

CITIZENS' VIEWS ON URBAN REVITALIZATION The Case of Providence, Rhode Island

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Renaissance cities have been widely discussed in the literature on urban development. However, despite scholarly interest in this subject, there has been little systematic research on how citizens feel about so-called "hot" cities and the factors that go into citizen conclusions that a city is doing well. In this paper, we use data from a survey of residents of Providence, Rhode Island and review the political and economic history of the area to assess what affects public opinion about city success, quality of life, and downtown improvement. Our analysis demonstrates that on dimensions such as moving in the right direction, satisfaction with specific services such as police protection is important to public assessments. In other areas, though, such as quality of life, factors such as race relations, street repairs, and political leadership matter more. We conclude with suggestions about what cities that wish to be seen as having "turned the corner" must do in order to bring citizens around to that viewpoint.

Once Providence was dismissed as a factory town with empty mills and exiting population; but in the year 2000 we are justly called a "renaissance city," with evidence everywhere of renewal and rebirth.

—Mayor Vincent "Buddy" Cianci, Budget Address, January 2000

All residents of Providence should share in the pride of being part of the renaissance that is capturing the imagination of our nation.

—Mayor Vincent "Buddy" Cianci

The media have hailed the development of downtown corporate offices, hotels, convention centers, sports stadiums, concert halls, waterfront festival markets, and downtown malls as sure signs that a central city is experiencing an "urban renaissance" (Judd and Swanstrom 1994, 335-66). Newspapers and magazines have carried articles on so-called "renaissance cities." Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and Philadelphia have all been featured

as “comeback cities” and “hot cities.” In such stories, journalists typically interview politicians and business leaders whose accounts are often positive and upbeat. Few of these articles, however, report the views of ordinary citizens.

Providence, Rhode Island’s state capital, has recently received considerable attention in the national press as a “comeback city,” drawing raves for its artful waterfront, quality restaurants, shiny downtown showpieces, and attracting visitors lured by the television show set in (and named for) the city. The *New York Times* observed that “after years of decline, Providence is again becoming an economic and cultural force in New England” (Miller 1999). *National Geographic Traveler* featured the city in a cover story titled “What’s Hot in Providence” (Kostyal 1999). A recent front-page story in *USA Today* proclaimed Providence as the symbol of urban renaissance in America’s medium-sized cities (Soriano 1999). According to *New York Times* journalist Carey Goldberg (2000), Providence is “a national model for how to make a run-down old city hot again.” In 2000, touting its “remarkable rebirth,” “quality of life,” and low housing prices, *Money Magazine* named Providence “the best place to live in the northeast.” As Providence Mayor Vincent Cianci unabashedly asserts, “The headlines say it all” (Cianci 1999a).

The question of whether the kind of revitalization taking place in Providence and other “renaissance” cities has actually benefited city residents has been widely discussed and debated in the literature (see, e.g., Wolman, Ford, and Hill 1994; Levine 1987, 1989; Squires 1989; Fainstein et al. 1986). However, no study has systematically researched citizens’ views of downtown revitalization. In this article, we present a detailed case study of Providence to determine what factors influence citizens’ feelings about “hot cities” or “renaissance cities.” In particular, we are interested in what dimensions of city life contribute to citizens’ sense that their city has experienced a “renaissance.” What role does political leadership play in influencing how residents feel about whether their city is headed in the right direction? How important are citizen views about traditional public services such as schools, police and fire protection, and garbage collection? What about less tangible factors, such as public opinion about race relations and job opportunities? Do demographic qualities affect how residents feel about whether a city has experienced an urban renaissance?

To study citizen opinions about the factors affecting views of urban revitalization, we undertook a random survey of Providence residents. In the cross-sectional survey of city residents, we examine how residents feel about Providence and what impressions guide people’s views on urban revitalization. Later, we undertake a multiple-regression analysis to ascertain what

parts of city life bear the strongest relationship to overall views about Providence. When citizens conclude that a city has “turned around” and experienced a “renaissance,” what factors spark those impressions? Is it the quality of the city’s political leadership? Is it satisfaction with specific city services?

In the next section, we provide a historical and political overview of Providence’s downtown revitalization. For many readers, this section will serve as an introduction to the “new” Providence, as the city has yet to receive attention from urban scholars (but see Rich 2000). Located less than an hour south of Boston and a stone’s throw away from Hartford, Connecticut, Providence’s emergence as a popular designation seems almost incomprehensible. It is a medium-sized city with few great historic moments. For decades, Providence was considered an old, gritty, fading industrial city, reputed to be New England’s organized crime capital. Next we turn to the survey, examining citizens’ overall impressions of Providence’s revitalization, public services, and political leadership. This is followed by an analysis of the factors that shape citizens’ views on three dimensions of urban revitalization—city direction, quality of life, and downtown improvement. We conclude with some observations about the multidimensional nature of urban revitalization.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PROVIDENCE: THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Providence is one of the oldest cities in the country. Founded in 1636 by Roger Williams who left Massachusetts to escape religious persecution, Providence built its economy on manufacturing and textiles (McLoughlin 1986). At the turn of the twentieth century, Providence was, next to Philadelphia, the largest woolen-producing city in America. The city ranked third in the manufacture of machinery and machine tools and was considered the jewelry manufacturing capital of the nation.

