

Op Data, 2003: Long Island City

Community Assessment and Perceptions of Quality of
Life, Safety and Services

Written by

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About the Authors

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Acknowledgments

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Community Assessment and Perceptions of Quality of Life, Safety and Services

Introduction

Long Island City is a mixed-use industrial and residential neighborhood in western Queens, located just over the East River from Manhattan. Once a heavy manufacturing sector with one of the greatest concentrations of industry in the East, the neighborhood experienced extensive disinvestment in the 1950s and 1960s.¹ The neighborhood is now largely occupied by light industrial and warehouse businesses with small residential communities on the North and East edges of the neighborhood. Long Island City also boasts one of the busiest commuting hubs on the East Coast, with numerous commuters traveling through Queens Plaza daily via automobile, subway, bus, and long-distance commuter trains. Recently the neighborhood has undergone a renaissance as new businesses, art institutions, movie studios, and residents have moved in to take advantage of reasonable rents and the neighborhood's views of Manhattan. To further encourage redevelopment, the City rezoned the central part of Long Island City in 2001 as a commercial business district.

The Operation Data project was developed by the Queens Plaza Community Cleanup as a mechanism for measuring the opinions of community members on issues of quality of life, safety, and community services. A project of the Center for Court Innovation, the Queens Plaza Community Cleanup is an effort to address conditions of disorder in Long Island City – graffiti, broken windows, trash-strewn parks – by employing the labor of both community volunteers and low-level offenders sentenced to community service.

The primary findings from the Long Island City Operation Data include:

- Safety issues and measures of neighborhood neglect are seen by respondents as the most problematic community issues;
- Respondents surveyed in public housing-dominated areas are significantly more likely to feel that the quality of life is poor and that there are more serious problems in the community than those surveyed in other areas;
- Longer tenure in Long Island City is associated with the belief that there are more serious problems in the community; and
- Those who live in Long Island City are more likely to view existing services and institutions as community assets than those who work in the area.

Methodology

The 2003 Long Island City Operation Data survey was conducted by approximately forty AmeriCorps members and eight Center for Court Innovation employees on June 12, 2003.² Corps members administered a total of 292 surveys with members of the Long Island City community.³ AmeriCorps members were divided into seven teams, each headed by a team leader – a Center employee who helped maintain a consistent methodology. The surveys were conducted in a diverse sample of community locations, including residential, commercial, and light industrial areas. Corps members went door-to-door, visiting both local residences and businesses as well as interviewing individuals in public spaces (e.g., parks, bus stops, etc.) throughout the community. The 54 questions in the survey covered such issues as quality of life, public safety, and services, as well as demographic characteristics of respondents (see Appendix A).

For analyses concerning perceptions of quality of life, neighborhood issues, and neighborhood resources, respondents were grouped together based on background characteristics such as gender, race, relationship to the neighborhood (resident or worker/merchant), tenure in the neighborhood, and neighborhood in which the survey was conducted.⁴ Race was coded as two dichotomous variables comparing the most prevalent racial/ethnic categories (black, Caucasian) to all other respondents. Respondents were additionally grouped by neighborhood tenure, with those respondents who have lived or worked in Long Island City for seven years or less being compared to those who have lived or worked in the neighborhood for more than seven years (the median tenure of all respondents). Finally, respondents were grouped according to the sections of Long Island City in which they were surveyed: those surveyed in heavily commercial areas, those surveyed in public housing areas, and those interviewed in other areas (mostly mixed-use residential/industrial areas).

