

Portland Tenants United: 2022 Renter Survey Report



Introduction

For the past 3 years, Portland Tenants United (PTU) has conducted an annual survey of Portland area renters to better understand tenant concerns and experiences. This year, the survey was administered throughout January and February, asking tenants to reflect on their housing experience in 2022. 162 tenants responded to the survey. The prevalence of persistent and unresolved housing issues, as well as patterns of landlord harassment, indicate the need for stronger tenant protections and rental support services.

Key Takeaways

1. 61% of respondents saw their rent increase over the past year. Of these tenants, the most common margin of increase was between 5-10%. However, 1 in 10 tenants saw their rent increase by more than 10%, which represents an increase larger than 2022's heightened inflation rates. This increase had significant consequences for the majority of households surveyed.
2. The overall sentiment amongst respondents about their housing and tenancy in 2022 was mixed. Almost half of respondents indicated that their housing situation was less than satisfactory; 32% expressed that it was "*not great, but could be worse*" and 15% felt that it was "*awful*."
3. Negative relations and perceived harassment from a landlord and/or property manager was a substantial cause of housing dissatisfaction and distress amongst tenants. 72% of respondents faced one or more significant housing issues in 2022, with 50% of these tenants experiencing three or more issues. 42% reported that their negative experience felt like harassment.
4. 44% of respondents expressed that their housing stability was threatened in 2022. The most common cause for this instability was difficulty paying rent due to income loss or rent increase. The second most common cause was conflict with a landlord and/or property manager. 17% of these tenants were prompted to move due to this instability.
5. While most tenants attempted to resolve their housing issues by contacting their landlord, a majority struggled to achieve a successful resolution. Only 14% reported that *most or all* of their housing issues were resolved, and 34% expressed that *none* of their issues were resolved.
6. A common theme shared by respondents was feeling precarious and anxious about their housing situation, and that they lacked options for seeking improvements. Tenants expressed that this insecurity and power disadvantage in relation to their landlord made it more difficult to advocate for themselves.

Profile of Respondents

The tenants surveyed had lived in their current home anywhere between a few months to 30 years, though most respondents had tenure lengths of up to 5 years (Figure 1). Tenants rented from property owners of varying sizes; 22% reported renting from a small landlord (managing less than 5 units) and 44% reported renting from a large landlord (more than 30 units) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: No. of years in current home as tenant
(n = 160)

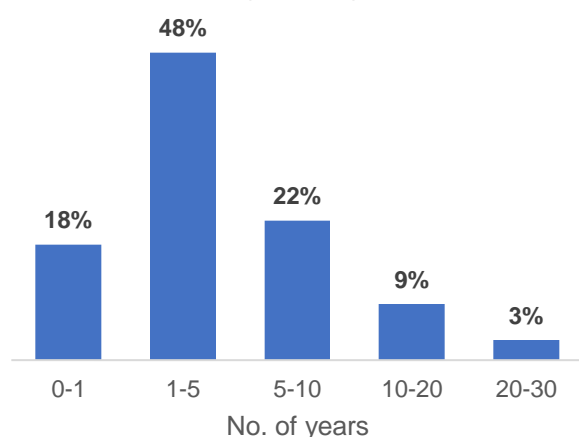
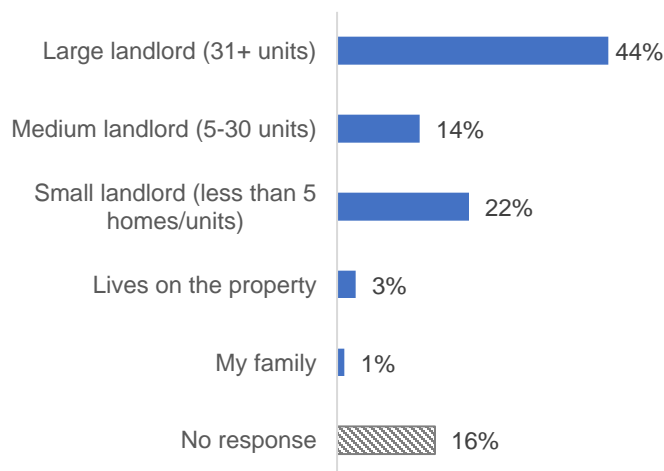


Figure 2: Size of current landlord (n = 162)



Rent Increases

61% of respondents saw their rent increase over the past year. The most common margin of increase was between 5-10%, though 1 in 10 tenants saw their rent increase by over 10% (Figure 3). Notably, a greater percentage of respondents who saw an increase in rent also reported having had a conflict of some type with their landlord and/or manager in the past year – 57% compared to only 36% of those whose rent didn't increase (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Annual rent increase percentages (n = 162)

