

Investigating the CHPC archives

Taking stock: Polling New Yorkers at the New Year in 1974

When we enter a new year, we inevitably take stock of our lives and our homes. The *New York Times* did just this in January 1974 with a series of polls of New Yorkers about New York City. Featured here is an original copy of the special reprint of this series, "New Yorkers Speak Out On New York," from CHPC's archives.

As New York faces a financial crisis in 2010, these articles give some perspective on how different today's concerns are from those in the 1970s, a period of economic stagnation coupled with rampant crime.

One article, entitled "Where New Yorkers Go--And Don't Go" contains a poll about well-known locations in the city. The results describe a very different New York: a shocking 37% said that "No one should go" to Central Park, while 41% said the same of Times Square, and 32% had this attitude towards Greenwich Village.



The mood was grim in terms of politics as well, as social disorder made the city seem increasingly out of control. One survey asked whether the city was ungovernable and whether the boroughs should be split up. While the response was largely no, the question itself has its own significance.

Other articles in the series ask about the city's worst ill (indisputably crime), whether the city has become a "welfare dumping ground," and what steps New Yorkers have taken to protect themselves. The *Times* also asks about the city's future, and two-thirds of respondents predicted that in the long run, the city would be a safer place to live--a prediction that, thankfully, turns out to have been correct.

-- Sulin Carling

"What New Yorkers believe may be contrary to hard facts or to what the experts know. But the very existence of these views about the city and about the lives of the people who live in it is in itself a fact."

- New York Times,
January 1974

Citizens Housing & Planning Council

Founded in 1937, CHPC is a non-profit policy research organization dedicated to improving housing and neighborhood conditions through cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors.

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New Yorkers Speak Out on New York

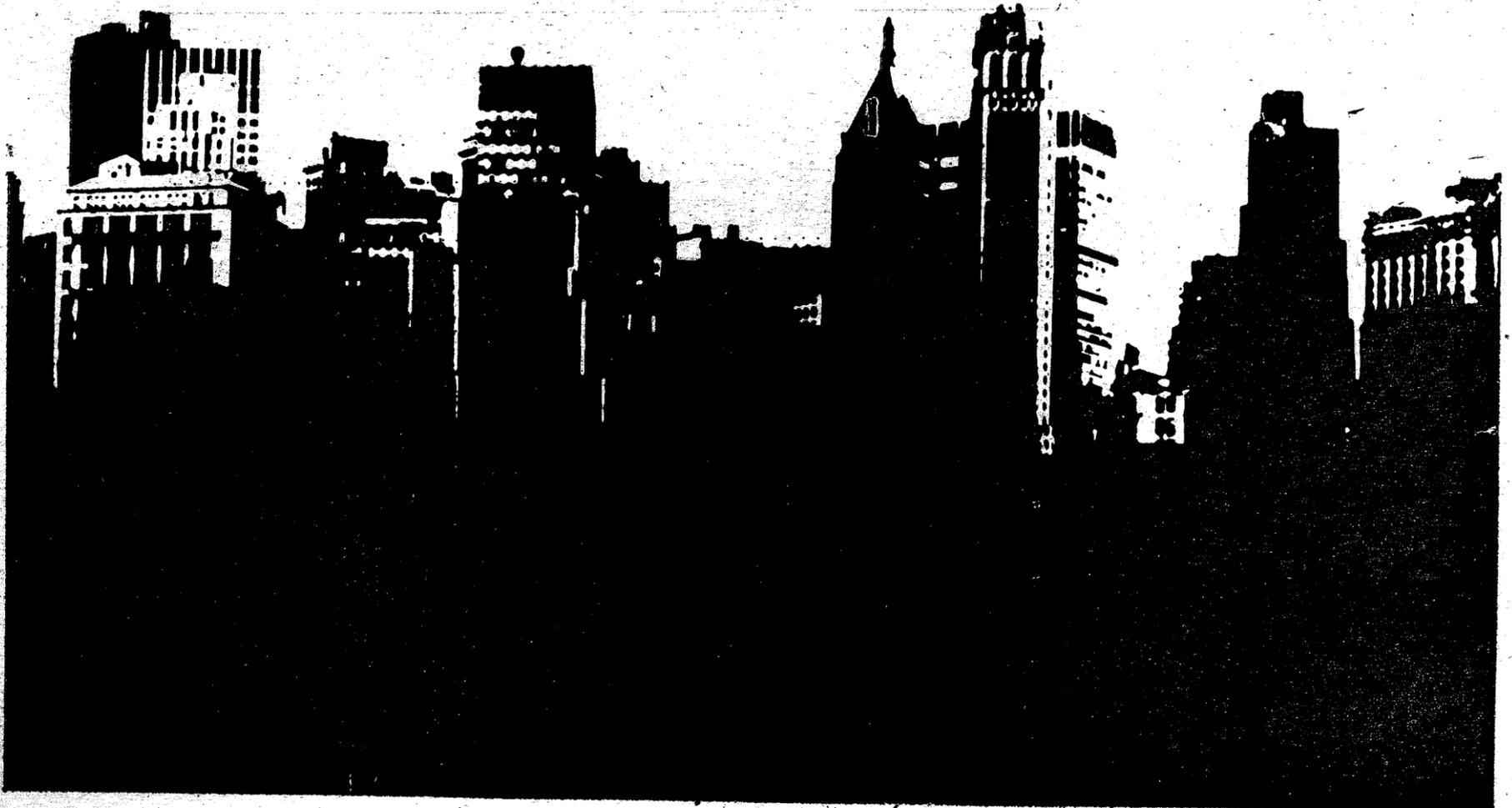
A special survey of New Yorkers' attitudes on the state of their city now and in the future, including things that please them, things that worry them, things that make them proud to be part of the world's greatest city.

