

Quality and Accessibility of Rent Stabilized Units

An analysis based on the 2017 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (NYCHVS).

Overall, the quality of the New York City housing stock is high. Conditions have improved since the advent of the NYCHVS, when quality was one of the City's greatest concerns. In more recent years, other issues, including affordability, have surpassed quality concerns. As we discuss here, although quality is high, there are still major differences across types of housing. We compare the quality of rent regulated and private, unregulated units.

The NYCHVS has collected data on housing quality since its first survey cycle in 1965. Data collection includes both interviewer observations and respondent answers on the condition of the building and unit. This information is collected for all units, but here we discuss only rent stabilized and private, unregulated units. It is important that we recognize the age of the housing stock when discussing differences between these groups. Buildings require upkeep as they age, so all else being equal, newer buildings are generally of higher quality than older buildings. Rent stabilized units are generally in buildings with six or more units built before 1974. As a result, a larger share of rent stabilized units is in older buildings compared with private, unregulated units.

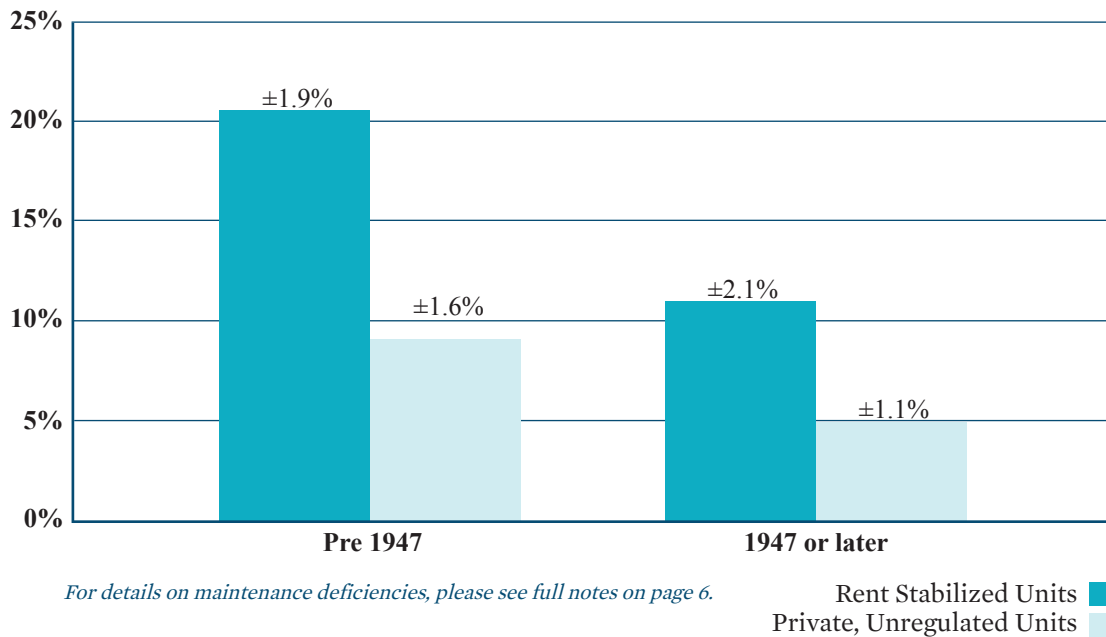
Table 1. Distribution of Units, by Rent Stabilization Status and Year Built

	Rent Stabilized Units		Private, Unregulated Units	
	Estimate	Margin of Error	Estimate	Margin of Error
1990 or later	8.4%	± 1.4%	12.3%	± 1.4%
1960 to 1989	10.8%	± 1.5%	18.5%	± 1.3%
1930 to 1959	32.8%	± 2.4%	27.6%	± 1.8%
1901 to 1929	44.6%	± 2.5%	35.5%	± 1.8%
1900 and earlier	3.5%	± 1.0%	6.0%	± 1.2%
Total	946,514		879,995	

As shown in Table 1, 45% of rent stabilized units are in buildings built between 1901 and 1929, compared with 36% of private, unregulated units. When we look at units in buildings built after 1960, about 30% of private and 20% of rent stabilized units were built in this period. There is not a stark divide between ages of the buildings containing the two types of units, however, since stabilized stock can destabilize and new buildings can have stabilized units through programs such as 421a, J51, and regulatory agreements.