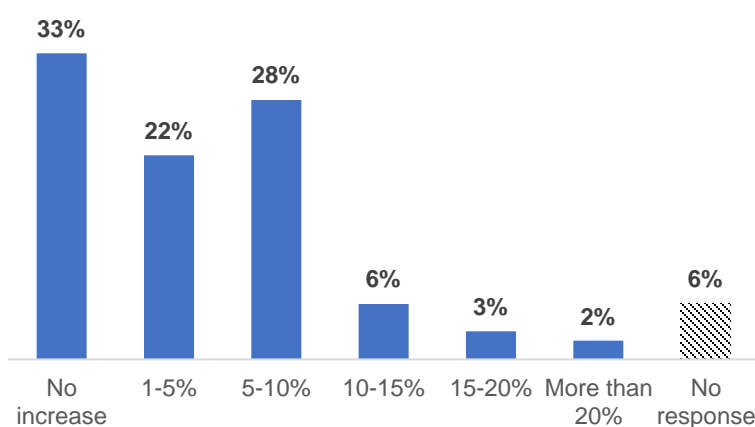
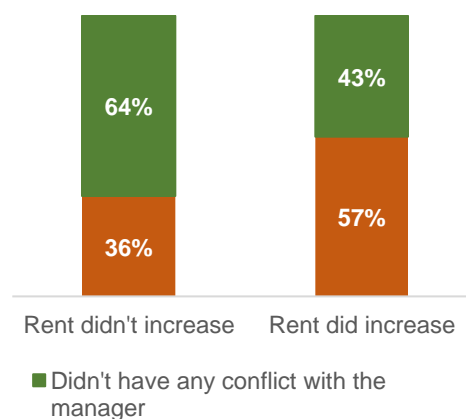
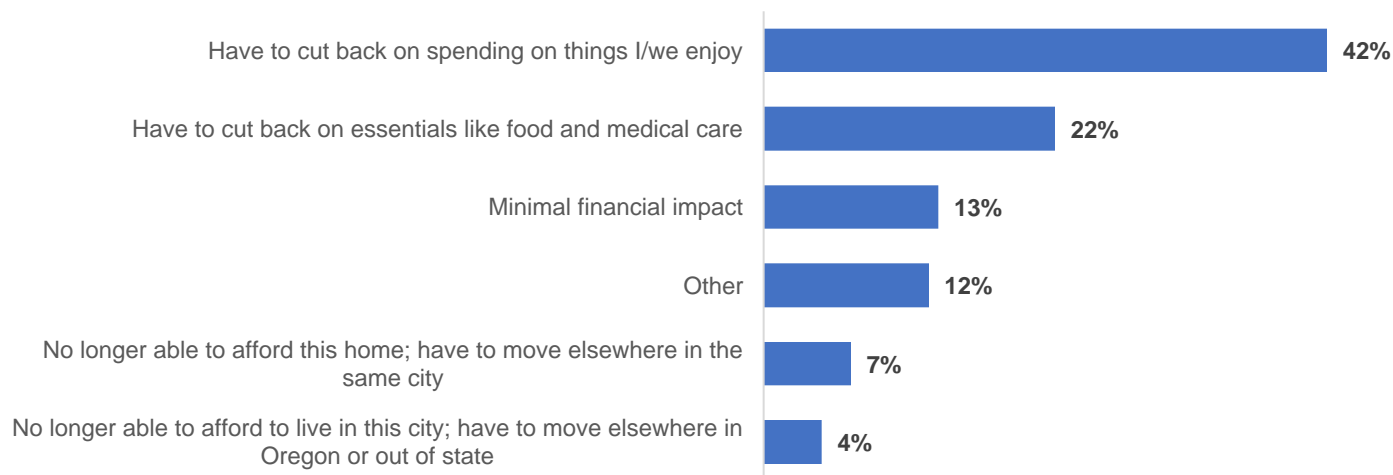


Figure 4: Rent increase and conflicts with landlord



When asked about the impact of this rent increase on their life, **almost 90% of respondents reported that the impact was more than minimal**. 42% expressed that they have had to reduce spending on things they enjoy, and 22% said they have had to cut back on essentials. 11% of respondents reported that they are no longer able to afford their home and will need to move, either within the city or outside of the Portland area (Figure 5).

Figure 5: “What does this rent increase mean for you / your family?”



Other reasons given for “What does this rent increase mean for you / your family?”

