected “technical assistance or mentoring” as one of the two tools they most support using. Thirty-one percent of mayors selected the municipal procurement process and 26 percent selected direct financial assistance in amounts less than \$20,000 respectively. Very few mayors said there were no “meaningful” gaps to address (10 percent) or that addressing such gaps was not the role of city government (three percent). One mayor said *“technical assistance is a hand up, not a handout philosophy. Similar for municipal procurement.”* Another said they were the most financially viable for the city: *“while I would have loved to have helped with financial assistance, money is always an issue, but technical assistance or mentoring is not cost prohibitive, neither is municipal procurement.”* Some mayors focused on direct funding because they saw capital as the critical gap. As one explained, *“it’s all about access to capital!”* Another said, *“getting the money to do the things they want, and not having a history of family wealth, means they have to get loans to support their business model. Technical assistance and backing private loans are good, but you have to directly finance something to get the business off the ground and running.”* Finally, a number of mayors showed enthusiasm for more than the two items we allowed them to select. For instance, one mayor said: *“already doing TA and municipal procurement. Might also add backing or otherwise supporting private loans. Lots of good choices on the list.”*

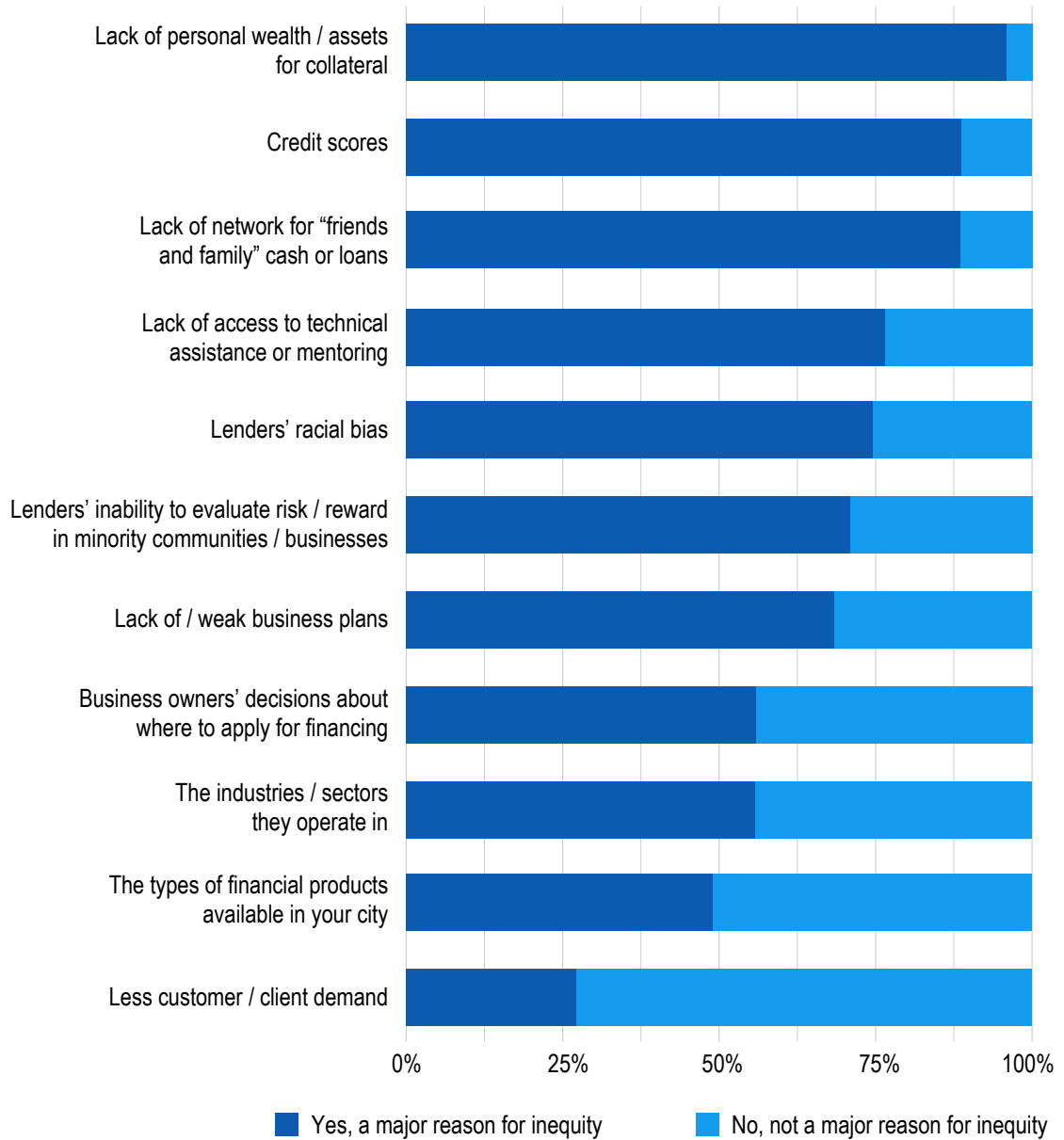
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12 Glick, D., K.L. Einstein, M. Palmer. “2021 Menino Survey of Mayors: Building Back Better.” Boston University Initiative on Cities (Nov. 2021): <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2021/11/2021-Menino-Survey-BBB-Report.pdf>.

13 Glick, D., K.L. Einstein, M. Palmer. “2021 Menino Survey of Mayors: Building Back Better.” Boston University Initiative on Cities (Nov. 2021), pgs. 18-19: <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2021/11/2021-Menino-Survey-BBB-Report.pdf>.