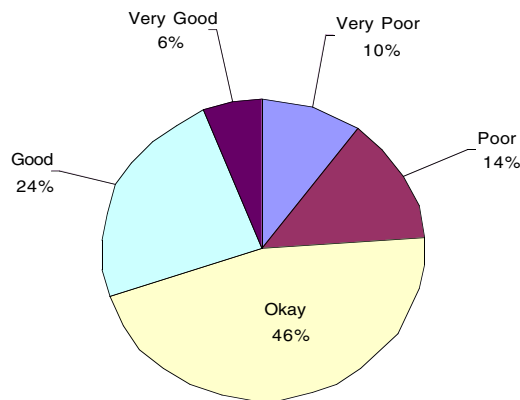
Respondent Characteristics

Respondents lived or worked in the Long Island City area for an average of twelve years, but the range of their tenure in the neighborhood varied greatly, with a sizeable percentage (13%) having been present in the neighborhood for less than one year. Most (94%) respondents were 65 or younger and 60% were between 18 and 40 years of age. More than half of respondents were male (58%). African-Americans and Caribbean-Americans comprised 41% of the sample, Hispanic/Latinos represented 17%, Caucasians made up 19%, and 23% classified themselves as other/multiracial. The majority of respondents surveyed (54%) lived in the neighborhood. Merchants (11%) and those who worked in the neighborhood (28%) made up a cumulative 39% of respondents, and the remaining 7% had various other connections to the neighborhood, including attending school at the nearby LaGuardia Community College and commuting through the community on a regular basis.

Neighborhood Public Safety and Quality of Life

As seen in Figure 1, when asked to rate the quality of life in Long Island City, nearly half of respondents (46%) reported that things were neither particularly good nor particularly bad. Nearly one-quarter of respondents (23%) rated the quality of life during the past year as poor or very poor, and 31% rated the quality of life as good or very good. Quality of life rankings did not vary significantly by gender, race, length of tenure in Long Island City, or resident/worker status (see Table 2). However, even when other factors were considered, those respondents surveyed in areas largely comprised of public housing were more likely to rate the quality of life as poor than those respondents surveyed in other areas (see Table 1, Appendix B).

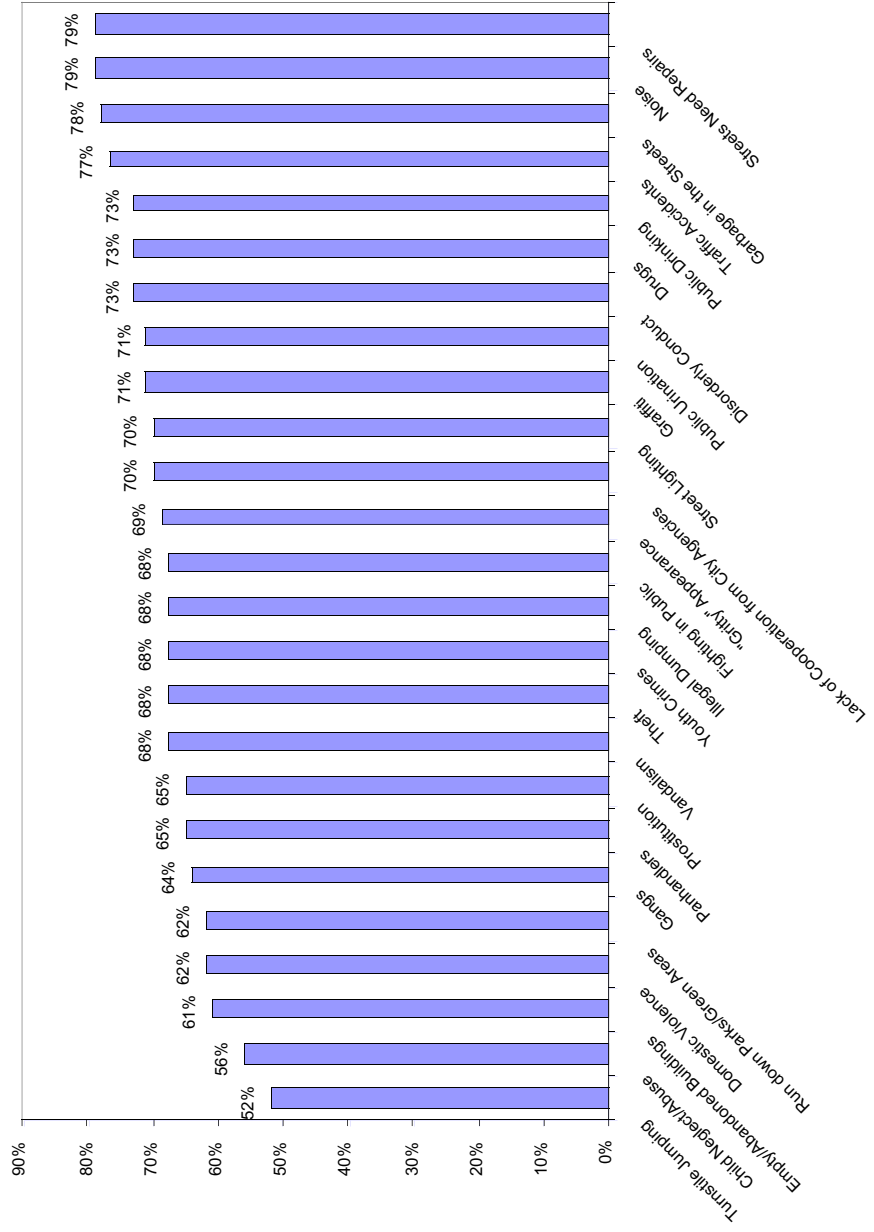
Figure 1. Respondents' Rankings of the Quality of Life in Long Island City in the Past Year