If rent goes up again in 2023, we may have to move	Reduces how much I can add to savings each month
Increase in overall loan amount for educational expenses	Added another roommate
If rent increases anymore, we'll have to move to either low-income housing or out of state	Reduce assistance to friends & neighbors in need...
If I didn't have three other roommates , would not be able to afford living in Portland	One more rent increase, can't afford to live here any longer
Was already struggling to keep up with rent and this seems to be the least expensive apartment within my son's school district	

Housing Issues

Tenants were asked if they had experienced any housing issues in 2022 that are commonly associated with landlord harassment. **72% of respondents said that they experienced at least one significant issue**, with 35% experiencing three or more issues. The most common concerns were one's landlord and/or property manager failing to perform requested maintenance and being unresponsive to communication (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Compounding housing issues (n = 117)

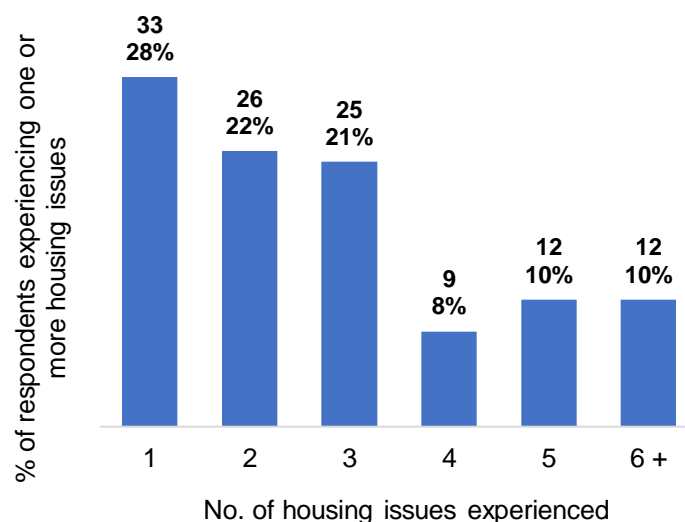
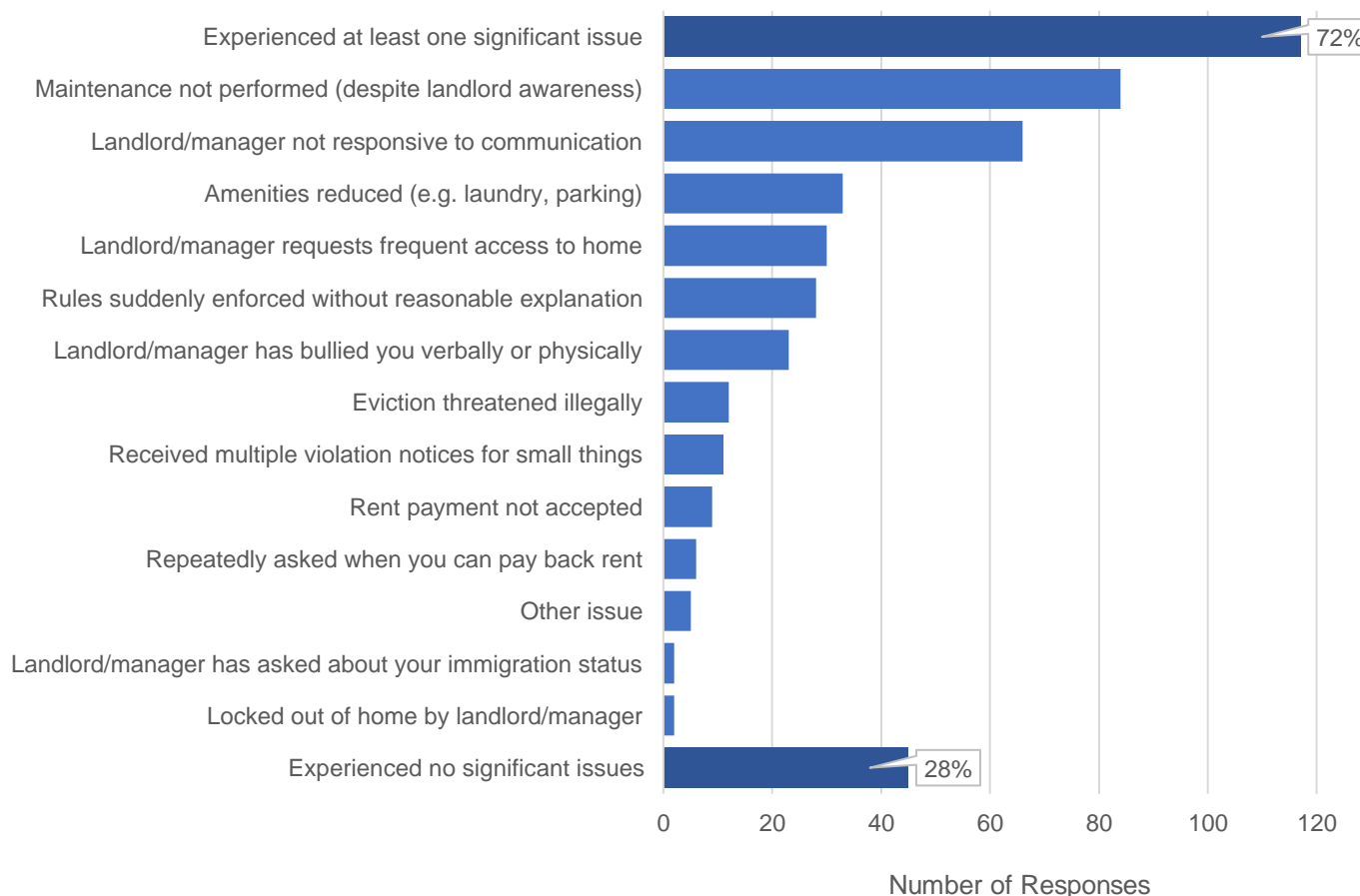


