

# **The National Citizen Survey™**

## **Jackson County, MI**

Community Livability Report

2014

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The National Citizen Survey™  
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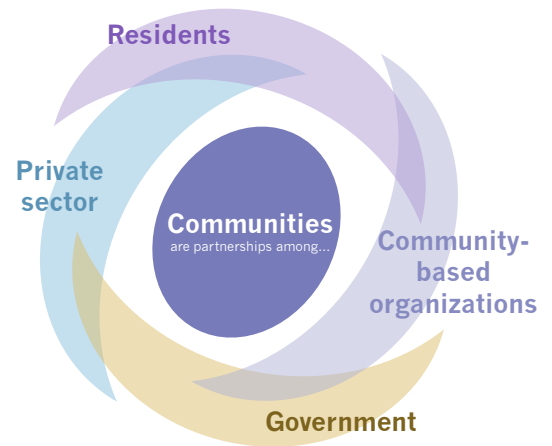
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# About

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.

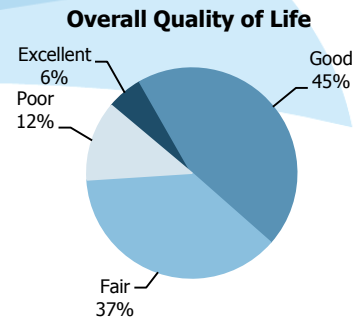
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 selected from 1,200 residents of Jackson County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample (328 completed surveys). The 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 rate the quality of life in Jackson County as excellent or good. The overall quality of life was rated below the national benchmark.








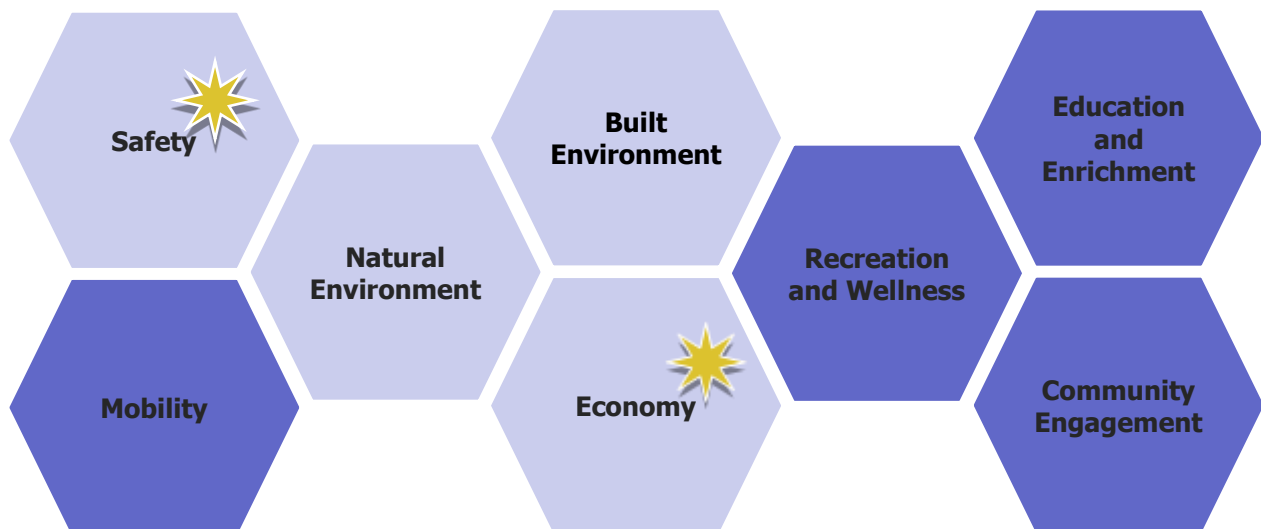
Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were 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. Jackson County residents gave ratings to both of these facets of community that were lower than ratings in other communities across the nation. Ratings for Mobility, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were positive and similar to other communities. 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
-  Benchmark comparison not available
-  Most important



# Community Characteristics

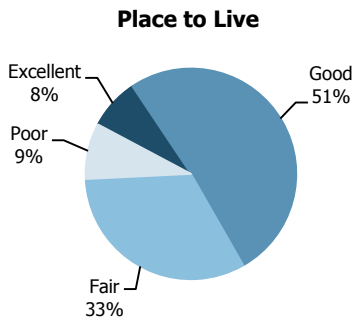
*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

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 (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover), but were higher in 2013 than in 2011 (see *Trends over Time* report provided under separate cover).