**Figure 7. Major Reasons for Inequity in Access to Capital**

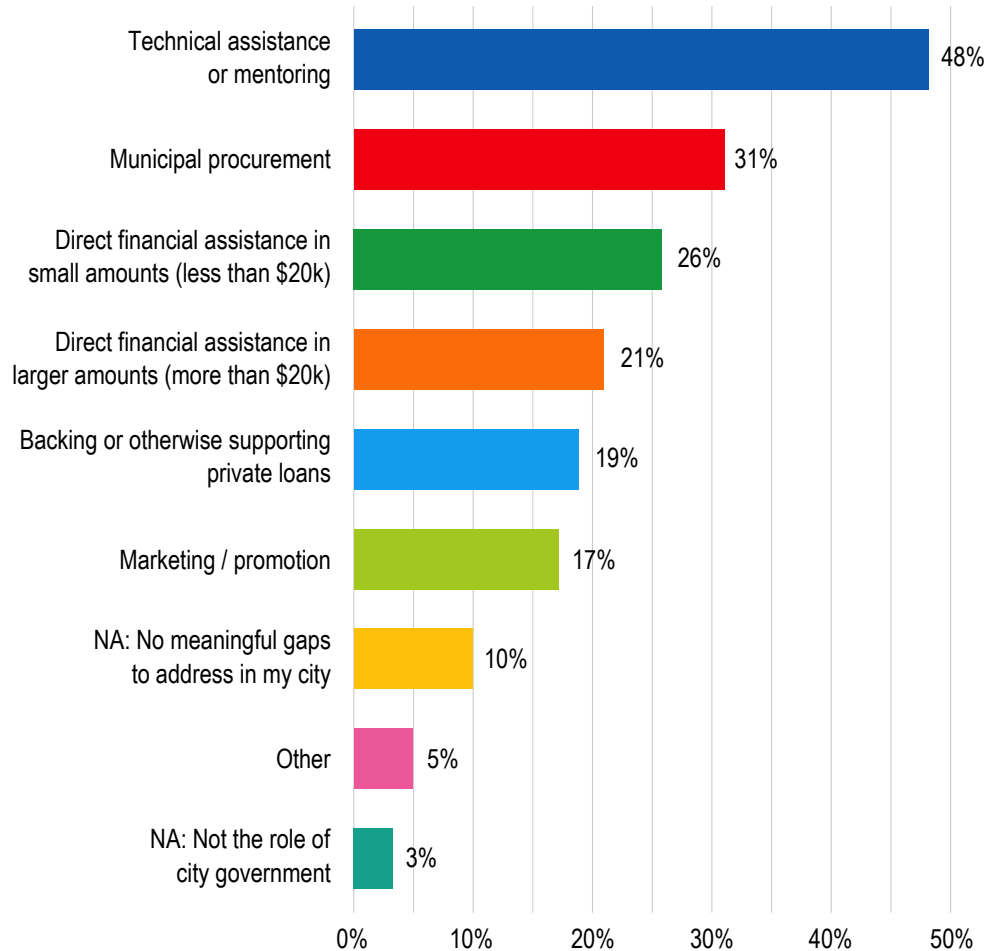
Which of the following are MAJOR reasons that your city's nonwhite small business owners' have a harder time accessing credit and capital than white small business owners?<sup>14</sup>



<sup>14</sup> Only includes mayors who said access to capital was a bigger challenge for non-white small business owners.

### Figure 8. City Policy Tools/Resources to Address Racial Gaps Between Businesses

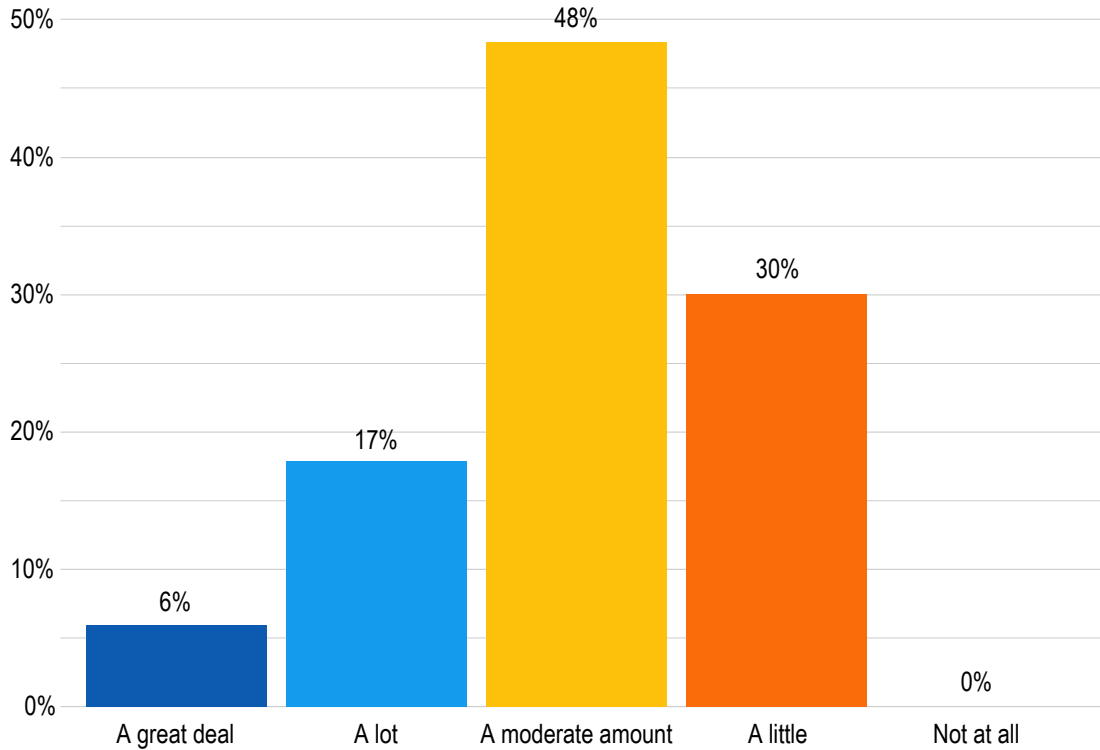
Which TWO of the following city policy tools or resources would you most support using for addressing gaps between white and nonwhite-owned small businesses in your city? Or are there no such gaps to address?



