



City of Salem, Oregon

Community Survey Report

November 2020



Overview

The City of Salem conducted a community survey to invite the public to share their perspectives on the City and their opinions about climate change. The survey ran for two weeks: October 21 - November 4, 2020, and nearly 500 completed responses were collected. Notably, despite all questions being optional, most participants wrote detailed responses to open-ended questions, providing a robust set of data to analyze. These qualitative responses were analyzed using a social science research method called content analysis, in which responses are labeled with categories (called “codes”) based on their content, in order to identify patterns and themes.

The input gathered from this survey will be integrated with the work of the Climate Action Task Force to develop a Climate Action Plan that reflects the views and insight of the community at large. Because it is the goal of the City to make equity a top priority in this process, voluntary demographic information was collected at the close of the survey. The remainder of this report outlines the results for each question.

Highlights

498

total completed responses from community members.

73%

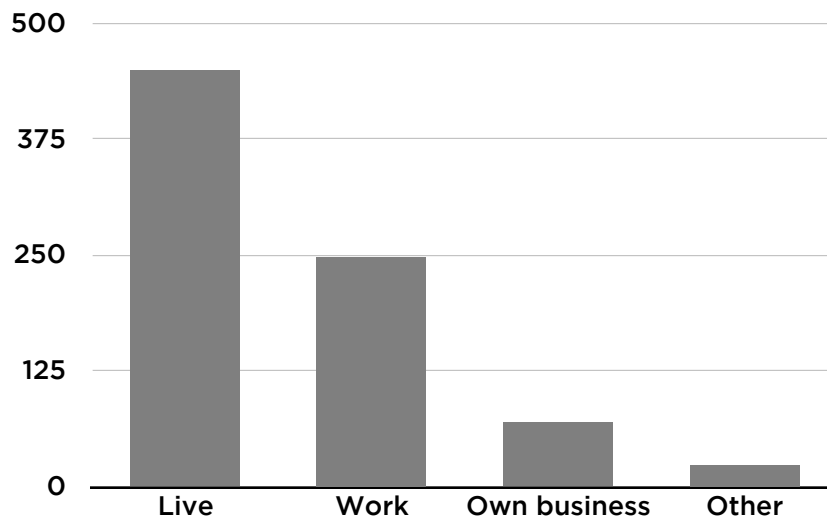
of respondents definitely or somewhat agree that it is important for Salem to create a Climate Action Plan.

77%

of respondents are very or somewhat worried about climate change.

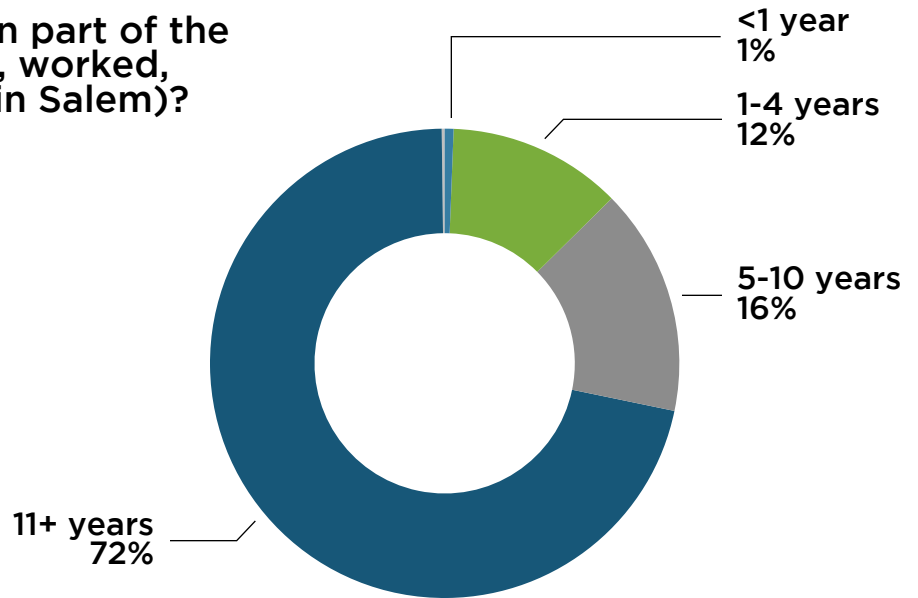
Results

Q1: Which of the following describe(s) your relation to Salem? (Select all that apply.)



Results (cont.)