Community Issues

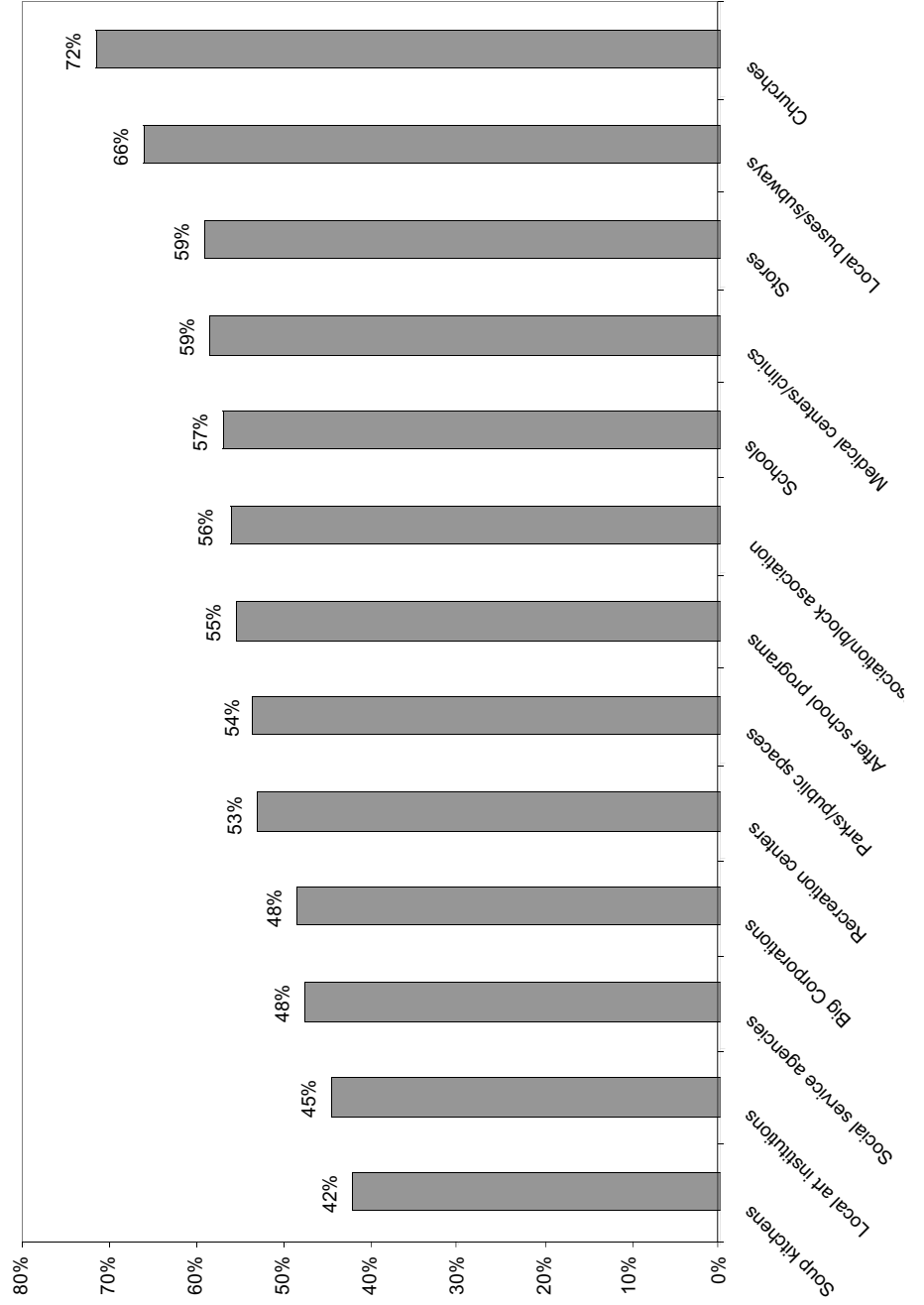
In addition to asking respondents to rate the overall quality of life in the neighborhood, respondents were asked to rate a number of potential community issues as very big problems, big problems, minor problems, or not problematic. Respondents ranked streets needing repairs and noise as the most problematic issues (79% felt that these were problems). Additional issues that were rated highly problematic included garbage in the streets, traffic accidents, public drinking, drugs, and disorderly conduct. Turnstile jumping and child abuse and neglect were rated the least problematic community issues (52% and 56% respectively felt that these were problems), followed by empty and abandoned buildings (61%), domestic violence (62%), and run down parks and green areas (62%). In general, issues involving violence, such as domestic violence, child abuse, and gangs, were rated relatively unproblematic by respondents. The results for all community issues can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Respondents Rating Community Issues Problematic in Long Island City*