Despite showing some enthusiasm for using these tools to address inequities in their small business communities, mayors generally do not think these are issues they have influence over. Only 16 percent of mayors say their government has a great deal or a lot of influence over differences in the performance of white-owned and minority-owned small businesses in their cities. In contrast, 34 percent believe they only have “a little” influence and 16 percent say they have no influence at all. Mayors see their governments having only modest influence over the state of small business in general — 23 percent say “a great deal” or “a lot.” Thirty percent say “a little,” but no mayors say “none at all.” However, they see their governments having even less influence over racial inequities in small business outcomes.

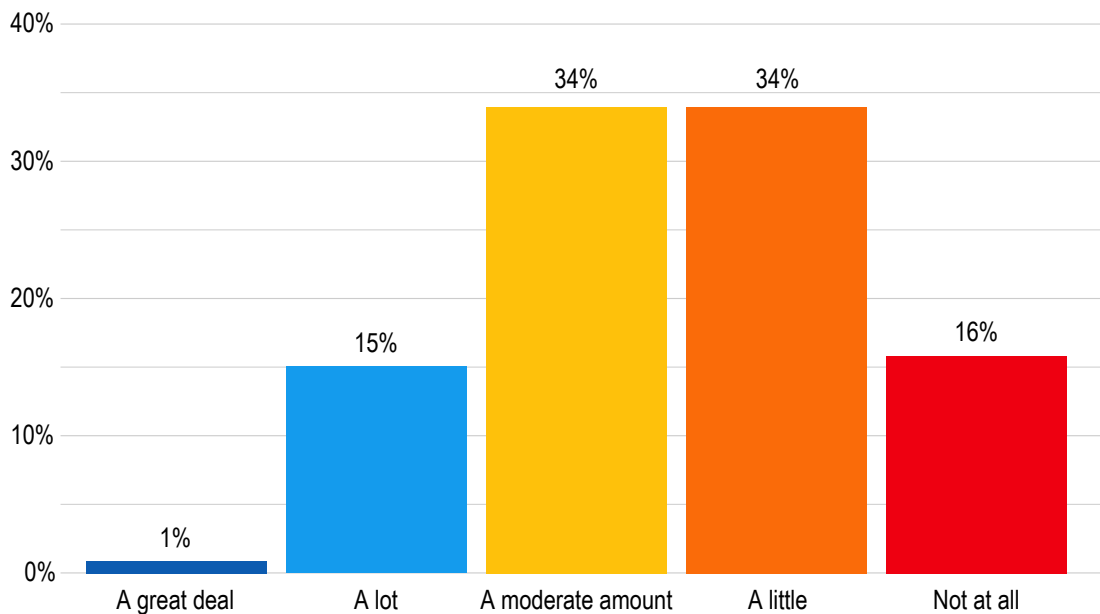
**Figure 9. Influence on Small Businesses**

*How much influence does your government have over the state of small businesses in your city?*



**Figure 10. Influence Over Racial Gaps Between Small Businesses**

*How much influence does your government have over differences in the state of white-owned and the state of nonwhite-owned small businesses in your city? Or are there no meaningful differences between them?*

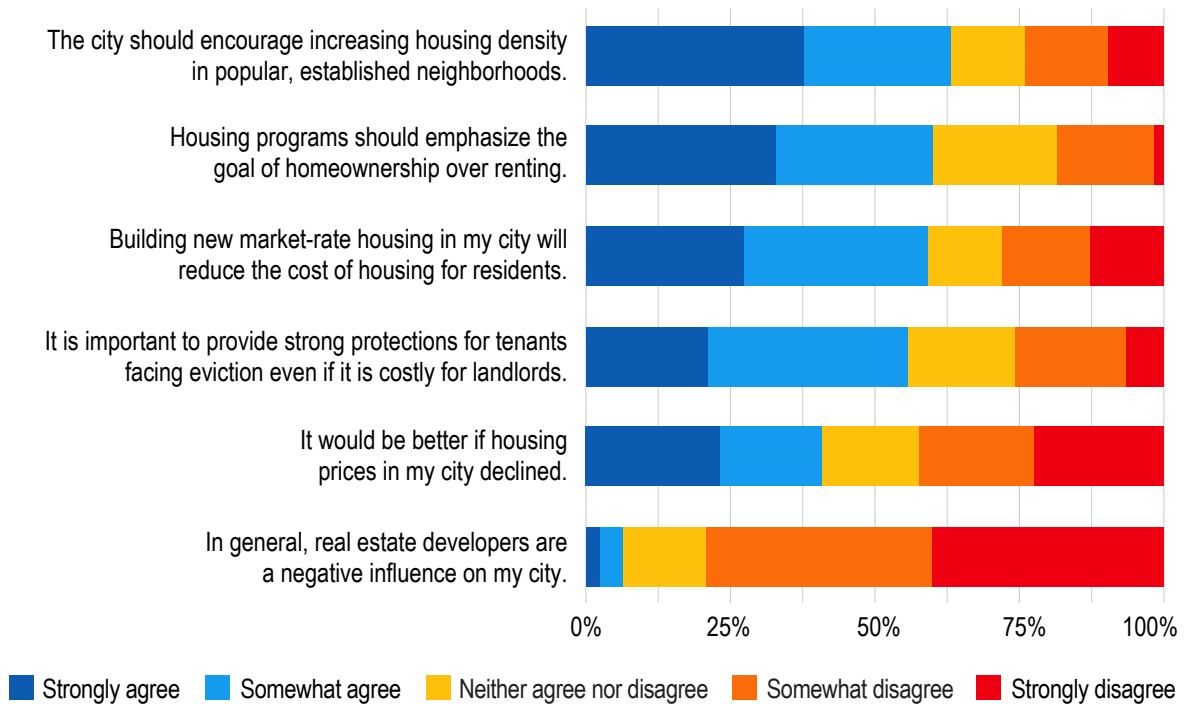


## HOUSING AND GENTRIFICATION

Almost every mayor identified a lack of personal wealth or assets as a major barrier for their cities' non-white small business owners. One major contributor to this is the ongoing housing crisis and the high costs of housing. To better understand the relationship between the racial wealth gap and housing, we asked mayors a series of questions about housing development and gentrification in their cities.