The early decades of the twentieth century found the city on the move. Providence’s skyline expanded with the construction of the Union Trust Building, the twin-towered Hospital Trust, the Biltmore Hotel, and the Industrial Trust Building, still the city’s tallest skyscraper. Providence quickly eclipsed Newport as the state’s financial, cultural, and political center, dictating Rhode Island’s “most important decisions,” setting “basic policies,” and turning Rhode Island into a “city-state” (McLoughlin 1986, 125-26).

The textile and manufacturing money helped construct elegant, stately, Victorian homes on the city’s eastside, along Benefit Street, near Brown University and the central business district. For these residents, early twentieth-century Providence “was not only a very comfortable, pleasant place to live,

but had an active social life and a rich cultural milieu in terms of theater, opera, vaudeville, and musical concerts" (McLoughlin 1986, 216).

Thousands of immigrants came to Providence looking for economic opportunities. The Irish, French Canadians, and Italians came in huge numbers during the latter part of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. A smaller group of Russians (mostly Jews), Scandinavians, Portuguese, Cape Verdeans, and African-Americans made their way into the city. Between 1900 and 1910, Providence's population rose by nearly 28%, from 175,567 to 224,326. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the city's population continued to rise, peaking to 253,000 in 1940.

The new ethnic groups "played at first little social or political part" in Providence (McLoughlin 1986, 126). A small group of rich Yankees presided over the city, despite the fact that by 1920, 71% of the population was of foreign stock (Cornwell 1960, 1961). Property requirements for naturalized citizens were added to the state constitution in 1843, restricting suffrage. In 1888, these restrictions were dropped for state elections and mayoral elections but continued for voting for city councilors. Providence's strong city council/weak mayor form of government allowed the Yankee Republicans to control the city council and make all the important city decisions, although the bulk of the city's residents were Democratic. In 1928, a state constitutional amendment eliminated the property requirement, finally giving the Democrats control of Rhode Island's major city governments, including Providence. Control of the formal machinery of government shifted to the Irish (Cornwell 1960). A 1940 charter revision increased the mayor's appointive and administrative authority, creating a strong mayoralty and a weakened unicameral city council. Armed with patronage, the Irish-led Democrats built a strong political machine, gaining the allegiance of Italians, French Canadians, Jews, and African-Americans and dominating city politics for the next 35 years.

PROVIDENCE IN TRANSITION

The post-World War II era was a period of demographic and economic transition for Providence. The exodus to suburbia, a national phenomenon, affected Providence. During the 1940s, according to U.S. census data, the city's population fell nearly 2%. The decline accelerated and continued into the 1950s and 1960s. Between 1950 and 1960, the city's population fell by 16.6%—from 248,674 to 207,498—as residents flocked to nearby suburban communities. By 1980, only 156,804 residents called Providence home. Heavy population losses occurred in South Providence as many Irish residents

moved to adjacent towns of Cranston and Warwick. Politically, the chief beneficiary of this population shift was the city's large Italian community, who replaced the Irish as the city's dominant political force. In 1975, Vincent "Buddy" Cianci became the city's first Italian-American mayor.

Since the 1970s, the city has experienced an influx of new residents. The city now has a growing Latino community, many from Puerto Rico and increasingly from Columbia, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. In 1990, Latinos comprised 15% of the population, slightly larger than the city's African-American population. Asians now make up about 6% of Providence's population; the vast majority are immigrants from Southeastern Asia—Cambodia and Vietnam. Many of these new residents have ended up in South Providence, Elmwood, Olneyville, and the West End, helping push the city's population up slightly from 156,804 in 1980 to 160,728 in 1990. Meanwhile, the city's African-American community has grown absolutely and relatively throughout the postwar period, from 8,304 in 1950 to 23,828 in 1990—an increase of 187%. The proportion of blacks to the total population rose from 3% in 1950 to 14.8% in 1990. For African-Americans, these demographic changes translated into political gains. Blacks first gained representation on the city council in 1969. In 2000, there were two African-Americans on the city council. Six blacks from Providence serve in the state legislature, including a state senator. Combined, the Hispanic and Asian populations slightly outnumber the city's African-American population, but "blacks are better organized politically," having arrived in Providence "during an era of strong parties and highly developed patronage systems" (Rich 2000, 208-9). In 1998, Providence's growing Latino community made political gains, winning a seat on the city council and the state legislature.

In addition to these major demographic changes, Providence underwent significant economic changes after World War II. For example, the nearby Walsh-Kaiser Shipyard, which employed more than 21,000 workers in 1944, employed fewer than 350 workers at the end of the war. Textile industries moved to cities in the southern United States or shut down completely. Olneyville, for example, was home to a number of textile-related businesses, including the massive Atlantic Mills. Once the industries moved out, the Olneyville neighborhood was devastated. Across the city, manufacturing plants and mills closed or moved, including Brown and Sharpe Manufacturing, Silver Spring Bleaching and Dyeing Company, Wanskuck Company, Rhode Island Locomotive Works, and the Nicholson File Company. Thousands of jobs were lost and never replaced. From 1950 to 1975, manufacturing jobs in the state fell from 125,000 to 109,000. Many of these jobs were located in Providence.

The only major building program undertaken by the city in the 1950s and the 1960s was the construction of seven low-income housing projects (nearly 4,000) units and housing facilities for the elderly. Significant downtown construction was light and sporadic. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, retail department stores in the city center closed, succumbing to competition from suburban malls. By the mid-1970s, Providence was sagging, the best of its manufacturing and retail business gone, along with many of its affluent and middle-class citizens.

DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT IN THE CAPITAL CITY

The early 1970s marked a sense of urgency, energizing civic and public leaders to work toward revitalizing the city's central core. The Nixon administration's decision to close the Navy shipyard in nearby Newport, rising gasoline prices, and record unemployment were major events that jump-started Providence's downtown redevelopment efforts. The first major effort was the construction of a downtown civic center, completed in 1973. With strong support from Mayor Joseph Doorley, Rhode Island's governor, and civic and business leaders, voters approved two bond referenda totaling \$11 million to help finance the civic center. Civic leaders claimed that the civic center would become the keystone of a New Providence.

Other significant downtown projects followed. A few months after the official opening of the civic center, the Trinity Repertory Company, an award-winning regional theater company, opened the doors of the newly renovated downtown Majestic Theater. Originally opened in 1917 as a vaudeville house, the Majestic fell on hard times after suburbanization left many downtown buildings empty. Today, the theater has an annual budget of \$5.2 million, employs 130 artistic and administrative staff, generates more than \$20 million in economic activity each year, and serves as one of the central points for the city's large arts community. The construction and opening in 1974 of the Rhode Island Hospital Ambulatory Patient Center and the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Tower (the state's largest office building) signaled that Providence's embryonic renaissance was gaining steam.

Two key events in 1974 would accelerate the tempo of Providence's downtown revitalization. First, to provide focused corporate involvement and resources to the short-term and long-term challenges facing the city's downtown area, the Providence Foundation, a nonprofit organization comprising the chief executive officers and top managers of some of the region's leading businesses—Fleet Bank of Rhode Island, Narragansett Electric,

Gilbane Properties, The Providence Journal, CVS Pharmacy, Textron, Providence Washington Insurance, Bell Atlantic, and others—was formed. Providence Foundation leaders proposed downtown projects and worked to make them happen. As a significant business group, the Providence Foundation has provided credit, technical expertise, in-depth analyses of problems, prestigious endorsements, donations, and organizational support for an array of downtown projects and programs. As Stone (1989) and others (see Elkin 1987; Orr and Stoker 1996) have shown elsewhere, the downtown business elite in Providence has played a leading role in the city's "comeback."

The other crucial event in 1974 was the election of the energetic Vincent Cianci as mayor. In his first inaugural address, Cianci called for a "new beginning" and a new "spirit of adventure and excitement" for the city's downtown, its neighborhood, and waterfront. Using the formal authority of Providence's strong-mayor system, the young Cianci (he was only 33 years old) forged a powerful mayoral-centered regime and, working closely with city's business leaders, worked to transform downtown Providence.

With unchallenged control over most aspects of the city's political system, Cianci negotiated tax breaks for prospective investors, condemned properties for redevelopment, and generally made deals with corporate entrepreneurs. During his first 10 years in office, Mayor Cianci concentrated on expanding and leveraging Providence's share of federal urban development action grants (UDAG) and community development block grants (CDBG), using the federal dollars for projects ranging from parks to community development (Rich 2000). From 1975 until 1982, more than \$600 million of CDBG funds, plus federal, state, and private-sector dollars, had been pumped into downtown and the city's neighborhoods. For example, in 1975, the Biltmore Hotel, which had served for decades as the city's grand downtown hotel, closed its doors. The hotel was operating at 20% occupancy and was in serious need of renovations. Resisting suggestions to transform the hotel into housing for the elderly, Mayor Cianci secured a \$3 million low-interest loan from the federal government and convinced the city council to provide a 10-year tax break for the hotel's new investors. The 245-room hotel reopened in February 1979, restored to its original grandeur, and remains a center of the city's downtown activity.

Union Station and the old Loew's Theater were restored. Davol Square, an old industrial complex, was transformed into a modern marketplace and office center. South Main Street, a commercial strip of restaurants and boutiques in the center of the Rhode Island School of Design, was substantially refurbished. By the early 1980s, the future of Providence appeared to be taking shape. Service industries were increasing. Banks, insurance companies, and hospitals and health care corporations were beginning to dominate the

local economy. Providence was finally positioning itself to survive in the postindustrial economy.

FILLING THE VOID: THE CORPORATE COMMUNITY AND THE EXIT OF MAYOR CIANCI

In 1984, just as Providence's redevelopment regime was gaining traction, Cianci resigned—forced out of office after physically attacking a man he accused of having an affair with his wife. He pleaded “no contest” to assault charges and was given probation. For many city residents, especially Providence's large Italian community, Mayor Cianci was simply defending his honor. Across the city, many believed that the optimism sparked by Providence's downtown renaissance outweighed the popular mayor's crime. Meanwhile, Providence's municipal government was hit by a big corruption scandal. “Cianci was never charged, but thirty members of his former administration were indicted on charges of extortion, larceny, and conspiracy” (Rich 2000, 203).

After Cianci's resignation, Joseph Paolino, Jr., city council president, ascended to the mayor's office and won election in his own right in 1986. Meanwhile, the business community continued to pursue its downtown revitalization agenda. The Providence Foundation, the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, and key corporate leaders such as Joseph DiStefano, president and general counsel for the Providence and Worcester Railroad, became key figures in mapping Providence's comeback. As Rich (2000) observed, “A broad array of economic leaders was behind the redevelopment plans for the city.”

