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MAPPING HUNGER IN NEW YORK CITY:

A Look at the Rate of Food Hardship in New York City Neighborhoods

Sarah Gordis, Columbia University

Sophie Collyer, Columbia University

Christopher Wimer, Columbia University

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For many families across New York City, Thanksgiving is a time to connect with family and friends over a delicious meal. But while many gather to enjoy traditional Thanksgiving dishes, many others find themselves without enough to eat, not only on Thanksgiving Day but throughout the year. In this brief, we highlight how New Yorkers living in different areas of the city experience food hardship and how much they are missing in their food budget.

The Poverty Tracker's measure of food hardship identifies those who run out of food or worry about running out of food throughout the year (see page 7 for a more detailed definition of food hardship).

Experiencing food deprivation even just a few times a year is a destabilizing event that can have a marked impact on health and well-being, particularly for children.¹ This report summarizes the landscape of food hardship by New York City neighborhood, using the last four years of data from the Robin Hood Poverty Tracker. We find that some neighborhoods in the city are significantly worse off than others when it comes to food hardship and other indicators of well-being, a result demonstrating how disadvantage is concentrated and compounding in certain areas of the city.

More About the Poverty Tracker

Launched in 2012 and conducted in partnership with Columbia University, the Robin Hood Poverty Tracker is a groundbreaking study of disadvantage in New York City. Unlike typical surveys of poverty that take an annual snapshot, the Poverty Tracker checks in with the same 4,000 households quarter after quarter for several years. This approach provides a dynamic view of poverty and disadvantage over time.

¹See: Hartline-Grafton, H., & Dean, O. (2017). *The impact of poverty, food insecurity, and poor nutrition on health and well-being*. Washington, DC: Food Research & Action Center. Retrieved from <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-impact-poverty-food-insecurity-health-well-being.pdf>.

Where are rates of food hardship the highest?

Citywide, approximately 40 percent of New Yorkers experience food hardship, though rates vary dramatically across different neighborhoods (see Figure 1). The maps on pages 8 to 12 show the rate of food hardship for each community district² in the five boroughs, indicating where rates of food hardship are the highest and the lowest. The maps are shaded by quintile, each of which represents 11 or 12 community districts. Compared to the rest of the city, the districts in the 1st quintile report the lowest rates of food hardship, while the districts in the 5th quintile report the highest rates.

At the high end, we find that 70 percent of New Yorkers living in Concourse, Highbridge, and Mount Eden in the Bronx (CD BX-4) experienced food hardship, meaning that seven in ten households in this district experienced a food shortage or worried that they would run out of food at some point in the year. Food hardship in this district was 30 percentage points higher than the citywide average.

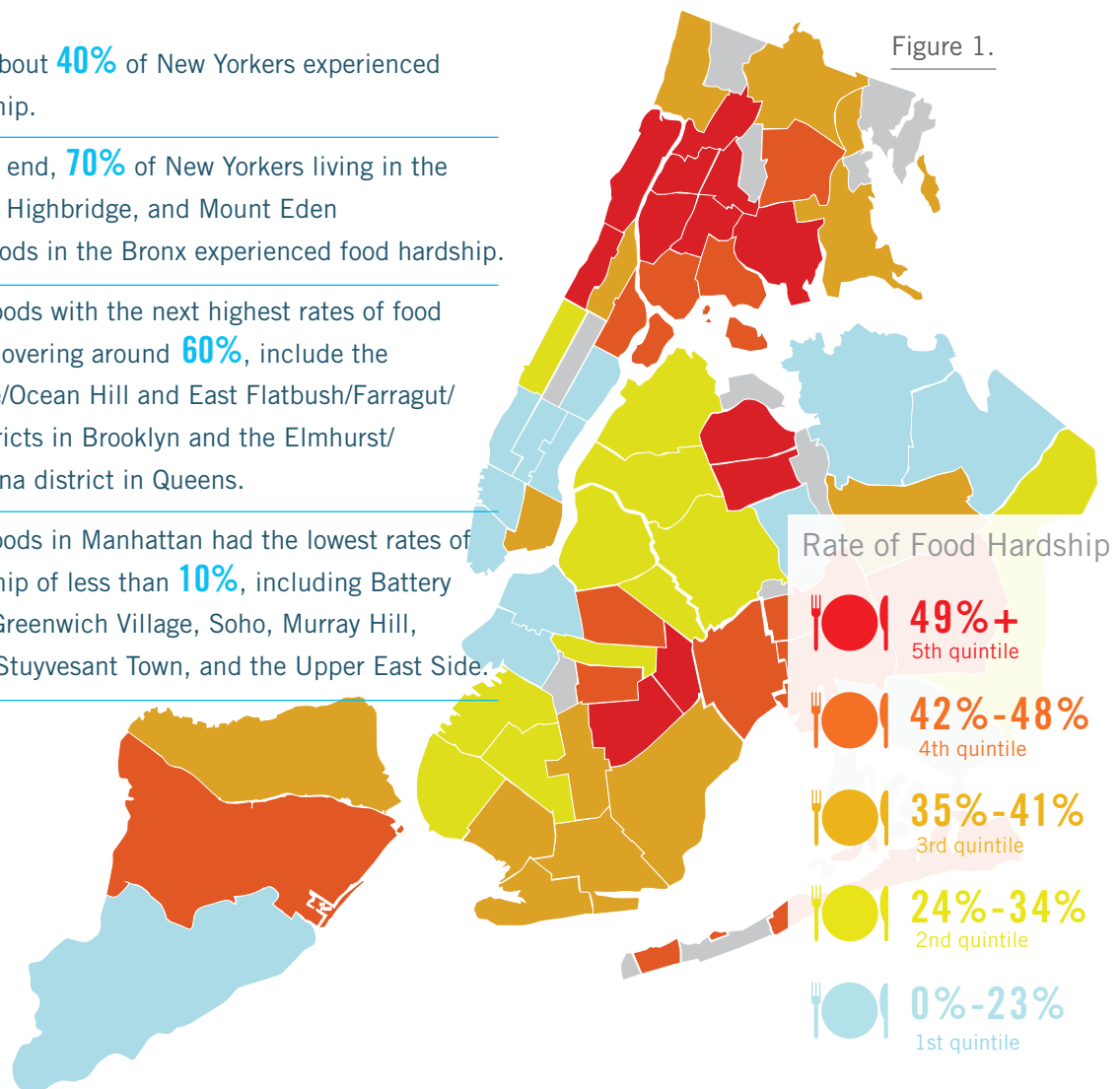
Citywide, about **40%** of New Yorkers experienced food hardship.