**Figure 11. Housing Development and Gentrification**

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.



Mayors are broadly supportive of increased housing development in their cities. A majority of mayors of all city types agree that their city should encourage increasing housing density in popular, established neighborhoods, but Democratic mayors (73 percent) are more likely to support increasing density than Republican mayors (41 percent). Recent efforts in many cities, including Minneapolis, Portland, and the Boston suburbs have focused on increasing

density through upzoning existing neighborhoods, rather than restricting new housing to undeveloped places. A majority of mayors agree that building new market-rate housing will reduce the cost of housing for residents. They also cohesively disagree that real estate developers are a negative influence on their cities. This starkly contrasts with the views of residents, who strongly distrust developers. A 2017 survey of the residents of the 20 largest metropolitan areas found that only 36% of residents had trust in developers.<sup>15</sup>

*Mayors... cohesively disagree that real estate developers are a negative influence on their cities. This starkly contrasts with the views of residents, who strongly distrust developers.*

<sup>15</sup> Marble, W. and C. Nall. 2020. "Where Interest Trumps Ideology: Homeownership and Liberal Opposition to Local Housing Development." *Journal of Politics* 83(4): 1747-1763.

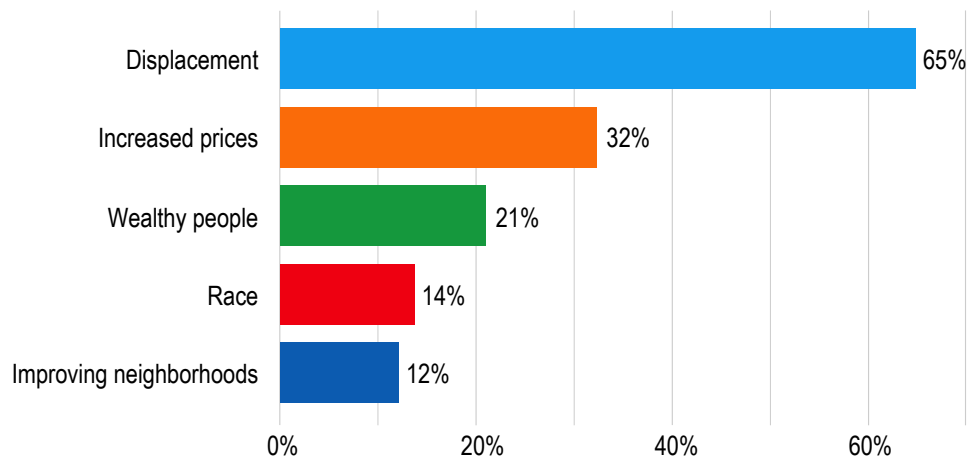
There was more disagreement about ways to address the housing crisis. Forty-one percent of mayors agreed that “it would be better if housing prices in my city declined,” but there was somewhat higher support for this position among mayors of Western cities and more expensive cities. However, there is a notable increase in support for this position compared to the 2018 Menino Survey, when only 20% of mayors agreed with the statement.<sup>16</sup>

Majorities of mayors of both parties agree that housing programs should emphasize the goal of homeownership over renting, but Republican mayors agreed at a higher rate (73 percent) than Democratic mayors (55 percent). Mayors of less expensive cities were also more supportive of homeownership. A small majority (56 percent) of mayors agreed that “it is important to provide strong protections for tenants facing eviction even if it is costly for landlords,” but support for tenant protections was significantly higher among Democratic mayors (69 percent) than Republican mayors (36 percent). Interestingly, support was also higher in less diverse cities (62 percent) than in more diverse cities (48 percent).

Concerns about housing prices, development, and the racial wealth gap are closely tied to gentrification and its potential effects on minority residents. To better understand mayoral views on gentrification, we asked mayors to define the term in one sentence and then coded their responses.

**Figure 12. Defining Gentrification, by Terms Mentioned**

*In one sentence, how do you define gentrification?*



While mayors provided a wide variety of definitions of gentrification, almost two-thirds of mayors mentioned displacement of current residents in defining gentrification, and one-third mentioned increased prices. Twenty-one percent of mayors discussed the role of wealthy people coming into a neighborhood, and 14 percent talked about the displacement of people of color in particular. Some mayors also talked about how gentrification can improve neighborhoods, but this was much less common than focusing on displacement and the downsides of gentrification.

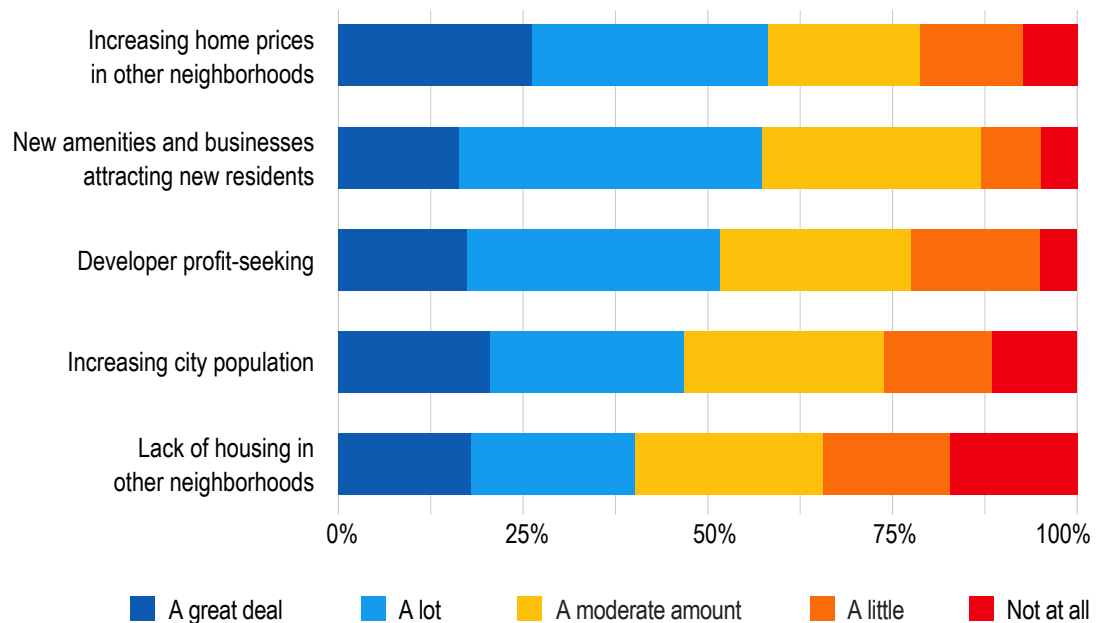
<sup>16</sup> Einstein, K.L., D. Glick, M. Palmer, S. Fox. “2018 Menino Survey of Mayors.” Boston University Initiative on Cities (Jan. 2019), pgs. 30-31: <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/files/2020/12/Menino-Survey-of-Mayors-2018-Final-Report.pdf>.