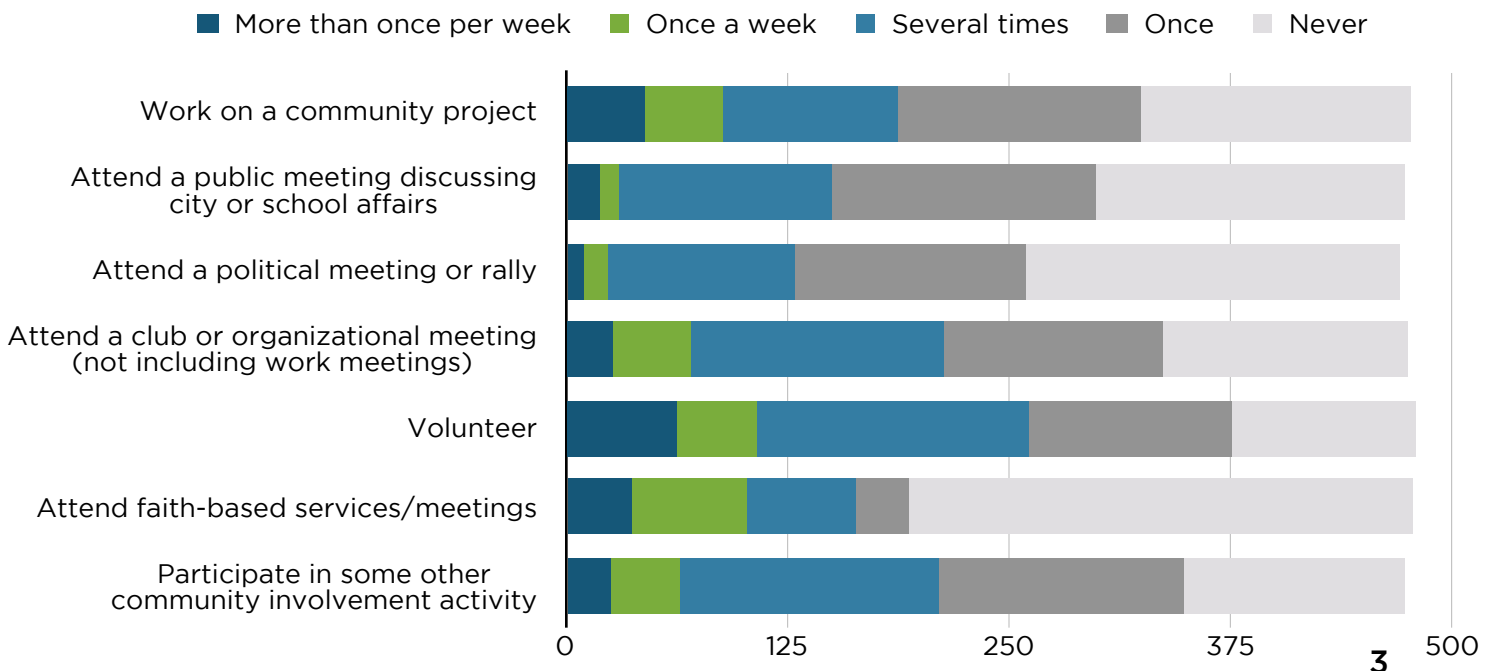
Q2: How long have you been part of the Salem community (i.e. lived, worked, owned a business, or other in Salem)?



Q3: What Salem community organizations are you a part of, if any? For example, churches, civic organizations, parent-teacher associations, recreational clubs, etc.

Responses to this question will be analyzed and used for reference to help understand which groups we are reaching.

Q4: In a typical month, how often do you do the following? Note: think about your typical month prior to COVID-19 restrictions.



Results (cont.)

Q5: In the space below, please share a brief description of the City of Salem. How would you describe Salem to someone from another state? Please include the following:

- Strengths of the Salem community
- Struggles the Salem community has experienced
- Defining characteristics of Salem's identity

Respondents were asked to describe the City of Salem in their own words, with prompts to include strengths, struggles, and defining characteristics. Responses were analyzed based on whether they were positive, negative, or neutral. Only one response was truly neutral: that Salem is the capital city of Oregon. Below are the top five positive and negative comments used to describe Salem, respectively. In each case, the most common response was mentioned significantly more times (more than double in both cases!) than any other characteristic. 156 responses identified the natural environment of Salem, including its green spaces and access to the coast and mountains, as a key descriptor. And 179 respondents identified affordable housing and homelessness as a negative aspect of the City. See Appendix A for a full breakdown of this qualitative analysis.

Top Salem Strengths

Green spaces/natural environment/
access to mountains & coast

Quiet/small town/size of city

Vibrant downtown/culture & arts

Nice people

High level of community involvement

Top Salem Struggles

Homelessness/lack of affordable housing

Insufficient transportation infrastructure

Racism/social justice issues

City government issues/lack of
leadership

Division among residents

Results (cont.)

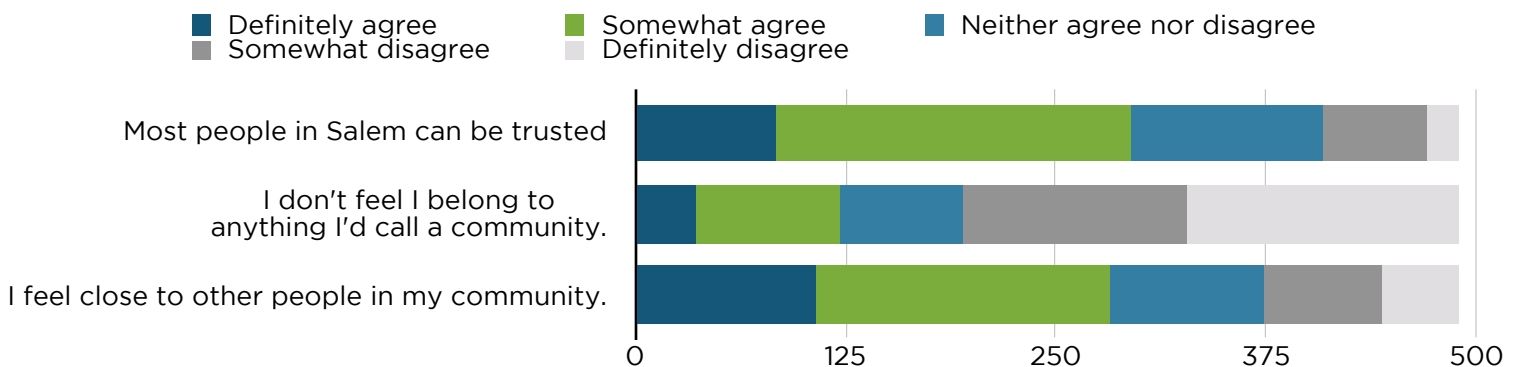
Q6: What changes have you noticed in the City of Salem over the last 5-10 years? Think about population size, density, weather, workforce, education, transportation, events, culture, development, etc. If you have not lived or worked in Salem this long, please share any changes you have noticed during your time, or feel free to move to the next question.