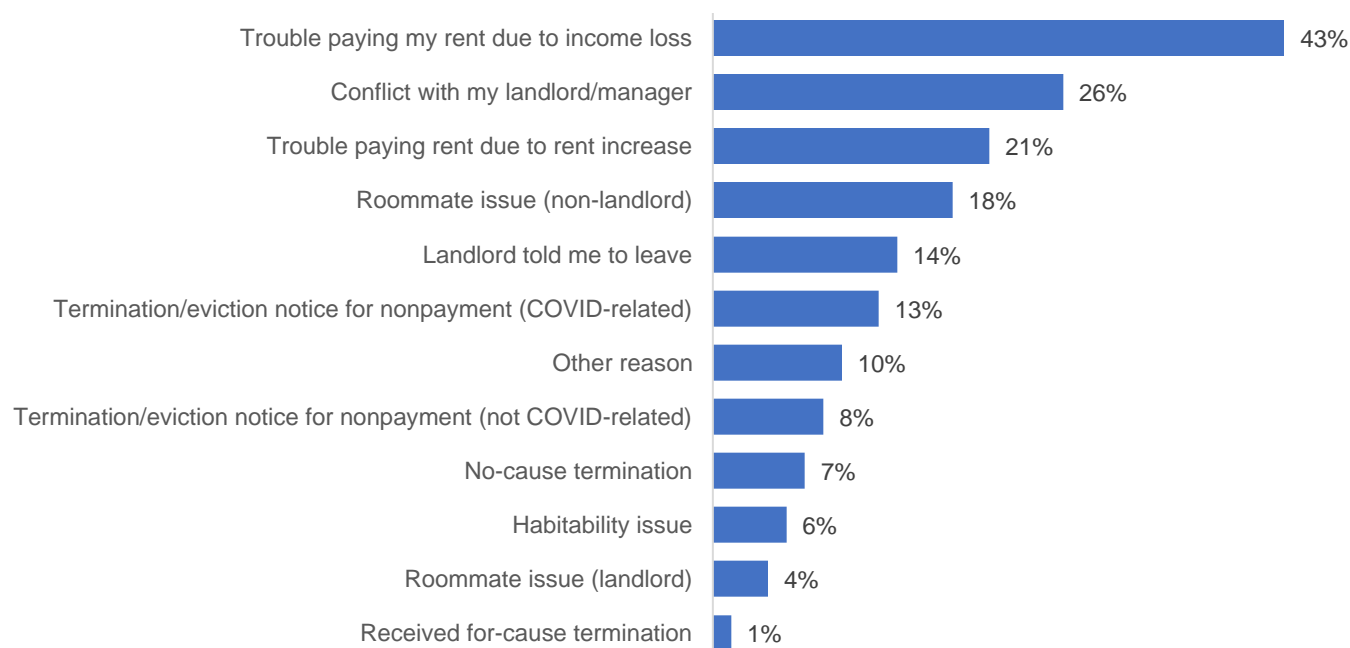
Figure 7: "Have you experienced a significant issue with your housing in 2022?" (n = 162)



Additionally, **44% of tenants expressed that their housing stability was threatened in 2022**. For those 72 respondents who experienced instability, the top three associated causes were trouble paying rent due to income loss (43%), conflict with their landlord and/or property manager (26%), and trouble paying rent due to a rent increase (21%) (Figure 8).