One interesting dimension of the mayors' definitions of gentrification are the terms they used to describe the process by which neighborhoods gentrify. For example, one mayor defined gentrification as "purposefully removing low-income residents and replacing with high-income residents," and another as "action taken by private developers and/or city that forces individuals to move out of an existing neighborhood because of rising housing costs caused by development." Such language reflects an active view of gentrification — individuals, developers, and other actors intentionally gentrify a neighborhood and displace its residents. Other mayors described gentrification using passive language, defining gentrification as "the transition of a low-income/working-class neighborhood or district into a middle-class/affluent one," "an unfair consequence to economic growth," or "a complex urban phenomenon that occurs when a community experiences an increase of more residents to such an extent that the community's social, cultural, and economic landscape is altered." However, these mayors are in the minority; mayors were twice as likely to use active language than passive language. This suggests that a majority of mayors may see gentrification as an activity, one that could be prevented or altered by government action, rather than a passive process over which they have no control.

... a majority of mayors may see gentrification as an activity, one that could be prevented or altered by government action, rather than a passive process over which they have no control.

**Figure 13. Drivers of Gentrification**

How much do each of the following contribute to gentrification in a neighborhood?

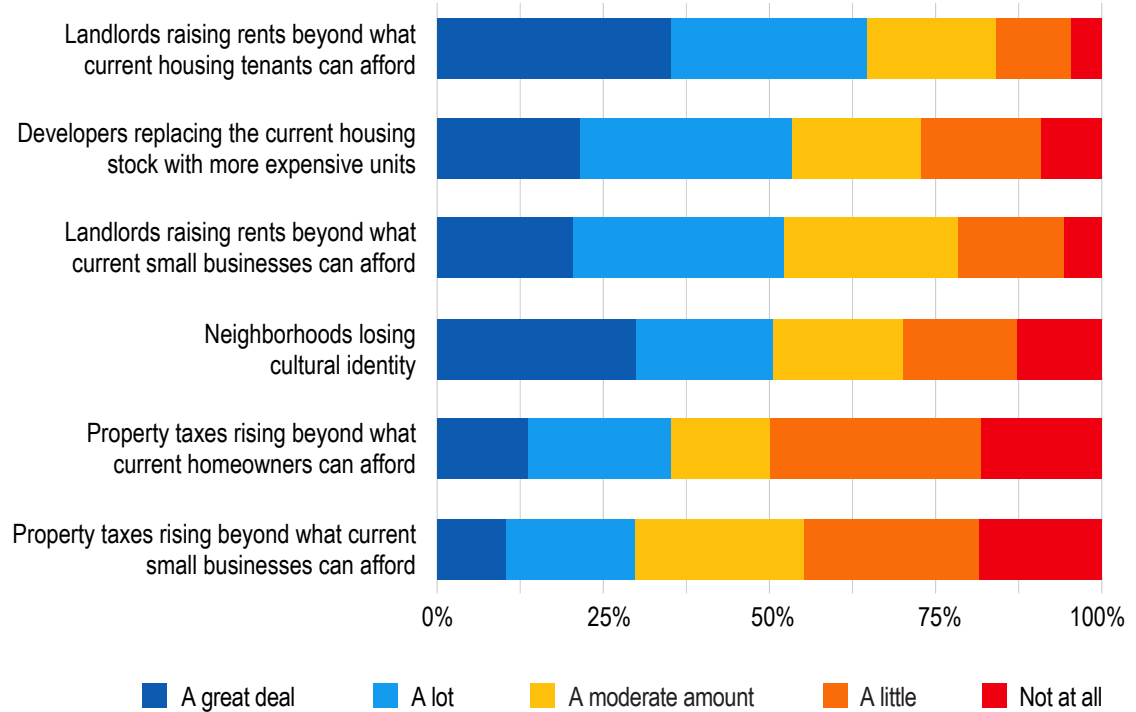


Overall, small majorities of mayors think that increasing home prices in other neighborhoods, new amenities and businesses attracting new residents, and developer profit-seeking contribute "a great deal" or "a lot" to gentrification. Fewer mayors see increasing city populations or a lack of housing in other neighborhoods as a major factor. Across all five factors, Democratic mayors are somewhat more likely than Republican mayors to answer that they contribute to gentrification. The partisan gap is largest for the role of developers in gentrification: 55 percent of Democratic mayors think developers contribute "a great deal" or "a lot" to gentrification, while only 38 percent of Republicans agree.



**Figure 14. Consequences of Gentrification**

*When you think about gentrification in your city, how worried are you about the following:*



We also asked mayors about their level of concern with different potential consequences of gentrification.<sup>17</sup> Reflecting their definitions of gentrification above, two-thirds of mayors were very concerned about landlords raising rents beyond what current housing tenants can afford, and 54 percent were very concerned about developers replacing the current housing stock with more expensive units. Majorities of mayors were also very concerned about landlords raising rents beyond what current small businesses can afford and neighborhoods losing cultural identity. Mayors were less concerned that rising property taxes, which are often caused by higher property values, might harm current homeowners and small businesses; mayors see landlords increasing rents, rather than rising property valuations increasing tax bills, as a bigger driver of displacement.