In 1989, city leaders purchased a large parcel near LaSalle Square for the construction of new a convention center. With 45,000 square feet of exhibition space and parking for more than 2,000 cars, civic leaders hoped the new convention center could put Providence in a position to compete as a “mid-market” convention site, helping push the city as a place for tourists. In addition, civic leaders hoped the new convention center would encourage visitors to eat, shop, and stay in downtown Providence. After a consultant report suggested that downtown lacked enough hotel rooms to support the convention hall—and efforts to solicit a private company to build a hotel adjacent to the proposed convention center failed—business leaders successfully lobbied the state government to help finance the construction of the convention center and an adjacent hotel. Today, the 363-room, full-service Westin hotel stands high above the city's skyline—connected by an elevated pedestrian walkway

to the convention center—as a physical manifestation of Providence’s revitalization.

The other major downtown projects undertaken during this period were moving the railroad tracks underground and rerouting the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers. The two rivers meandered through the city’s downtown but were covered in the 1940s by huge slabs of concrete, part of an ill-conceived plan to enclose the polluted rivers and ease automobile traffic congestion. Providence once had a place in the record books as home to the world’s widest bridge. Many leaders believed that downtown could benefit from the ambiance of a natural waterfront. The railroad tracks were considered a major hindrance for future downtown projects, taking up valuable land that could be redeveloped. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, with significant financial support from the federal government, parts of the railroad tracks were rerouted and put underground. The two rivers were cleaned up, slightly rerouted, and the blocks of concrete that covered them lifted. Where once railroad tracks ran along a weedy right-of-way is today a riverwalk allowing pedestrians to stroll both sides of the rivers. The rivers are now the central part of downtown, complemented by new bridges, walkways, a stone amphitheater, and Waterplace Park, where visitors come to dine and shop. Rerouting the rivers and moving the railroad tracks underground opened large parcels for further development. The huge multistory Citizens One Building and the Providence Place Mall, a \$400 million downtown, upscale mall and the biggest construction project in Rhode Island history, sit where the railroad tracks once stood. “The mold for the New Providence was being set and all that was needed was a salesman. That salesman was found when Buddy Cianci reentered politics and took over once again as mayor” (Rich 2000, 203-4). After a judge ruled that his “no contest” plea was not a conviction and under Rhode Island he could serve as mayor, Cianci ran as an independent in 1990 and won a closely contested three-way contest for mayor. He was reelected in 1994 and 1998, the latter time without opposition.

PROVIDENCE RENAISSANCE: ACT II

During his second stint as mayor, Cianci did not lose his appetite for downtown projects, large or small. He concentrated on attracting residents and businesses to move into the downtown area by offering incentives to develop abandoned buildings. He successfully lobbied the legislature to provide income tax and sales tax breaks for artists who live and work in the refurbished upper-floor loft and studio spaces in downtown Providence. New

Englanders come from surrounding cities to dine at one of Providence's many appealing restaurants. City government has played a part in the city's restaurant scene through a model restaurant loan program. In 1998, a downtown ice skating rink opened, with a surface twice the size of the one at New York's Rockefeller Center and fully funded by the private sector. Investors have committed to constructing four new hotels in downtown Providence, including a 370-room Marriott.

More large-scale projects are under way. A state bond issue won voter approval in November 2000 to help fund the rerouting of an interstate highway that currently cuts through the downtown area. The relocation of Interstate 195 will open access to more than 60 acres of land for riverfront development. Work is already under way on the second leg of the Providence riverwalk, and the city is preparing a new wave of waterfront projects, including Heritage Harbor, the \$50-million Rhode Island history museum due to open in 2002. Ground breaking is expected at the 140,000 square foot festival marketplace, including a market and a multiscreen cinema complex near the downtown mall. In the arts and entertainment district, city officials are negotiating with an offshoot of Robert Redford's Sundance Institute to build a multiscreen arts and cinema complex near the Providence Performing Arts Center. Finally, in Downcity, Providence's "old downtown" area (just south of the current redevelopment activity), there are plans to continue the renovation and conversion of empty office buildings into artists' lofts. A coalition of nonprofits and business leaders is exploring ways to finance Downcity business renovation, including establishing a multimillion-dollar revolving fund that would help cover the costs (Van Siclen 2000).

Providence leaders' efforts to revitalize the city's downtown area have not only translated into rave headlines; an expanded tourist trade has also resulted. Table 1 shows that since 1996, the number of conventions, a central component of downtown revitalization in all cities, has risen. Bookings, room nights, and convention proposals all have increased. The number of bookings at the Rhode Island Convention Center has risen steadily—from 19 to 46. Also telling is the number of room nights, which has more than doubled over the past 5 years. Similarly, the number of convention proposals increased from 96 in 1997, peaking to 157 in 1999. In March 2000, Amnesty International—USA held its national convention in Providence. The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Fraternal Order of Police will hold conventions in 2002 and 2003, respectively.

In the remainder of this article, we report the views of city residents. Although there is little doubt that Providence has come a long way from its depths of recession in the mid-1970s, it is not clear what residents think about the city's revitalization and what factors help shape their opinions. In March

TABLE 1: Convention Business in Providence, 1996-2000

	<i>Bookings</i>	<i>Room Nights</i>	<i>Proposals</i>
1996	19	51,237	NA
1997	39	79,638	96
1998	35	80,212	121
1999	39	106,920	157
2000	46	92,022	NA

SOURCE: Providence/Warwick Convention Bureau, "Meeting Convention Sales Report," May 2000.

NOTE: The figures are for fiscal years beginning in July of each year. The 2000 figures cover only July 1999 through March 2000.