*Ad envelope
City Planning
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New T.*

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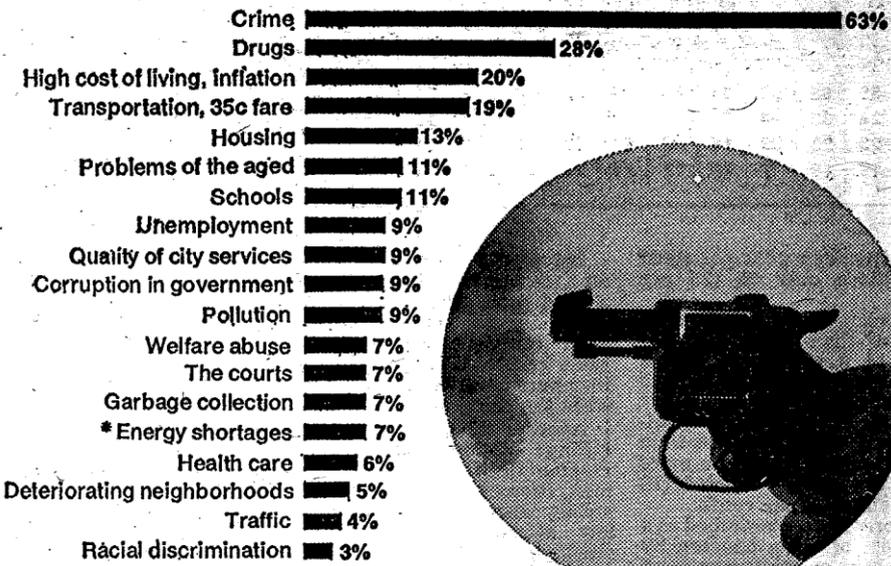
The New York Times

January, 1974



Most Call Crime City's Worst Ill

What are the 2 or 3 problems or issues of greatest concern to you personally that you would most like to see the new city administration do something about?



* Survey was taken last two weeks of November

The New York Times/Jan. 16, 1974

By DAVID BURNHAM
An overwhelming majority of New Yorkers—rich and poor, black and white, conservative and liberal—regard crime as the worst problem they face personally and the single issue that they would most like Mayor Beame's new administration to tackle.

Two out of three New Yorkers, according to a New York Times survey of 1,341 city residents, volunteered "crime, danger in the streets or law and order" as the issue of "greatest concern to you personally, that you would like to see the city

Third of eight articles.

administration do something about."

