

**Managing Homelessness in New York City:
A Review of Mayoral Homelessness Plans**

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Abstract

Homeless services in New York City have become an increasingly privatized industry supported by lofty government contracts to non-governmental social service organizations. In Fiscal Year 2023, the Department of Homeless Services had an expense budget of \$3.1 billion. Simultaneously, they awarded \$5.6 billion in active contracts to various vendors. Despite immense spending on homeless services, the average nightly shelter population is at an all-time high: each night, 75,540 people slept in city-run shelters in March 2023. This study explores the privatization of homeless services, social abandonment, and methods of controlling housing-deprived people through a framework analysis of four mayoral homelessness plans from the Bloomberg, de Blasio, and Adams administrations. I sought to understand the intent of homeless services in New York City and why homelessness persists despite billions of dollars in funding for homeless services. The study reveals that all three administrations offer methods to manage homelessness without addressing the root causes of housing deprivation: a market-based system of housing distribution.

Keywords: homeless management, social abandonment, privatization, housing deprivation

Introduction

Managing homelessness is a complex political issue in New York City. With each mayoral administration comes both recycled rhetoric and new messaging about how they will address the homelessness crisis – whether through “outreach” and policing, “investing” in affordable housing, or outsourcing services to the nonprofit sector. Regardless of the administration, the city spends immense amounts of money in the form of grants and contracts with nonprofits, funding for policing efforts, and tracking software. The resources seem to be either allocated inefficiently or altogether insufficient, because the number of people sleeping in Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters reached an all-time high in March 2023. The city’s failure to eliminate homelessness despite billions in spending raises questions about spending priorities, privatization, law enforcement and, ultimately, the intention behind New York City’s approach to managing homelessness.

In order to grasp the historical roots of homeless services in New York City and theories surrounding homeless management, this study is informed by existing literature on methods of controlling the homeless population, the privatization of homeless services, and how homeless people experience the services offered to them. Following a review of the literature, I provide a framework analysis of mayoral homelessness plans from the Bloomberg, de Blasio, and Adams administrations to identify the shifts and consistencies in homeless management and rhetoric at the mayoral level over the past two decades. Through this analysis, I seek to understand the intention of homeless services in New York City.

Background

In March 2023, an average of 75,540 people slept in city-operated Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters each night (*Facts about homelessness*, 2023). This number

is an undercount of the true population of homeless people in New York City because it excludes unsheltered homeless folks, people living ‘doubled-up’ with family or friends, and those living in shelters overseen by agencies other than DHS (*How many total people are homeless in New York City?*, n.d.). The overall number of homeless people in municipal shelters has increased 49 percent over the past ten years while the number of single adults has increased by 121 percent in the same period. Black and Hispanic people are disproportionately represented in the shelter system, and the majority of people living in shelters are impacted by at least one disability (*New York City Homelessness: The Basic Facts*, 2023). The shelter population dropped drastically in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic when many homeless people were transported to hotels to reduce the spread. However, the shelter population skyrocketed again in 2022 when New York State lifted their eviction moratorium and the use of hotels to house homeless folks declined (*Facts about homelessness*, 2023).

As of Fiscal Year 2023, the DHS has an expense budget of \$3.1 billion which is spent primarily on shelter, intake, and street programs (New York City Comptroller, n.d.). Also in Fiscal Year 2023, DHS has \$5.6 billion in active contracts awarded to various vendors. Project Renewal is the top DHS vendor of FY2023 with four registered contracts amounting to \$572.6 million, followed by the Bowery Residents’ Committee, Women in Need, HELP Social Service Corporation, and Westhab (New York City Comptroller, n.d.). This fiscal year, the DHS dedicated \$2.5 billion more to contracted vendors than their own expense budget.

A brief history of homeless services in New York City...

New York is unique in comparison to other U.S. states due to the Callahan v. Carey decree of 1981, a landmark court decision which required the city to provide shelter to anyone who requested it. This marked the beginning of the entitlement era, during which spending on homeless services grew exponentially and the city opened large shelters with no privacy or personal space. These essentially served to warehouse the homeless population the State was now required to give shelter. The legal entitlement to shelter was problematic to many administrators and politicians who believed that ‘proper behavior,’ specifically participation in work and treatment programs, must somehow be enforced. Their agenda to reform entitlement-era shelters was implemented under Mayor Giuliani in the 1990s and birthed paternalism – the idea that rights should be earned based on good behavior (Main, 2016).

The city began outsourcing the management of shelters to private, non-profit entities who could set work and rehabilitation requirements for their residents to enforce the new agenda. While entitlement generated a large-scale, centralized approach to services, paternalism produced a decentralized shelter system run by private entities which provided a right to shelter on the condition that clients fulfill responsibilities set by the institution (Main, 2016). Post-paternalism partially abandoned the notions of responsibility and service-worthiness inherent to paternalism in the late 1990s, but only for a segment of the city’s homeless population. During this time, researcher Dennis Culhane imagined the category of the ‘chronically homeless’ – the ‘most disabled’ individuals who accounted for the majority of time spent in city shelters. This category was eagerly appropriated by service providers taking a new approach to ‘solving’ homelessness: focus on the smaller proportion of those

cycling through the system and offer them specialized support to reduce shelter use. It also placed an emphasis on people resistant to the city's shelter system due to paternalistic controls by offering them supportive housing without work and sobriety 'good behavior' requirements. The 'Housing First' philosophy is a product of Culhane's notions of chronic homelessness (Main, 2016).

The category of chronic homelessness is largely influential on homeless policy but still faces critiques. Willse (2015) analyzes the term as an economic identity assigned to housing-deprived people rather than a legitimate category, turning the subject of analysis from 'chronically homeless' individuals onto those who define them as such. He argues that Culhane's findings placed economic concerns at the forefront of homeless management, and by 2001 the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) made the issue of chronic homelessness a top priority. Chronic homelessness programs have a dual economic incentive: "removing an economic obstacle and ... investing in a growing nonprofit industry of population management" (Willse, 2015, p. 168).

The Problem

Homeless services in New York City have become an increasingly privatized industry supported by lofty government contracts. Despite immense spending on homeless services, the nightly shelter population is at an all-time high. There is a disconnect between government spending on homeless services and the outcome of those services.

Research Questions

How has New York City's approach to homeless management shifted or remained stagnant over the past three mayoral administrations? What does this reveal about the city's response to housing deprivation?

Theoretical Framework

This study will build on Willse's understanding of homeless policy in the U.S. Willse understands housing as a "technology for the organization and distribution of life, health, illness and death" (Willse, 2015, p. 2). To Willse, the market-based system of housing in the United States creates housing deprivation (the withholding of homes from those who cannot afford to participate). He rejects the individualist ideal that to be homeless is a personal failure. The government responds to mass-housing deprivation through homeless management, which Willse defines as service and knowledge industries comprised of social service institutions (both governments and non-governmental organizations) which produce research, conduct outreach, and provide services or policing based on the knowledge they have generated. He asserts:

Social welfare policy and administration, as biopolitical technologies and economic enterprises, may invest in life and health as objects of governance without challenging the conditions that reproduce and distribute illness and exposure to premature death. (Willse, 2015, p. 50).