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. Residents gave high ratings to their neighborhood as a place to live, which were similar to the national benchmark. A majority of residents rated Jackson County as an "excellent" or "good" place to raise children. The overall image of Jackson County received less favorable ratings; 23% of respondents assessed the county positively in this area. Compared to 2011, ratings of general Community Characteristics generally were similar to or higher than ratings in 2013 (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. Safety was rated highly by most respondents, with around 80% or more saying they felt very or somewhat safe in their neighborhood and in downtown/commercial areas; these ratings were similar to the national benchmark. Ratings for Mobility and Natural Environment also tended to be high, with half or more of respondents rating most aspects favorably. In 2013, ratings within Natural Environment and Education and Enrichment tended to improve compared to 2011, while most others did not markedly change during this time.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower □ Not available

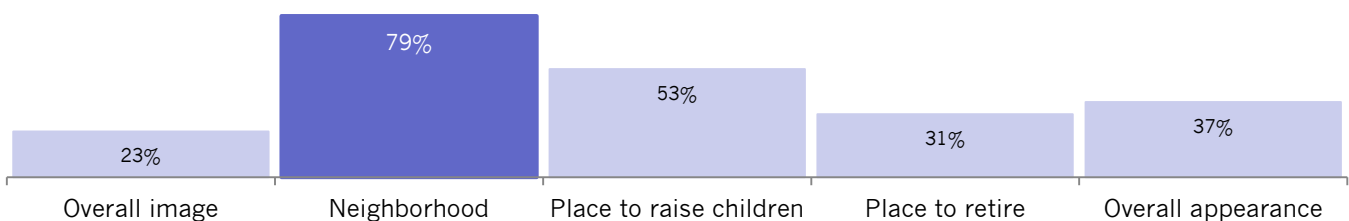
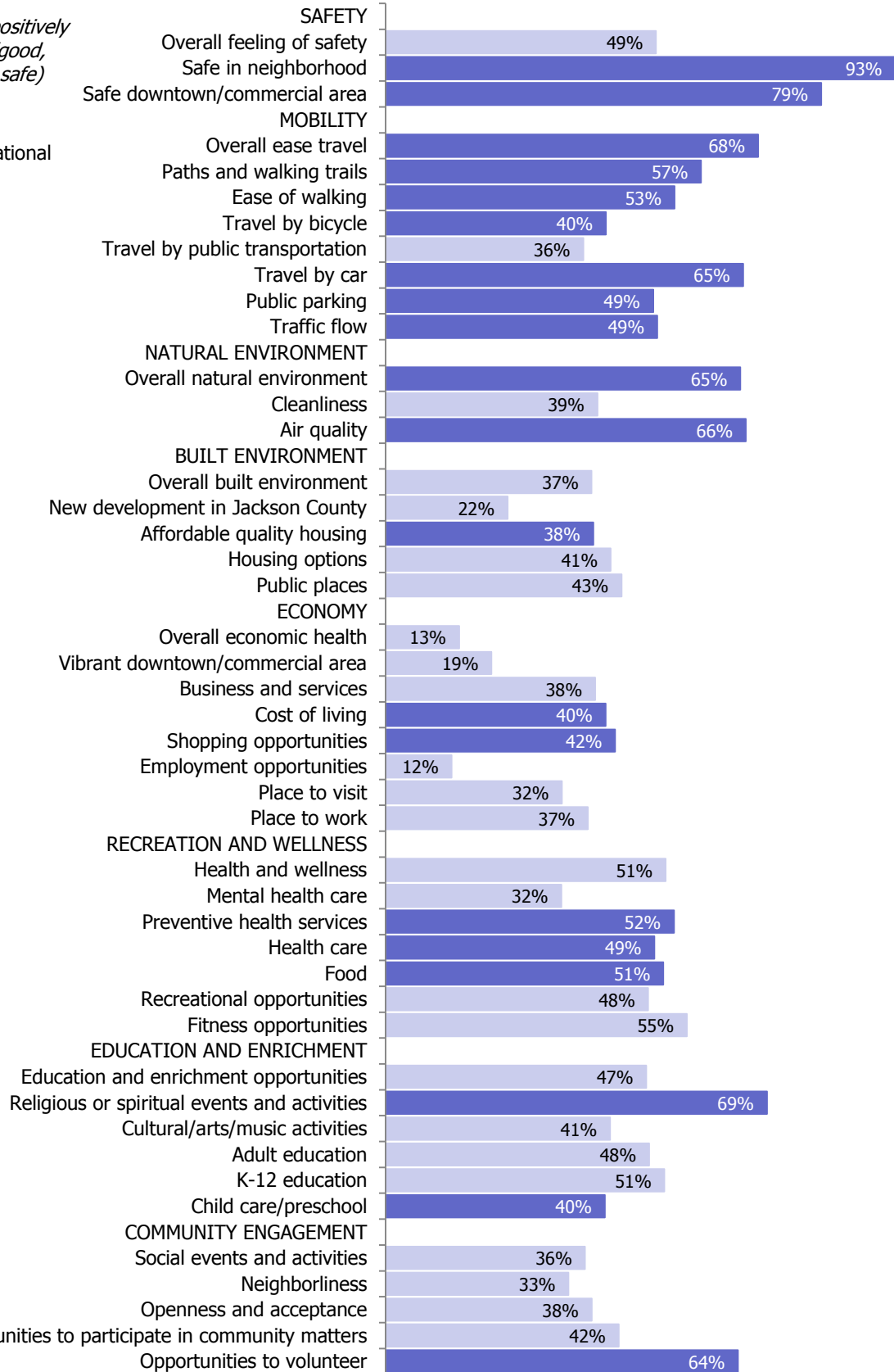


Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available



# Governance

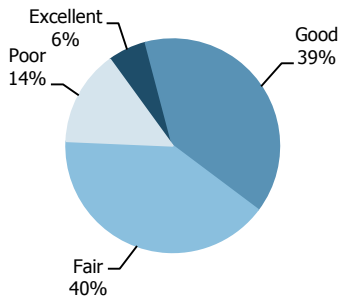
*How well does the government of Jackson County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

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. About half of respondents rated the overall quality of County services as “excellent” or “good,” compared to 20% of respondents rating the Federal Government positively. This overall rating of services provided by Jackson County was lower than in other communities in the U.S.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Jackson County’s leadership and governance. Most of these aspects were rated as “excellent” or “good” by about one-quarter to one-third of survey respondents, ratings which fell below the national benchmark. Half of respondents gave high ratings for customer service provided by the County.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Jackson County. Safety tended to garner the most positive ratings compared to other areas. Most participants gave positive ratings to traffic enforcement, bus or transit services, health services and public libraries, all of which received ratings that were similar to the national benchmark. Overall service ratings in the facets of General Governance, Safety, Mobility, Economy, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement remained stable between 2011 and 2013, while ratings in the areas of Natural Environment, Built Environment and Recreation and Wellness declined.

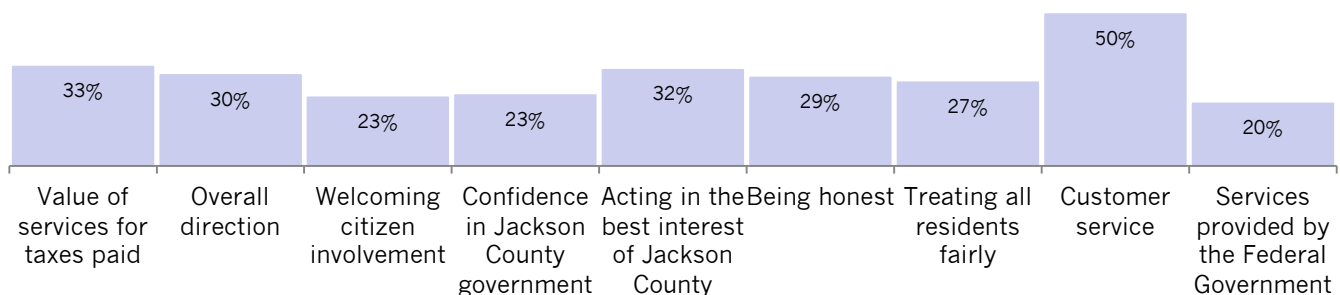
**Overall Quality of County Services**



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower □ Not available