At the high end, **70%** of New Yorkers living in the Concourse, Highbridge, and Mount Eden neighborhoods in the Bronx experienced food hardship.

Neighborhoods with the next highest rates of food hardship, hovering around **60%**, include the Brownsville/Ocean Hill and East Flatbush/Farragut/Rugby districts in Brooklyn and the Elmhurst/South Corona district in Queens.

Neighborhoods in Manhattan had the lowest rates of food hardship of less than **10%**, including Battery Park City, Greenwich Village, Soho, Murray Hill, Gramercy, Stuyvesant Town, and the Upper East Side.

Figure 1.

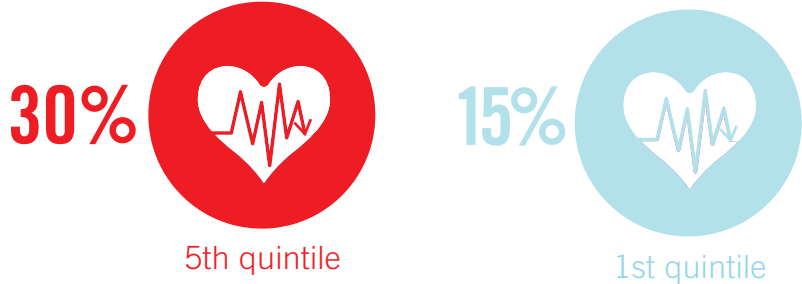


²Respondents were classified based on the geographic location of their residence into one of the city's 59 Community Districts. Our representative sample yields an average sample size of 213 respondents for each Community District.

Community districts with the next highest average rates of food hardship — approximately 60 percent of households — include the districts comprising Brownsville and Ocean Hill in Brooklyn (CD BK-16), East Flatbush, Farragut, and Rugby in Brooklyn (CD BK-17), and Elmhurst and South Corona in Queens (CD QN-4). In contrast, community districts comprising Battery Park City (CD MN-1), Greenwich Village, and Soho (CD MN-2), Murray Hill, Gramercy, and Stuyvesant Town (CD MN-6), and the Upper East Side (CD MN-8) — all in Manhattan — demonstrated the lowest rates of food hardship with rates of less than 10 percent. Fewer than one in ten households in these districts experienced food hardship at some point during the year.

When comparing other measures of well-being between the districts that experience high rates of food hardship versus lower rates of food hardship, we see a similar trend. On average, 30 percent of respondents in community districts in the 5th quintile experienced poor health or a work-limiting health condition, compared to just 15 percent of respondents in the community districts in the 1st quintile. These findings are alarming, given the intimate relationship between nutrition and health; in addition, they further emphasize the extent to which disadvantages are both concentrated and compounded in certain communities in New York City.

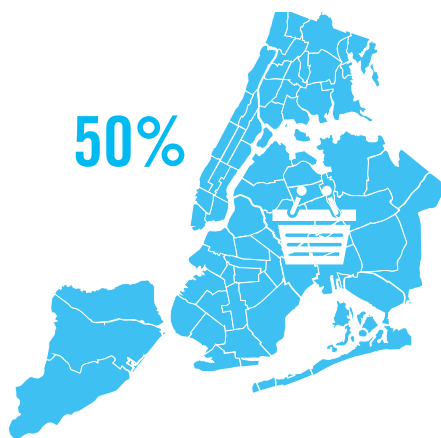
On average, 30 percent of respondents in community districts with the highest rates of food hardship experienced poor health or a work-limiting health condition, compared to just 15 percent of respondents in the community districts with the lowest rates of food hardship.



What are the rates of food hardship over time?