This preoccupation with crime stood out in bold contrast when compared with the one out of five respondents who mentioned such other critical issues as the high cost of living, transportation needs, housing, and the necessity of saving the 35-cent transit fare.

The survey of the mood of the city—how New Yorkers feel about their town's delights and dangers, about its civil servants and politicians, about its neighborhoods and ball clubs—was conducted in late November by Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., a leading public opinion and market research firm.

Just how anxious the public has become about crime was reinforced when the survey, mindful of the costs involved in providing government services, asked New Yorkers to isolate from the issues they had chosen as their personal concerns the special problem that "would be your first priority for the new administration, even if it meant nothing else got done."

Two out of five New Yorkers—41 per cent of those surveyed—cited crime, danger in the streets and law and order as the priority issue confronting the new

Beame administration. Crime was selected four times as frequently as any other issue, with concern for narcotics receiving 9 per cent, the high cost of living, 6 per cent and transportation, the deterioration of the subways and the need to preserve the 35-cent fare, receiving only 5 per cent.

The crime issue dominated the survey among all New Yorkers even though the over-all rate of crimes reported to the police has declined during the last year.

The fear resounds throughout the city. Among those 65 and older, crime was the preoccupation of 71 per cent. Even in the relatively crime-free borough of Richmond, 54 per cent of all respondents living there listed crime as their major concern. Those who felt so threatened that they try to stay at home whenever possible tended to be the retired New Yorkers over 65 (70 per cent), low-income residents (48 per cent) and lone women (50 per cent).

Still Defiant

Despite this overwhelming concern, a high percentage of New Yorkers seem as determined as ever to enjoy this town. Two out of three residents interviewed said they have continued "to go out and do the things you used to do" and two out of five reported they have not taken any steps to protect themselves or their families from crime.

Those who did adopt safety measures included 12 per cent who reported they now use double locks and door chains, 8 per cent who now keep windows and doors locked and 5 per cent who have installed burglar alarms or bought dogs. Few, however, have decided to take extreme measures. Only two per cent said they have purchased guns and but one per cent said they have studied karate.

Nonetheless, the anxiety about crime discerned by the survey is so strong that the liberal beliefs that many New Yorkers have been presumed to support in respect to law and order and civil liberties appear to have crumbled.

A large majority of New Yorkers—seven out of ten surveyed—said, for example,

that they now favor death penalties for some crimes and life sentences without parole for drug pushers.

Another indication of the intense concern about crime was the overwhelming support among all New Yorkers for stronger gun control laws. Four out of five whites—and an even larger proportion of blacks—said they favored tighter legal controls of weapons.

At the same time that the survey recorded the widespread demand for law and order among all New Yorkers, however, it also found that a substantial minority of residents expressed serious mistrust of the institutions of government responsible for enforcing the laws and providing public safety.

Lack of Confidence Cited

The suspicion took these forms:

When asked whether "you have a lot of confidence, some confidence, or no confidence that you could get a policeman at once if you needed one," one out of three New Yorkers answered that he had no confidence.

This contrasted with the view of more than four out of five New Yorkers interviewed who voiced a lot or some confidence that "the fire department would come at once if you called them."

The lack of confidence in the dependability of the police is strongest among the city's black residents (44 per cent of whom had no confidence) and those under 25 years of age (40 per cent).

Two out of five New Yorkers said they had no confidence that a criminal who robbed them, if caught, would go to jail and one out of six said he had no confidence he would receive a fair trial if he himself was arrested.

Similarly, two out of five New Yorkers said they had no confidence that a city employe would turn down a bribe. Almost half of the respondents said they felt it was fair to say New York City "has more corruption, waste and graft than other cities" and that the courts here "are more inefficient and lax."

Only about one out of three interviewed said these generalizations were

unfair, with the balance expressing uncertainty.

Drugs Seen Critical

Another indication of the considerable lack of faith in the city's criminal-justice institutions emerged when the respondents were asked what forces they believed were "most responsible for the crime situation today."