It was not uncommon for tenants to experience a combination of factors contributing to their instability, such as both income loss and rent increase. **Overall, 50% of respondents experiencing instability in 2022 at least partially attributed their situation to a difficulty paying rent.**

Figure 8: Reason for housing instability (n = 72)



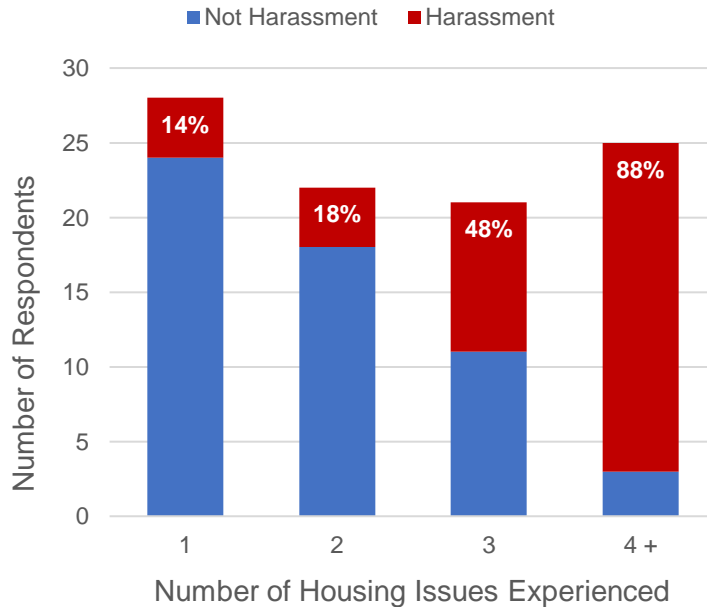
Landlord Relations & Harassment

Harassment

Tenants were additionally asked if the housing issues they experienced in 2022 caused them to feel like they were being harassed by their landlord and/or property manager. Of the 117 respondents who experienced at least one significant housing issue, **42% said yes, their experience felt like harassment.**

Not surprisingly, the number of housing issues a tenant experienced positively correlated with an increased perception of harassment. While still significant, only 14-18% of respondents experiencing 1 or 2 issues felt like they were being harassed. Beyond 2 housing issues, however, perceptions of harassment rose substantially. 48% of tenants experiencing 3 issues felt like they were being harassed, jumping to almost 88% of those experiencing 4 or more issues (Figure 9). This supports a characterization of harassment as a holistic pattern of “bad faith” behavior on the part of the landlord or property manager.

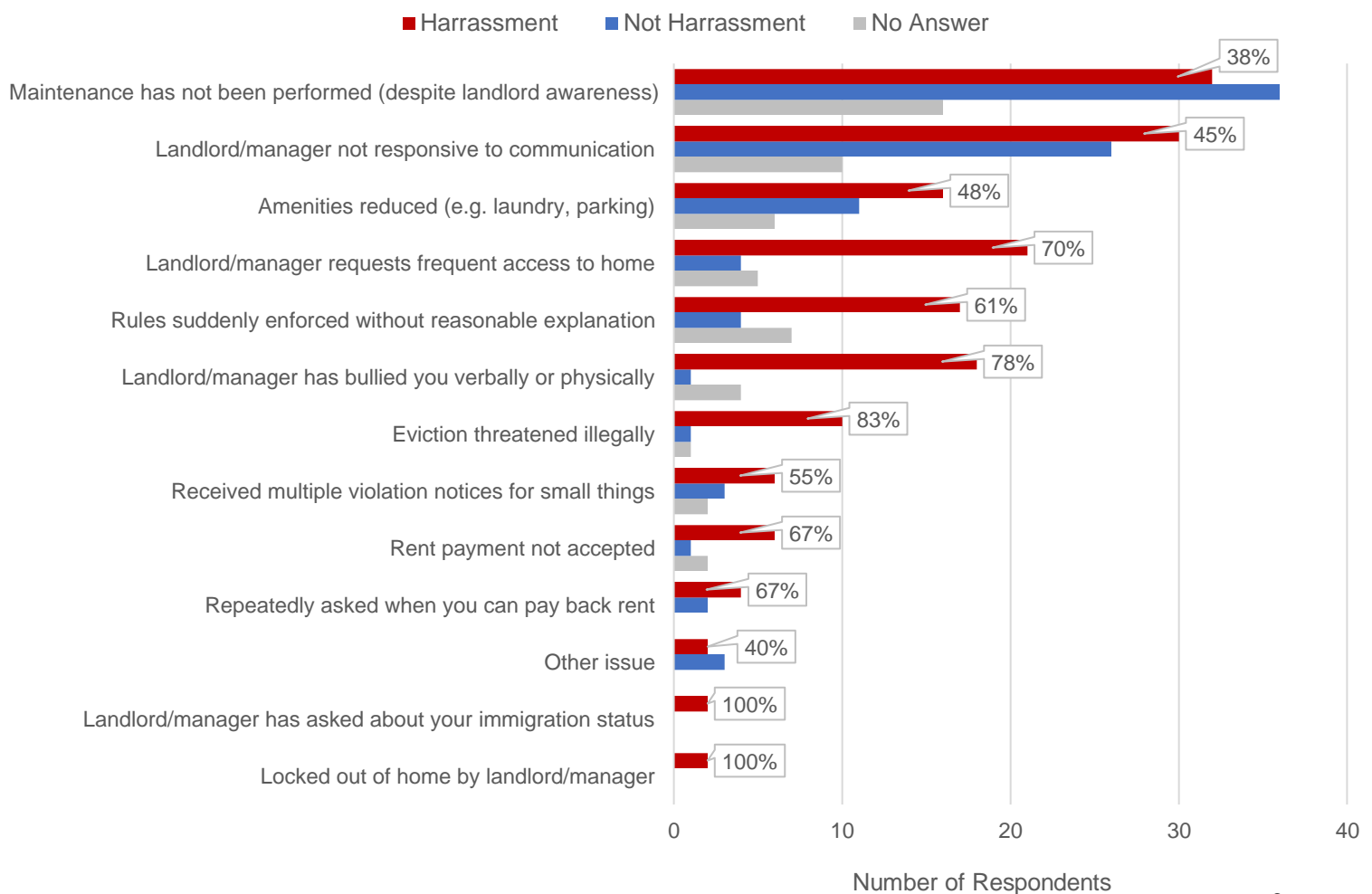
Figure 9: “Did landlord action feel like harassment?” (n = 96)