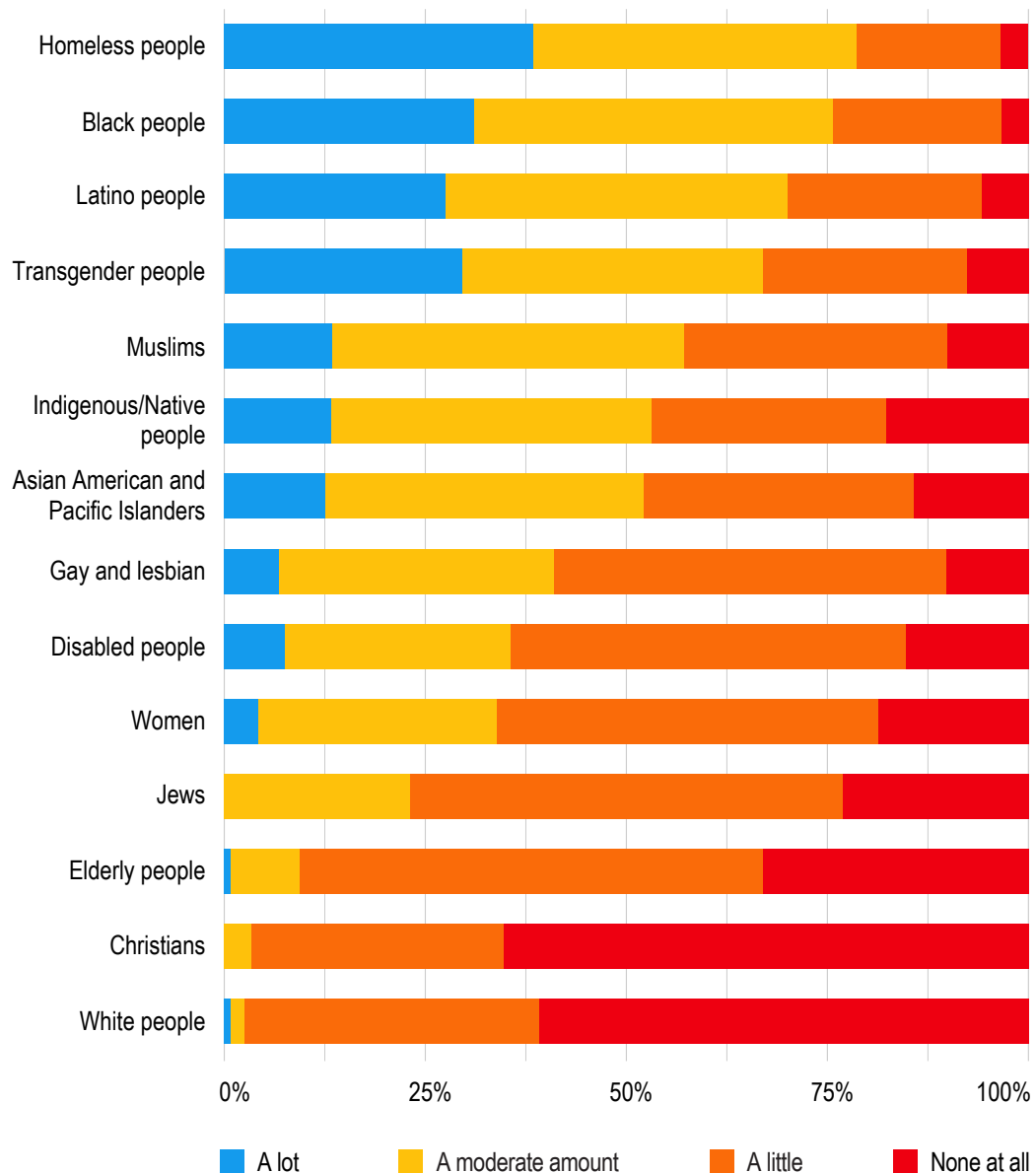
<sup>17</sup> Only asked of mayors who thought that gentrification was happening in a neighborhood of their city.

## DISCRIMINATION AND MEASURING INEQUITY

Outside of any particular policy area, mayors recognize widespread discrimination in their communities. Strong majorities believe that homeless, Black, Latino, and transgender people experience at least a moderate amount of discrimination in their cities. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly given rising hate crimes against Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), only a slim majority perceive a lot or a moderate amount of discrimination against the AAPI community in their cities. Virtually no mayors believe that white people or Christians experience more than a little discrimination in their cities.

**Figure 15. Discrimination in City**

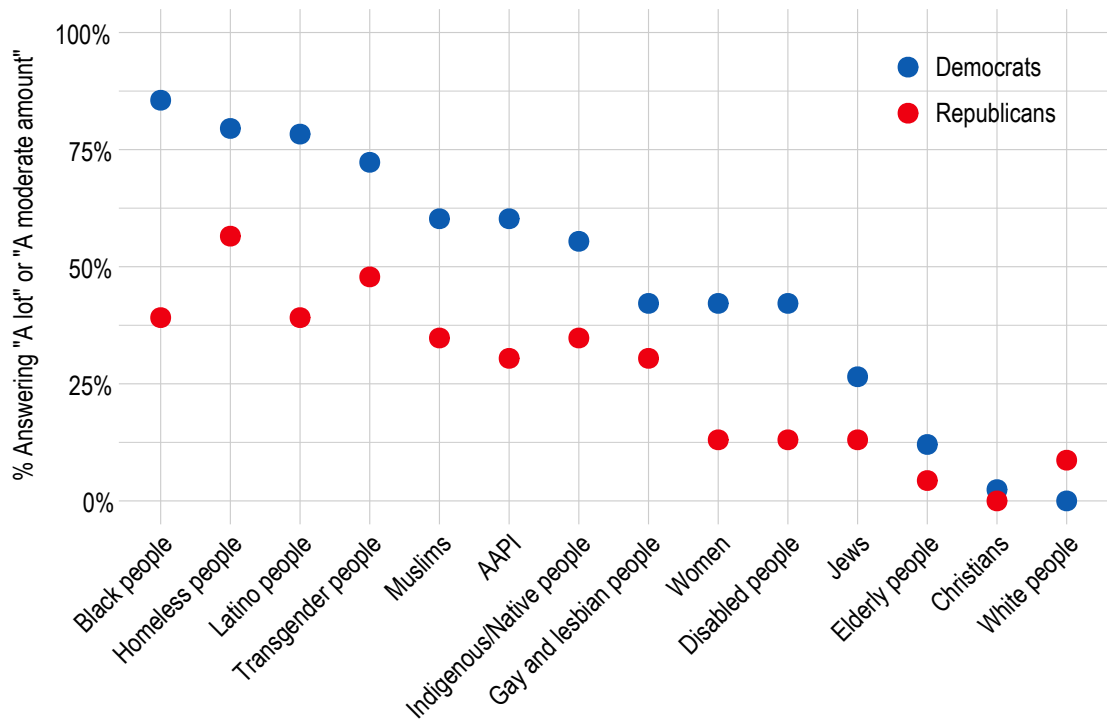
*How much discrimination do each of the following groups face in your city?*