When asked about the changes they've observed in Salem over the past 5-10 years, respondents often acknowledged a growth in population size without adequate growth in services and other areas, such as affordable housing and infrastructure. The most common change identified was an increase in homelessness - often cited as the cause of other problems such safety concerns and businesses leaving the downtown area. However, the second most common change that respondents identified was the development of more restaurants and cultural activities, particularly in the downtown core.

Top Changes to Salem

- 1 More homelessness
- 2 More vibrant downtown/increased entertainment options and cultural activities
- 3 More traffic/congestion
- 4 Growth
- 5 Less affordable housing

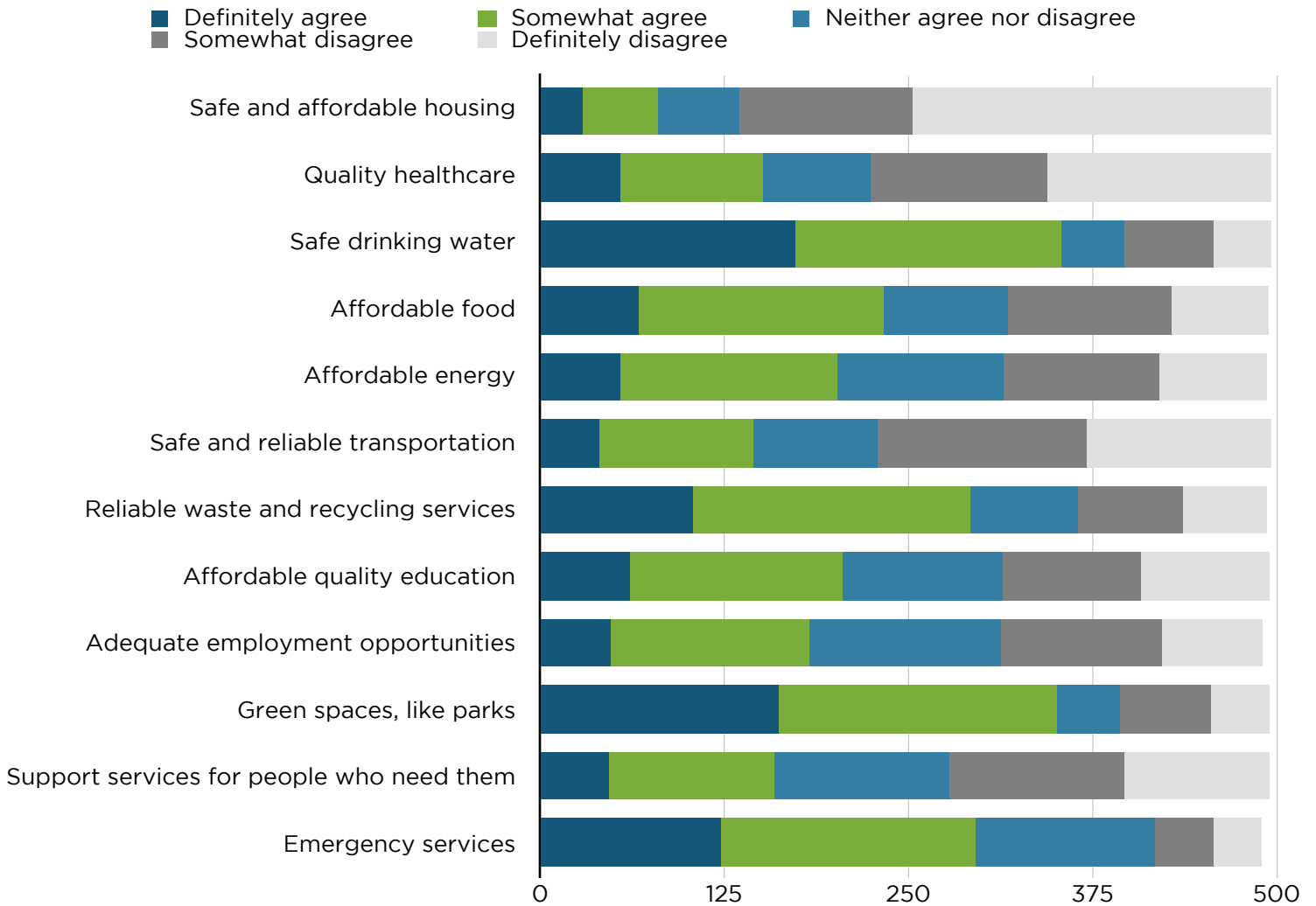
Q7: Thinking of your community in Salem, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Results (cont.)

