



**THE NCS**<sup>TM</sup>  
The National Citizen Survey<sup>TM</sup>

## Jackson County, MI

Community Livability Report  
2016



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The National Citizen Survey™  
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NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

# About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Jackson County. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

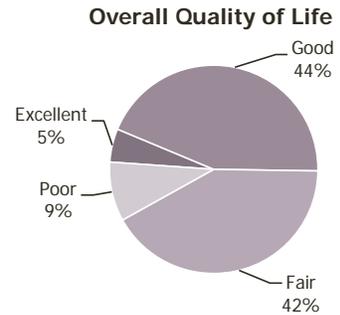
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 306 residents of Jackson County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Jackson County

A majority of residents rated the quality of life in Jackson County as excellent or good. This was lower than ratings in comparison communities (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).



Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.

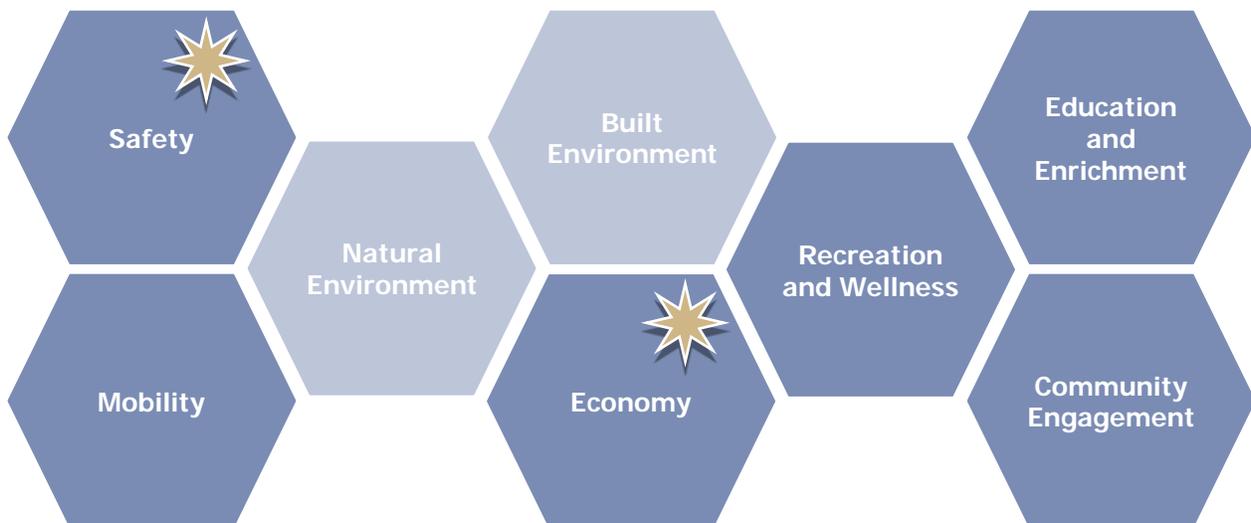
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Jackson County community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Jackson County residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets of community as well as to Mobility, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where residents see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for Jackson County’s unique questions.

## Legend

- Higher than national benchmark
- Similar to national benchmark
- Lower than national benchmark

★ Most important



# Community Characteristics

*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Jackson County, 59% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Jackson County as a place to live were lower than ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the County as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Jackson County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Jackson County and its overall appearance. About 7 in 10 residents rated their neighborhood as an excellent or good place to live. Slightly fewer residents rated Jackson County as a place to raise children positively while the other aspects of community quality received lower ratings. Compared to 2013, ratings of general Community Characteristics trended upwards for Jackson County as a place to retire while neighborhoods as places to live declined in 2015 (see *Trends Over Time* report provided under separate cover).

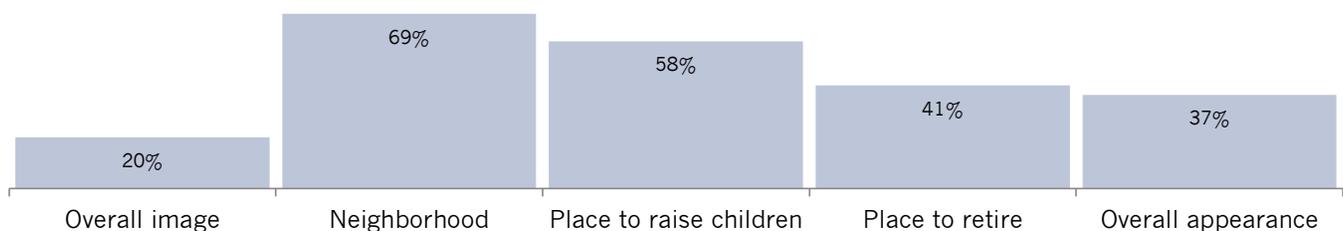
Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. These ratings tended to be similar to or lower than ratings in comparison communities. All aspects of Safety were rated positively by a majority of residents with 70% or more stating that they felt safe in the downtown/commercial area as well as in their neighborhoods. Aspects within Mobility also saw positive ratings especially the aspects of overall ease of travel, paths and walking trails, travel by public transportation, travel by car, public parking and traffic flow which received excellent or good ratings from at least 4 in 10 residents and were similar to the national benchmark. Other high ratings within Community Characteristics were opportunities to attend religious or spiritual events and activities, air quality, and opportunities to volunteer which were rated favorably by at least 6 in 10 residents.