But, it is interesting to note that there are differences in quality between rent stabilized and private, unregulated units, regardless of age. When we compare rent stabilized and private, unregulated units built before 1947, we see that a larger share of rent stabilized units have three or more maintenance deficiencies. The same holds true for units built after 1947.

Figure 1. Units with Three or More Maintenance Deficiencies, by Year Built



When we look at maintenance deficiencies overall, a higher proportion of households in private, unregulated units (64%) had no maintenance deficiencies, compared with 50% of households in rent stabilized units. About twice as many households in regulated units reported having three or more maintenance deficiencies as households in private, unregulated units.

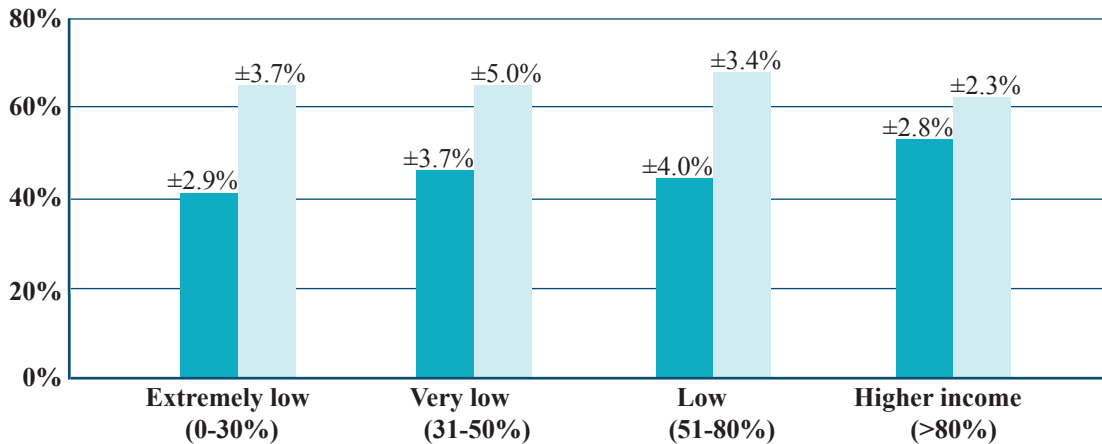
Table 2. Maintenance Deficiencies

	Rent Stabilized Units		Private, Unregulated Units	
	Estimate	Margin of Error	Estimate	Margin of Error
No Maintenance Deficiencies	47.0%	± 1.6%	63.6%	± 1.4%
3+ Maintenance Deficiencies	17.8%	± 1.7%	7.5%	± 1.0%
5+ Maintenance Deficiencies	4.2%	± 0.8%	1.4%	± 0.4%
Total	946,514		879,995	

'3+ maintenance deficiencies' includes units that reported 3, 4, 5, 6, or all 7 deficiencies; units with 5+ maintenance deficiencies are therefore a subset of these units. For details on maintenance deficiencies, please see full notes on page 6.

We further investigate the prevalence of maintenance deficiencies across different income levels defined by HUD Income Limits (HUDIL). A higher proportion of units have no maintenance deficiencies in private, unregulated units, regardless of the income of the household. Among rent stabilized units, a smaller proportion of households have one or more maintenance deficiency in higher income households (earning more than 80% HUDIL) than in lower income households (earning less than 30% HUDIL).