1999, we conducted a random telephone survey of 324 Providence residents. The survey was broadly representative of the city's demographic diversity. The sample slightly overrepresented nonwhites and those with a college education but generally was within the margin of error in terms of the city's demographic composition (see Table 2). The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 5.5%. Finally, we compiled data on the demographic background of residents to have controls for factors such as gender, sex, age, race, education, and income. Because it is known that people of various backgrounds have different life experiences, we wanted to see whether views of a city's "hotness" were affected by demographic factors.

CITIZENS' OVERALL VIEWS ON URBAN REVITALIZATION

We wanted to get a sense of the citizens' overall impressions of Providence, their opinion of the city's revitalization. We relied on three measures of revitalization. First, given that the city's downtown revitalization is relatively recent and ongoing, we asked the respondents whether they believed the city was headed in the right direction. Specifically, we asked, "Generally speaking, would you say things in Providence are going in the right direction, or have they gotten off on the wrong track?" Our second measurement of Providence's revitalization is based on the respondent's subjective perception of his or her "quality of life" as a resident of the city. We asked, "How satisfied are you with the overall quality of life in Providence? Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not very satisfied?" Third, we wanted to gauge Providence residents' opinion of the downtown improvement efforts. We asked, "Compared to five years ago, would you say downtown Providence looks better off, about the same, or worse off?"

TABLE 2: Demographics of Survey Sample and General Population

	<i>Sample (%)</i>	<i>Population (%)</i>
Sex		
Male	45	48
Female	55	52
Race		
White	62	70
Nonwhite	38	30
Education		
8th grade or less	5	16
Some high school	14	21
High school graduate	22	25
Some college	25	12
College graduate	19	12
Postgraduate work	12	10
Age		
18-24	25	18
25-34	20	18
35-44	15	12
45-54	13	8
55-64	9	7
65+	15	14

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990).

Table 3 shows the results of the Providence citizens' overall impression of the city's revitalization. We found broad support for the notion that Providence has done an admirable job of revitalizing itself. More than 70% of those interviewed reported that they believed things in Providence were headed in the "right direction," but only 10% thought it was "off on the wrong track." A similar percentage of respondents felt that downtown Providence was "better off" in 1999 than five years previously. Only 3% reported that downtown Providence was "worse off."

Political scientist Mark Schneider (1976, 300) has shown that subjective life quality is related to such "aspects of personal life as aspirations, expectations, happiness, and satisfaction." When asked about their satisfaction with the overall quality of life in Providence, 30% said they were "very satisfied," 54% felt "somewhat satisfied," 13% were "not very satisfied," and 3% expressed no opinion.

In short, it is not just positive press or the pronouncement of local boosters that marks the sense of urban revitalization in Providence. Citizens themselves report that the city has turned around and is headed in the right direction. Providence residents, however, appear to be less enthusiastic about their

TABLE 3: Three Dimensions of Urban Revitalization (in percentages)

City direction	
Right direction	72
Wrong track	10
Don't know/no answer	11
Satisfaction with life quality	
Very satisfied	30
Somewhat satisfied	54
Not very satisfied	13
Don't know/no answer	3
Downtown improvement	
Looks better off	72
Looks about the same	9
Looks worse off	3
Don't know/no answer	16

SOURCE: Brown University Survey, March 6-8, 1999.

quality of life. This is an interesting finding. City residents appear to be exposed to an objectively revitalized downtown but subjectively feel that the quality of their personal life experiences is modest at best. This finding raises the issue of the relationship between downtown revitalization and residents' perception of their quality of life.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND CITIZEN ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICES

There is a longstanding literature showing that city residents consider traditional public services—schools, police and fire protection, garbage collection—foremost when rating a city's quality of life. Providing services always has been a major function of local government (Morgan and England 1996, 178-210). Robert Lineberry (1977, 12-13) observed that "public services are the grist of urban politics. . . . Virtually all the rawest nerves of urban political life are touched by the distribution of urban service burdens and benefits." Bryan Jones and his associates (1980, 2) maintain that "delivering services is the primary function of municipal government." Decisions about city service agencies, they add, "comprise the bulk of the benefits provided to citizens provided by their governments." Richard C. Rich (1982, 2) has observed that "public services provided by U.S. cities *do* shape the quality of life."

In one of largest surveys assessing the quality of life in local communities (more than 7,000 local residents were surveyed), the public's evaluation of how well local government provided basic services was a key part of the

TABLE 4: Providence Citizens' Assessment of City Services (in percentages)

<i>City Services</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Only Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Police	15	48	23	12
Fire	32	49	7	1
Garbage	19	52	20	6
Street repairs	6	21	31	40
Public transportation	11	44	17	7
Public schools	6	23	28	21

respondents' evaluation (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] 1978; but see Stipak 1979). "The public's evaluation of how well these services are being provided, if at all, in their neighborhood is an indication both of the quality of life in that particular place as well as a measure of citizen satisfaction with local government" (HUD 1978, 406).

In our survey, Providence residents were asked to assess the quality of municipal services. We asked, "How would you rate the following Providence city services (police protection, fire services, garbage collection, street repairs, public transportation, and public schools): excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" In other words, we examine the tie between services such as police, fire, and garbage collection and overall satisfaction with the city.

Table 4 displays the results of Providence residents' assessment of municipal services. The activity receiving the highest percentage of excellent or good ratings was fire services (81%), garbage collection (71%), police protection (63%), public transportation (55%), public schools (29%), and street repairs (27%). The wide range of views reported here demonstrates that citizens are capable of drawing sharp distinctions across different aspects of city life. The nearly 60 percentage point variation in positive ratings shows that some services are viewed quite positively, but others garnered poor ratings.