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

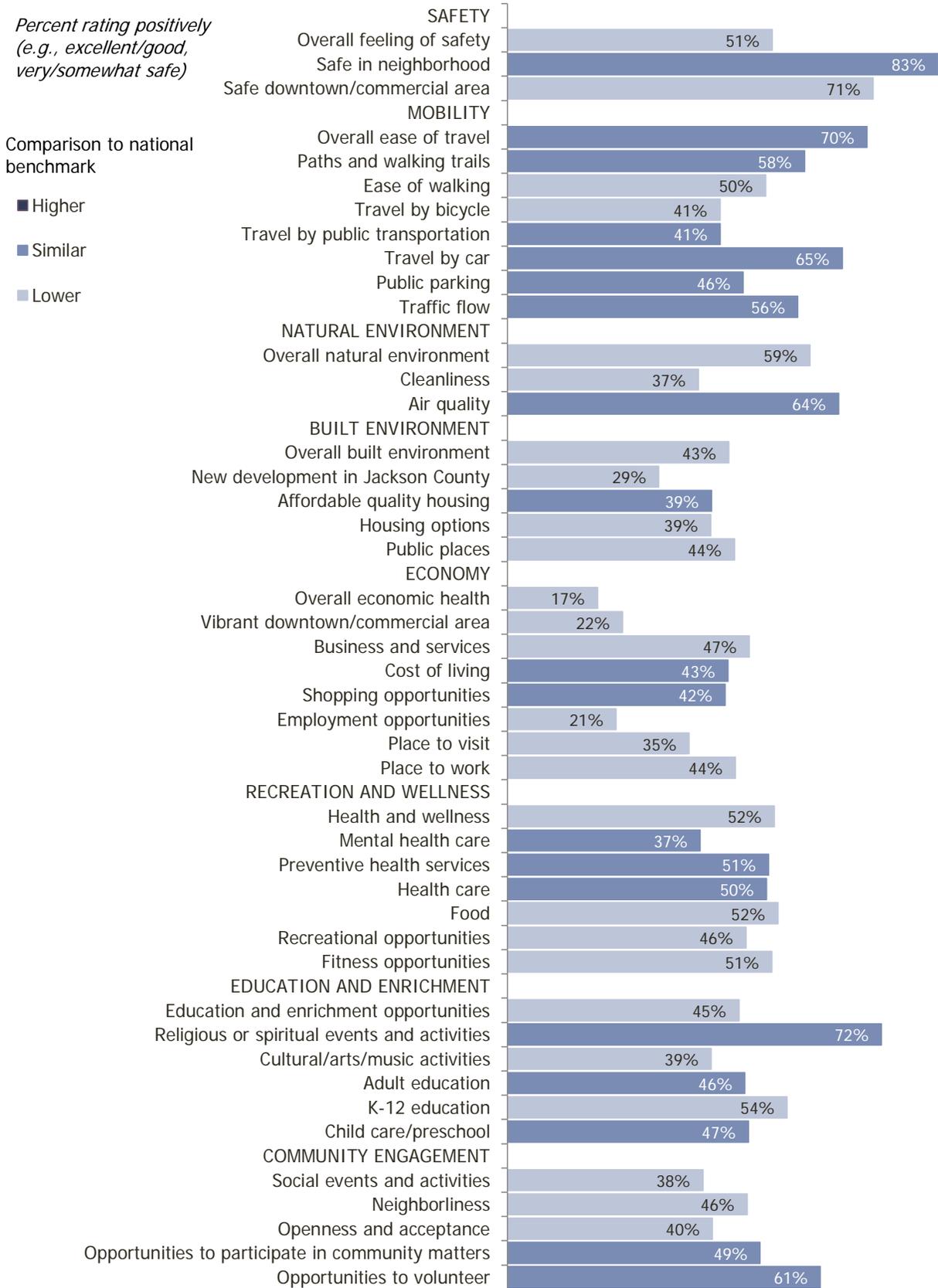
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



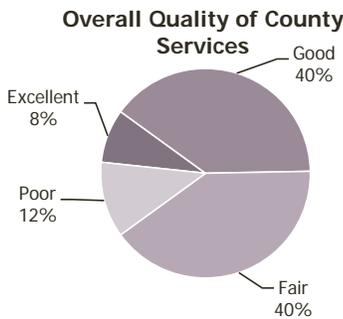
# Governance

*How well does the government of Jackson County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by Jackson County as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Close to half of the survey respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by Jackson County while around 3 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the services provided by the Federal Government.