*Percentages include respondents rating issues as "Very Big Problem(s)", "Big Problems", and "Minor Problems".

Figure 3: "Strong" and "Very Strong" Perceptions of Community Institutions and Services in Long Island City



Tenure in Long Island City Those respondents who have lived or worked in Long Island City for more than seven years were more likely to rate issues as problems in the neighborhood (Table 2, Appendix B). Even when other factors were held constant, this relationship remained significant (see Table 3, Appendix B).

Survey Location Those respondents surveyed in sections of Long Island City dominated by public housing were generally more likely to rate community issues as problems. Those interviewed in commercial areas were also more likely to rate community issues as problems (Table 3, Appendix B).

Relationship to the Neighborhood Analyses indicate that Long Island City residents did not vary significantly from those who work in Long Island City in their view of community issues as problems (see Table 3, Appendix B).

Basic Demographics Male and female respondents differed little in their rating of community issues. In general, female respondents ranked community issues as slightly more problematic than male respondents (Table 2, Appendix B), but this is likely due to the fact that females are more likely to have been surveyed in public housing areas. In fact, once these additional factors are controlled, the effect of gender *per se* disappears (Table 3, Appendix B).

Blacks and whites did not vary significantly in their ranking of community problems (results for blacks only displayed in Table 3, Appendix B).

Community Service Respondents were asked to rate the existence of a number of services and institutions in their community as a big strength, a strength, a weakness, or a big weakness to their community. The results are displayed in Figure 3, Page 5. A large amount of missing data for these variables indicates that the results should be interpreted cautiously; it is possible that with a larger sample size additional significance could have been detected.

Respondents were most likely to feel that churches (72%) and public transportation (66%) were community strengths and least likely to believe that soup kitchens (42%) and local art institutions (45%) were a community strength. When all thirteen services and institutions were included in a single index, respondents' answers did not vary significantly by gender, race, tenure in the community, or survey location (Table 4, Appendix B). However, Long Island City residents were more likely to rank services and institutions as community assets than those who work in Long Island City (see Table 5, Appendix B).