Although the results are not reported in Table 4, the survey found wide variation among various demographic groups in the city. For example, police protection was rated more highly by whites (70% excellent or good) than nonwhites (49% excellent or good). Nonwhites (36%) rated public schools more positively than whites (24%). There also were differences in ratings by neighborhood. The area giving the police the highest ratings was the working-class area of Mt. Pleasant/Elmhurst (79%), followed by Downtown/Federal Hill/Smith Hill (75%) and the West End/Silver Lake/Hartford/Olneyville/Manton (69%). On the more affluent and largely white East Side, 66% rated the police positively, but in the city's poorest section and largely minority neighborhoods of South Providence and Elmwood, only 46% gave the police excellent or good ratings. The area giving public schools the lowest

TABLE 5: Providence Citizens' Assessment of City Life (in percentages)

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Only Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Restaurants	31	43	13	4
Employment	10	32	31	15
Taxes	4	18	32	32
Race relations	2	32	38	15

ratings was the East Side (16% excellent or good), followed by South Providence/Elmwood (23%). On street repairs, the area giving city services the highest ratings was Mt. Pleasant/Elmhurst (34%), followed by Downtown/Federal Hill/Smith Hill (33%), the West End/Silver Lake/Hartford/Olneyville/Manton (26%), the East Side (25%), and South Providence/Elmwood (19%).

RESTAURANTS, TAXES, AND JOBS IN A "RENAISSANCE" CITY

It is often argued that factors such as employment opportunities, taxes, and the state of local race relations influence how people feel about the quality of life in urban America (HUD 1978; Judd and Swanstrom 1996; Peterson 1981). In the 1978 HUD survey, a large majority of the respondents reported that "cities" had the "best restaurants" when they were growing up. When asked whether large cities still provided the best restaurants, "smaller numbers, but majorities nevertheless, say that large cities still have the best" restaurants. Good restaurants are a major draw to cities.

Mayor Cianci and other local promoters take pride in Providence's dining-out experience and point to it as an indicator of the city's "renaissance." As noted, city hall has encouraged the development of new restaurants through a low-interest loan program. Providence's restaurant scene also benefits from its ties to Johnson & Wales University, a nationally renowned culinary arts school headquartered in downtown Providence. The city's reputation for fine cuisine was recently featured in the *New York Times* (Miller 1999). When we asked Providence citizens to rate the city's restaurants as an aspect of the quality of life in the city, 74% responded that they were either excellent or good (see Table 5).

Part of the logic of urban growth politics is that the creation of jobs in the central city will have a broad impact on the quality of life (Peterson 1981). The existence of employment opportunities is a major draw to a city and

affects how residents feel about a city. When we asked city residents to rate employment opportunities in Providence, only 10% characterized them as "excellent," 32% as "good," and 46% as "only fair" or "poor." Providence residents are not as sanguine about employment prospects as the promoters of economic growth are.

We hypothesized that the nature of race relations affects how citizens feel about a city. Experiences across the nation suggest that high levels of racial tensions can hamper revitalization efforts (see Widick 1989; Levine 1974). Cities where race relations are more harmonious are likely to do a better job at becoming "hot" (see Stone 1989). As indicated, Providence is increasingly becoming a multiethnic, multiracial city. We wished to ascertain Providence residents' views on race relations. As Table 5 shows, only 2% of the respondents rated race relations in Providence as "excellent." A majority of citizens (53%) characterized the city's race relations as "only fair" or "poor." Our data suggest that Rich's (2000, 208) speculation that the city's growing racial diversity poses "political problems for the city" in the future has some bases of support.

Paul Peterson (1981), in his influential work *City Limits*, reminds us of the impact high taxes can have on a central city. Higher taxes reduce a city's competitiveness as an attractive site for commerce, industry, and residents. When asked to rate taxes as an aspect of life in Providence, a large majority of Providence citizens—64%—gave a negative response (see Table 5).

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND URBAN REVITALIZATION

"Leadership is not a process of presiding over what is inevitable. It is about making something happen that, given the ordinary course of events, would not occur" (Stone, Orr, and Imbroscio 1991, 236). It generally is believed that the quality of political leadership influences how residents feel about the overall direction and quality of urban existence. Local observers in Providence have noted that Mayor Cianci has used his formal and informal leadership to transform a decaying, old textile city into a city of national prominence.

Strong leaders and innovative vision should make city dwellers feel better about a locality and lead them to give the city high marks in terms of urban revitalization (see Hollis 1999). Because Providence has a strong-mayor system and Mayor Cianci claims credit for being the primary architect of the city's turnaround, we asked citizens, "How would you rate the job Buddy Cianci is doing as mayor—excellent, good, fair, or poor?" In line with the

generally positive press Mayor Cianci has received throughout the 1990s, his political leadership earned very favorable ratings. Seventy-seven percent thought he was doing an excellent or good job, 14% believed his job performance was only fair, 3% felt it was poor, and 6% had no opinion. Whites (83%) were more likely to view him positively than nonwhites (65%). Women (78%) were slightly more likely than men (74%) were to be positive about Cianci's performance. In terms of age, Cianci was rated most favorably by those age 65 or older and 45 to 64 (82% each), compared to 75% for those ages 25 to 44 and 69% for those ages 18 to 24. New arrivals (those living in Providence five years or less) rated Cianci almost as positively (75%) compared to those who have been in the city 20 years or more (78% excellent or good).