Certain housing issues were more likely than others to be associated with perceptions of harassment (Figure 10). For all housing issues besides failure to perform maintenance, tenants were more likely to feel harassed than not. However, among the issues that occurred with frequency (10 or more respondents), the landlord behaviors most associated with harassment were:

- 1) excessively frequent requests to access a tenant's home
- 2) rules suddenly being enforced without reasonable explanation
- 3) verbal or physical bullying

Figure 10: Housing issues and perceptions of harassment (n = 117)





What tenants said about the housing issues they experienced:

Deferred Maintenance

“It took 18 months to get someone to look at a stuck shut window. Then when the repairman arrived it was fixed in less than 3 minutes. For 18 months I wrote email after email asking again and again and was met with delays and the most ridiculous stories I ever heard. Meanwhile I lived with poor air quality and compromised egress. It caused me enormous amounts of anxiety and stress. There needs to be a way to hold landlords accountable.”

“When I report a problem, I’m asked numerous questions over email and texts, all of which imply I caused the problem, even a leaky faucet. If the issue is in communal spaces she interrogates every tenant.”

“The inside of the unit needs a lot of work, which they know about and have told me will be replaced AFTER I move out.”

Poor Communication

“There is a new landlord and owner for our building, whom we still have not met. These faceless people kept putting violation notices on our door instead of utilizing conversations we already had going where it would have been cleared immediately, but they also kept not responding to our emails or phone calls requesting our lease renewal to sign...These unanswered communications went beyond our deadline date and was incredibly anxiety inducing.”

Reduced Services

“Landlord has stopped providing recycling services, stopped supporting the provided washer and dryer, requested entry into my apartment without notice, and delivered all notices illegally.”

Access Requests

“They set up inconvenient times to inspect my apartment, and then call it an emergency. Yet no emergency exists. I cancel appointments to be at the unit, then no one comes to inspect my unit.”

Improper Rule Enforcement

“[My landlord] has no boundaries and is constantly emailing us, telling us how “disappointed” he is with something. He frequently pits tenants in the building against each other, offering cash rewards if we turn in each other for small things like not recycling properly.”

Retaliation

“I have resolved multiple conflicts with [my landlord] just by being understanding, calm, and by avoiding contact with her in the last 3 years. However, in 2022 when I got tired of taking responsibility for her, and started exercising my rights, I experienced what could only be described as harassment. Bizarre behavior, offering to fix a window with no lock by drilling a drill bit into it and leaving it there...telling me on Christmas eve to remove my belongings from a different portion of the house and putting them outside in freezing weather with no protection.”



Attempts at Resolution

Tenants were additionally asked how they attempted to resolve the housing issues they experienced and any threats to their housing stability in 2022. Notably, of the 72 tenants who experienced threats to their housing stability, 17% “resolved” their situation by moving out of their home, effectively being displaced. Most tenants who experienced significant housing issues in 2022 attempted to resolve their situation by communicating with their landlord (Figure 11). However, overall, respondents did not experience great success in resolving most of their issues. **Only 14% reported that *most or all of their housing issues were resolved*, and 34% expressed that *none of their issues were resolved*.**

Figure 11: “How did you try to resolve your housing issues?” (n = 117)