He theorizes that social welfare institutions *invest* in the homeless population as an economic venture through technology that generates information on homelessness and uses that knowledge to govern them. This governance does not attempt to eliminate homelessness, but rather allows social service institutions to distribute wellness, illness, and death amongst housing deprived people. Willse's theories of social abandonment and homeless management will inform my analysis of the mayoral homelessness plans.

Definitions

Homelessness

Homelessness is an amorphous social category ascribed to people who do not have access to safe and reliable housing. Referring to "the homeless" activates a pathological

understanding of individuals living without homes, seeped in assumptions that change over time. To understand homelessness from a structural perspective, we can discuss housing deprivation, which implies the “active taking away of shelter” (Willse, 2015, p. 2). This paper will use “homeless” and “housing deprived” interchangeably.

Social Abandonment

Social abandonment is the alienation of certain populations through media and academia that produce the “illusion of separateness” which deems some life unworthy of investment (Willse, 2015, p. 10). Housing deprivation is a mechanism through which this abandonment takes place. Welfare programs that assist unsheltered populations “manage the costs of social abandonment” so illness and death can be transformed into economic ventures coded as a form of help (Willse, 2015, p. 50).

Tyranny of Kindness

The tyranny of kindness is a term coined by Theresa Funicello that describes how paternalistic programs demand submission to certain protocols for “the client’s own good” (Willse, 2015, p. 102). It revokes agency in exchange for services by regulating certain behaviors seen as antithetical to improving one’s conditions. Such paternalism has become enshrined in social service institutions as their funding is tied to programs’ efficiency and effectiveness, evaluated through statistics rather than the knowledge of clients and staff (Hoffman and Coffey, 2008).

Literature Review

Homeless services in the U.S., and more specifically New York City, have evolved to fit within new ideologies and methods for managing housing deprivation. The literature around policing, privatization, and lived experiences of homeless people provide fertile ground for investigating and understanding the logics of homeless policy in New York City. Vitale (2008) gives insight into policing methods and how notions of disorder criminalize homelessness. Hoffman and Coffey (2008) and *Picture the Homeless* explore the impact of homeless services on the people who use them. Mosley (2012) delves into how non-profit homeless service providers are influenced by government funding, and Gilmore (2017) explains the non-profit industrial complex. My research seeks to bridge discussions on the philosophies and rationales of homeless services, the privatization of social services, and how these services are experienced. The goal of this literature review is to understand the foundations of homeless management before investigating the intricacies of contemporary homeless policy in New York City.

Methods of Control

Vitale (2008) departs from Main's broad view of homeless services to focus specifically on policing. He offers an extensive history of policing disorder in New York City and provides an analysis of notions of disorder, politics, and their impact on policing methods. He conceptualizes disorder as a changing social concept rather than an objective set of behaviors which change depending on the sociopolitical context of a given time (Vitale, 2008). Vitale introduces the quality-of-life paradigm – a set of “social control practices united by a political philosophy that explained the nature of homelessness and disorder as one

of personal responsibility” which “established punitive methods for restoring social order and public civility...in the city’s public spaces” (Vitale, 2008, p. 1).

Vitale argues that by defining homelessness as a personal failure, authorities are able to reconstruct a social services issue as a criminal problem and justify the punitive response by law enforcement. Non-criminal actions that are perceived as disorderly were effectively criminalized through outside agencies including the Transit Authority, which implemented new codes of conduct in 1989 that prohibited blocking stairs, sleeping while lying down, trespassing in tunnels, and panhandling (Vitale, 2008). This allowed for the removal or punitive treatment of ‘disorderly’ but otherwise unharmed behaviors which “became code words for the presence of homeless people, and...established a new way of thinking about homeless people as causes of disorder, thereby facilitating the criminalization of a whole range of socially marginal people” (Vitale, 2008, p. 24).

The quality-of-life paradigm was developed into policing tactics under Giuliani and his police commissioner William Bratton in the 1990s. The urban-liberal paradigm, a political philosophy which emphasized government planning to resolve social problems, increasingly lost support as the city’s inability to handle the crisis of housing deprivation became evident (Vitale, 2008). This coincided with the shelter system’s paternalistic swing in which housing deprived people needed to give up certain rights in exchange for access to increasingly privatized services (Main, 2016).

Giuliani capitalized politically on New Yorkers’ anger and channeled it into a push for more punitive policing of homelessness during his run for governor. He cited the city’s failures as a reason to “allow the free market to provide housing” and limit the number of days people could stay in a shelter before forcing them out to fend for themselves in the

private employment and housing markets (Vitale, 2008, p. 83). Vitale explains that police targeted ‘disorderly’ conduct and minor quality-of-life violations to prevent more serious crimes, and to do so they proactively policed based on crime patterns rather than simply responding to calls for service. Tactics stemming from these theories include stop and frisk, zero tolerance, civil enforcement, flexible deployment, and the creation of new laws and regulations.

Compstat, a “computerized mapping system...of real time crime” was established under NYPD Commissioner Bratton to hold precinct leaders accountable based on various performance metrics (Vitale, 2008, p. 117). The implications of Compstat stretched beyond internal accountability to identify ‘high-crime’ neighborhoods, thus advancing the quality-of-life style of policing and acting as a tool for organizing public spaces and rapidly (or pre-emptively) responding to disorder. Compstat’s strategy has been repackaged through Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program. Willse explains that similar to Compstat, HMIS generates knowledge about the homeless population and uses that knowledge to govern them. He argues that while the database provides a history of interactions with the state, it also determines how a population will be managed in the future.

The Privatization of Homeless Services

Mosley’s study of non-profit homeless service providers (HSPs) offers insight into how government funding influences their policy decisions. They argue that managerial priorities shift to establishing funding relationships rather than “substantive policy change or client representation” in an effort to secure government funding (Mosley, 2012, p. 841). Advocacy is still central to obtaining aid due to the vertical relationship between nonprofit

HSPs and government funding which emphasizes performance and accountability. Mosley explains that this incentivizes advocacy as nonprofits seek to prove their expertise, and therefore, worthiness of funding. Reliance on government aid shifts the advocacy goals of a nonprofit to maintaining funding stability away from a primary focus on helping their clients.