When asked about their own involvement in community meetings such as PTA, Tenant Association, Block Association, and business or merchant associations, 60% of respondents reported never attending such meetings, 31% reported that they attend such meetings occasionally, and 10% indicated that they attend community meetings frequently.

APPENDIX A: OPERATION DATA LONG ISLAND CITY COMMUNITY SURVEY 2003

New York City Public Safety Corps -- Operation Data

COMMUNITY SURVEY SPRING 2003

Opening Remarks

Hello my name is _____. I'm with the New York City Public Safety Corps. We're conducting a survey to learn about the strengths and problems of your neighborhood. Participation in this survey is voluntary. Your responses will be kept confidential. The information is for research purposes only. The survey will be about 10 minutes.

#	Answers				Question
1					First, I have a few basic questions. What is your relationship to this neighborhood? Choose all that apply. Are you
			1		A Resident
			2		A Merchant
			3		Someone who works in the neighborhood
			4		Other _____
1a					<i>[If resident,]</i> What street do you live on? _____
					Between what cross streets(2)? _____
1b					<i>[If merchant/work in neighborhood,]</i> What street do you work on? _____
					Between what cross streets(2)? _____
2					How many years have you lived/worked in this neighborhood? <i>[if less than 1, put 0]</i>
3					Over the past year, how would you rate the quality of life in the neighborhood? Is the quality of life:
			1		Very poor
			2		Poor
			3		OK
			4		Good
			5		Very Good
					Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your neighborhood. Please tell me if each of the following is a very big problem, a big problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all. <i>1 - very big problem</i> <i>2 - big problem</i> <i>3 - minor problem</i> <i>4 - not a problem</i>
4	Very Big	Big	Minor	Not	Garbage on the streets
5	1	2	3	4	Illegal dumping
6	1	2	3	4	Run down parks/green areas
7	1	2	3	4	Streets needing repairs
8	1	2	3	4	Street lighting
9	1	2	3	4	Lack of cooperation from city agencies to solve community problems
10	1	2	3	4	Abandoned or dilapidated buildings or houses
11	1	2	3	4	Traffic accidents
12	1	2	3	4	Disorderly conduct
13	1	2	3	4	Public urination
14	1	2	3	4	Noise
15	1	2	3	4	"Gritty" appearance of streets and buildings

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					<p>The next set of questions uses the same scale as the last questions. Please tell me if each of the following is a very big problem, a big problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all.</p> <p><i>1 - very big problem</i> <i>2 - big problem</i> <i>3 - minor problem</i> <i>4 - not a problem</i></p>	
	Very Big	Big	Minor	Not		
16	1	2	3	4	Turnstile jumping (at the subway)	
17	1	2	3	4	Vandalism	
18	1	2	3	4	Graffiti	
19	1	2	3	4	Public drinking	
20	1	2	3	4	Fighting in public	
21	1	2	3	4	Panhandlers	
22	1	2	3	4	Gangs	
23	1	2	3	4	Theft	
24	1	2	3	4	Prostitution	
25	1	2	3	4	Youth crimes	
26	1	2	3	4	Drugs	
27	1	2	3	4	Domestic violence	
28	1	2	3	4	Child neglect and abuse	
29					<p>What other problems is the neighborhood facing?</p> <hr/>	
		Yes	No		<p>Have you contacted the following government agencies for help with a neighborhood or local problem in the last year?</p>	
30		1	2		911	
31		1	2		Police	
32		1	2		Sanitation	
33		1	2		Other. <i>[If other, please identify.]</i> _____	
					<p>Is the existence of each of the following items a strength or weakness of the neighborhood? Identify each as a big strength, a strength, a weakness, or a big weakness.</p> <p><i>1 A Big Strength</i> <i>2 A Strength</i> <i>3 A Weakness</i> <i>4 A Big Weakness</i> <i>5 Not Applicable</i></p>	
	Big Strength		Big Weakness	N/A		
34	1	2	3	4	5	Tenant Association or Block Association
35	1	2	3	4	5	Churches
36	1	2	3	4	5	Soup Kitchens
37	1	2	3	4	5	Health Clinics/Medical Centers
38	1	2	3	4	5	After school programs
39	1	2	3	4	5	Corporations moving into Long Island City
40	1	2	3	4	5	Recreational centers
41	1	2	3	4	5	Schools
42	1	2	3	4	5	Parks/public spaces
43	1	2	3	4	5	Stores
44	1	2	3	4	5	Social service agencies
45	1	2	3	4	5	Local art institutions
46	1	2	3	4	5	Local buses and subways
47						<p>What other organizations/leaders/programs in the neighborhood do you consider strengths of the community?</p> <hr/>