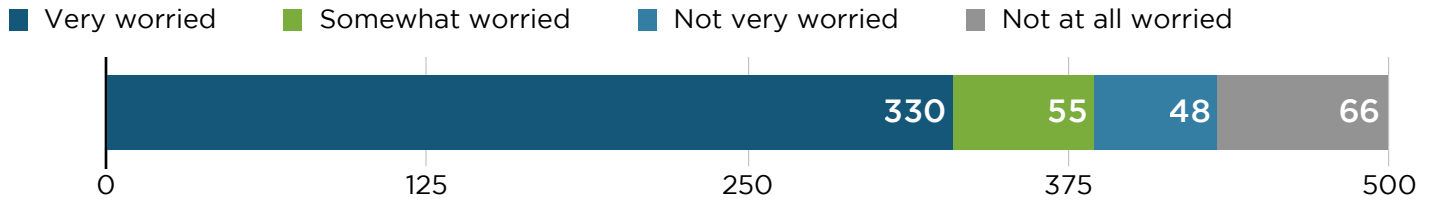
Q8: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Salem?

ALL Salem residents have access to...

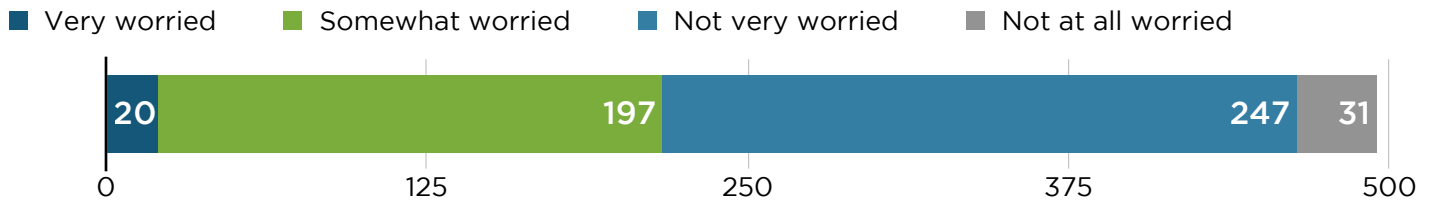


Results (cont.)

Q10: How worried are you about climate change?

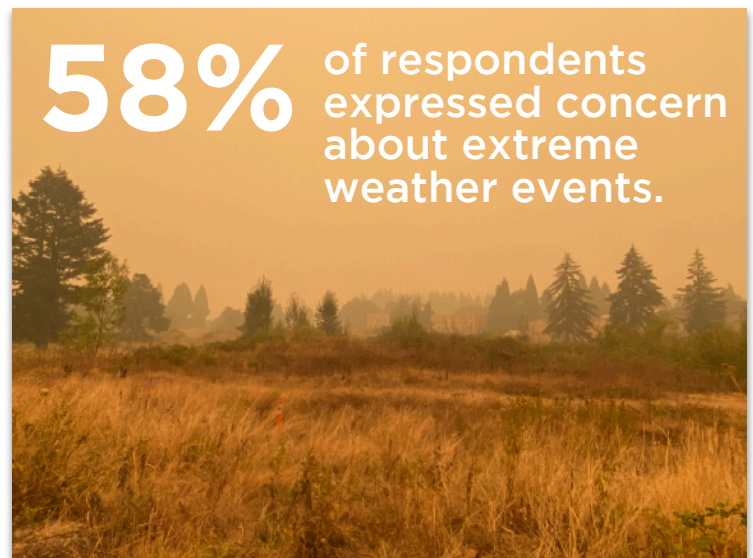


Q12: How worried do you think the average Salem resident is about climate change?



Q11: What worries you most about climate change?

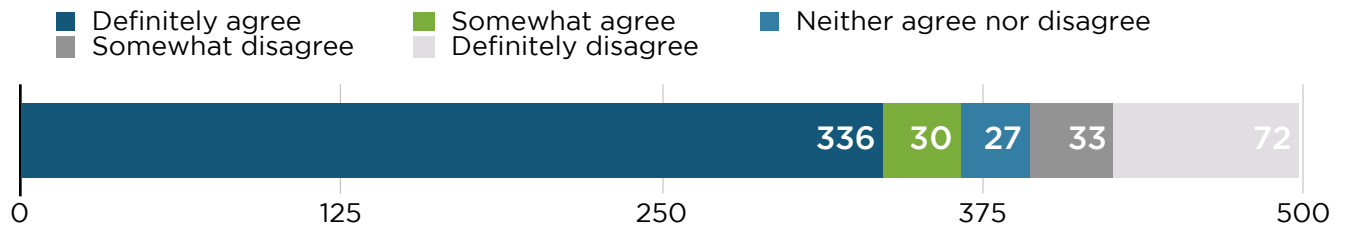
On this open-ended question, respondents were asked to share what worries them most about climate change. Of 455 total responses, the most common (23% of responses) concern was the livability of the planet, including inhospitable conditions that would degrade the quality of life of future generations and force people to migrate away from their homes. Many of these responses included personal concern for children and/or grandchildren. The next most common concern was wildfires. Because a large quantity of responses (264) referenced some type of extreme weather event, with many identifying a specific disaster like flood or drought, each type of event was analyzed as a separate category (see Appendix C for full code list). Wildfires or forest fires was the most commonly referenced weather event, with 101 responses (22%). Access to food and water was the next top concern (82 responses, 18%), followed by responses related to leadership and/or politics (16%). Responses about leadership/politics included references to disagreement over policy at the national and international level, the politicization of climate science, and lack of confidence or trust in government at all levels. Lastly, 60 respondents (13%) expressed concern about the impacts of climate change on wildlife and biodiversity, including worries that some species will go extinct and ecosystems will fail.



