

New England Survey of Renters

Survey Highlights

March 27, 2026

Field Dates: September 12 – October 01, 2024

N = 800 households

Methodology in Brief

The full questionnaire with topline results and detailed methodology disclosure are available on the Stern Civic Engagement Lab website.

Survey design and analysis by Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, Saul I Stern Professor of Civic Engagement and Skip Mark, Associate Professor at the University of Rhode Island, additional analysis was conducted by Damian Maffioletti, PhD Candidate and Research Assistant in the Stern Civic Engagement Lab.

Do you have a question about this poll? If so, reach out to us at spearson@umd.edu.

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Survey Results

- 1. High rent obligations deeply impact the quality of life for renters, and frequently compromise their ability to afford basic necessities.** A significant portion of the renting population faces severe financial pressure from their housing costs. Over half of all renters (54.8%) spend more than 30% of their income on rent, with 19.3% spending over half of their total income on rent. Nearly 1 in 4 renters (24.4%) report "always" or "often" struggling to make rent payments. For low-income households, this figure rises to 32.1%. The cost of housing directly impacts survival; 32.9% of respondents report that rent costs "always" or "often" make it difficult to afford food or healthcare. About a quarter of respondents said they are concerned about facing eviction.
- 2. Renters generally express satisfaction with their locations but have complex relationships with building management.** While 85.1% feel they are treated fairly by management, responsiveness varies. Only 26.5% say management "always" listens to their concerns. Experiences of discrimination by building management are particularly stark, with 23.4% of non-white and 22.4% of low-income renters reporting unfair treatment, in contrast to only 6.7% of high-income renters, underscoring how race and income shape everyday housing and neighborhood experiences. Overall, 26% of renters report having moved at least once because of the way they were treated. Interestingly, there is a high appetite for participatory budgeting: 52.5% of renters said they were "definitely" or "probably" interested in working with management to determine how building budgets are spent.
- 3. Crime was a major concern for renters and perceptions of safety vary greatly by income and ethnicity.** Over 50% of renters consider crime in their area to be "very" or "somewhat" serious. This concern is significantly higher among Non-White respondents (61.2%) compared to White respondents (42.7%). Victimization follows a similar pattern: 16.2% of low-income renters report having been a victim of crime in their current neighborhood compared to only 6.7% of high-income renters. White and non-white respondents show a similar proportion of victimization. These concerns translate into different actions for policing and self-protection. Most renters do not desire a larger police presence and most are satisfied with the current police presence: 64% reported wanting the police presence to remain the same, 22.5% would prefer a larger presence. There was also relatively high approval of the police with 75.9% saying they trust local police to treat them with dignity and respect and 73.5% agreeing with the statement that the local police made them feel safe. However, low-income and non-white residents are more likely to favor a larger police presence and to have taken actions such as installing cameras, using crime-monitoring apps, or contacting officials about crime, reflecting both heightened exposure and adaptation to perceived risk. At the same time, trust in local police and feelings of safety when engaging in everyday activities like walking in the neighborhood tend to be slightly lower among non-white and low-income renters, highlighting a tension between seeking safety and skepticism toward existing security institutions.

4. **Renters feel some connection to their neighborhoods but social capital is low.** Almost 60% of renters reported knowing "some" of their neighbors, but only 5% said they knew all of them. Only 39.6% percent reported having regular face to face conversations with their neighbors. Comfort levels are split regarding physical security; only 36% would feel comfortable leaving a set of keys with a neighbor in an emergency. Social isolation is also a large concern, with 27% of renters reporting they feel lonely "always," "almost always," or "often". And among low income renters, 75% reported feeling lonely at least some of the time, and 35% reporting feeling lonely always or often.
5. **Car access is widespread but accessibility to services remains an issue.** While car access is widespread across the region, it remains significantly uneven. Approximately 71% of renters either own a vehicle or live with someone who does, yet nearly one-quarter (23%) report having no access to a vehicle at all. This mobility gap is most acute among low-income households (31%) and Non-White respondents (27%). Even for those with vehicles, reliability is tied to economic status; while over 96% of car-owning renters describe their vehicles as reliable, low-income respondents are notably more likely to report their cars as only "somewhat reliable" or "unreliable," potentially limiting their mobility. Despite these disparities, overall satisfaction with living locations remains high, with 81% of respondents expressing contentment. General access to essential services—including public transit, grocery stores, schools, and healthcare—is rated between 3.1 and 3.4 on a 4-point scale (where 1 is extremely difficult to access and 4 is extremely easy to access), suggesting that most renters find it relatively easy to reach key amenities. However, the data reveals a substantial minority facing compounded barriers, as low-income renters are both more likely to live without a car and more likely to report greater difficulty accessing these essential services. Moreover, of the services we asked about childcare was by far the most inaccessible.
6. **Renters strongly support a fundamental human right to housing and are interested in working together with landlords to improve building management.** When asked what the "right to adequate housing" should include under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the vast majority of renters prioritize basic survival and physical safety. The highest levels of agreement were for affordable housing (83%) and safe utilities (78%), followed closely by the right to privacy (68%). Interestingly, while a majority also support the inclusion of eviction protections (58%) and housing with access (55%), fewer than half of the respondents—only 44%—believe the definition should encompass participation in housing decisions. Despite this, a significant portion of renters express a strong desire to collaborate with management on spending decisions. Additionally, 53% of respondents are "definitely" or "probably" interested in working with others to determine maintenance budgets, but this figure jumps to 60% when asked about helping determine priorities for their specific home. This high level of interest in "participatory budgeting" is particularly notable among high-income renters: 47% of whom expressed a definite interest in helping determine residence expenditures. Finally, while only 8% of renters are willing to volunteer their labor unconditionally, a much larger group (39%) would be interested in helping maintain their residence if their landlord compensated them for their time and effort.