Drugs, addicts and pushers were singled out by two out of five New Yorkers as the primary cause of crime. Black and Puerto Rican respondents were somewhat more likely to mention drugs as a central cause of crime than whites.

But the major cause of crime—according to one-third of the respondents—was lax courts, weak laws and poor police protection.

Although comparing the answers produced by different polls is difficult because of the differences in the way questions are asked and other variables, the causes of crime suggested by large numbers of New Yorkers today contrast importantly with the explanations offered by samplings of people in all parts of the United States in the mid-nineteen-sixties.

In a 1965 poll conducted by Gallup (the American Institute of Public Opinion), respondents were asked to name the forces they believed were responsible for the increase in crime. More than half gave answers that involved "family and poor parental guidance." This compares with only one out of ten New Yorkers in The Times - Yankelovich survey who said the major cause of crime in the city today was "not enough parental guidance, children with too much money and teen-age gangs."

In another national poll, one conducted in 1966 by Louis Harris & Associates, only one person in ten mentioned alcohol or drugs as a principal cause of crime. This compares with the four out of ten New Yorkers in the November survey who cited drugs and drug pushers as a principal cause of crime in the city.

More Patrols Demanded

What, then, did New Yorkers specifically want done about crime?

Despite these negative feelings about the quality of law enforcement, New Yorkers, given a list of possibilities, simply and emphatically wanted more policemen on the beat.

Three out of five of all residents participating in the survey chose more policemen on the beat when di-

rectly asked, "What's the one thing that would make you feel safer—more policemen on the beat, better lighting, some kind of private neighborhood patrol, or having a gun or some weapon of defense?"

Only 21 per cent chose neighborhood patrols, 14 per cent better lighting, and 6 per cent weapons. The rest were not sure.

The relative unanimity by which New Yorkers looked on the cop on the beat as a top priority in law enforcement was matched by the remarkable unanimity by which they viewed the crime problem as the top assignment of the new administration at City Hall.

Joining in such an assessment were 64 per cent of the whites surveyed, 66 per cent of the blacks, 64 per cent of those earning less than \$10,000 a year, 62 per cent of those earning more than \$15,000, 69 per cent of those who considered themselves conservative and 58 per cent of those who considered themselves radical or liberal.

An above-average view of crime as the top issue was the 76 per cent recorded for single women under 35. A lower-than-average finding was the 54 per cent recorded for Puerto Ricans.

Some Racial Divisions

The survey found less agreement along racial lines in responses to other crime questions, however. Almost six out of ten whites (58 per cent) said they believed New York's crime problem was the same or less than other major American cities, such as Chicago, Los Angeles and Boston. This compared to only 50 per cent of the blacks and 44 per cent of the Puerto Ricans who agreed.

Another division was found in the answers given to the question, "Do you feel your own particular neighborhood is somewhat safer, about the same, or less safe than other areas in the city?"

Sixty-three per cent of the whites, 32 per cent of the blacks and 37 per cent of the Puerto Ricans said they felt their neighborhoods were safer than others in the city.

The perception by the large proportion of white respondents that their neighborhoods were safer than others, and the belief by a larger group of blacks and Puerto Ricans that theirs were more dangerous, corresponds with the pattern that emerges from the available police precinct-by-precinct crime statistics.

Have you taken any steps to protect yourself or your family? What's that? Anything else?

In per cent	
No/none/do nothing	44
Double locks/double lock chains	12
Stay home at night/do not work nights	9
Keep house/doors/windows locked	8
Alert to problem, dangers	6
Changed locks/new locks	5
Burglar alarm(s)	5
Keep dog(s)	5
Do not go out alone	5
Bars/gates/guards	4
Prepared weapon/gun	2
Don't know/no answer	2
Do not open door unless know person	1
Building security	1
Take cab after dark	1
Keep lights on	1
Support community action	1
Learned how to fight	1
Insurance	1
Pray	1
My neighborhood is safe/have no fears	1
Other	1
Do not ride subway	*
Do not carry cash	*

* Less than 1%

The New York Times/Jan. 16, 1974

Where New Yorkers Go—and Don't Go

By DEIRDRE CARMODY

What do New Yorkers like to do?