Results (cont.)

Q13: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

It is important for Salem to create a Climate Action Plan.



Q14: What do you see as barriers to Salem addressing climate change?

On this open-ended question, respondents were asked to describe the barriers they see as preventing Salem from taking meaningful action on climate change. The top cited barrier (160 responses, 36%) was leadership and/or politics - similar to question 11 (worries), responses often identified lack of political agreement or will to address climate change as a barrier. Respondents noted that politicians either do not understand or have a vested interest in not understanding the threat of climate change, and that there is insufficient government leadership on this issue at all levels.

The second most common response (139 responses, 31%) was a lack of understanding of climate science - or willful climate denial among citizens. This tied in with the leadership/politics category as many responses cited a lack of understanding among political leaders. The third top barrier (107 responses) identified was apathy - many respondents believe that people want to stick with the status quo/“business as usual” and do not want to change their behaviors. The next most common barrier was cost (86 responses, 19%). These responses were concerned about the costs associated with climate solutions and the inability of the city budget or individuals to accommodate those costs.

Top Barriers to Addressing Climate Change



Leadership/politics



Lack of understanding/denial



Apathy/resistance to change



Cost

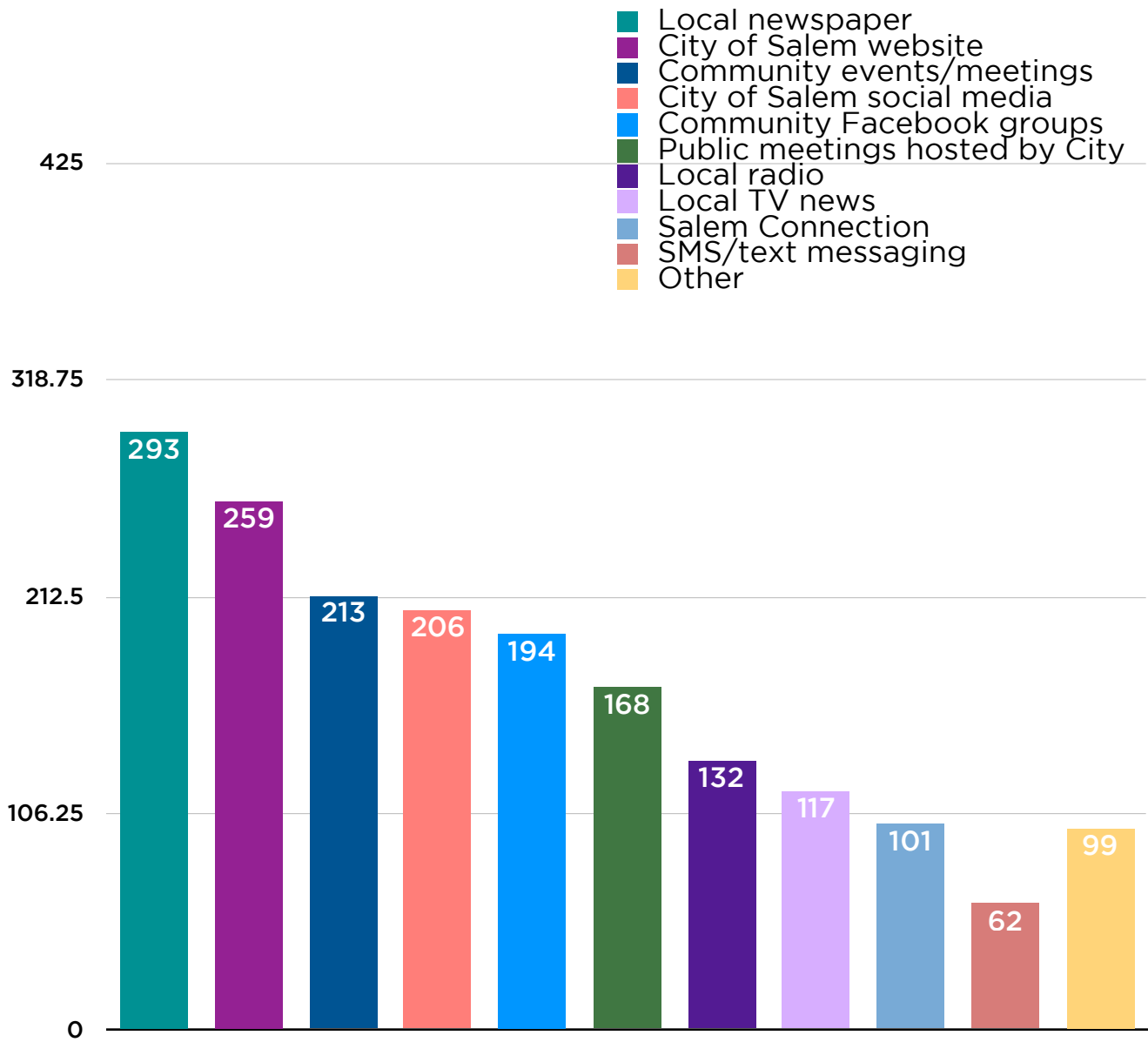


Business interests

Lastly, business interests (i.e., corporate influence on city, regional, or national policies) was the fifth most common barrier (40 responses, 9%). It is important to note that the barrier of business interests was often tied to leadership and politics as well. For a full list of barriers identified in this question, see Appendix D.

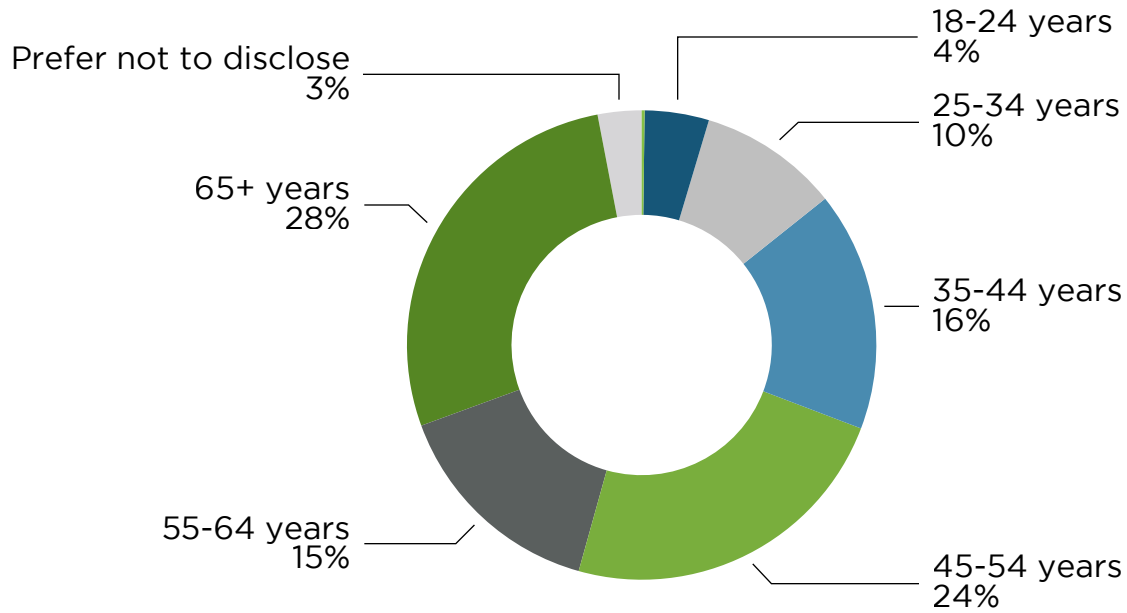
Results (cont.)

Q16: From what sources do you get information about Salem or news regarding your community?