Mosley summarizes the complex process through which federal government funds are allocated to HSPs. The 1986 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act boosted federal spending from “virtually zero” before its passage to \$1.2 billion in 2000. The act led to a boom in nonprofit HSPs, which is why many have operated for less than 25 years. Federally, HUD distributes funding through local Continuums of Care (CoC), which are “collaborative structures comprised of local government agencies, providers, and other relevant stakeholders” (Mosley, 2012, p. 847). Local CoCs submit a single regional application and funding is distributed based on the needs of each locality. In addition to McKinney-Vento funds, nonprofit HSPs receive a mix of other federal, state and local funding in the form of grants, contracts and other arrangements. Due to the changing nature of government funding priorities, nonprofits must monitor and shift behaviors to maintain funding by “rationing services and changing their service mix” (Mosley, 2012, p. 847). Mosley provides the example of the Housing First philosophy that emerged in the early 2000s (after Culhane’s imagining of “chronic homelessness”) and how it spurred many HSPs to shift services from emergency shelter to long-term, lower barrier housing.

Gilmore (2017) explains that social service nonprofits have proliferated since the 1970s when the U.S. government began to rapidly undo many of the New Deal-era social programs that had been established since the 1930s. As legislators “shrunk” government agencies, the role of government shifted from directly delivering social services to overseeing

service provision by third parties. Gilmore introduces Wolch's term "the shadow state" which describes the phenomenon of non-profits increasingly offering social services to people "in the throes of social abandonment" (Gilmore, 2017, p.45). In other words, the non-profit sector stepped in to provide services for people who had been abandoned by government programs while receiving funding and oversight from those same agencies. The expansion of nonprofits, or the "third-sector," encouraged organizations to incorporate as nonprofits and engage in advocacy to obtain government contracts. Mosley similarly states that the interdependence between nonprofits and government comprise a "hollow state" or "third party government" (Mosley, 2012, p. 841).

Gilmore's historical analysis complements Mosley's findings as she explains how government funding imposes specialization on organizations so their staff can no longer address the larger needs of their clients and society. These relationships between the government and third-sector are cemented in funding and oversight relationships which fall under the "non-profit industrial complex" (NPIC). To Gilmore, the problem with the NPIC is that it contorts the missions of organizations to conform to "sternly specific funding rubrics and structural prohibitions" (Gilmore, 2017, p.47). Willse's writing reiterates this point – the NPIC facilitates the "proliferation of chronic homelessness programs, the circulation of funding, [and] the commissioning of studies and reports" within the realm of homeless management (Willse, 2015, p. 168)

Experiencing Homeless Services

Hoffman and Coffey (2008) overview the lived experiences of homeless folks in Portland, Oregon. Although their study was not conducted in New York City, homeless policy in the U.S. shares many consistencies due to federal funding and social science

research (Mosley, 2012; Main, 2016). They found that homeless people who engaged with the social service network in Portland felt disrespected, infantilized, and objectified, leading some to “opt-out” (distance themselves from the social service network as much as possible). Infantilization was a common theme in which respondents felt staff treated them like children who did not know what was best for themselves. Paternal attitudes and treatment were common, and the researchers explain that “by controlling resources and access to goods and services, staff attempt to elicit certain kinds of behaviors from the interviewees” (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008, p. 214). The researchers specify that this is not simply an issue with individual staff members, but rather a phenomenon that may be embedded in their training. These findings illustrate how homeless people receiving services experience the tyranny of kindness: the help they receive is dependent on submission to an organization’s norms.

The interviews revealed that it was not only strict rules that repelled some from shelters, but also the dehumanization that they faced. The disrespectful, unprofessional behavior of staff compounded with the often poor and degrading physical nature of shelters led some to opt-out in order to maintain a sense of dignity and self-respect. On the other hand, people who reported positive experiences mentioned being respected by staff as full human beings, building personal relationships, offering leniency, and simply feeling cared about by those there to help them. Having a space that “feels like home” and offers freedom of movement was also important to respondents (Hoffman and Coffey, 2008).

Hoffman and Coffey explore how HMIS value the collection of numbers and statistics over the lived experiences of ‘clients’ and transform human beings into numerical data used to assess program efficiency. In-line with Willse’s critique of HMIS, the researchers found that “being treated as only a number is symptomatic of a kind of abandonment by mainstream

society” (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008, p. 214). Taken together, Willse and Hoffman and Coffey’s critiques explain the way this abandonment happens and how housing-deprived people cope.

Picture the Homeless, a New York City homeless advocacy group led by homeless folks, profiled over 30 of their members on their website. These testimonies provide first-hand experience of housing deprived people in New York City. Many members mention the number of vacant properties in New York City and question why there are so many people using shelters when units are available. They proudly draw attention to the advocacy they have done with Picture the Homeless and call out forces such as landlords, real estate, and the city government, offering legislative solutions to these problems (*Our Members*, 2020).

A repeated comment by the members is that they are currently working and actively trying to change their situation, but the structures that they exist under prohibit them from doing so. Member Jarquay Abdullah says: “I want to see something happen with these vacant lots and buildings; right now nothing is happening with them. I want to change my situation. I’m tired of sitting in the shelter, working two jobs, and still can’t afford housing” (*Jarquay Abdullah*, 2020). Jesus Morales explains that he has a job, “but after I finish work, I’m still on the street. And the cops are treating homeless people like dirt, every day. They assaulted me and my friends while we were asleep, and they tossed our belongings in a dump truck, and it’s not right” (*Jesus Morales*, 2020). Overwhelmingly, members assert the mistreatment of homeless people, the complicity of city policy in maintaining homelessness, the number of vacant lots and units in comparison to shelter use, the inability to escape homelessness despite their best efforts, and lack of attention to homeless folks’ voices (*Our Members*, 2020). Despite these massive hurdles, all the members proudly mention their advocacy and

focus on the mission of Picture the Homeless. Hoffman and Coffey and Picture the Homeless collectively show how housing-deprived people navigate services and understand homelessness.

This study advances the discussion of the topic with a contemporary view of homeless services in New York City. It draws on literature surrounding the trends in homeless policy, theories of methods of control, the privatization of services, and the experience of homeless services. These sources will inform my analysis of New York City's changing approach to managing homelessness.

Methodology

To understand the rationale of homeless management in New York City, I will conduct a framework analysis of mayoral homelessness plans from the Bloomberg, de Blasio and Adams administrations. The analysis will compare the approaches of three mayoral administrations to identify recurring themes and reveal changes in the approach to homeless management over time.

Justification of Methodology

A framework analysis is an effective tool for policy research because its “overall objective ... is to identify, describe, and interpret key patterns within and across cases of and themes within the phenomenon of interest” (Goldsmith, 2021, p. 2061). In this study the phenomenon of interest is homeless management, and a framework analysis of the four plans will allow me to identify key patterns within them. The homelessness plans are not technically policies; however, they state the policy approach that a given administration will take throughout the mayor’s tenure. Additionally, framework analysis is “inherently comparative” and “employs an organized structure of inductively- and deductively-derived themes...to conduct cross-sectional analysis using a combination of data description and abstraction” (Goldsmith, 2021, p. 2061). Due to the comparative nature of this study, a framework analysis is apt to apply the existing theories of homeless management to policy documents while deriving meaning from the documents themselves.