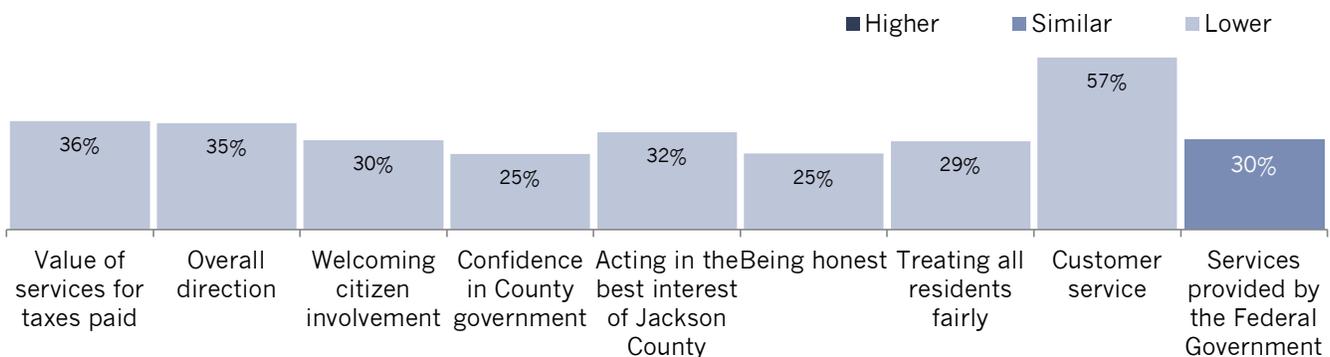
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Jackson County's leadership and governance. These ratings tended to be lower than the benchmark. Close to 6 in 10 residents positively rated the overall customer service provided by Jackson County employees while around one-third rated the value of services for taxes paid, overall direction the County is taking, and acting in the best interest of Jackson County less favorably. General ratings for Jackson County's leadership and governance tended to remain stable between 2013 and 2015.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Jackson County. The highest rated services were police, fire and ambulance/EMS services, garbage collection and public libraries. Among the lowest rated aspects of Governance were street repair, street cleaning, sidewalk maintenance, code enforcement and economic development. There were several aspects of Governance that increased in ratings from 2013 to 2015 and none that declined in that time. These aspects that trended up were mostly within the facet of Safety and Built Environment though there were some that increased in Mobility, Natural Environment and Economy as well.