Figure 2. Units with No Maintenance Deficiencies, by HUD Income Limits

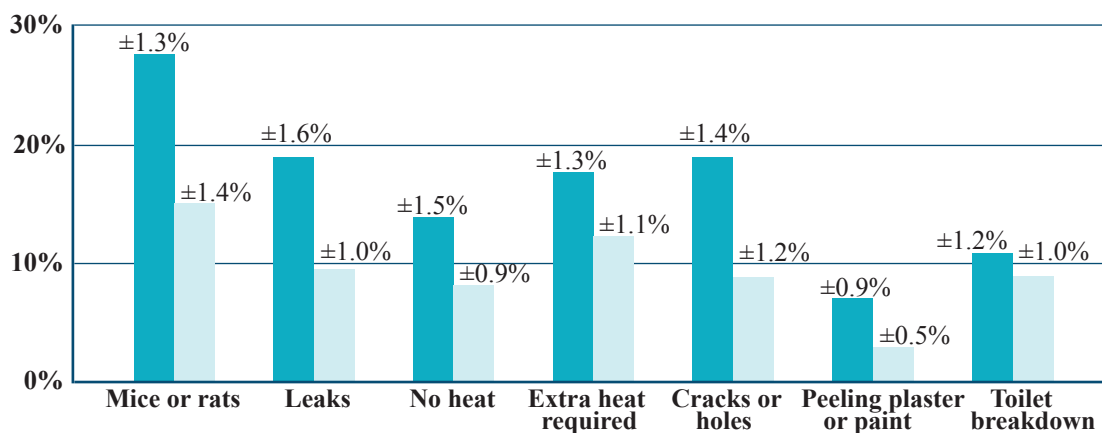


HUD Income Limits are based on FY 2016 Income Limits. Income Limits are not calculated for households with more than eight people or for households where any component of income was top coded. Households that reported having no income are counted as having \$0 income and are included in these estimates. For details on maintenance deficiencies, please see full notes on page 6.

Rent Stabilized Units
Private, Unregulated Units

There are more maintenance deficiencies in rent stabilized units than private, unregulated units, regardless of the problem. When we look at maintenance deficiencies broken down by type of issue, we see that there is a greater prevalence of some problems than others. As seen in Figure 3, more than a quarter of households in rent stabilized units have seen mice or rats, or signs of mice or rats, in their building in the last 90 days, compared with about 15% in private, unregulated units.

Figure 3. Maintenance Deficiencies, by Type



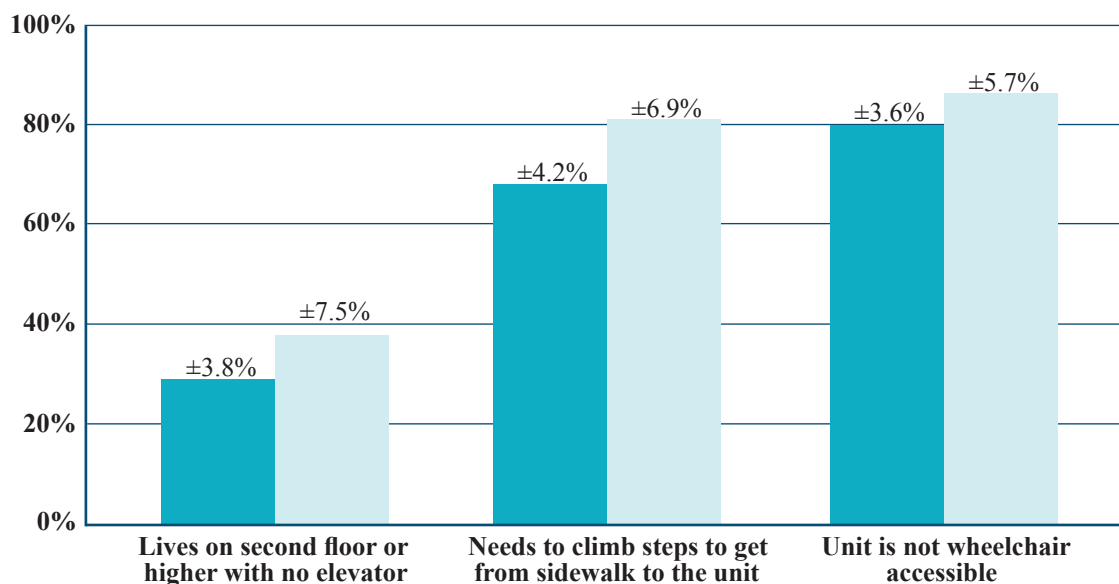
For details on maintenance deficiencies, please see full notes on page 6. 'Toilet breakdown' is not calculated for units with no plumbing facilities or no toilet.

Rent Stabilized Units
Private, Unregulated Units

The difference in the prevalence of maintenance deficiencies between rent stabilized and private, unregulated units is significant. Even when we factor in the age of the building and household income levels into our analysis, we continue to see more maintenance deficiencies in rent stabilized units. This is especially interesting when we look at certain types of deficiencies. Issues on the apartment level, such as leaks, cracks, and peeling plaster have a higher prevalence in rent stabilized units than private, unregulated units, despite reforms that have encouraged apartment-level improvements in rent stabilized units.