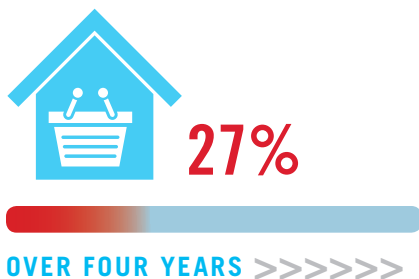
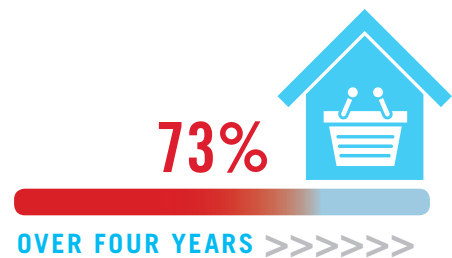
The Poverty Tracker also allows us to understand the prevalence and recurrence of food hardship over time. To do so, we looked at how many respondents reported ever experiencing food hardship at some point during the four years that they were surveyed.³ As found in the analysis of annual rates of food hardship, certain areas of the city face significantly higher rates of food hardship across the **FOUR YEARS** that we examined.

We found that:



Citywide, more than 50 percent of respondents reported experiencing food hardship at least once over the four years they were surveyed.

In the neighborhoods facing the highest annual rates of food hardship (i.e., the 5th quintile), 73 percent of households, on average, experienced food hardship in at least one of the four years that we examined.



In the neighborhoods facing the lowest annual rates of food hardship (i.e., the 1st quintile), 27 percent of households, on average, experienced food hardship in at least one of the four years.

Taken together, this means that residents in certain areas of the city are almost three times as likely than residents of other areas to experience food hardship at some point within a four-year window.

The data also shows that food hardship is often a recurring condition. To measure the recurrence of food hardship, we looked at how many respondents indicated that they experienced food hardship across multiple surveys, and we found that 75 percent of those who faced food hardship reported this challenge multiple times.

³Only those respondents who completed at least three annual surveys in the preceding four years were included in this analysis.

How much additional money would households need to address their food hardship? And what are the implications of recent policy proposals for food hardship?

The Poverty Tracker's measure of food hardship identifies those households that run out of food because they run out of money. Naturally, we wanted to understand how much more money families would need to ensure that they do not struggle to purchase food. The Poverty Tracker can help shed light on the food budget shortfalls that families face. Respondents are asked, **in order to buy just enough food to meet your household's needs, would you need to spend more, less, or about the same as you spend now?** Those who respond saying that they would need more are asked, **how much more would you need to spend each week to buy enough food to meet the needs of your household?** These questions are used to identify the household's "food budget shortfall."⁴ On average, New Yorkers who are not able to meet their household food budget would need an additional \$52 per person, per week to meet the budget gap.



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Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has proposed regulations that would effectively preclude thousands of New Yorkers from maintaining their eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps. In 2020, the maximum SNAP benefit for a family of four will be \$646 per month.⁵ At present, individuals can gain eligibility either through having income or resources below certain levels or through receiving other means-tested benefits, a pathway referred to as Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE). The U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposal, however, would eliminate BBCE. Importantly, categorical eligibility also removes rigid asset tests, thereby enabling families both to receive SNAP benefits and to set money aside as savings. With the proposed regulations to decrease the categorical eligibility for benefits, thousands of families will be forced either to give up SNAP benefits or to liquify and spend accumulated assets. These types of policy changes could exacerbate the food budget shortfalls that New Yorkers face as well as the alarming prevalence of food hardship discussed in this report.

⁴Households that indicate they would not need to spend more to meet their household's needs have a food budget shortfall of \$0.

⁵See: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2019). *A quick guide to SNAP eligibility and benefits*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-quick-guide-to-snap-eligibility-and-benefits>.

Final thoughts

Our results show that many New Yorkers continue to struggle to afford food, and this is often an ongoing challenge. Moreover, struggles with food are concentrated in specific areas across the city. While Thanksgiving is a time when overeating and expanded waistlines abound, this report encourages us to remain mindful of the communities that, as a whole, regularly struggle to put enough food on the table. Further, given the current proposed regulations to curtail SNAP eligibility, it is critical to build awareness of the pervasive food hardship experienced by millions of New Yorkers year after year.

Definition of Food Hardship

The Poverty Tracker's measure of food hardship includes experiences of severe food hardship and moderate food hardship, defined as:

Severe Food Hardship⁶

[severe]

Often running out of food or often worrying about running out of food without having enough money to buy more.