Design

I will conduct the study chronologically beginning with Mayor Bloomberg’s 2004 plan *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter: The Action Plan for New York City*. Mayor de

Blasio released two homelessness plans in his tenure, first *Turning the Tide* in 2017, which provides an overall approach to homelessness in New York City, followed by *The Journey Home* in 2019, which focused on unsheltered homelessness. The analysis will conclude with Mayor Adams' *Subway Safety Plan* released in February 2022. Throughout the process, I will identify recurring themes and analyze them through the frameworks of homeless management, privatization, and methods of control discussed in the introduction and literature review. This will reveal consistent ideologies and approaches across administrations as well as departures from previous administrations' rhetoric.

Research Tools

The documents will be read and annotated through Adobe Acrobat using the highlighting, commenting and search functions to differentiate between themes and emerging frameworks. I will then organize the data in a Microsoft Word document (Appendix A) for further analysis. PDFs of the documents can be accessed through a Google search of each document's name.

Data Collection

The study will follow Goldsmith's (2021) five steps of framework analysis: 1) data familiarization, 2) identifying a thematic framework, 3) indexing data, 4) charting the data, and 5) mapping and interpreting patterns and themes. The data of interest in this study are descriptors of homeless people as individuals, framing of the crisis on a systemic level, agencies or actors involved in the plans, methods of control, privatization of services, and proposed approaches or solutions to homelessness. In the familiarization stage I will read and note-take on each document to gain an "initial, purposeful understanding of the data" (Goldsmith, 2021, p. 2063). This process will help me begin to identify key themes. The

framework identification stage involves “the identification of more abstract concepts, with the objective of providing a framework... for the analysis” (Goldsmith, 2021, p. 2065).

Rather than an in-vivo approach that purely derives codes from the documents themselves, I begin with frameworks identified in the introduction and literature review: methods of control, privatization, and descriptors of homelessness.

The third phase of indexing data involves “systematically apply[ing] the framework to all of the study data...using any approach with which the researcher is comfortable for coding data” (Goldsmith, 2021, p. 2067). I will index the data in Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft word guided by the framework components. The following step, charting, is “a process of ordering and abstracting the now-indexed study data such that the data can be examined systematically and in totality” (Goldsmith, 2021, p.2068). Additionally, I will identify key terms and phrases that are repeated throughout the document or receive less mention than anticipated. The chart will be organized horizontally by document and vertically by theme. In this stage the data will be clearly presented by document and corresponding theme in preparation for step 5: mapping and interpretation. The final stage synthesizes the findings of all previous steps and compares data “across and within framework components” (Goldsmith, 2021, p. 2071). The framework analysis chart can be found in Appendix A.

Findings

Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter: The Action Plan for New York City

Mayor Bloomberg's 2004 plan entitled *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* is a 47-page document outlining his administration's approach to combatting homelessness. As its title implies, the plan favors a shift in spending priorities away from homeless shelters towards prevention. It was released two years after The Culhane Report, which created the category of the chronically homeless. Culhane's influence is clear in Bloomberg's plan, with "chronic" or "chronically" homeless mentioned 24 times. Generally, Bloomberg urges personal responsibility of homeless individuals ("mutual responsibility" is mentioned 14 times, "accountability" is mentioned 16), creating new methods to divert people from the shelter system ("prevention" is stated 94 times), and the creation of an inter-agency tracking system for the homeless population ("coordination" is mentioned 46 times, "collaboration" 8 times, "interagency" and "cross-agency" each mentioned 5 times).

Descriptors of Homeless People

This theme explores the characteristics ascribed to homeless people as individuals. For Bloomberg, chronic homelessness is a central issue because "Sixteen percent of the single adults in shelter use more than 50% of all of the resources" (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 25). He asserts that the average length of shelter stay has grown over time, due to a lack of affordable housing and some clients' unwillingness to leave shelter, "preferring the safe and stable living arrangements provided at no cost" (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 25). Street homelessness is the other side of this coin, wherein people choose to reside in public spaces rather than "coming inside." This

population is “largely comprised of individuals with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 7). According to the plan, they make this decision to avoid sobriety or program requirements, and some because they “believe” that shelters are unsafe. For this reason, Bloomberg advocates for “standards of mutual responsibility” between staff and clients in prevention programs which urge clients to “move toward self-sufficiency” through “self-advocacy and responsibility.” Although he recognizes that there are structural factors contributing to one’s reliance on shelters, homelessness is still framed as an individual failing that a person can overcome by self-advocacy.

Framing of the Crisis

This theme focuses on the systemic framing of the homelessness crisis beyond the individual level. First, Bloomberg reminds the reader that homelessness is a national issue, not one only faced by New York City. He critiques shelters as “the de facto, institutionalized response to wide-ranging needs” and declares that “incentives should not encourage or needlessly prolong dependence on shelters” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 4). Additionally, Bloomberg challenges a “collective acceptance” of homelessness, characterized by “the generosity of passers-by [which] enables many to remain on the streets” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 4). Discharges from institutional settings (prisons, jails, hospitals) into homeless shelters drive up the shelter population, and Bloomberg recognizes that this creates a cycle of homelessness. He also acknowledges that there is “a profound shortage of housing at every rental level,” especially affordable housing (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004).

A central point of the plan is that a lack of information-sharing across agencies slows the outreach process and distribution of services which necessitates a city-wide database to

coordinate efforts. Ultimately, Bloomberg blames the bloated and ineffective shelter system on a series of “well-meaning court orders and administrative policies” such as “New York’s extraordinary commitment to guaranteeing shelter” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 22, 29).

Actors Involved in the Plan & Privatization

Continuing with his calls for inter-agency collaboration, Bloomberg asserts that no single agency can handle the homeless crisis alone. The plan thanks 12 NGOs and individuals for their donations, however it is unclear in what way these donations were made and what they were used for. The co-chairs of the planning process include the mayor’s chief of staff Peter Madonia, the chairman of Association for a Better New York (ABNY) William C. Rudin, and Lilliam Barrios-Paoli of United Way of New York City (the latter are nonprofit organizations). The coordinating committee is extensive and includes collaborators from city agencies (New York City Civil Court, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), and the Human Rights Administration (HRA), nonprofits (St. Francis Friends of the Poor and Common Ground), business improvement districts (Grand Central Partnership and the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation), banks and private equity firms (Community Capital Bank, American Property Financing, and Lightyear Capital), and real estate groups (Real Estate Board of New York and Brookfield Financial Properties). This is not a complete list, but it highlights the public-private interests that shaped the plan.

Bloomberg also announced a DHS-Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DoHMH) “tracking initiative” to expedite service and programming efficiency. The plan establishes a joint HRA-DHS team to assist Adult Protective Services (APS) clients in avoiding homelessness and refer others to the program. Bloomberg planned to expand a State

Division of Parole pilot program to divert parolees from shelter, and instead place them in permanent housing. He calls for “city-funded nonprofit legal services” in an effort to prevent homelessness by offering free legal services to people facing eviction. Finally, he drew attention to his housing plan, *The New Housing Marketplace*, in which “City agencies and private interests collectively will leverage funding, provide financial incentives, and simplify the regulatory and development processes to increase the supply of affordable housing” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 35).