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national benchmark



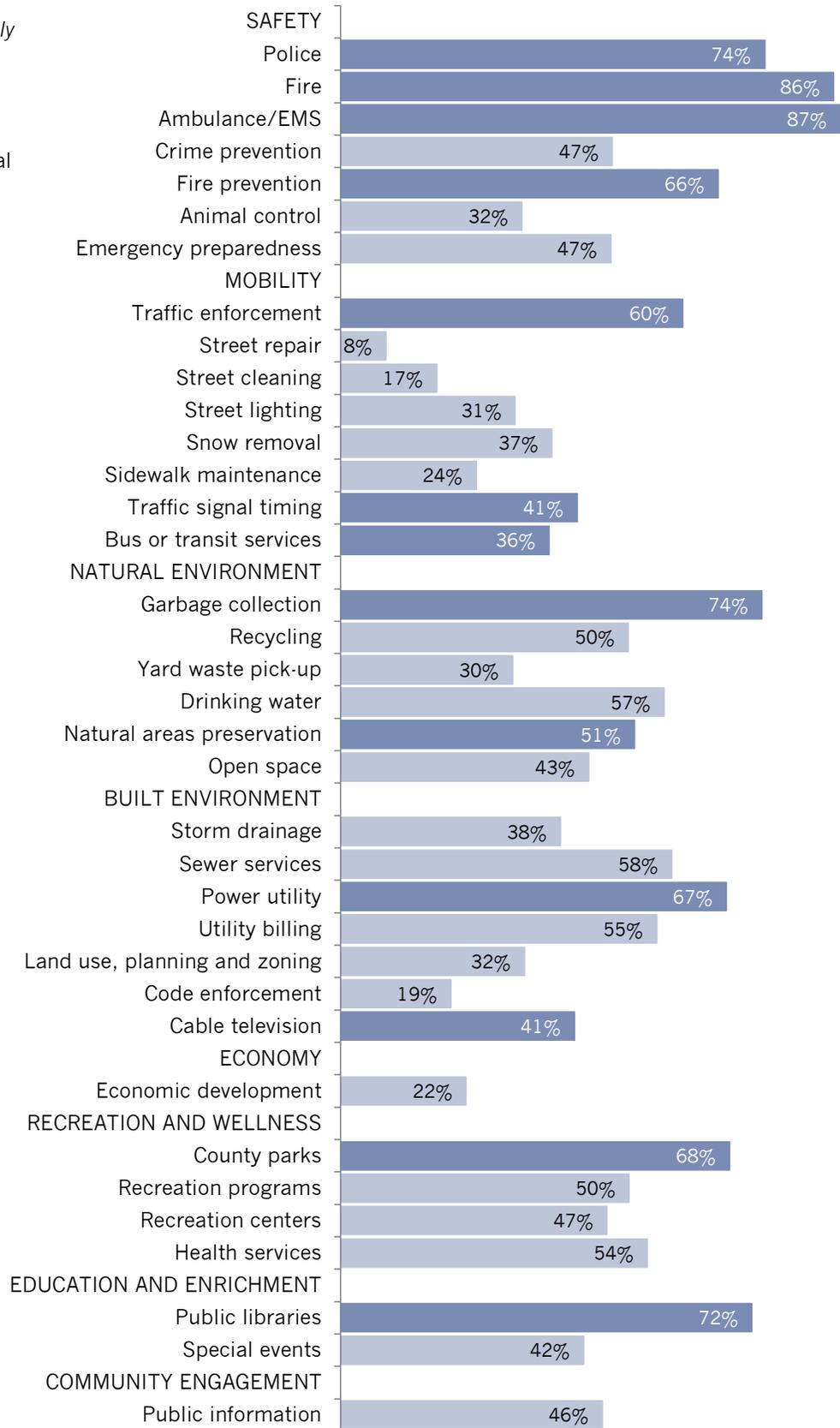
## The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

Percent rating positively  
(e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

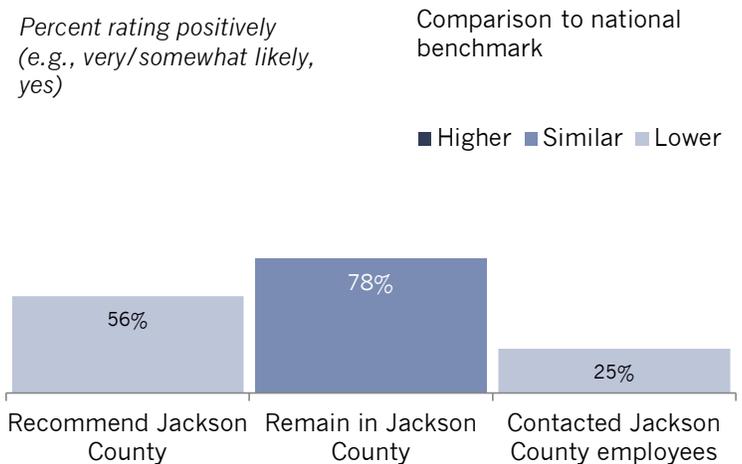
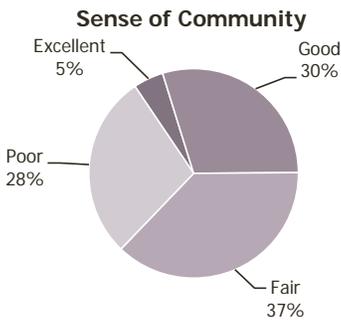