Moderate Food Hardship

[moderate]

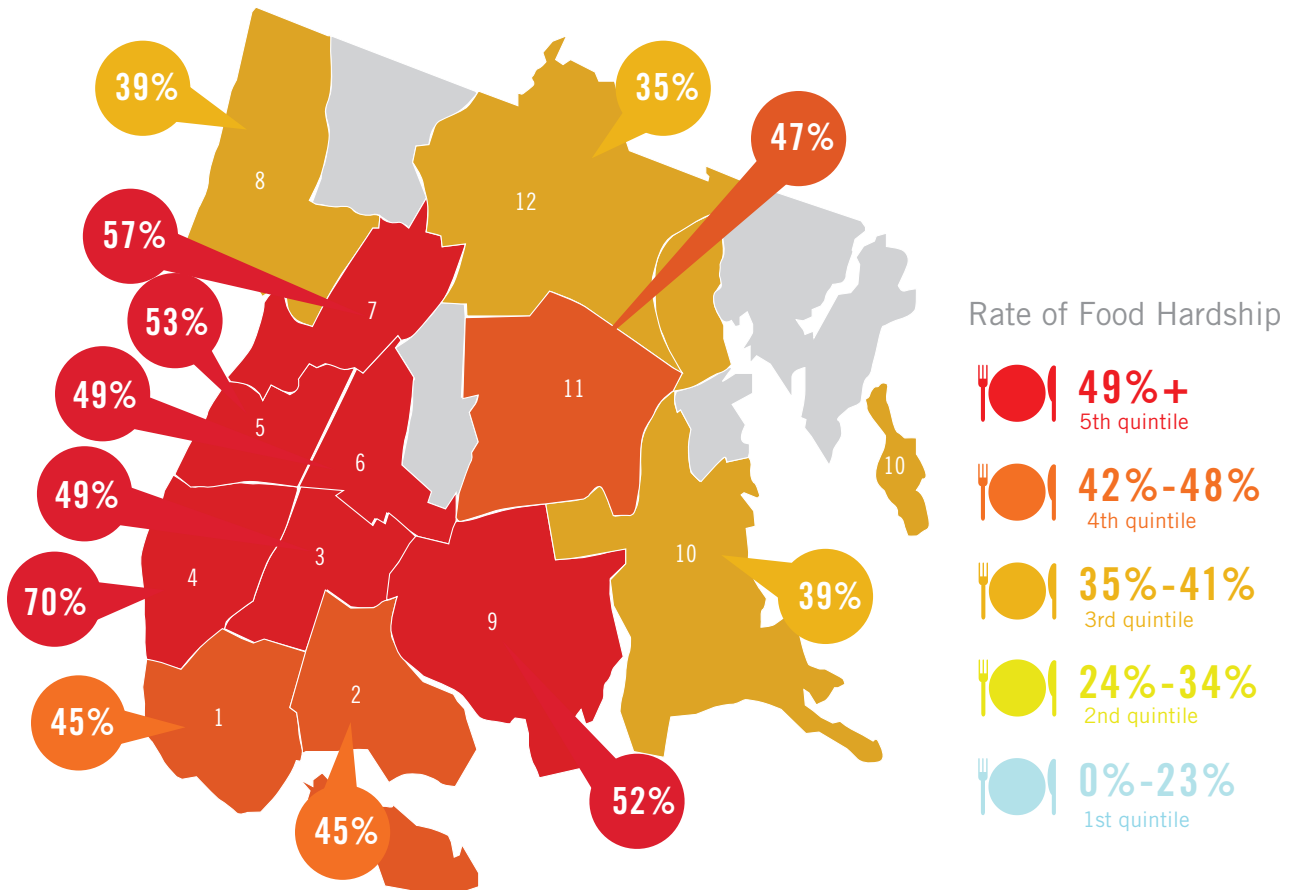
Sometimes running out of food or sometimes worrying about running out of food without having enough money to buy more but not facing severe food hardship.

The Poverty Tracker assesses food hardship by asking respondents how often in the preceding 12 months they faced one of the challenges related to food that are listed above.

⁶In past reports, we have sometimes referred to "severe food hardship" as "food hardship."