Methods of Control

Bloomberg’s plan mentions HOMESTAT once, which he claims, “will give public agencies and providers new data on reasons for homelessness, best practices, and insight into broader policies that can reduce homelessness” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 37). He repeatedly mentions the use of databases and “computerized technologies” to create accountability measures and client monitoring tools that generate information for the academic and research communities, as well as public policy. Specifically, he calls for a “database system containing demographics, lodging and housing history (including hospitalization and incarceration), clinical information, and details about prior homelessness episodes” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 9). The plan does not mention police, policing, or the NYPD. However, it introduces mandatory aftercare services to those leaving shelters that “need, but reject, this assistance” (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 13).

Proposed solutions

The overarching solutions mentioned in *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* are to shift spending from shelter to prevention, increase accountability measures for providers and

clients, and increase inter-agency information sharing. Bloomberg established the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE), a volunteer-run, annual count of the street homeless population which remains the city's only attempt to quantify how many people live in public spaces to this day. The plan emphasizes a streamlined placement process into other assistance programs to divert people from shelters and creates new approaches for outreach teams that "offer comprehensive integrated treatment for co-occurring mental health, substance abuse, and medical issues (particularly HIV)" (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 9). Despite calls to shrink the shelter population, the plan does embrace transitional housing, including Safe Haven locations, which are described as "similar to drop-in centers but have onsite beds" (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p.10). The final action listed in the plan is to "create community ownership around addressing homelessness" through public education campaigns (*Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter*, 2004, p. 38).

Turning the Tide & The Journey Home

Mayor de Blasio released two plans during his tenure. *Turning the Tide* is a 128-page plan that offers an overall approach to homelessness while *The Journey Home* is 32 pages and focuses on unsheltered homelessness. de Blasio's administration takes a more empathetic tone than Bloomberg's, emphasizing "getting people back on their feet," supporting families, and building trust (over both plans, "trust" and "compassion" are each mentioned 17 times, "support" is mentioned 141). At the same time, they call for increased policing initiatives and innovative outreach techniques to divert the homeless population from subways and increase efficiency ("NYPD" is mentioned 41 times and "outreach" is mentioned 175 across plans).

Descriptors of Homeless People

de Blasio's plans describe homeless people as having been failed by "persistent inequalities," but maintain that the central cause of unsheltered homelessness is an unwillingness to accept services (*The Journey Home*, 2017, p. 1). He asserts that homeless folks "come from all walks of life," a departure from Bloomberg's focus on chronic homelessness (*The Journey Home*, 2017, p. 7). de Blasio does not mention chronic homelessness in his plan, opting instead for "long term street homelessness." This is contrary to "transient" homelessness, people who only temporarily reside on the streets. The plan declares that "homelessness should be at most a temporary condition, not a defining identity or personal characteristic" (*The Journey Home*, 2017, p. 4). *The Journey Home* also includes three "client stories" which detail how outreach teams built trust with three individuals to convince them to accept city services. *Turning the Tide* centers the crisis around homeless families with children who accounted for two thirds of the DHS shelter population, and one third of this group included an employed family member. It provides a detailed breakdown of the homeless population across age, family type, employment, and education level. *Turning the Tide* also includes client stories in their own words, describing how they became homeless.

Framing of Crisis

de Blasio frames the homelessness crisis as a result of wages not keeping pace with housing costs paired with evictions and broken mental and behavioral healthcare systems. *Turning the Tide* emphasizes wide-spread rent-burdened households and people's inability to afford average rent and utilities, but reminds readers that the crisis in New York City is still lower than other major U.S. cities. It asserts that "many of the factors that create homelessness are out of our control" and passively states that many middle and low-income

families were driven to homelessness by the loss of “hundreds of thousands of affordable or rent stabilized units” (*Turning the Tide*, 2017, p. v). Like Bloomberg, de Blasio addresses the shelter system as ineffective and resulting from “decades of short-term responses” that won’t be solved overnight (*Turning the Tide*, 2017, p. iii).

The Journey Home promises to end street homelessness within five years through “individualized paths that have helped more than 2,450 New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness find their way back home” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 1). It does not define what “finding their way back home” means. The plan frames the homelessness crisis as “a moral challenge” and declares it is New York City’s “moral imperative” to help every unsheltered homeless individual (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 1). To the de Blasio administration, “every engagement [with outreach teams] represents progress” as they “offer a helping hand” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 9). It is the collective responsibility of “all New Yorkers to help our homeless neighbors to make the journey home” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 20).

Actors Involved & Privatization

Turning the Tide and *The Journey Home* cite similar agencies involved in managing homelessness: DHS, HRA, Department of Social Services (DSS), Health and Hospitals (H+H), DoHMH, NYPD, Department of Sanitation, and the Parks Department. *Turning the Tide* highlights the importance of career, mental health, and substance use counsellors, and *The Journey Home* similarly mentions licensed clinicians and psychiatrists, and calls on property owners, faith, civic and business leaders to identify new locations for Safe Haven shelters. It repeatedly encourages “everyday New Yorkers” to step in and call 311 when they “see someone in need” or have loved ones experiencing homelessness (*The Journey Home*,

2019, p. 20). Both plans call for collaboration with nonprofits including the Doe Fund, Manhattan Outreach Consortium, BronxWorks, and the Bowery Residents Committee, which operate outreach and shelter facilities. Specifically, *The Journey Home* states that “DHS welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the business community and tech sector to serve the needs of homeless clients, whether through partnerships or in-kind donations” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 26). *Turning the Tide* offers the following plan:

Over the next two years, the City will spur shelter development by removing barriers to nonprofit ownership of purpose-built shelters, for instance, by establishing mechanisms to help nonprofit partners finance large-scale capital projects and by expediting the shelter approval process to meet the realities of the real estate market. (*Turning the Tide*, 2017, p. 90).

Additionally, New York City will “leverage important public-private partnerships that bring together a variety of organizations and City agencies” (*Turning the Tide*, 2017, p. 52).

Methods of Control

The de Blasio administration focused on expanding HOMESTAT, diversion programs, and NYPD involvement in homeless shelters. The administration doubled spending on DHS shelter security to \$217 million in 2017, the same year the NYPD began to oversee shelter security. “The NYPD is making shelters safer,” the plan claims (*Turning the Tide*, 2017, p. ix). *The Journey Home* pedestalizes HOMESTAT, which “built the City’s first-ever By-Name list of individuals known to be homeless and residing on the streets to improve delivery of services to help them come off the streets” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 8). It expands on this, saying NYPD officers will now join outreach teams to provide “the unique combination of services that will ultimately help them come indoors” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 8).