48			How often do you attend community meetings (such as PTA meetings, Tenant Association meetings, Block Association meetings, or Business merchant association meetings, or any other neighborhood associations)
		1 2 3	Never Sometimes Often
49			Would you be interested in participating in community service projects your neighborhood? Would you say that you are:
		1 2 3 4 5	Very Interested Somewhat Interested Neutral Probably Not Interested Definitely Not Interested
50	<u>Yes</u> 1	<u>No</u> 2	Are there any "problem areas" in the neighborhood? For example, are there places where illegal dumping, trash, loud noise, or poor street lighting are problematic? <i>[If yes,] Where? [Include street addresses and/or cross streets.]</i> _____
51	Yes 1	No 2	Are there any particular areas where you don't feel safe? <i>[If yes,] Where? [Include street addresses and/or cross streets.]</i> _____
52		1 2 3 4	What is your age range? 18-25 26-40 40-65 Over 65
53		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	What ethnic/racial group do you consider yourself a part of? <i>(INTERVIEWER: Do not read the options, let respondents supply their own answer.) Circle all that apply.</i> <i>Black</i> <i>White</i> <i>Native American</i> <i>Multiracial</i> <i>Asian</i> <i>Latino</i> <i>Other:</i> _____ <i>Refused</i>
54		1 2	What gender is the respondent? <i>(INTERVIEWER: You do not have to ask this question if you can determine the person's gender on your own.)</i> Male Female

Appendix B:
Regression Analyses Predicting Respondents’
Perceptions of Quality of Life, Community Issues, and Services
in Long Island City

Table 1. Regression Predicting Respondents’
Rating of Quality of Life in Long Island City in the
Past Year

Independent Variables	Standardized Regression Coefficients
<i>N</i>	204
Male	-.029
Black American	.008
Age	.023
Lived in Long Island City More than 7 Years	.000
Long Island City Resident	.078
Surveyed in NYCHA neighborhood	-.342***
Surveyed in commercial neighborhood	-.112
<i>R</i> ²	.076

+ p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations of Long Island City Residents' Reports of Quality of Life and Neighborhood Problems by Gender, Race, Tenure, Relationship to Neighborhood, and Survey Location