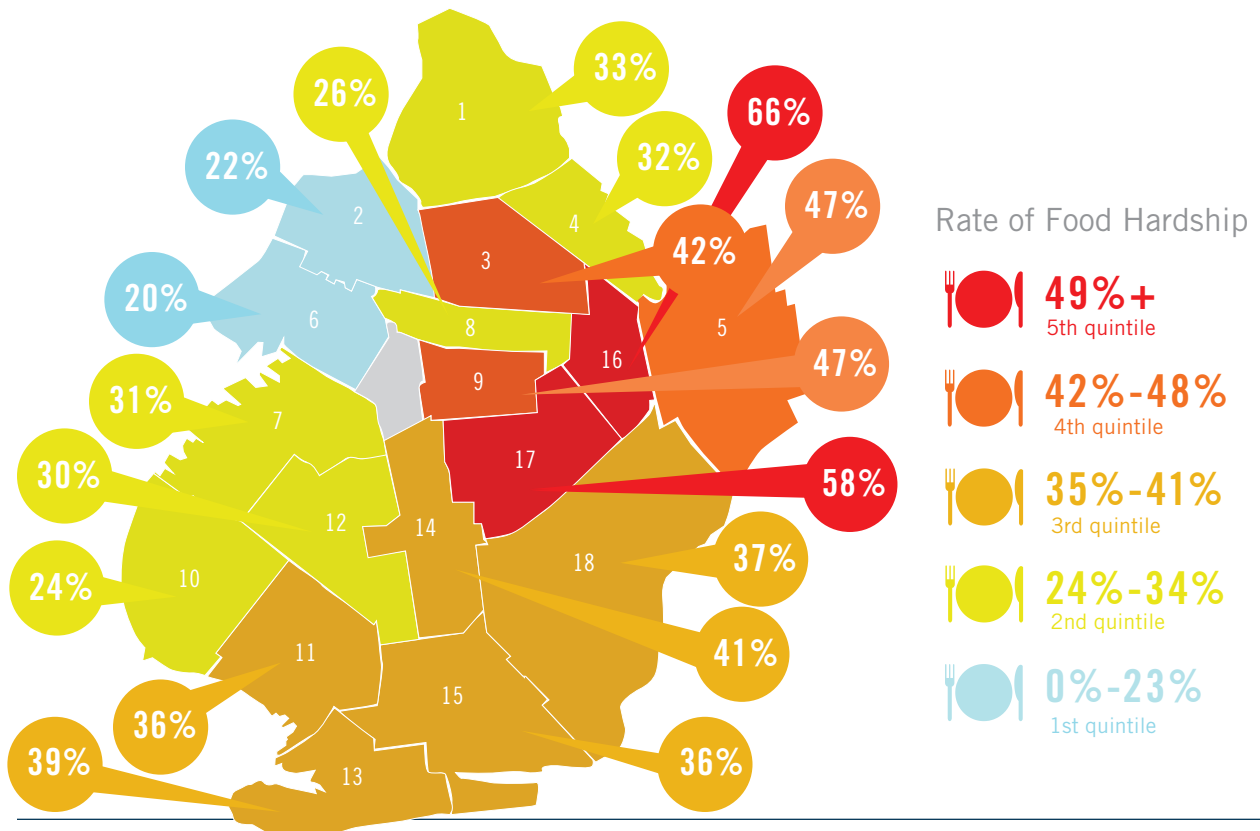
BRONX

COMMUNITY DISTRICT NUMBER	COMMUNITY DISTRICT NAME	FOOD HARDSHIP RATE	MARGIN OF ERROR	QUINTILE	SAMPLE SIZE
1*	MELROSE, MOTT HAVEN, PORT MORRIS	45%	+/- 11%	4	243
2*	HUNTS POINT, LONGWOOD	45%	+/- 11%	4	243
3*	CLAREMONT, CROTONA PARK EAST, MELROSE, MORRISANIA	49%	+/- 9%	5	331
4	CONCOURSE, HIGHBRIDGE & MOUNT EDEN	70%	+/- 7%	5	284
5	MORRIS HEIGHTS, FORDHAM SOUTH & MOUNT HOPE	53%	+/- 12%	5	216
6*	BELMONT, BATHGATE & EAST TREMONT	49%	+/- 9%	5	331
7	BEDFORD PARK, FORDHAM NORTH & NORWOOD	57%	+/- 11%	5	239
8	RIVERDALE, FIELDSTON & KINGSBRIDGE	39%	+/- 10%	3	213
9	CASTLE HILL, CLASON POINT & PARKCHESTER	52%	+/- 7%	5	334
10	CO-OP CITY, PELHAM BAY & SCHUYLerville	39%	+/- 9%	3	218
11	PELHAM PARKWAY, MORRIS PARK & LACONIA	47%	+/- 13%	4	186
12	WAKEFIELD, WILLIAMSBRIDGE & WOODLAWN	35%	+/- 9%	3	184