EXPLAINING CITIZEN VIEWS OF PROVIDENCE'S REVITALIZATION

We have established that citizens hold favorable opinions about city revitalization but have quite divided views regarding a range of city services and aspects of city life. In general, they feel more positively about the city's political leadership and services such as fire and police than qualities such as the public schools, taxes, and street repairs. The unanswered question is, What parts of city life bear the strongest relationship to overall views about Providence? When citizens conclude that a city has turned around and become revitalized, what sparks those impressions? Is it the quality of the political leadership? Is it satisfaction with specific services? Is it less tangible qualities, such as race relations, city schools, or taxes? To examine those questions, we undertook regression analyses of our three dimensions of urban revitalization: city direction, quality of life, and downtown improvement. Table 6 reports the results, and it is clear that different qualities explain various aspects of citizen reactions.

In the model for citizen views about the city being on the "right" or "wrong track," the factors that bore the strongest relationship to city direction were ratings of police protection, sex, age, and race. Residents who felt police protection was good were more likely to feel the city was headed in the right direction. The same was true for men, young people, and whites. Conversely, factors such as political leadership, taxes, and nightlife bore no significant relationship to city direction.

Providence's resuscitation from a gritty industrial city into a revitalized tourist attraction of national prominence is an ongoing enterprise. A large majority of respondents in our survey believed the city was moving in the right direction. In general, it is clear that police protection was most crucial in

TABLE 6: Determinants of Citizen Views About Urban Revitalization

	<i>City Direction</i>	<i>Quality of Life</i>	<i>Downtown Improvement</i>
<i>City services</i>			
Police protection	.08 (.04)*	.03 (.08)	-.08 (.07)
Fire services	-.04 (.05)	.04 (.09)	-.02 (.08)
Garbage collection	.00 (.04)	.10 (.08)	.04 (.07)
Street repairs	.03 (.03)	.14 (.07)*	.00 (.06)
Public transportation	-.04 (.04)	-.07 (.08)	.07 (.07)
Public schools	-.01 (.04)	-.04 (.07)	.15 (.06)*
<i>City life</i>			
Restaurants/nightlife	.00 (.04)	.06 (.07)	-.03 (.06)
Employment possibilities	.02 (.04)	.05 (.07)	.12 (.07)
Taxes	-.02 (.03)	.08 (.07)	.07 (.06)
Race relations	.06 (.04)	.22 (.08)**	.07 (.07)
<i>Political leadership</i>			
Mayor's performance	.03 (.04)	-.01 (.08)	.15 (.07)*
<i>Demographics</i>			
Sex	.14 (.06)**	-.09 (.11)	.08 (.10)
Age	.05 (.02)**	.07 (.04)*	.04 (.03)
Race	.15 (.06)**	.08 (.12)	.11 (.11)
Education	-.04 (.02)	-.02 (.04)	-.10 (.04)**
Income	.01 (.02)	-.04 (.03)	.07 (.03)**
Constant	-.71 (.21)	.30 (.43)	.68 (.39)
<i>R</i> ² (%)	37	37	30

SOURCE: Providence City Survey, March 6-8, 1999.

NOTE: The numbers are unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

helping to shape these views. Like many major cities, Providence has witnessed a significant drop in its crime rate during the 1990s, for which the police have been given much credit. In 1998, serious crime in Providence was at its lowest point in 30 years. Other than demographic background, this satisfaction with police service was the only aspect of city service and living that bore a strong relationship with citizens' overall views about the city direction.

One of the downsides of a rejuvenated downtown is that as more people flock to the city center, the opportunities for criminal mischief multiply. Public officials in cities experiencing the kind of "renaissance" Providence has enjoyed should be mindful that public safety plays a significant role in shaping residents' views about whether the city is on the "right or wrong track."

On our second dimension of urban revitalization—satisfaction with the overall quality of life—two factors stood out as major predictors: those who

felt street repairs are good and those who gave favorable ratings to race relationships within the city. In addition, young people were more likely to report high satisfaction with Providence's life quality.

In a classic study of Oakland, California, conducted in the early 1970s, Levy, Meltsner, and Wildavsky (1974, 99) argued that "in no small part, streets contribute to the quality of urban life." Our findings provide some confirmation of this assertion. Residents believing that the city had done a good job on streets and street repairs were much more likely to report that they were satisfied with the quality of life within the city. Most of us take streets for granted. However, streets and street repairs are crucial life quality measures because they tap everyday dimensions that residents care about. This is suggested by the frequency in which citizens contact local government officials concerning streets. In his survey of the literature of who contacts government agencies and why, Philip B. Coulter (1988, 15) found that the second most popular subject of contact concerns streets. In Providence, a city with limited mass transit options, the quality of the streets was a major contributing factor to how citizens defined their overall quality of life.

Mayors and other public officials have had to develop a delicate balancing act between promoting downtown revitalization and tending to the concerns of their voter base. Indeed, some of the nation's "best" big-city mayors were able to promote economic development and address the public service needs of city residents (Hollis 1999). According to urban historian Melvin Hollis (1999, 109), Mayor Richard J. Daley, who successfully revitalized Chicago's downtown Loop, won public support "because he paid close attention to the delivery of public services," giving substance to the slogan "The City That Works." Baltimore's William Donald Schaefer, who oversaw Baltimore's downtown restructuring and was often criticized as a "bricks-and-mortar" mayor, never lost sight of the significance of providing good public services (Schaefer 1986; Smith 1999). Dissatisfaction with schools, police protection, street repairs, and other routine services heighten residents' discontent and hasten their exodus out of the city. Mayors, although occupied with issues of economic development, risk ignoring important public services at their own peril.