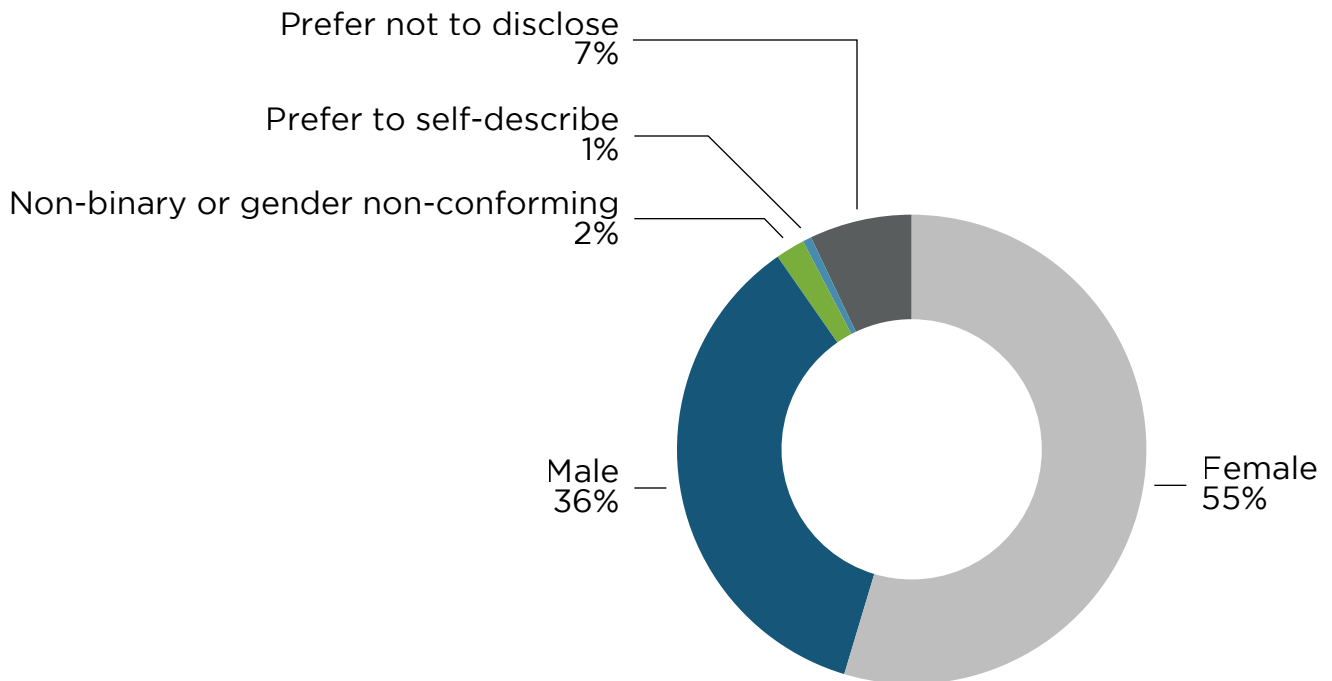


Demographics

Q17: What is your age?

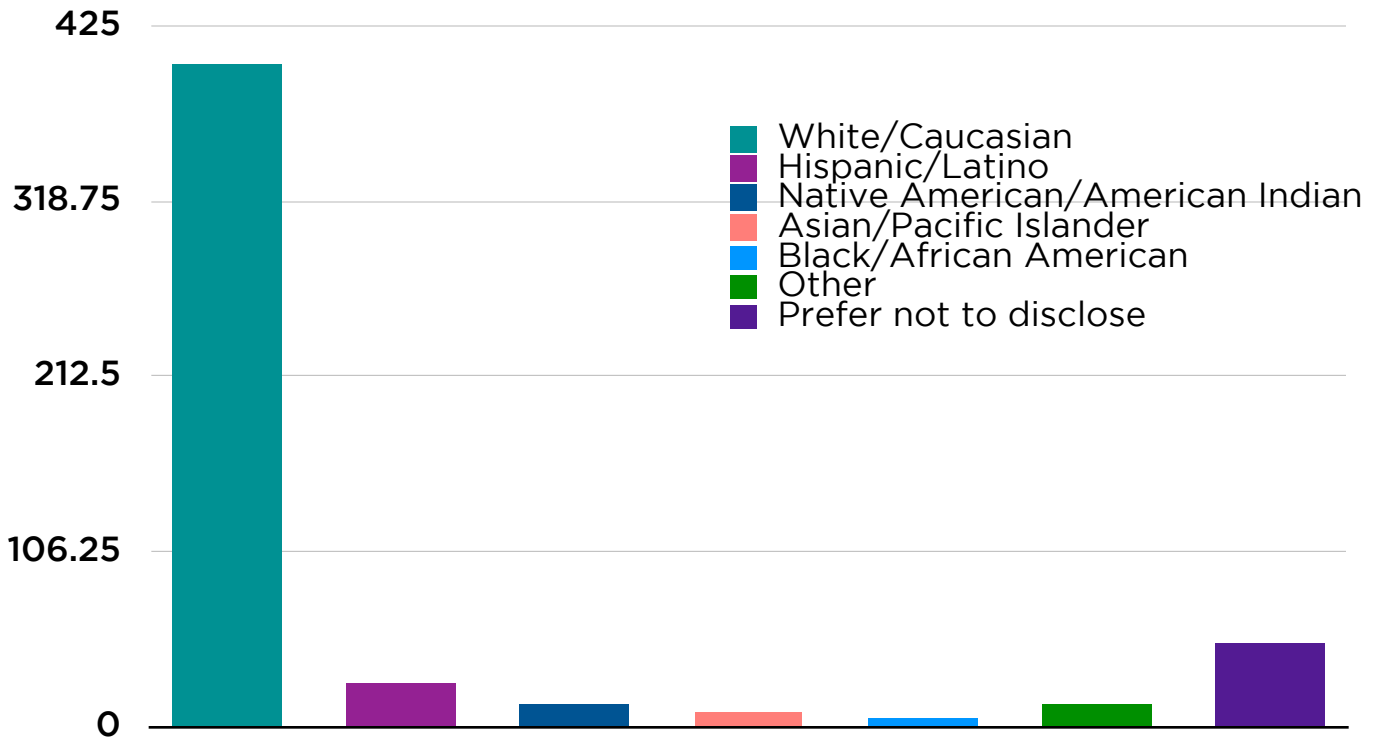


Q18: What is your gender identity?