They like to stroll along Fifth Avenue and look at some of the most elegant window displays in the world. They like to wander through the Metropolitan Museum of Art and study Old Masters and new acquisitions. They like to go to Shea Stadium and Madison Square Garden and cheer until their voices crack.

These are among the favorite pastimes of two-thirds of all New York City residents, according to a survey of the city conducted for The New York Times.

Ten of New York's famous landmarks were selected in the survey, which was con-

Fifth of eight articles

ducted by Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., the public opinion and research firm, during the last two weeks of November. Some 1,341 New Yorkers were asked whether

they thought of each place as one "you like to go yourself, as a place you'd recommend to tourists or not a place you think anyone ought to go."

They were also asked how they felt about the downtown shopping area of the borough in which they lived — whether they shopped there themselves, whether they would recommend it to tourists or whether they felt no one should go there.

The answers reflected, on the whole, an ambivalence on the part of New Yorkers about their city. Some of the answers were predictable. Many reflected an enthusiasm and an active interest in the landmarks of the city. Others reflected a wariness, particularly about places that might be considered dangerous.

Times Square, for years the symbol of the glamour and the glory of New York City, has become a place where more than four out of

ten New Yorkers think no one ought to go, according to the survey. Only one-third of those interviewed go there themselves and only one-third would recommend it to tourists.

New Yorkers are almost as bearish on Greenwich Village, the survey found. Nearly four out of ten said that they did not think of the Village, one of the city's best-known landmark areas, as a place they themselves visit. Almost as many said they would not recommend it to tourists. And 32 per cent felt no one should go there at all.

The question of the quality of life in a city, which is basically the question which was asked here, is almost impossible to answer by yes-and-no or multiple-choice answers. Much of the quality of life in a city can only be measured by immeasurables.

Many a seasoned New Yorker, for instance, finds that his throat can still catch on occasion at the startling beauty of the skyline at night. His throat can also catch in a very different way when he walks down a sidewalk that has recently been

littered by dogs and these brief moments can affect his feelings about the city as much as do the quality of its schools or the efficiency of its services.

An Index of 'Quality'

The survey may be the first time that this kind of an analysis has been undertaken of how New Yorkers feel about the quality of life in their town. Most of the places mentioned, for example, have never themselves undertaken any kind of analysis of their patrons.

While the survey does give a picture of how New Yorkers perceive the quality of life in their city, it does not attempt to say directly why people answered the way they did. For example, it is not clear why only one-third think of Times Square as a place they go themselves. It may be that the others regard it as dangerous or it may simply be that they do not go there because it is out of the way of their normal routine.

Part of the answers may rest in the constantly shifting urban ethnic tides, which the survey also reflects. For instance, blacks and Puerto Ricans are now flocking to areas that were once largely white, such as Coney Island, Times Square and Prospect Park.

Coney Island can be reached by subway and it was once thought of as the city's seaside resort and its most popular spot on a hot summer's day. But only 28 per cent of the people in the survey said they went there themselves and part of this may be that those with cars can now bypass Coney and go on to Jones Beach and the Hamptons. A question that now arises is whether the gasoline shortage, if it continues, will repopularize Coney Island.

This is the way the respondents felt about the 11 places mentioned in the survey:

Times Square

Among those who were particularly emphatic that no one should go to Times Square were women, Bronxites, New Yorkers of Irish and Italian backgrounds and people over the age of 50. However, single people, Puerto Ricans, blacks and people under 25 replied in the greatest numbers that they went there themselves.

According to a racial and ethnic breakdown, the survey found that 42 per cent of the city's blacks, 40 per cent of its Puerto Ricans and only 27 per cent of its whites welcomed the idea of visiting Times Square, traditionally considered the center of the city.

However, 44 per cent of the whites, 40 per cent of the Puerto Ricans and 33 per cent of the blacks said that no one should go there.

Greenwich Village

New Yorkers who most often said they visited Greenwich Village were college graduates, people under 35, newcomers to the city, people making over \$15,000 a year, Manhattan whites, people who live in Queens, liberals and single men and women.