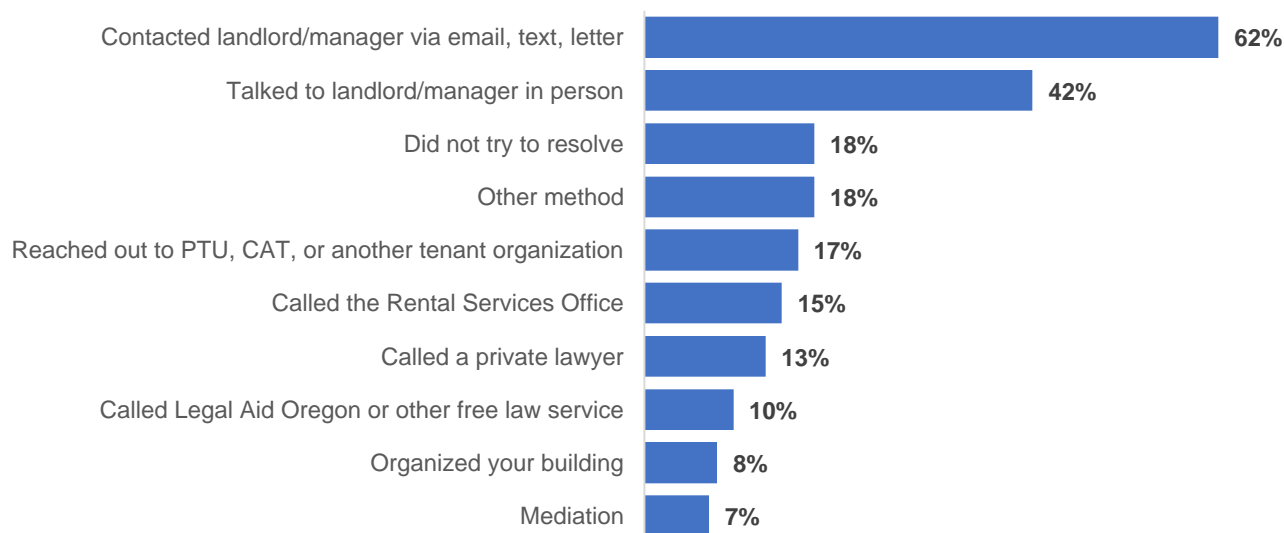
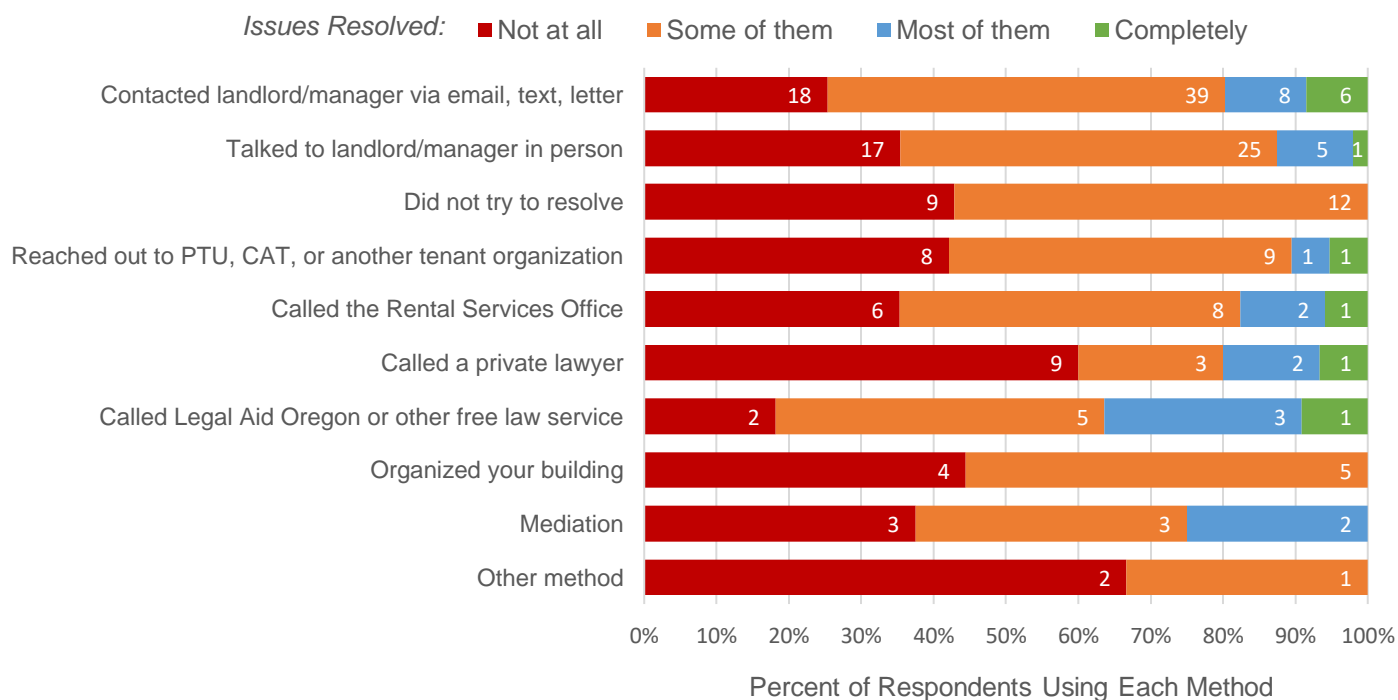