The Street Homelessness Joint Command Center, a joint DHS-NYPD venture, “conducts interagency rapid outreach deployment from a central location using precision mapping, client information, and rapid response to incoming notifications” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 19). StreetSmart is a case management and reporting system for outreach teams that “provide them with a mechanism to track outcomes after clients have accepted services and come indoors to a transitional or permanent setting” through a by-name list of unsheltered homeless individuals that tracks each of their encounters with outreach workers (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 21). The Subway Diversion Initiative attempts to divert unsheltered people from the subways by offering the choice between receiving a summons or accepting social services for the chance to have their summonses cleared. The NYPD, MTA, New York City Transit Authority, and contracted nonprofits are involved in the Initiative.

Proposed solutions

Turning the Tide calls to reduce the number of shelters by 45% by removing cluster apartments and hotel facilities, instead identifying new shelter locations to keep people closer to their home neighborhoods. The city offered rental assistance to people leaving shelter through Living In Communities (LINC), the City Family Eviction Prevention Supplement/Family Exit Plan Supplement (CityFEPS), Special Exit and Prevention Supplement (SEPS), reopening Section 8 housing vouchers and NYCHA apartments. This assistance was paired “with funding and incentives for landlords and brokers to rehouse the homeless” (*Turning the Tide*, 2017, p. vii). The city also committed to universal legal assistance for evictions.

The Journey Home repeatedly calls on all New Yorkers to take action in order to change the “culture of our city” (*The Journey Home*, 2019, p. 1). The plan focuses on

HOMESTAT to bridge outreach efforts and track unsheltered people through engagements with outreach workers. It pledges to expand the breadth of outreach techniques and increase the number of Safe Haven and low-barrier apartments to shrink the shelter footprint. It also uses police as outreach workers and leverages legal summonses and the threat of arrest to convince people residing on subways to engage with homeless service providers.

The Subway Safety Plan

Adams' plan, *The Subway Safety Plan*, is significantly shorter than his predecessors at 17 pages. It is not explicitly a homelessness plan, however it focuses heavily on homelessness (mentioned 21 times), mental health/illness (mentioned 48 times), psychiatry (11 times), safety (30 times) and behavioral health (16 times). This count reflects variations of each word/ phrase (i.e., homeless and homelessness, psychiatric and psychiatry). The plan only addresses unsheltered homelessness, specifically on the New York City subways. Adams takes a law-and-order approach with his proposed solutions, and his rhetoric towards the homeless population takes a harsher turn than de Blasio's.

Descriptors of Homeless People

In line with his predecessors, Adams recognizes that homelessness is a structural issue stemming from a lack of critical services. He acknowledges that "all [homeless people] are our fellow New Yorkers" (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 3). Although the plan consistently draws connections between homelessness and public safety, it offers the caveat:

...while we know homelessness and violence do not equate and must not be conflated, we must also acknowledge that a small minority of individuals who may be experiencing several compounding challenges at once, including behavioral health challenges, must be reached with immediate interventions to prevent deterioration and potential danger (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 3).

Adams pledges to protect all New Yorkers, “including those experiencing homelessness and those with severe mental illness.” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 3).

At the same time, he consistently links homelessness with “severe mental illness...substance use disorder, and complex physical health needs” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 11). Adams makes the implication that homeless people are inherently mentally ill or drug abusive by pairing homelessness with the phrases “mentally ill” and “substance use disorder.” In the same vein, the plan lists prohibited behaviors that use coded language which effectively bans housing-deprived people from using the subway system.

Specifically, *The Subway Safety Plan* prohibits:

Lying down, sleeping, or outstretching in a way that takes up more than one seat per passenger or interferes with fellow passengers...Creating an unsanitary environment by spitting, littering, and more...Exhibiting aggressive behavior towards other passengers...Using the subway system for any purpose other than transportation... Smoking or open drug use (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 7).

These behaviors equate to a de facto ban on housing deprived people using the subway system.

Framing of the Crisis

Like de Blasio, Adams describes homelessness as “a painful humanitarian crisis” caused by systemic challenges including a lack mental health services and an affordable housing shortage (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 3). These causes are not addressed equally throughout the plan, however. “Housing” is mentioned 16 times, “beds” is mentioned 10 times, and “affordable” is mentioned only twice. Conversely, “mental health/illness” is mentioned 48 times within the 17-page plan, “behavior” is mentioned 16 times, “psychiatry” is mentioned 11, and “hospital” is mentioned 9.

For Adams, the lack of psychiatric beds is a central issue caused by “outdated and discriminatory” funding provisions which “disincentivized the growth of psychiatric bed capacity, especially at private hospital systems, and directly contributes to negative consequences for those with severe mental illness” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 15). This is in stark contrast to Bloomberg, who advocated for prevention rather than short-term solutions. Whereas Bloomberg mentions “prevention” 94 times, Adams mentions it only once.

The Subway Safety Plan sets strict parameters for the purpose of MTA subways: “our subways exist to move paying customers from one point to another. They are not meant to house individuals or provide recreational space, and we will make it clear our stations and trains are not intended – or available – as an alternative” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 5). It concludes, much like the prior plans, that “we will not solve a decades-long crisis overnight” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 16).

Actors Involved & Privatization

Adams’ plan calls on the same actors as previous plans: the MTA, NYPD, DHS, DoHMH, H+H, Parks Department, DSS, and HRA, among others. It also calls for collaboration with the Transit Workers Union, which had not been mentioned previously. Adams emphasizes that adequately addressing homelessness must be a joint effort between the city, state, and federal government. He says the administration will “engage in a public-private effort” to increase access to psychiatric beds (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 14). The plan does not cite specific private or nongovernmental actors that will be involved but calls on a conversation between “public and private partners, academic experts, practitioners,

persons with lived experience, advocates and government leaders” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 11).

Methods of Control

The Subway Safety Plan asserts that “public safety and justice go hand-in-hand,” creating a link between law-and-order and compassion (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 16). Adams claims that his “goal is corrective action, not removal, and we will give individuals an opportunity to remedy their behavior before taking further action” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 7). This is reminiscent of de Blasio’s Subway Diversion Initiative, as both plans strive to “correct” the actions of housing-deprived people seeking shelter in the subway system rather than immediately arresting them. Adams informs readers that “New Yorkers will continue to see an increased presence of NYPD officers in subway cars and on platforms, especially at high priority stations. More than 1,000 additional officers have already been deployed across the system” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 7). These officers “will now have a clear mandate to enforce the MTA and New York City Transit Authority (New York City TA)’s rules of conduct and will undergo additional training in these rules before setting foot in our stations and on trains” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 7). Their efforts will build on “the NYPD’s revolutionary COMPStat strategy” and “develop a similar strategy for homelessness, public safety, and mental health challenges” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 9). Interestingly, Adams does not mention HOMESTAT, an already existing technology initiated under Bloomberg and expanded under de Blasio.