	Gender: Male	Race: Black ¹	Race: Caucasian ²	Tenure in Neighborhood: Greater than 7 years ³	Relationship to Neighborhood: Resident ⁴	Survey Location: NYCHA ⁵	Survey Location: Commercial area ⁶
<i>N</i>	247	243	243	231	231	254	254
Quality of Life	.006	-.055	.058	-.041	-.011	-.209**	-.005
Neighborhood Problems⁷							
Garbage on the streets	.012	-.008	.003	-.111+	-.054	-.039	-.051
Illegal dumping	.021	.040	.003	-.142*	-.141*	-.040	-.141*
Rundown parks/green areas	.152*	-.053	.079	-.102	-.081	-.139*	-.088
Streets needing repairs	.039	-.059	.040	-.091	-.127+	-.030	-.031
Street lighting	-.007	-.024	.105	-.118+	-.101	-.150*	.003
Lack of cooperation from city agencies	.078	-.048	.070	-.130+	-.161*	-.147*	-.054
Abandoned/dilapidated buildings or houses	.099	.091	-.019	.001	.083	.085	-.151*
Traffic accidents	.103	-.071	.165*	-.125+	-.019	-.076	.010
Disorderly conduct	.066	-.120+	.250***	-.211**	-.215**	-.347***	.093
Public urination	.184**	-.132*	.202**	-.204**	-.160*	-.319***	.048
Noise	-.039	-.095	.125+	-.230***	-.153*	-.140*	.027
"Gritty" appearance of streets and buildings	.009	.055	-.006	-.117+	-.023	-.030	-.078
Turnstile jumping	.080	-.014	.102	-.093	-.035	-.032	-.124+
Vandalism	.035	-.042	.018	-.165*	-.022	-.071	.000
Graffiti	.036	-.051	-.013	-.137*	-.005	.033	.038
Public drinking	.071	-.110+	.143*	-.142*	-.162*	-.174**	.096
Fighting in public	.175**	-.157*	.214**	-.198**	-.181**	-.324***	.128*
Panhandling	.107	-.078	.135*	-.131+	-.062	-.042	-.056
Gangs	.132*	-.044	.174**	-.138*	-.158*	-.146*	-.021
Theft	.106	-.021	.172**	-.120+	-.085	-.081	.038
Prostitution	.120+	-.141*	.129*	-.126+	-.123*	-.148*	-.086
Youth crimes	.126+	-.115+	.174**	-.214**	-.230**	-.288***	.096
Drugs	.127+	-.284***	.248***	-.256***	-.244***	-.385***	.131*
Domestic violence	.131*	-.150*	.171**	-.169*	-.128+	-.3191**	.009
Child neglect and abuse	.199**	-.132*	.178**	-.148*	-.132+	-.236***	.066
<i>Neighborhood Problems Index⁸</i>	.136*	-.102	.183**	-.229***	-.169*	-.220***	-.023

+ p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

¹ Those respondents identifying as black are compared to all other racial/ethnic categories.

² Those respondents identifying as Caucasian are compared to all other racial/ethnic categories.

³ Median time in neighborhood for all respondents is seven years, therefore the dependent variable for tenure in neighborhood is divided into those who have resided or worked in Long Island City for less than or equal to seven years and those who have resided or worked in Long Island City for more than seven years.

⁴ Those respondents who both live and work in Long Island City (N=7) have been coded as residents.

⁵ Those respondents surveyed in areas dominated by NYCHA housing are compared to respondents surveyed in all other areas.

⁶ Those respondents surveyed in areas dominated by commercial establishments are compared to respondents surveyed in all other areas.

⁷ All neighborhood problems are coded on the following scheme: 1=very big problem, 2=big problem, 3=minor problem, 4=not a problem.

Table 3. Regression Predicting Respondents' Ranking of Community Issues in Long Island City

Independent Variables	Standardized Regression Coefficients
<i>N</i>	204
Male	.051
Black American	.023
Age	.027
Lived in Long Island City More than 7 Years	-.170*
Long Island City Resident	-.051
Surveyed in NYCHA neighborhood	-.292**
Surveyed in commercial neighborhood	-.157*
<i>R</i> ²	.136

Note: The dependent variable is a Neighborhood Problems Index averaging respondents' responses on twenty-five component variables.

Table 4. Bivariate Correlations of Long Island City Residents' Rankings of Community Services and Institutions by Gender, Race, Tenure, Relationship to Neighborhood, and Survey Location

	Gender: Male	Race: Black ¹	Race: Caucasian ²	Tenure in Neighborhood: Greater than 7 years ³	Relationship to Neighborhood: Resident ⁴	Survey Location: NYCHA ⁵	Survey Location: Commercial area ⁶
<i>N</i>	205	201	201	190	186	206	206
Services and Institutions							
Tenant association or block association	-.108	-.019	-.021	.096	.022	.212**	-.121
Churches	-.050	.045	-.083	.124	.129+	.100	-.127+
Soup kitchens	-.027	.029	-.161+	.012	.022	.236**	-.168*
Health clinics/medical centers	-.036	.179*	-.176*	.050	.002	.253***	-.103
After school programs	-.110	.165*	-.006	.043	-.002	.159*	-.174*
Corporations moving into Long Island City	-.090	-.122	.064	-.071	-.219**	-.045	.022
Recreational centers	-.055	.232**	-.077	.100	-.079	.143+	-.154*
Schools	-.050	.116	.010	.091	-.169*	-.022	.018
Parks/public spaces	.002	.094	-.099	.015	-.117	.085	-.182*
Stores	-.015	.050	-.027	-.019	-.249**	-.003	-.014
Social service agencies	-.006	.034	-.092	.117	-.211**	.023	.034
Local art institutions	-.068	.045	.058	.083	-.099	.053	-.020
Local buses and subways	-.045	-.100	.116	.006	-.037	-.018	-.074
<i>Community Services and Institutions Index</i> ⁷	-.041	.081	-.047	.067	-.120	.106	-.025+