Figure 12: Resolution outcome by method (n = 117)

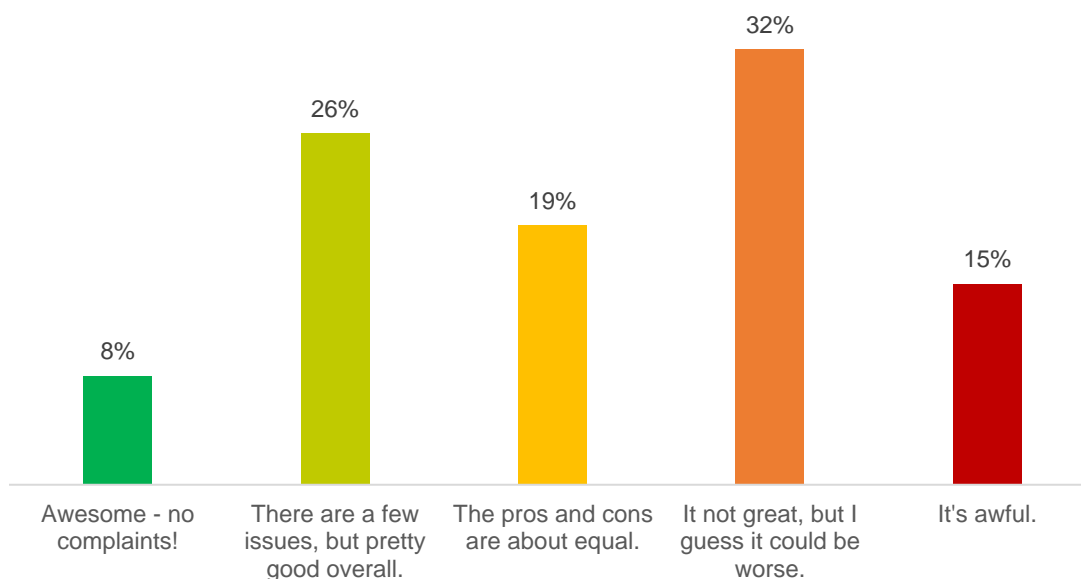


Outside support was shown to be important for securing better outcomes. As one respondent shared, “[my landlord] tried to raise my rent to a higher amount - until I told them I was not sure that it was legal to increase my rent higher without a formal notice and that I’d be seeking out legal advice. I ended up writing to PTU and one of the Portland bureaus that deals with renters for advice. The landlord backed down and my rent is the lower amount.”

Conclusion

When asked to describe their overall housing experience in 2022, many tenants shared that they felt anxious and frustrated with their living conditions, landlord relations, and overall precarity. Frequently tenants reported that they felt stuck – that their housing costs and habitability issues were escalating, but that seeking out other options felt impossible due to the competitive housing market and myriad challenges of moving. As one tenant put it, “Can’t afford to stay where you are, but can’t afford to move either.” Even some tenants who described their current situations as manageable expressed feeling anxious that this could change at any moment. As another tenant shared, “I’ve moved every year since I left home at 18, and the thought of rent increasing up to 14% is terrifying. I finally found a nice home and I’m afraid.....just nothing is permanent. Everything is temporary. It’s hard to relax.” Low-income renters, tenants with disabilities, and parents of young children felt especially impacted by this precarity. “I spent so much effort finding spaces that worked for me, and in both instances I was pushed out before being there a year,” one respondent described. “Being poor or disabled means that a move is much more than an inconvenience, it can upend months or even years of progress, savings, habit building and stability.”

Figure 13: “Overall, what best describes how you feel about your housing situation throughout 2022?”
(n = 162)



Tenants were keenly aware of their power disadvantage and indicated that they held back from fully advocating for themselves due to their insecure position. As one tenant shared, “I don’t know how to resolve the danger in our kitchen or whom to talk to about it. It’s scary and frustrating. I feel helpless,

but our rent is low for Portland, so we live with the danger.” This unease was additionally evident when tenants were asked to rate their overall housing situation. Almost half of respondents (47%) indicated that their housing situation in 2022 was less than satisfactory; 32% expressed that it was “*not great, but could be worse*” and 15% felt that it was “*awful*” (Figure 13). It is clear that tenants need access to greater protections and resources. Policies such as rent control and a Tenant Protection Ordinance would improve renter stability and support tenants in advocating for housing improvements while preventing harassment. More robust city resources, such as a well-equipped Rental Services Office, would additionally help renters navigate this advocacy and achieve more successful outcomes.