A unique tenant of Adams’ plan is his focus on reforming Kendra’s Law (Mental Hygiene Law § 9.60) “so that if someone who can’t take care of themselves refuses treatment, they can be hospitalized if that is what a doctor and judge recommend” (*The*

Subway Safety Plan, 2022, p. 12). He also calls for “staff across agencies [to] be trained in 9.58 assessments – enabling better engagement and evaluation with individuals experiencing homelessness” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 5). This proposal would expand the state’s ability to forcibly institutionalize people who are perceived as unable to care for themselves.

Proposed solutions

Adams’ proposed solutions include more outreach teams, collaboration across all levels of government, reforming mental health laws, and establishing new ways to share information across agencies. Additional hospital beds are also essential to accommodate an expected influx of psychiatric patients. The plan calls to “increase availability of 140 Safe Haven beds and nearly 350 Stabilization Beds in 2022” and “expand the availability of supportive housing through new development and by streamlining the placement process” (*The Subway Safety Plan*, 2022, p. 11). He encourages state and federal partners to reform laws under their respective purviews and increase funding to grow the number of psychiatric beds and ease the process of committing people.

Discussion

Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter, *Turning the Tide*, *The Journey Home*, and *The Subway Safety Plan* paint a picture of homeless management in New York City that reflects theories from the literature review, but also diverge into unexpected claims and proposed solutions. They reveal each administration's ideology towards housing deprivation through how they discuss homeless people and frame the housing crisis. The actors mentioned in each plan are fairly consistent, but the extent to which they mention private interests reveal outside influences on proposed policies. Their methods of controlling the homeless population utilize quality-of-life policing and the tyranny of kindness to different degrees within each plan. The proposed solutions lay the foundation for each mayor's future policies and illustrate what they believe is an effective approach to managing homelessness.

Across plans there is a consistent emphasis on information-sharing across agencies, computerized tracking of the homeless population, public-private partnerships, and expanding outreach. The primary differences between plans are rhetorical, however each has a primary focus: Bloomberg on self-sufficiency and transitioning away from shelter towards prevention, de Blasio on outreach and computerized tracking, and Adams on psychiatric care and quality-of-life policing.

Expected Findings

All three mayors value public-private partnerships to alleviate homelessness. Nonprofits conduct joint outreach with the NYPD, operate shelters and conduct intake appointments with clients. A plethora of private interests were directly involved in the creation of Bloomberg's *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* – from nonprofits to investment firms. The strategy of shifting social services to the nonprofit sector is indicative

of the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) discussed by Willse and Gilmore, in which nonprofits are funded through government contracts to provide social services to people in the throes of social abandonment while the state shrinks its direct involvement in providing services.

The importance of information sharing across agencies and nonprofit organizations is heavily emphasized across plans. New York City's HOMESTAT is a HMIS which generates knowledge about the homeless population and then use that knowledge to govern them. It creates a history of interactions with the state so that individual homeless people, and the population as a whole, can be more efficiently managed. To de Blasio, every encounter between a housing deprived person and the state is a step closer to "coming inside," a progress milestone that numericizes an individual's deeply personal experience with housing deprivation. Although all three mayors claim to believe that each person is unique while collapsing the population into a database for academics and service providers to parse through. This is, as Hoffman and Coffey assert, "symptomatic of a kind of abandonment by mainstream society" (Hoffman and Coffey, 2008, p. 214).

The third consistency across plans is the acknowledgement of structural inequalities that create homelessness, but each response is still largely individualized. Bloomberg and de Blasio call for the construction of more affordable housing without reckoning with the market forces that drive up housing costs or widespread divestment from public housing. Members of Picture the Homeless express annoyance with this type of strategy that ignores residential vacancies and offers a solely market-oriented approach (*Our Members*, 2020). Approaching homelessness without addressing the speculative housing markets that determine costs and

evict those who cannot afford it is futile, because it is these market forces that produce housing deprivation to begin with (Willse, 2015).

Bloomberg is the only mayor to explicitly use the term chronic homelessness. He expresses concern with the cost of services for a minor subset of the population, similar to Culhane's focus on the cost-effectiveness of homeless services. Bloomberg also focuses on self-sufficiency and mutual responsibility between clients and staff. This is a paternalistic strategy discussed by both Hoffman and Coffey and Main, in which service providers leverage shelter and other forms of assistance to modify their clients' behaviors.

de Blasio's *The Journey Home* perfectly encapsulates the "tyranny of kindness" in which paternalistic programs demand submission to receive services. The plan empathetically addresses people experiencing homelessness, framing the crisis as a moral issue and mentioning structural causes of homelessness. This compassionate rhetoric is paired with a policing strategy (the Subway Diversion Initiative) that effectively forces housing deprived people to choose between a summons or interacting with the very system that dehumanizes and numericizes them. This is a form of conditioning in which police "attempt to elicit certain kinds of behaviors" from unsheltered homeless people by leveraging legal action (Hoffman and Coffey, 2016, p. 214).

Adams maintains a policing-oriented approach but uses less coded language to make the plan appear compassionate. In fact, Adams' plan positions quality-of-life policing as compassion. The expansion of police throughout subways with a strict directive to enforce MTA codes of conduct exemplifies the quality-of-life paradigm that Vitale critiques. The heightened policing of minor infractions that do not harm others but create an environment of "disorder" is a social control tactic to maintain "public civility" and reproduce a social order

in which housing deprived people are merely impediments to the housed people around them (Vitale, 2008). He embraces the tyranny of kindness in his campaign to expand Kendra's Law and ease the process of forcibly hospitalizing people perceived as mentally ill. This positions homeless people as both a danger to the public and infantile, unable to make decisions for their own wellbeing.

Throughout the plan, Adams paints a picture of mental illness posing a threat to general public through his repetitious pairing of mental health with homelessness and danger. The prohibited behaviors of being unsanitary, aggressive, or interfering with other passengers on the subways implies that not only are homeless riders a nuisance to the public, but a danger that must be removed. This rhetoric is not isolated to his homelessness plan – fearmongering around mental illness and crime are echoed in his media appearances and press releases. Adams publicly called 911 twice in his first six months as mayor, including on his first day in office. He has announced that he feels unsafe riding the subways, claims he has “never witnessed crime at this level” despite being a transit officer in the 1990s when crime rates were significantly higher, and visited active crime scenes (Fitzsimmons, 2022). After his inauguration, mentions of violent crime in digital and print media spiked to nearly 800 stories per month in comparison to an average of 132 stories during de Blasio's administration (Akinnibi and Wahid, 2022).

Over a year of fixating on crime and mental illness culminated on May 3, 2023, when Jordan Neely was choked to death on the subway by a fellow rider. Neely was known by regular riders for his Michael Jackson impersonations. He was also a black homeless man in the throes of social abandonment as he stood on the F train and gave a “somewhat aggressive” speech in which he demanded food, water, and announced “he didn't care about

anything” (Stieb, 2023). Neely made no explicit threats or violent actions, but another passenger found him threatening enough to put him in a chokehold for approximately 15 minutes until Neely was unconscious. He was pronounced dead at the hospital from compression to the neck, according to the medical examiner. Adams responded to the situation:

...we do know that there were serious mental health issues in play here, which is why our administration has made record investments in providing care to those who need it and getting people of the streets and the subways, and out of dangerous situations (Steib, 2023).