The gap between Democratic and Republican mayors was quite sizable when we asked about racial groups. In particular, Democratic mayors were significantly more likely to perceive discrimination against Black and Latino people in their cities, by margins of 46 and 39 percentage points, respectively. They were also more likely to believe AAPI people, disabled people, and women experienced discrimination in their city by a margin of 30 percentage points. Interestingly, mayors were considerably less divided by partisanship when we asked about other economic, age, gender, and social identities.

**Figure 16. Discrimination in City, by Party**

*How much discrimination do each of the following groups face in your city?*



*To address discrimination, racial wealth gaps, and other inequities, cities and researchers need access to high-quality, geographically disaggregated racial data.*

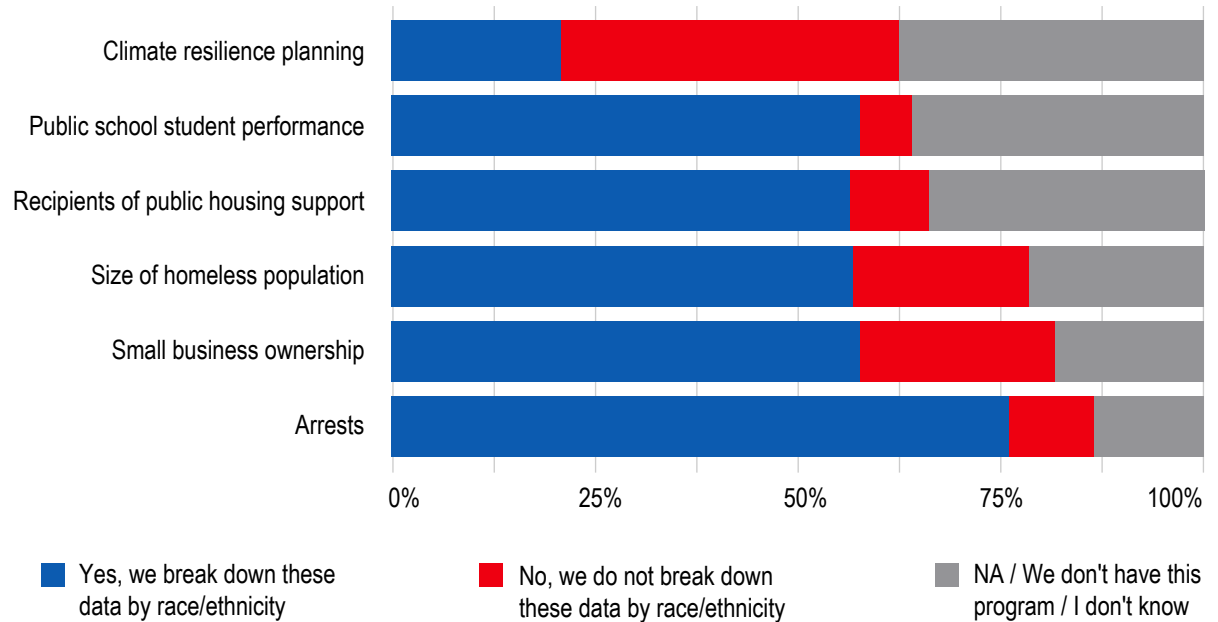
To address discrimination, racial wealth gaps, and other inequities, cities and researchers need access to high-quality, geographically disaggregated racial data. Indeed, access to such data is a central component of the Biden Administrations' Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity.<sup>18</sup> The availability of such data varies widely by city and policy area. For example, while over 75 percent of cities collect racial data on arrests and crime statistics, under 25

percent assess analogous data when they conduct their climate resilience planning. This availability of racial data does not differ by mayoral partisanship or city racial composition.

<sup>18</sup> The White House. "Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government." Briefing Room: Presidential Actions (Jan. 20, 2021): <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/>.

**Figure 17. Local Racial/Ethnic Data Collection**

Does your city collect data by race/ethnicity for each of the following areas?



A majority of mayors (66 percent) wished they had access to better racial data. Importantly, though, a sizable minority (33 percent) were satisfied with their current racial data. Many mayors believe they already collect high-quality data, and that they have no need for additional information. Others believe that there are significant privacy concerns that come with collecting higher quality racial data. Less commonly, a few mayors suggested that racial inequality and racism were not significant issues in their communities — therefore obviating the need for data. As one western mayor put it, “I don't have any desire to have better data [...] We're pretty diverse and pretty accepting of that diversity, and we spend a lot of time interacting with each other. We don't run into much racism or racial/ethnic divide.”

Most mayors, however, sought better racial data. This remained true across a variety of demographic characteristics, with majority support from mayors of both political parties, of high and low housing cost cities, and more diverse and homogeneous cities. They highlighted needs in a wide variety of areas. The most frequently cited groups for which mayors sought better data were: immigrants; Latino people; Black people; AAPI people; and homeless people. Mayors were interested in obtaining data that better measured the complexity underneath broad racial categories; for example, several mayors wanted data for their American-born Black and Haitian populations — groups that were lumped together as “Black” under current reporting schemes.