In addition to the physical condition of units, as measured by the prevalence of maintenance deficiencies, we also consider the units' accessibility. NYCHVS field representatives record whether it is possible to reach a unit from the sidewalk without climbing any steps. They also record floor of unit and whether there is an elevator in the building. In Figure 4, we compare the accessibility of rent stabilized units with private, unregulated units for those units with a senior in the household that has aged in place, defined here as having lived in the unit for 20 or more years. When we look at households that have a senior that has aged in place, about 150,000 are in rent stabilized units and about 40,000 of them are in private, unregulated units.

Figure 4. Accessibility for Seniors Who Have Aged in Place



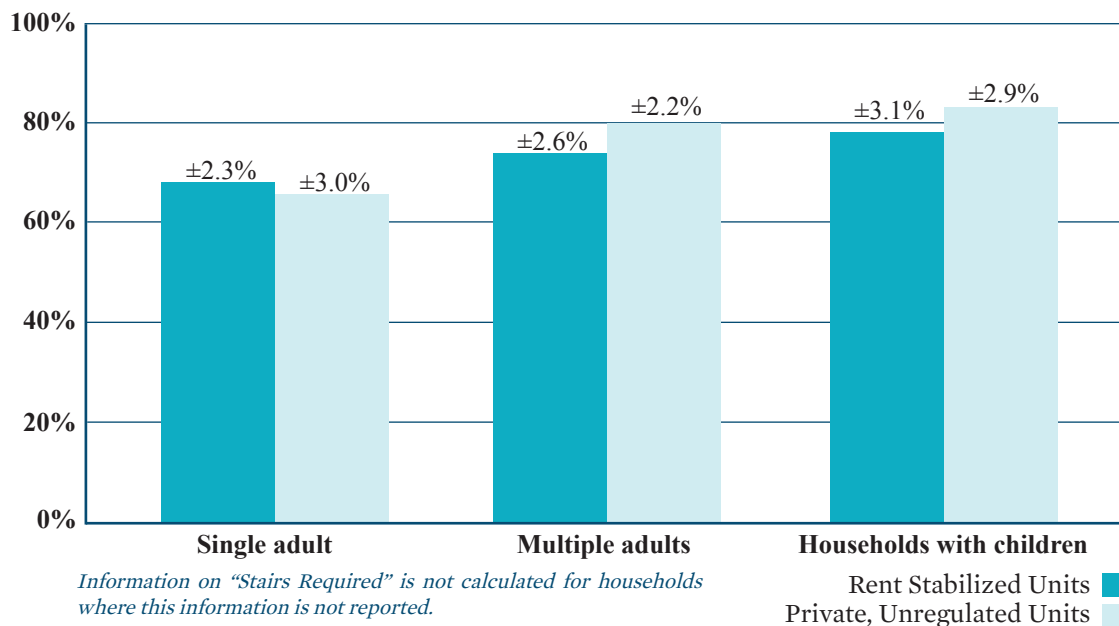
Estimates in this figure are restricted to households with one or more senior that moved into their unit in 1998 or earlier. 'Lives on second floor or higher with no elevator' is defined as living on the second floor or higher in a building that does not have a passenger elevator. 'Needs to climb steps to get from sidewalk to unit' is not calculated for households where this information is not reported. 'Unit is not wheelchair accessible' is based on five structural characteristics of the unit and building: (1) street/inner lobby entry at least 32 inches wide (to allow a wheelchair to move in and out); (2) residential unit entrance of the same width; (3) elevator door at least 36 inches wide and cab at least 51 inches deep (in buildings with elevators); (4) no stairs between the sidewalk and a passenger elevator (in buildings with an elevator); and (5) no stairs between the sidewalk and the residential unit. Wheelchair access is not calculated for households where one or more of the responses to the questions used to determine if a unit was wheelchair accessible was not reported.

As shown in Figure 4, regardless of stabilization, more than 60% of households with seniors who have aged in place in these units have to climb steps to get from the sidewalk to their unit. More than 80% of their units are not wheelchair accessible. Since there is a similar proportion of accessible units in private, unregulated and stabilized units (according to these measures), accessibility may be a challenge for some seniors across all housing types.

Although the NYCHVS does not measure whether or not a household needs such accessibility measures, it does allow us to look at other household traits that may be indicative of this need. For example, as discussed in the first memo on the sociodemographics of rent stabilized tenants, rent stabilized units house more seniors than private, unregulated units. These seniors have stayed in their units for a longer period of time as well, and are more likely to have aged in place in their current home. These residents may not have had accessibility in mind when they moved into their current unit, but it may have become a more important issue as they aged.