Those who most felt that no one should go there included women, Republicans, Conservatives, people over 50, the less educated, blue-collar workers, people who said that too much attention was being given to minorities and those of Irish heritage.

Although a large part of the Village's permanent and long-settled population is of Italian background, it was endorsed by only 30 per cent of New York Italians who said they went there themselves and 33 per cent who said they would recommend it to others; 39 per cent believed no one should go there.

Fifth Avenue

Fifth Avenue has traditionally been considered one of the great avenues of the world, ranked with the Champs-Élysées, New Bond Street and the Via Condotti. New Yorkers apparently do not disagree.

Seven in ten New Yorkers thought of it as a place they visit themselves. Manhattan whites and people making more than \$15,000 a year were most enthusiastic and an overwhelming percentage of blacks and Puerto Ricans also said they went there.

Borough Shopping

Some seven out of ten New Yorkers said they shopped in their own borough centers and 17 per cent thought enough of these hubs to recommend them to tourists.

Brooklyn, however, was the somber exception. Despite its large, established downtown shopping center, 26 per cent of the residents of that borough thought that no one should shop there.

Staten Island, reflecting, perhaps, its distance from



Central Park

Go yourself 39%
Send a tourist 29%
No one should go 37%
Not sure 2%



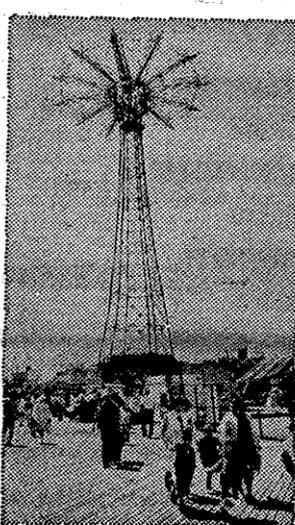
Madison Square Garden

Go yourself 69%
Send a tourist 39%
No one should go 3%
Not sure 1%



The Bronx Zoo

Go yourself 48%
Send a tourist 41%
No one should go 17%
Not sure 3%



Coney Island

Go yourself 28%
Send a tourist 25%
No one should go 48%
Not sure 3%

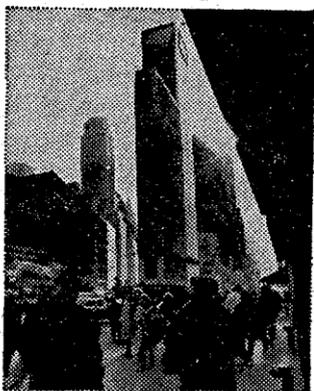
How do you feel about some of the different parts of New York—for example, do you think of Greenwich Village mostly as a place you like to go yourself, mostly a place you'd recommend to tourists, or not a place you think anyone ought to go? How about:

(More than one answer was permitted)



Downtown shopping in your own borough

Go yourself 72%
Send a tourist 17%
No one should go 16%
Not sure 2%



Times Square

Go yourself 31%
Send a tourist 31%
No one should go 41%
Not sure 2%



Shea Stadium

Go yourself 65%
Send a tourist 40%
No one should go 4%
Not sure 2%



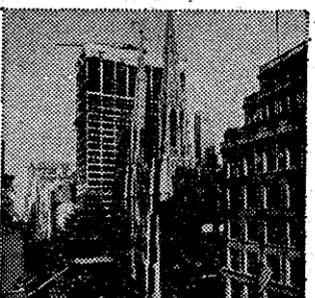
Greenwich Village

Go yourself 37%
Send a tourist 35%
No one should go 32%
Not sure 3%



Prospect Park

Go yourself 30%
Send a tourist 24%
No one should go 44%
Not sure 6%



Fifth Avenue

Go yourself 68%
Send a tourist 37%
No one should go 5%
Not sure 2%



Museum of Art

Go yourself 66%
Send a tourist 42%
No one should go 3%
Not sure 1%

Residents Say No to Idea Of Breaking Up the City

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

New Yorkers overwhelmingly reject the idea that their city is ungovernable and should be broken up, although those who live in the four outer boroughs very much resent what they believe to be the domination of Manhattan.