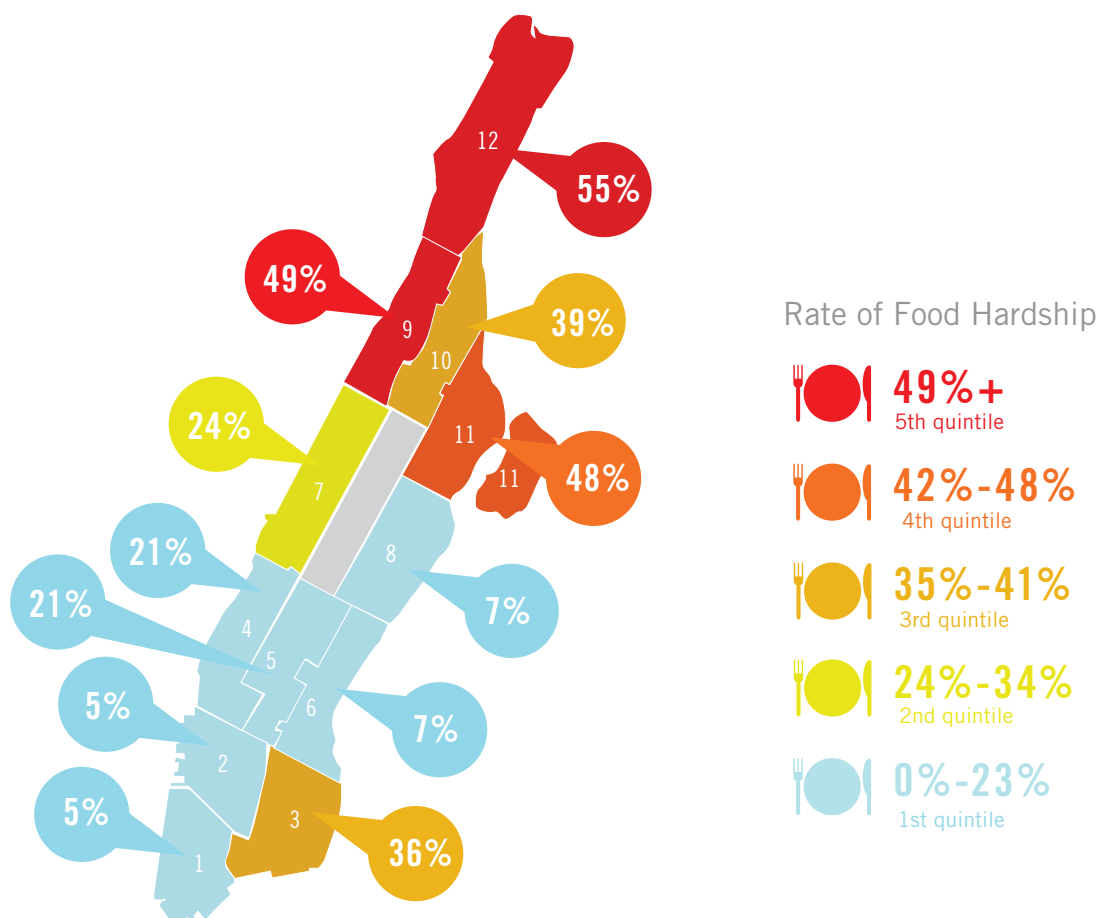
BROOKLYN

COMMUNITY DISTRICT NUMBER	COMMUNITY DISTRICT NAME	FOOD HARDSHIP RATE	MARGIN OF ERROR	QUINTILE	SAMPLE SIZE
1	GREENPOINT & WILLIAMSBURG	33%	+/- 9%	2	186
2	BROOKLYN HEIGHTS & FORT GREENE	22%	+/- 9%	1	213
3	BEDFORD-STUYVESANT	42%	+/- 10%	4	219
4	BUSHWICK	32%	+/- 10%	2	183
5	EAST NEW YORK & STARRETT CITY	47%	+/- 11%	4	212
6	PARK SLOPE, CARROLL GARDENS & RED HOOK	20%	+/- 8%	1	224
7	SUNSET PARK & WINDSOR TERRACE	31%	+/- 15%	2	91
8	CROWN HEIGHTS NORTH & PROSPECT HEIGHTS	26%	+/- 7%	2	214
9	CROWN HEIGHTS SO., PROSPECT LEFFERTS & WINGATE	47%	+/- 11%	4	156
10	BAY RIDGE & DYKER HEIGHTS	24%	+/- 9%	2	163
11	BENSONHURST & BATH BEACH	36%	+/- 9%	3	171
12	BOROUGH PARK, KENSINGTON & OCEAN PARKWAY	30%	+/- 15%	2	103
13	BRIGHTON BEACH & CONEY ISLAND	39%	+/- 13%	3	105
14	FLATBUSH & MIDWOOD	41%	+/- 10%	3	195
15	SHEEPSHEAD BAY, GERRITSEN BEACH & HOMECREST	36%	+/- 11%	3	124
16	BROWNSVILLE & OCEAN HILL	66%	+/- 8%	5	278
17	EAST FLATBUSH, FARRAGUT & RUGBY	58%	+/- 11%	5	150
18	CANARSIE & FLATLANDS	37%	+/- 10%	3	230