"Mayor Cianci has been very careful to make sure some of the Urban Development Action Grant funds are spent in the neighborhoods. Every neighborhood gets new sidewalks" (Rich 2000, 209). In his 1999 inaugural address, Cianci (1999b) proudly stressed that since 1990, 73 miles of city streets were resurfaced, 42 parks refurbished, thousands of sidewalks replaced, brighter streetlights installed in 80% of the city, and state-of-the-art equipment provided to the police department. In other words, Mayor Cianci has tried to balance downtown revitalization with provision of basic services.

In a city that is 30% nonwhite, relations between whites and minorities significantly affected how citizens felt about the overall quality of life within the city. Those residents who believed race relations were good were more likely to approve of the city's quality of life. We know from Detroit's and other cities' experiences how heightened racial tensions can hamper efforts to rejuvenate a city's central business district, weakening the capacity to create a "renaissance." Providence's political leadership has been successful in navigating the tensions that often exist in a multiethnic/multiracial city. However, as the city's Hispanic and Asian communities continue to grow, how the city's leaders incorporate them into the local governing regime and address their concerns will become a critical factor in the city's future.

The contrast between the factors affecting life quality and city direction demonstrates that urban revitalization is multidimensional in nature. There is not a single consistent factor that explains citizen belief in a city's turnaround. Rather, city residents draw distinctions between a belief that a city is headed in the right direction and that an area has a high quality of life. Our results suggest that cities cannot focus on service delivery to the exclusion of more general issues of community climate. Sometimes, civic leaders spend all their time on bricks, mortar, and service delivery, not recognizing that community factors also count for a lot with residents. Based on our findings, narrow, technical approaches to governing that do not also work to improve the "spirit" of a city will not be as successful as those that function at both levels.

Our final dimension of urban revitalization—downtown improvement—taps into the city's political leadership. It has been surprising that the quality of political leadership within a city does not explain much of citizen views about a city being revitalized. In part, that is because it is difficult for mayors to claim credit for abstract successes such as a city being headed in the right direction or citizens being satisfied with the overall quality of life within the city. The one aspect of revitalization where political leadership can be shown to matter is on the physical restructuring of downtown.

Providence has undergone a renaissance in part because the downtown area looks much better compared to five years ago. Mayor Cianci is widely credited with having the vision and political abilities to attract the resources for new office buildings, an upscale downtown mall, and relocating rivers that opened up new walkways and parks. Cianci frequently claims credit for the downtown turnaround as well, peppering his speeches with concrete evidence of progress in the downtown area. In looking at the factors that explain why people feel the downtown has improved, one of the strongest predictors was the quality of political leadership. People who felt that Cianci had done a good job as mayor were much more likely to say that downtown Providence

looks better. These individuals recognized that Cianci's charismatic personality and strong leadership abilities were important determinants in the downtown's turnabout. Between working with private developers and tapping into valuable state and federal revenue sources, the mayor is seen as instrumental to the Providence renaissance.

THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL NATURE OF URBAN REVITALIZATION

Amid all the discussions about how cities turn around, many scholars have ignored the citizen perspective. It is common to study the role of political leadership, the business community, and the quality of city services without asking citizens their views on urban revitalization and studying how citizen impressions are linked to the creation of an urban renaissance. This omission is problematic because revitalization involves much more than positive press clippings and leadership cheerleading. For cities really to turn around, the ordinary person on the street must share those conclusions and support the changes in the city.

We have found, based on a case study of one northeastern city with a demonstrated urban renaissance, that different factors explain various dimensions of revitalization. For city direction, we found that police protection was the most important factor in determining whether citizens felt the city was headed in the right direction. On quality of life, race relations and street repairs were more important. And on downtown improvement, political leadership was the most crucial factor in explaining why residents felt positively.

Three important conclusions flow from these results. First is the multidimensional nature of urban revitalization. There is not a single factor or a single strategy that is going to turn around a city's image in the minds of the general public. Only by looking at a broad range of factors can one fully understand how citizens form opinions about downtown development, the quality of life in their city, and whether their area is a "comeback city" moving in the right direction. Success along several dimensions is important if citizens are to conclude that their city has undergone a significant renaissance. On some things, such as feeling the city is headed in the right direction, very concrete things such as police protection is important to making citizens feel that cities have dealt with one of the most visible problems that urban areas had in the 1970s and 1980s—crime. But in other areas, such as quality of life and downtown improvement, less concrete qualities such as race relations, street repairs, and political leadership were absolutely crucial to making people feel a city had turned the corner toward success.

Second, on urban revitalization, politics does matter, but only in particular ways. The quality of political leadership is most important in terms of specific evidence of revitalization, such as improving a downtown area. On dimensions such as this, a mayor legitimately can claim and earn credit from the general public. Based on our findings, it is more difficult for a mayor to claim credit and persuade a cynical public that he actually deserves the credit with more abstract qualities such as a city being headed in the right direction or improved quality of life.

Finally, there is more to urban revitalization than bricks and mortar. It is not enough just to improve service delivery, construct new buildings, or issue policy edicts. Civic leaders must successfully address community concerns such as race relations. In addition, improving the spirit of a community demands that difficult matters be addressed and that people of different backgrounds feel good about the character of their community. There must also be a sense of collective ownership and a sense of inclusion. Technocratic approaches to city governance are not sufficient to turn around a city in the minds of ordinary citizens.

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