A survey by The New York Times on attitudes and perceptions of New Yorkers also elicited responses indicating that each borough, despite its own internal population mixes, retains its own strong identity—an identity quite different from the one manifested by its neighbor across the river.

The survey asked, "Do you feel that the criticism that New York is ungovernable and should be split up is fair or not fair?"

The answers, given by 1,341 New Yorkers representing most slices of the city's economic, geographic, and ethnic life, showed that less than three out of ten residents in Manhattan and the Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island, called the statement fair.

Queens evinced a bit more interest in dividing the city, with more than three in ten there saying that the criticism was just. But even in that affluent borough, four in

The last of eight articles.

ten residents declared that New York was governable and should not be dismembered.

The survey, conducted for The Times in late November by Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., the public opinion firm, found that while New Yorkers opted for municipal unity and expressed strong confidence that the city is indeed governable, they fell short of declaring themselves one big happy family—at least when it comes to that big daddy, Manhattan.

The survey asked, "Do you feel that the criticism that Manhattan always gets preferential treatment from the city is fair or not fair?"

Residents of the outer boroughs, with memories of lingering snows and recurrent threats of city bridge tolls and with a sense of being backstage to downtown's

show, had few doubts that this was a fair statement.

In Queens, more than half of those questioned thought that Manhattan was getting preferential treatment from City Hall. In the Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island, more people felt the favoritism was real than felt it was not. In Manhattan, as might be expected, only 31 per cent thought the complaint rang of truth as against 46 per cent who did not.

City of Superlatives

In terms of superlatives, the survey outlined prominent profiles of the boroughs. Manhattanites are the most educated. Brooklynites, surprisingly, in view of the borough's liberal voting record, are the most conservative. Bronxites are the most liberal. Queens is the most Jewish. Staten Island is the most Roman Catholic and youngest (39 per cent of the islanders are under 35 years old).

The survey also explored the sense of loyalty and esteem with which New Yorkers regard their own and the other boroughs. "Of all the boroughs in New York, which do you think is probably the best place to live?" the survey asked.

More than three in ten of all New Yorkers chose Queens. Two in ten selected Brooklyn and Manhattan, with Staten Island only slightly less favored. But only one in ten selected the Bronx, a recognition of the depressed condition of much of that borough.

While those surveyed tended generally to prefer their own home boroughs, there was wide variation among New Yorkers in the degrees of borough loyalty.

More than nine of ten Staten Islanders thought their island was the best place to live and more than eight out of ten in Queens indicated that their own sprawling acres made the best home. In Manhattan seven out of ten found they thrived best near the city's downtown heart.

But in Brooklyn, which has earned an international reputation for local patriotism, little more than five in ten residents thought Brooklyn best. Another three in ten Brooklynites chose Queens and Staten Island as preferable places.

Similarly, in the Bronx, less than half of those interviewed there thought that their borough, the only one attached to the United States mainland, was the city's best liv-

ing room, with Queens, Staten Island and Manhattan getting other Bronxite preferences in that order.

The sense of gloom in the northernmost borough was reinforced by the response to another question: "Would you say that the main reason you live in the city is because you many of which are new and composed of people who came from the other boroughs. Just six out of ten Staten Islanders have been in their localities for as long as six years.

Manhattan, the traditional transient borough for newcomers from abroad and from elsewhere in the nation, had the least deeply rooted population, with more than four in ten residents having lived in their neighborhoods five years or less.

On the other hand, the survey showed, many Manhattanites do not stray too far out of their neighborhoods once they move in; one quarter of them walk to work.

In Queens there is an anomaly between its actual circumstances and its fears. Despite or perhaps because of its relative affluence and desirability as a place to live, residents of Queens have the want to live here, or because you really have no other choice?"

In the Bronx, 42 per cent of those surveyed said they were living there because they had no choice, against 47 per cent who said they wanted to. By contrast, seven of ten Staten Islanders were in New York by choice.

Queens, surprisingly perhaps, came close to the Bronx estimate, with no more than half of that borough's residents saying they were here because they wanted to be and four in ten believing they had no choice.

Brooklynites, somewhere in the middle on the issue of living here by choice or not, seem to have the deepest roots in the city.