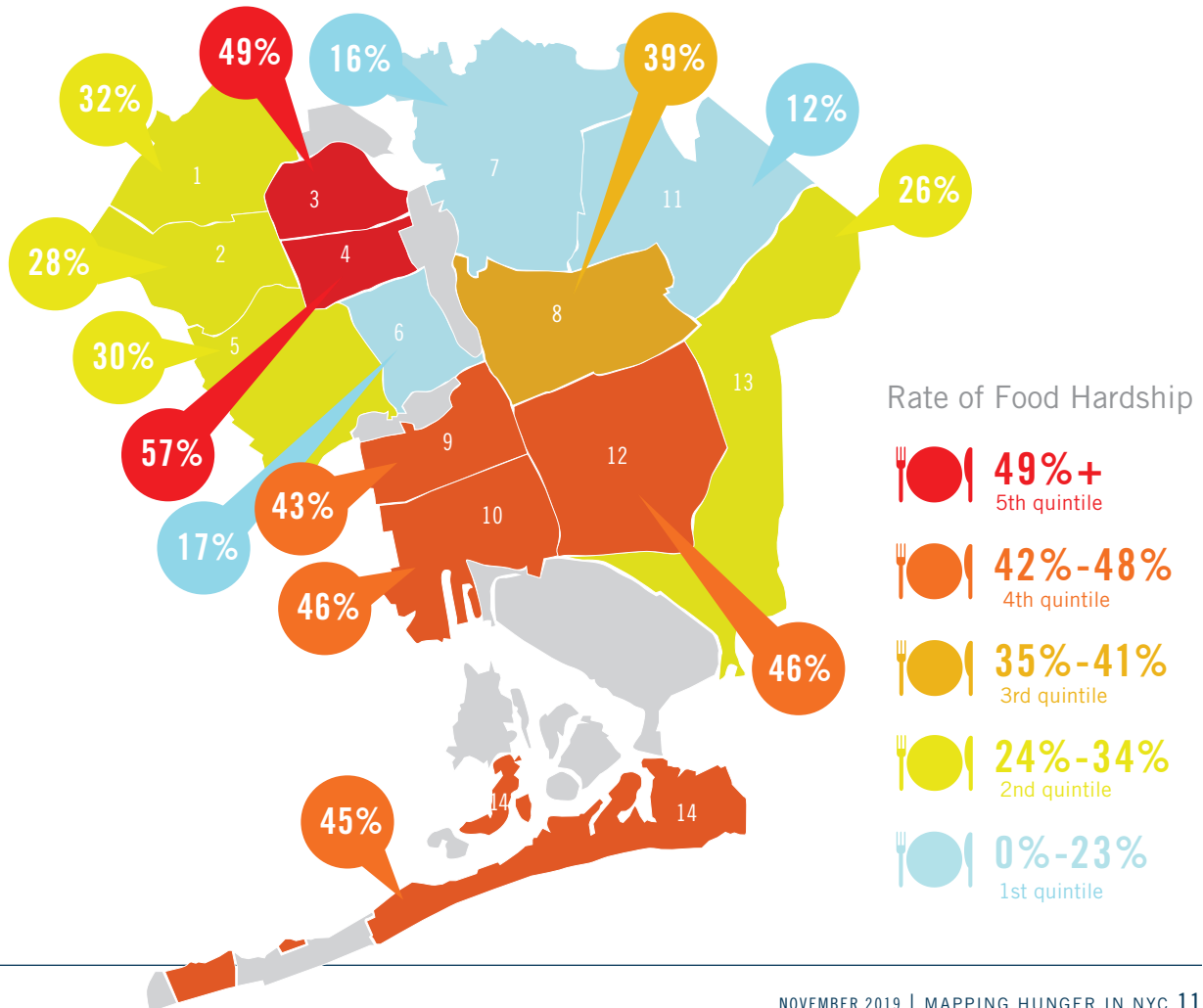
MANHATTAN

COMMUNITY DISTRICT NUMBER	COMMUNITY DISTRICT NAME	FOOD HARDSHIP RATE	MARGIN OF ERROR	QUINTILE	SAMPLE SIZE
1*	BATTERY PARK CITY, CIVIC CENTER	5%	+/- 3%	1	215
2*	GREENWICH VILLAGE & SOHO	5%	+/- 3%	1	215
3	CHINATOWN & LOWER EAST SIDE	36%	+/- 12%	3	248
4*	CHELSEA, CLINTON & HUDSON YARDS	21%	+/- 6%	1	259
5*	FLATIRON, MIDTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT	21%	+/- 6%	1	259
6	MURRAY HILL, GRAMERCY & STUYVESANT TOWN	7%	+/- 4%	1	196
7	UPPER WEST SIDE & WEST SIDE	24%	+/- 6%	2	379
8	UPPER EAST SIDE	7%	+/- 5%	1	262
9	HAMILTON HTS, MANHATTANVILLE & WEST HARLEM	49%	+/- 12%	5	242
10	CENTRAL HARLEM	39%	+/- 8%	3	359
11	EAST HARLEM	48%	+/- 9%	4	334
12	WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, INWOOD & MARBLE HILL	55%	+/- 8%	5	445