# Participation

*Are the residents of Jackson County connected to the community and each other?*

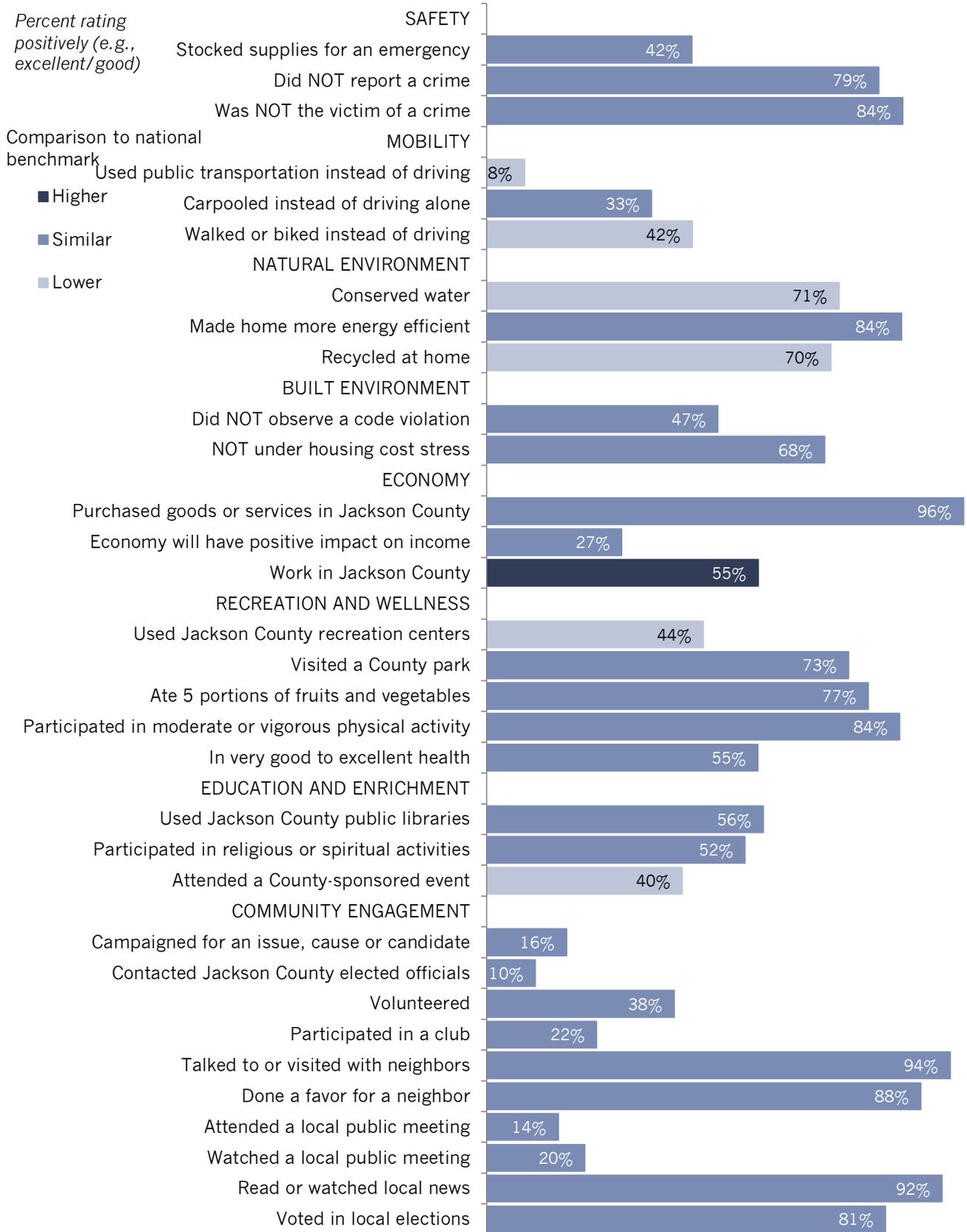
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community; a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Ratings for the sense of community in Jackson County were rated fair or higher by nearly three-quarters of residents. A majority reported that they would recommend living in Jackson County and nearly 8 in 10 planned to remain in Jackson County for the next five years. Overall sense of community increased between 2013 and 2015 while the number of residents who said they would recommend living in Jackson County decreased in 2015.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Jackson County residents tended to report similar rates of Participation when compared to other communities across the nation. Among the activities or behaviors with the highest reported rates of Participation were purchased goods or services in Jackson County, talked to or visited with neighbors, and read or watched local news. More residents in Jackson County reported that they work within the County than was reported in other communities across the nation. Trends within Participation rates for Jackson County varied between 2013 and 2015. In 2015, Jackson County more residents reported that they were not reporting crimes than in 2013. However, fewer residents reported that they carpooled instead of driving, used Jackson County recreation centers, voted in local elections, campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate or contacted Jackson County elected officials in 2015.



# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 3: Aspects of Participation



# Special Topics

Jackson County included six questions of special interest on The NCS. The first custom question asked residents to rate the importance of certain strategic planning areas to the overall quality of life in Jackson County. Overall, most residents reported that all of the strategic planning areas were important. Safe community and education were among the most rated “essential” strategic planning area for Jackson County. Residents were then asked to select which strategic planning area they felt was most important and safe community and economic development were selected most by about one-third of respondents.