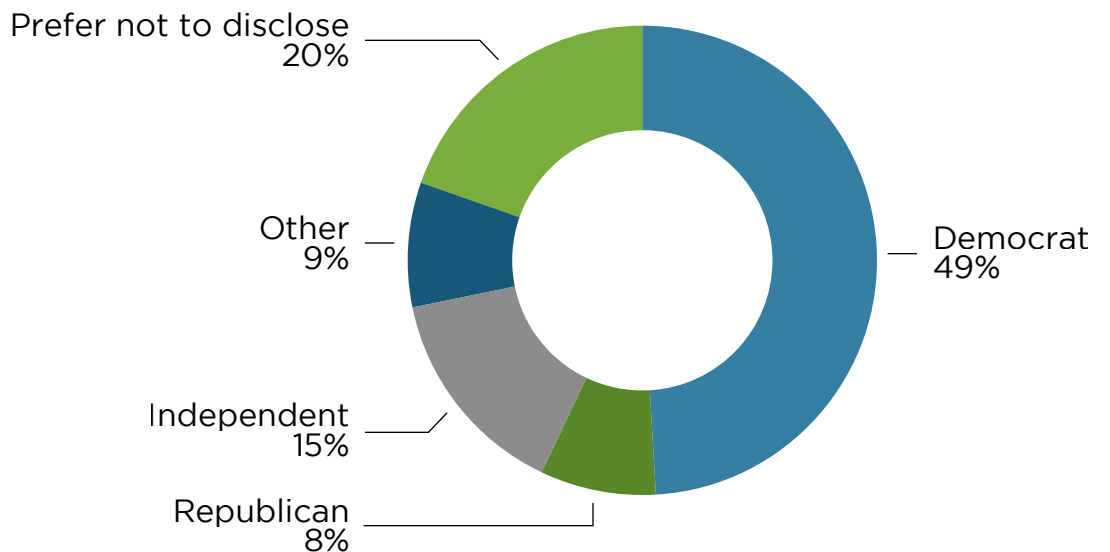


Demographics (cont.)

Q19: What is your race/ethnicity?



Q20: In general, which of the following best describes your political affiliation?



Appendix A: Q5 Full Code List

Code (Positive)	# of references	% of responses
Green spaces/natural environment/ access to mountains & coast	156	36%
Quiet/small town/size of city	70	16%
Vibrant downtown/culture & arts	66	15%
Nice people	54	12%
High level of community involvement	37	9%
Diversity	30	7%
Good place to live/raise family	22	5%
Good schools/library/police & fire	21	5%
Affordable	19	4%
Historic	17	4%
Universities	16	4%
State/hospital jobs	11	3%
Progressive	7	2%
Good transportation infrastructure	7	2%
Conservative (positive)	4	1%
Clean	4	1%
State capital	82	19%

Appendix A: Q5 Full Code List

Code (Negative)	# of references	% of responses
Homelessness/lack of affordable housing	179	41%
Insufficient transportation infrastructure	82	19%
Racism/social justice issues	63	15%
City government issues/lack of leadership	50	12%
Division among residents	44	10%
Struggle to balance growth with adequate/desirable development	42	10%
Crime	34	8%
Conservative/radical right wing (negative)	26	6%
Small - not enough to do	19	4%
Identity crisis	18	4%
Taxes	16	4%
City/police response (negative)	15	3%
Climate/sustainability issues	15	3%
Litter/pollution	15	3%
Not progressive	14	3%
Drugs	12	3%
Poverty	11	3%
Challenges for business	8	2%
Lacks community engagement	7	2%
Liberal (negative)	6	1%
Low education level	5	1%
Negative public perception	5	1%

Appendix B: Q6 Full Code List

Code	# of references	% of responses
More homelessness	138	31%
More vibrant downtown/increased entertainment options and cultural activities	137	31%
More traffic/congestion	127	29%
Growth (neutral)	69	16%
Less affordable housing	45	10%
Less infrastructure/fewer public services	41	9%
Growth (negative)	37	8%
Job/economic loss	34	8%
Less safe	33	8%
Better/more green spaces	32	7%
Hotter summers	26	6%
More diverse	25	6%
More problems with schools	25	6%
More housing/density	24	5%
Job/economic growth	23	5%
More problems with City leadership	20	5%
Less precipitation	19	4%
Better infrastructure	19	4%
More division among residents (including racism)	18	4%
More progressive	15	3%
Growth (positive)	9	2%
Fewer/worsening green spaces	8	2%
Worsening environmental quality (air, water)	7	2%
Increased taxes	5	1%
Higher cost of living	3	1%

Appendix C: Q11 Full Code List

Code	# of references	% of responses
Uninhabitability of planet (includes concern for future generations and climate migration)	106	23%
Wildfires	101	22%
Food/water access	82	18%
Leadership/politics	71	16%
Wildlife/biodiversity impact	60	13%
Extreme weather (non-specific)	54	12%
Drought	44	10%
Government imposition/should not be a priority for Salem government	38	8%
Inadequate solutions	35	8%
Agriculture	34	7%
Air quality	33	7%
Lack of understanding	30	7%
Irreversible damage	28	6%
Extreme heat	27	6%
Sea level rise	25	5%
Financial implications	24	5%
Human apathy/inaction	24	5%
Flooding	22	5%
Storms	16	4%
Environmental injustice	16	4%
Denies existence of climate change	13	3%
Nothing	12	3%
Health impacts	12	3%

Appendix D: Q14 Full Code List

Code	# of references	% of responses
Leadership/politics	160	36%
Lack of understanding/climate denial	139	31%
Apathy/resistance to change	107	24%
Cost	86	19%
Business interests	40	9%
Need to address other priorities	37	8%
Salem can't make a difference	31	7%
Lack of infrastructure	23	5%
Short-term thinking	20	4%
Inadequate solutions	9	2%
Exclusivity of efforts	3	1%