We also know, however, that accessibility is not only an issue for seniors. It can affect all residents and types of households for a variety of reasons. Across all household types, there is a similar share of rent stabilized and private, unregulated units that can be accessed without going up or down any stairs, about 77% of private, unregulated units and about 73% of rent stabilized units. As Seen in Figure 5, this holds true regardless of housing type.

Figure 5. Stairs are Required to Get from the Sidewalk to the Unit, by Household Composition



Summary

It is important that we continue to examine the quality of New York City’s housing stock. Rent stabilized units are in older buildings and have more maintenance deficiencies than private, unregulated units. As the original rent stabilized stock continues to age, units that already had more quality issues than private, unregulated units may experience increasing deficiencies. Maintenance deficiencies not only reflect issues with the housing stock, but also indicate potential danger to its occupants. Lack of accessibility affects tenants in both private, unregulated and rent stabilized units. Although there are similar levels of accessibility across rent stabilized and private, unregulated units, rent stabilized units house a large population of seniors that are aging in place and may face accessibility challenges in their homes.

The New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey

All data cited here come from the 2017 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (NYCHVS). The NYCHVS is a representative survey of the New York City housing stock and population sponsored by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. It is the longest running housing survey in the country and is statutorily required. Data from the survey cover many characteristics of the City's population, households, housing stock, and neighborhoods, including: size and composition of the housing inventory, housing costs and affordability, housing quality, housing subsidy, tenure and building characteristics, demographics, education, income, household composition and length of residence, and vacancy status.

For more information about the NYCHVS, please visit:

www.census.gov/programs-surveys/nychvs.html

Maintenance Deficiencies

There are seven maintenance deficiencies that are considered in the tables and figures in this memo, they are defined follows: 1) "Mice or rats" is based on sightings of mice, rats, or signs of either in the building in the last 90 days; 2) "Leaks" is based on water leaking into the home within the last twelve months; 3) "No heat" is based on having at least one breakdown of heating equipment that lasted at least six hours during the last winter; 4) "Extra heat required" is based on having to use additional sources of heat because the regular heating system did not provide enough heat; 5) "Cracks or holes" is based on having open cracks or holes in the ceiling or walls or holes in the floor; 6) "Broken plaster or peeling paint" is based on having either broken plaster or peeling paint larger than 8.5" x 11;" 7) "Toilet breakdown" is based on all toilets in the unit not working for at least six consecutive hours in the last three months. Excepting Figure 3, all estimates of maintenance deficiencies in this memo are only calculated for households that reported either having or not having all deficiencies. Units where the presence or absence of any one or more of these maintenance deficiencies was not reported are not included in these estimates.

Glossary

Rent Stabilization - Rent stabilization generally covers buildings built before 1974, and apartments removed from rent control. It also covers buildings that receive J-51 and 421-a tax benefits. The NYC Rent Guidelines Board sets rates for rent increases in stabilized apartments in the five boroughs. Rent stabilization provides protections to tenants in addition to limitations on the amount of rent increases. Many affordable housing programs are subject to rent stabilization and may be included in these estimates.

Unregulated - In this document, we refer to rental units with no rent regulation, subsidy, or additional housing intervention as unregulated or private units. Unregulated units are market-rate and are not subject to limits on rent increases.

For more definitions and information about rent regulation, please visit:

www.nysher.org/Rent/FactSheets/

For more information on HUD income limits in New York City, please visit:

www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il.html

Margins of Error

All numbers reported in this memo are estimates of the population and are subject to sampling and non-sampling error. The precision of these estimates is captured in the margins of error, which are reported along with each estimate. All margins of error in this memo are based on a 95% confidence interval, meaning that there is a 95% chance the actual figure for any estimate is within the range of that estimate plus and minus the corresponding margin of error. For example, in Table 1 we report that 44.6% of rent stabilized units were built between 1901 and 1929; the margin of error for this estimate is 2.5%. This should be interpreted as there being a 95% chance that the actual percentage of rent stabilized units built between 1901 and 1929 is within the range of 42.1% and 47.1%. One way to check whether two groups are meaningfully different is to compare the ranges to see if they do not overlap.

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<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/policy-reports.page>