Figure 4: Strategic Planning Areas Part 1

*Please rate how important, if at all, each of the following strategic planning areas are to the overall quality of life in Jackson County.*

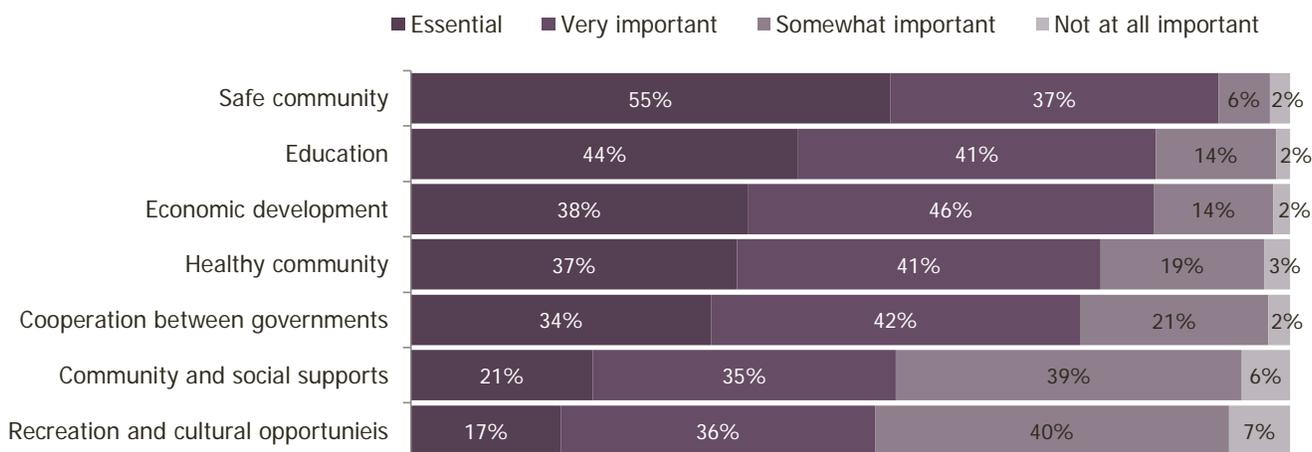
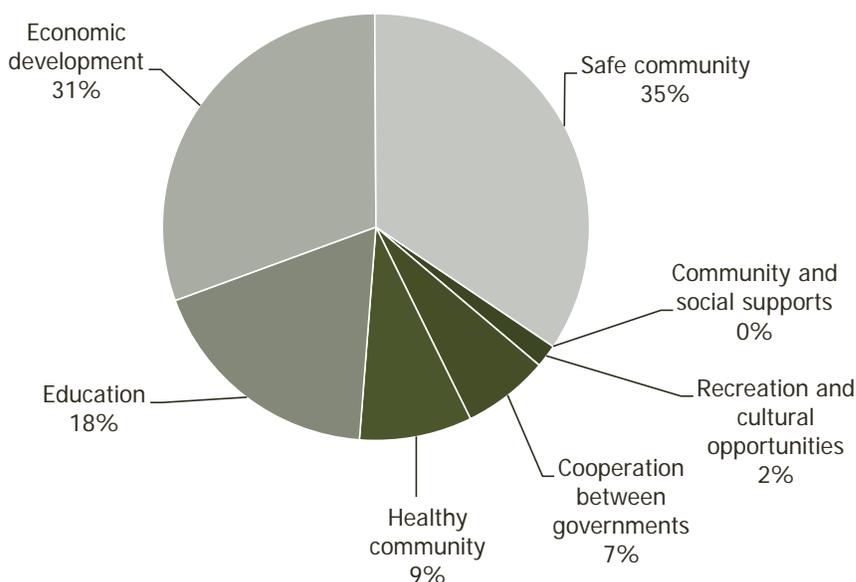