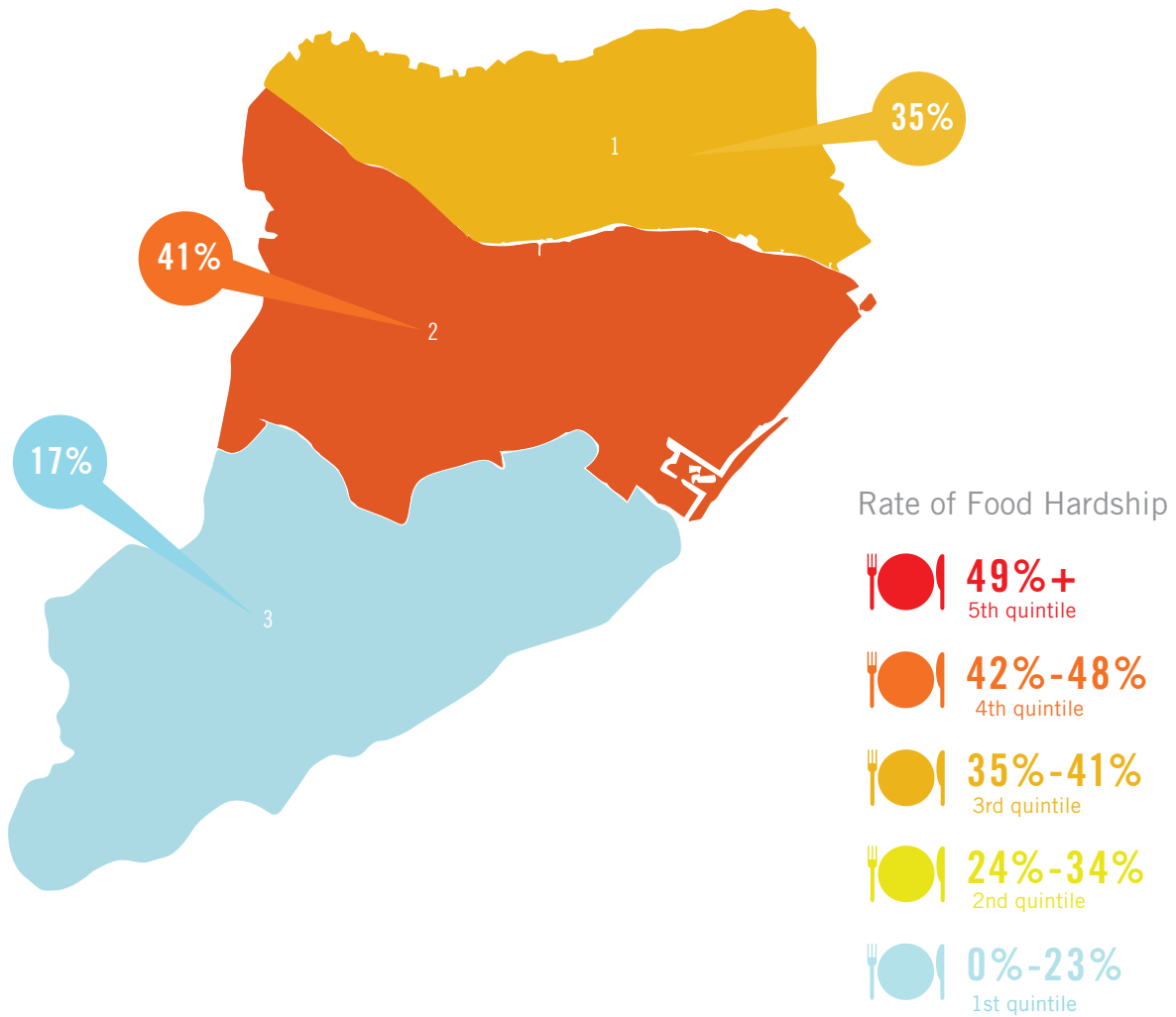
QUEENS

COMMUNITY DISTRICT NUMBER	COMMUNITY DISTRICT NAME	FOOD HARDSHIP RATE	MARGIN OF ERROR	QUINTILE	SAMPLE SIZE
1	ASTORIA & LONG ISLAND CITY	32%	+/- 8%	2	236
2	SUNNYSIDE & WOODSIDE	28%	+/- 11%	2	158
3	JACKSON HEIGHTS & NORTH CORONA	49%	+/- 10%	5	221
4	ELMHURST & SOUTH CORONA	57%	+/- 12%	5	125
5	RIDGEWOOD, GLENDALE & MIDDLE VILLAGE	30%	+/- 10%	2	143
6	FOREST HILLS & REGO PARK	17%	+/- 9%	1	128
7	FLUSHING, MURRAY HILL & WHITESTONE	16%	+/- 8%	1	172
8	BRIARWOOD, FRESH MEADOWS & HILLCREST	39%	+/- 14%	3	126
9	RICHMOND HILL & WOODHAVEN	43%	+/- 13%	4	117
10	HOWARD BEACH & OZONE PARK	46%	+/- 13%	4	124
11	BAYSIDE, DOUGLSTON & LITTLE NECK	12%	+/- 7%	1	144
12	JAMAICA, HOLLIS & ST. ALBANS	46%	+/- 10%	4	264
13	QUEENS VILLAGE, CAMBRIA HEIGHTS & ROSEDALE	26%	+/- 7%	2	233
14	FAR ROCKAWAY, BREEZY POINT & BROAD CHANNEL	45%	+/- 9%	4	229



STATEN ISLAND

COMMUNITY DISTRICT NUMBER	COMMUNITY DISTRICT NAME	FOOD HARDSHIP RATE	MARGIN OF ERROR	QUINTILE	SAMPLE SIZE
1	PORT RICHMOND, STAPLETON & MARINER'S HARBOR	35%	+/- 7%	3	317
2	NEW SPRINGVILLE & SOUTH BEACH	41%	+/- 11%	4	134
3	TOTTENVILLE, GREAT KILLS & ANNADALE	17%	+/- 7%	1	185



*In the Poverty Tracker Data, we identify the area that a respondent lives in using a Census Bureau geographic identifier called the Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA). For nearly all of the community districts in New York City, the districts' boundaries overlap with the boundaries of the PUMAs. In the data, we calculate the rate of food hardship for each PUMA and then match the PUMA and the rate of food hardship in that PUMA to the corresponding community district. There are, however, four pairs of contiguous community districts that fall within the same PUMA: (1) BX-1 and BX-2, (2) BX-3 and BX-6, (3) MN-1 and MN-2, and (4) MN-5 and MN-4. Our estimates of the rate of food hardship in these districts is based on the rate in the larger PUMA that they share.

*See [here](#) for a map that matches the community districts to the PUMAs.

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