+ p<.10 * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001

¹Those respondents identifying as black are compared to all other racial/ethnic categories.

²Those respondents identifying as Caucasian are compared to all other racial/ethnic categories.

³Median time in neighborhood for all respondents is seven years, therefore the dependent variable for tenure in neighborhood is divided into those who have resided or worked in Long Island City for less than or equal to seven years and those who have resided or worked in Long Island City for more that seven years.

⁴Those respondents who both live and work in Long Island City (N=7) have been coded as residents.

⁵Those respondents surveyed in areas dominated by NYCHA housing are compared to respondents surveyed in all other areas.

⁶Those respondents surveyed in areas dominated by commercial establishments are compared to respondents surveyed in all other areas.

⁷ The Community Services and Institutions Index includes all 13 services and institutions listed above. Participants who supplied responses to fewer than 50% of the component variables were excluded from the index.

Table 5. Regression Predicting Respondents' Ranking of Community Services and Institutions in Long Island City

Independent Variables	Standardized Regression Coefficients
<i>N</i>	160
Male	-.017
Black American	.003
Age	-.015
Lived in Long Island City More than 6 Years	.097
Long Island City Resident	-.246**
Surveyed in NYCHA neighborhood	.162
Surveyed in commercial neighborhood	-.118
<i>R</i> ²	.084

Note: The dependent variable is a Community Services and Institutions Index averaging respondents' responses on thirteen component variables.

Notes

1. Greater Astoria Historical Society. *The Long Island City-Astoria Story*, “Farmland to Suburb to Urban Center.” <http://www.astorialic.org/story/story.htm>; Greenburg, Kenny. “A History of Long Island City”. 1996. <http://www.licweb.com/history.html>
2. The New York City Public Safety Corps was established in 2002 and is an AmeriCorps community service program that seeks to improve the quality of life in New York through assisting criminal justice officials (police, probation officers, prosecutors, judges), working directly with victims, and engaging local residents in solving discrete neighborhood public safety problems. Approximately forty full-time AmeriCorps members serve in locations throughout the city. In Long Island City, Corps members work with a local police precinct and help administer the Queens Plaza Community Cleanup Project.
3. Due to data quality issues, only 254 (87%) of these surveys will be included in the current report. During data entry, the authors noted that some of the responses seemed suspect for a variety of reasons (made up addresses, addresses outside the surveying area, multiple surveys with exactly the same responses). Surveys with suspect responses were flagged and two sets of analyses were conducted: one including these suspect cases and one excluding them. Because the results of the two analyses differed in noticeable ways, it was decided that those surveys the authors had reason to suspect of being inaccurate or falsified should be excluded.
4. When determining respondents’ relationship to the neighborhood, preference was given to residence status. This was done primarily because only seven (3%) of the total population indicated that they both lived and worked in LIC, it did not make sense to create a separate category for such a small number of cases.

Center for Court Innovation

The winner of an Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Center for Court Innovation is a unique public-private partnership that promotes new thinking about how courts and criminal justice agencies can aid victims, change the behavior of offenders and strengthen communities.

In New York, the Center functions as the State Court System's independent research and development arm, creating demonstration projects that test new approaches to problems that have resisted conventional solutions. The Center's problem-solving courts include the nation's first community court (Midtown Community Court), as well as drug courts, domestic violence courts, youth courts, mental health courts and others.

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For more information, call 212 397 3050 or e-mail info@courtinnovation.org.

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