Figure 5: Strategic Planning Areas Part 2

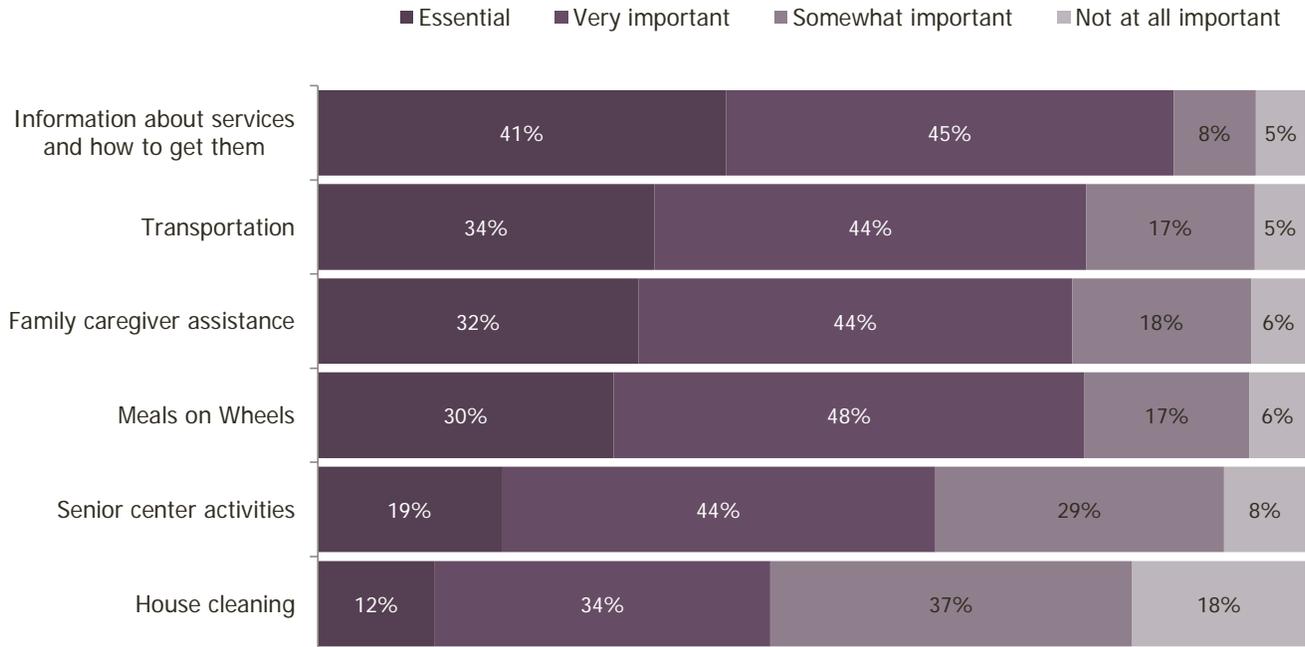
*Please check which ONE is most important*



The second special interest question Jackson County asked residents was how important it was to for the County to provide certain older adult services. Information about services and how to get them was ranked highest among respondents for the County to provide. Meanwhile, house cleaning was ranked not at all important by nearly 2 in 10 residents.

Figure 6: Older Adult Services

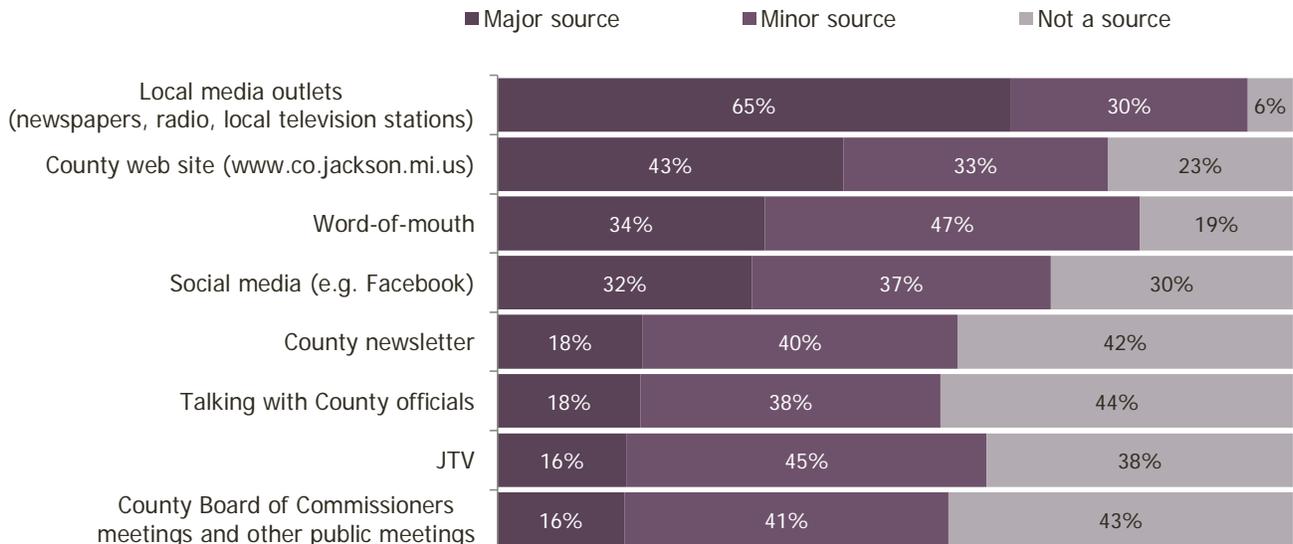
Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following older adult services are for the County to provide:



The next special interest question asked residents which media sources they felt were the best method for obtaining information about the County government. Residents stated that they were most likely to use local media outlets as the major source of information while 4 in 10 reported that the County Board of Commissioners meetings and other public meetings were not a source at all.

Figure 7: Sources of Information

Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the County government and its activities, events and services:



When asked if they had tested their home for radon, most respondents for whom this question applied stated that they had not. Similar ratings were given when asked about whether their well-water had been tested for bacteria in the last five years; two-thirds stated they had not.