In an interview with CNN, Adams avoided taking a stance on vigilantism amongst subway riders, saying “each situation is different” (Brown, 2023). In the aftermath of Neely’s murder, his mental illness and prior arrests are being highlighted in the media while Adams uses the case to support removing people with visible mental illness from public life. This is a clear illustration of Adams’ vision of public safety – a homeless murder victim is the issue that must be addressed rather than the white housed man who killed him publicly, on video. Neely’s murder is the natural yet devastating culmination of Adams’ rhetoric and media fearmongering around homelessness and crime.

Unexpected Findings

The four plans raised various themes that were not mentioned in the literature. Each plan evoked community ownership over addressing homelessness. Bloomberg strived to increase community awareness and challenge “a collective acceptance of homelessness” while identifying preventative measures that could be taken within communities (Bloomberg, 2002, p. 5). de Blasio makes consistent and specific requests of New Yorkers. He asks community leaders to identify new shelter locations in their neighborhoods and urges New Yorkers and

families of housing-deprived people to call 311 when they perceive someone to be homeless in public spaces, declaring: “I call on every New Yorker to help” (de Blasio, 2019, p. 1).

Unlike his predecessors, Adams does not call on the community extensively in his plan. He does mention community-based service providers and makes vague references to “permanent housing and community,” but doesn’t specify what this means (Adams, 2022, p. 4). de Blasio’s plan specifically invites New Yorkers to join the policing efforts by calling 311 under the guise of helping their fellow unsheltered neighbors. It invites everyday people to assist the state in their project to surveil and remove homeless people from public life, framing it as a compassionate act. It comforts people witnessing the inhumanity of housing deprivation, alleviates feelings of guilt or complicity one may have. Bloomberg’s desire to create “community ownership” may be an attempt to build urgency amongst the housed population through a feeling of complicity in mass housing deprivation, making people more eager to accept policy changes. Adams largely shies away from community, and instead seeks to build confidence in the state to manage and remove agency from homeless people.

Bloomberg and Adam’s offer contradictory plans – whereas Bloomberg aims to reduce spending on shelters, shrink the shelter footprint, and instead invest in diversion, Adams’ focus is to increase spending on temporary psychiatric beds. While all three mayors address mental illness in their plans, Adams especially instates homeless people struggling with mental health as an object of fear. His approach is reflective of Willse’s conceptualization of the “mad homeless,” people who are presented as simultaneously subhuman and “an excess of personhood” in which “their bodies and possessions [occupy] too much inconvenient space” (Willse, 2014, p. 95). Adams’ approach is medicalization, a process wherein “the body and mind of the individual subject become targeted as the source

of social problems” to be controlled through surveillance, policing, and (in Adams’ case) forced institutionalization (Willse, 2014, p. 97). To Adams, the market forces that structure housing access in the United States are not the root of social problems. Rather, the bodies and minds of housing deprived populations are targeted to remove signs of economic inequality and the failure of the free market to provide housing.

The final consistency across plans is the assertion that the current shelter system is not working. In a way, this is a necessary caveat based on the growing number of people depending on shelters, but it also raises the question: what does a functional shelter system look like? What is the function of shelters to begin with? Due to New York State’s entitlement to shelter, their legal function is to provide shelter to anyone that needs it. To the housing deprived people that use them, shelters are a temporary location where they can rest in exchange for modifying certain behaviors. To the nonprofits that operate shelters, they are a vehicle to obtain government funding. To social scientists and social workers, they are a source of knowledge collection, a mode to reform behavior, and a vehicle to provide services. To the NYPD, they are the central location to deposit unsheltered people who are occupying public space. To capital, they are the place where excess populations may be disposed when their presence impedes on consumer economies.

Shelters are a sorting system for surplus life that has been evicted from housing and neglected by society. They are not meant to end homelessness, especially when housing is distributed by the invisible hand of the market (which none of these plans claim to regulate or reign in). To borrow Willse’s words, they “invest in life and health as objects of governance without challenging the conditions that reproduce and distribute illness and exposure to premature death” (Willse, 2014, p. 50). Mayors assert that the shelter system isn’t working

because the number of housing-deprived people continues to expand. However, they do not offer a vision of what it would look like if the shelter system did “work” properly. Rather, each mayor attempts to manage surplus populations that have been displaced by a neoliberal housing market, then generate knowledge off the population which streamlines their future policing and capacity for investment by private interests.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the fact that the mayoral homeless plans are not actual policies, but rather proposed roadmaps for each administration. The documents obscure the actual policy decisions made by each administration as well as the outcomes on homeless people as individuals and as a population. Although the plans outline spending priorities, the actual funding of government agencies as well as contracts with independent contractors are not present. Finally, this analysis excludes the public reception of each administration’s actions.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future studies can bridge the gaps in this framework analysis by analyzing funding streams for government agencies and nonprofits to derive meaning from where public money is funneled. Looking into the growth of the homeless population in relation to housing policies and other determinants could identify causal relationships. Research into local reporting on homelessness and management techniques will reveal public perceptions, media representations, and intricacies of how the generalized plans are carried out. Looking into individual nonprofits contracted by the city would also open new inquiries into the role of the third-sector and how neoliberal outsourcing of social services plays out. Finally, following the Adams administration with a close and critical eye is necessary as he expands the

capacity of police to control not only homeless people with mental illnesses, but anyone who disrupts the existing social order.

Conclusions

This study investigated the changing approaches to homeless management over three mayoral administrations through a framework analysis of their homelessness plans to understand the intention of homeless services in New York City. Existing research provided foundational information on the history of homelessness in New York City, the privatization of homeless services, methods of controlling housing deprived populations, and the experiences of homeless people. The literature offered a theoretical understanding of the issue but obscured the intricacies of homeless policy in New York City. Using pre-established frameworks to analyze the four documents, I found a consistent emphasis on information-sharing across agencies, computerized tracking of the homeless population, public-private partnerships, and expanding outreach.

Each administration had a different focus: Bloomberg on self-sufficiency and transitioning away from shelter towards prevention, de Blasio on outreach and computerized tracking, and Adams on psychiatric care and quality-of-life policing. The analysis raised new questions about the real outcomes of these plans and what the outsourcing of homeless services looks like. Ultimately, each mayor neglected to reform the market-based system of housing that produces housing deprivation. Without establishing a new, equitable method of distributing housing, any homeless policy is simply aimed at managing homelessness, not eliminating it.

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Appendix A: Framework Analysis Chart

Framework	Bloomberg	de Blasio	Adams
Descriptors of Homeless People (Individual)			
Framing of the Crisis (Systemic)			
Actors involved in the plan			
Methods of Control			
Privatization of Services			
Proposed solutions			
Repeated Words & Phrases			
Structure of Document			