*Mayors highlighted several obstacles to collecting higher quality racial data. Perhaps most significantly, they struggled to work with surrounding governments.*

Mayors highlighted several obstacles to collecting higher quality racial data. Perhaps most significantly, they struggled to work with surrounding governments. Multiple mayors highlighted poor data sharing from local school districts and their counties. Indeed, city-county coordination challenges became especially problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic, when valuable health data were

collected by county governments in many places. Several mayors said that they had trouble obtaining racial data on COVID-19 infection and vaccinations from their counties. One northeastern mayor lamented: “We did not have any ability to collect [COVID-19 vaccination data] because it was done at the county level. We were not given vaccines as a city. We worked closely [with the county], but we were not able to collect the data.” Another northeastern mayor suggested

that it “would be beneficial to access more comprehensive healthcare data...The challenge is that the sectors are siloed...If we could begin to work together on this, it would help to address systemic inequities. But we’re not in that space yet.” Some mayors complained about state government restrictions. One western mayor noted, “we weren’t allowed to collect [racial data] on arrests and ticketing. It’s a state form and they won’t allow us to change it.”

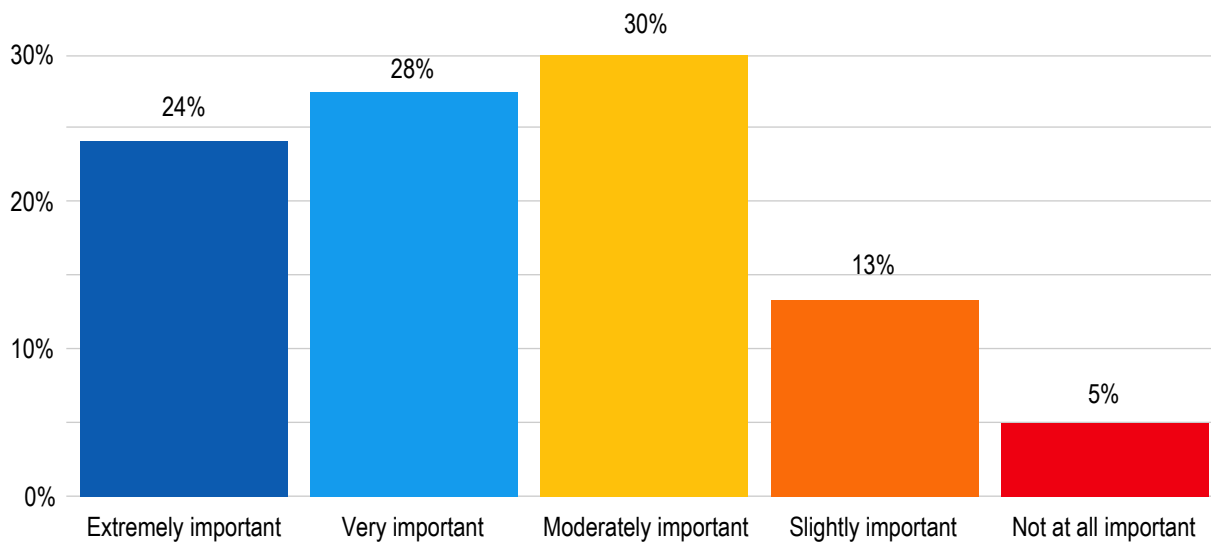
**Many mayors suggested that the self-reported nature of racial data limits their ability to collect accurate information.**

Many mayors suggested that the self-reported nature of racial data limits their ability to collect accurate information. One southern mayor observed, “we always want more data across all groups. The challenge is that some [data] are dependent on self-reporting, which can lead to incomplete data. We don’t always get the information we need.”

Some mayors also felt they lacked staff capacity to analyze additional data. One northeastern mayor wanted to get better data on their “Black, Latino, and Asian populations.” They noted that they are currently transitioning to “much better technological tools...but, at the current moment, we just don’t have the tools we need or the staff capacity.” A southern mayor similarly wished for more data, but noted that their city did not “have dedicated staff to do that.”

Finally, many mayors saw the federal government racial and ethnic categories for data-gathering as simultaneously influential yet unhelpful. Eighty-two percent of mayors saw federal reporting requirements as at least moderately important in driving the racial/ethnic data they collected. Not all mayors viewed this in a positive light. One western mayor, in outlining their desire for better homelessness data, noted that “federal reporting requirements are [my] greatest irritation. They are stupid.” A southern mayor noted that changes in federal and state standards complicated analysis and communication of racial data: “The state and federal standards sometimes change in how the data [are] collected and broken down, and that makes it a little confusing and misleading to the public who is used to seeing one group of data points.”

**Figure 18. Importance of Federal Reporting Requirements in Racial/Ethnic Data Collection**  
In general, how important are federal reporting requirements in driving the racial/ethnic data you collect?



## CONCLUSION

Mayors face many challenges as the racial wealth gap continues to grow in cities across the United States. While a majority of mayors are concerned with the racial wealth gap and broadly support targeted policies to help minority small business owners and homeowners, there is less consensus on the particular kinds of programs to support. Mayors broadly support new housing development, but are particularly concerned with effects of gentrification on minority communities. One key impediment to addressing the racial wealth gap is the lack of high-quality data; improving federal and state data collection programs and requirements may help cities better address the racial wealth gap in the future.



### **Boston University Initiative on Cities**

The Boston University Initiative on Cities leads research in, on, and with cities in pursuit of sustainable, just, and inclusive urban transformation. We marshal the talents and resources of wide-ranging disciplines across Boston University spanning the social, natural, computational, and health sciences. The Menino Survey is named for the late Mayor Tom Menino, who co-founded the Initiative on Cities in 2014 following 20 years as mayor of Boston. [bu.edu/ioc](http://bu.edu/ioc)

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