Figure 8: Radon Testing

*Have you ever tested your home for radon, including during the process of purchasing it?*

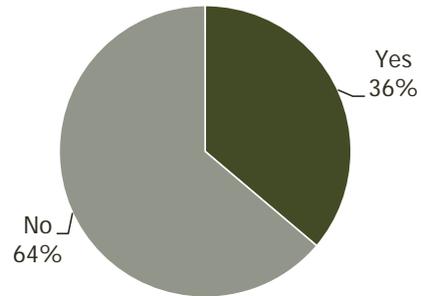
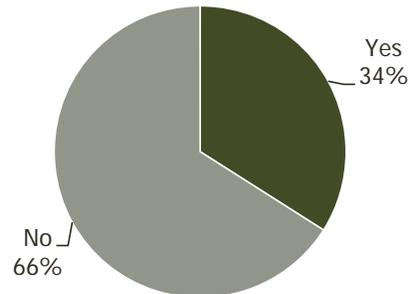


Figure 9: Well-water Testing

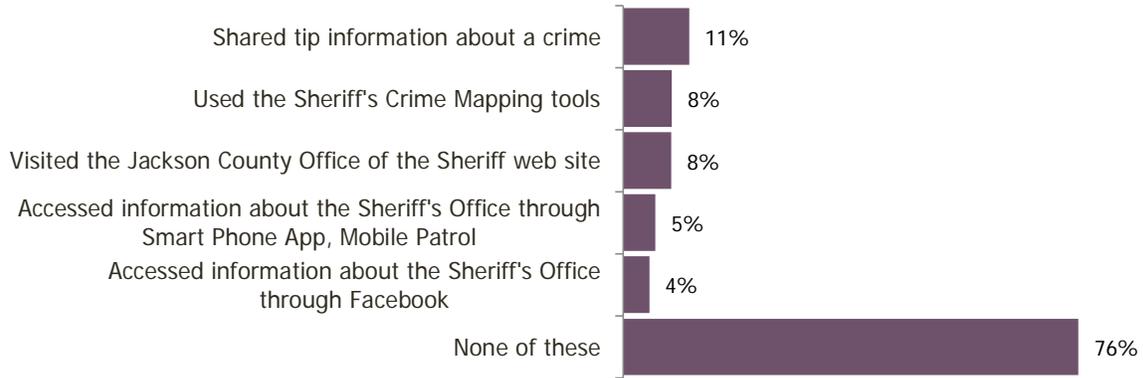
*Have you had your private well water tested for bacteria in the past 5 years?*



The last special interest question inquired about whether residents had had any contact with the Jackson County Office of the Sheriff in the past year. The majority of respondents (three-quarters) stated that they had not contacted the County Office of the Sheriff. Of those who had, the most often stated reason was to share tip information about a crime though that was reported by about 1 in 10 residents.

Figure 10: Contact with Jackson County Office of the Sheriff

*Have you had contact with the Jackson County Office of the Sheriff in any of the following ways in the last 12 months? (Please select all that apply.)*



Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one option.

# Conclusions

## A majority of residents continue to experience good quality of life in Jackson County.

Overall, the quality of life in Jackson County was seen as excellent or good by about half of residents. A majority of respondents rated the County as a place to live, their neighborhood as a place to live and Jackson County as a place to raise children as excellent or good. Ratings for Jackson County as a place to retire, though below the benchmark, trended up in 2015 compared to 2013. Nearly 8 in 10 residents reported that they planned on remaining in the county for the next five years and a majority of residents indicated that they would recommend living in Jackson County despite the decrease in reporting in 2015.

## Safety continues to be top priority for residents.

Safety was identified as a top community focus area by Jackson County residents and was essential to most respondents when asked about important strategic planning areas. Many aspects received favorable ratings that were similar to the benchmark and several ratings increased from 2013 to 2015 including police, fire and ambulance/EMS services, fire prevention and emergency preparedness. Additionally, those who said they were not reporting crimes increased between survey years. Alternatively, fewer residents reported feeling safe in their neighborhood and in the downtown/commercial area in 2015 than in 2013.

## The economy is important to residents.

Survey respondents identified Economy as an important item to focus on in the next two years and economic development was listed high on the priority list of residents for strategic planning purposes. Economy ratings tended to be lower than ratings seen in other communities for a handful of aspects, though more residents reported working in Jackson County than those seen in comparison communities and ratings for employment opportunities increased in 2015. Almost all residents reported that they purchased goods or services in Jackson County and 4 in 10 residents rated the cost of living and shopping opportunities in Jackson County as excellent or good. Lastly, although economic development received ratings that were lower than the benchmark, ratings for this aspect increased between 2013 and 2015 and no Economy ratings decreased over time.