Eight out of ten Brooklynites, the survey found, have lived in their neighborhood for six years or longer. Somewhat fewer than seven in ten have lived that long in their Queens neighborhoods, most pessimistic view of New York's future.

The question was, "What's your long-range view for the city—do you think that 10 or 15 years from now New York City will be a better place to live than it is now, about the same, or worse?"

Four in ten in Queens said, "worse" and less than three in ten there thought things would be better. In no other borough did a greater percentage of New Yorkers believe the city would get worse rather than better. In fact, New Yorkers generally were decidedly optimistic about the future of their town.

In Manhattan, 38 per cent

thought things would get better and 21 per cent looked for worse to come. In Brooklyn, it was 43 per cent anticipating a better future and 33 per cent, worse. In the Bronx, 42 per cent envisioned a happier time, 21 per cent worse. And in Staten Island, 41 per cent were optimistic, 26 per cent were pessimistic.

Some Borough Variables

On social and municipal issues there was a variety of borough-borne perceptions.

More than six out of ten in Queens felt it was fair to say that the city has become "a welfare dumping ground" for the rest of the nation. Slightly less than half of those in Manhattan subscribed to this view, however.

Nearly two-thirds of those interviewed in Queens contended that Open Admissions at City University lowered the quality of education. Only a bit more than one-third of Bronxites shared that view.

Although 34 per cent of those in the Bronx described themselves as liberals, the borough was the one most in favor of the death penalty for certain crimes. Nearly eight in ten Bronxites wanted the death penalty restored. In Brooklyn, which has the most conservatives, less than seven in ten residents favored the death penalty, still a high percentage in that Democratic party stronghold.

In the Bronx, nearly two-thirds of those surveyed, more than in any other borough, were against legalizing marijuana. The borough also was most strongly (almost eight in ten) in favor of life sentences for drug pushers and in support (two-thirds of the residents interviewed) of a crackdown on pornography.

On the controversial proposals for decentralizing major city services, Staten Islanders more than other New Yorkers wanted more local authority in school affairs, garbage collection and hospitals. They did not ask as much as Bronx people did, however, for the decentralization of the police.

Staten Island, the borough connected directly to the rest of the city only by a high-toll bridge and a low-fare ferry, emerged as a distinct entity of New York on yet another question, one asking where borough residents have their relatives and friends—in the suburbs, the city or someplace else.

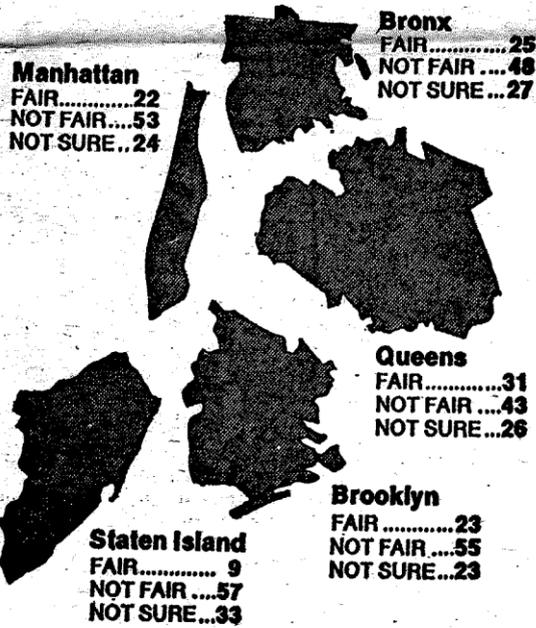
While more than two-thirds of the residents of the other boroughs said they had their friends and relatives in the city, more than two-thirds of the Staten Islanders said their family and comradely bonds were linked to the suburbs.

Still, no borough wants to break up this town.

A lot of criticisms have been raised about the city. Some are probably fair; some are probably not fair. Do you feel that the criticism that the city is ungovernable and should be split up is fair or not fair?

In per cent (Figures are rounded)

City Total: FAIR 25 NOT FAIR 50 NOT SURE 25



The New York Times/Jan. 31, 1974