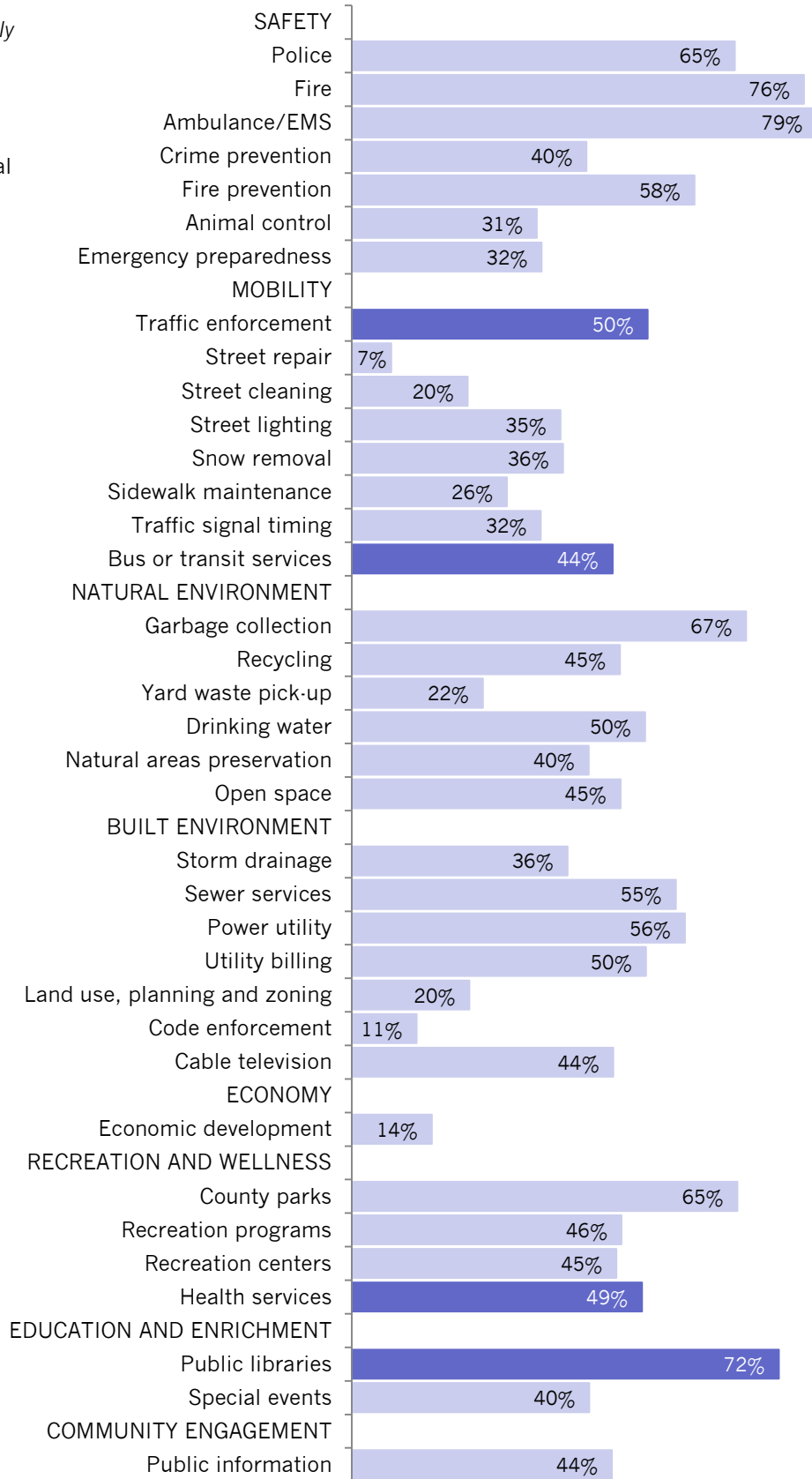
The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available





# Participation

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

An engaged community is a livable community. 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. About one-quarter of Jackson County residents felt positively about the sense of community in the county and about half said that it was “fair.” Sense of community was not rated as highly in Jackson County as in other communities nationwide. Many residents would recommend Jackson County to others and most planned on remaining in the community for the foreseeable future; both measures were higher in 2013 than in 2011. About one in three Jackson County residents had contacted County employees in the past year.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. In general, measures of Participation tended to be similar in Jackson County as in other communities nationally. Safety, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement all had high levels of participation that were on par with comparison communities. Similarly, most respondents had not been a victim of a crime nor reported a crime. Jackson County residents reported voting in local elections at a higher rate than in other communities in the U.S. In 2013 participation in these various activities tended to be lower overall, although more residents voted in local elections and felt that the economy would have a positive impact on their income in 2013 than in 2011.

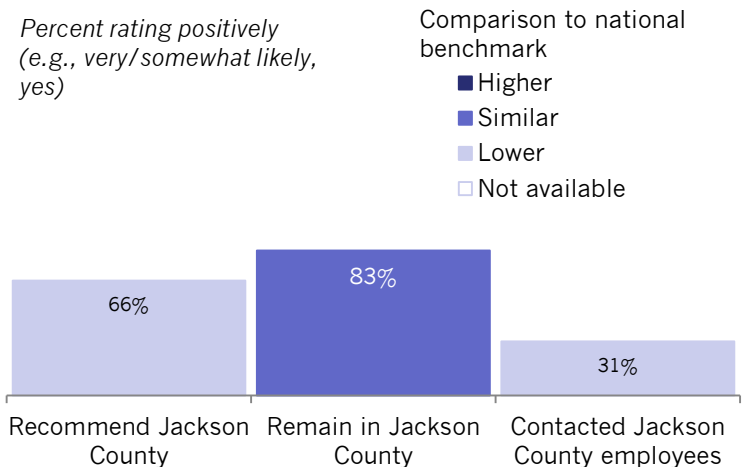
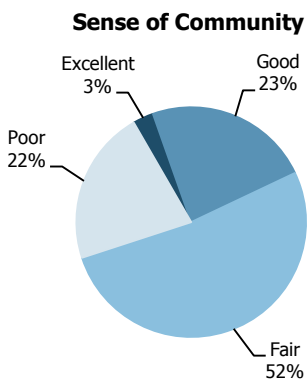
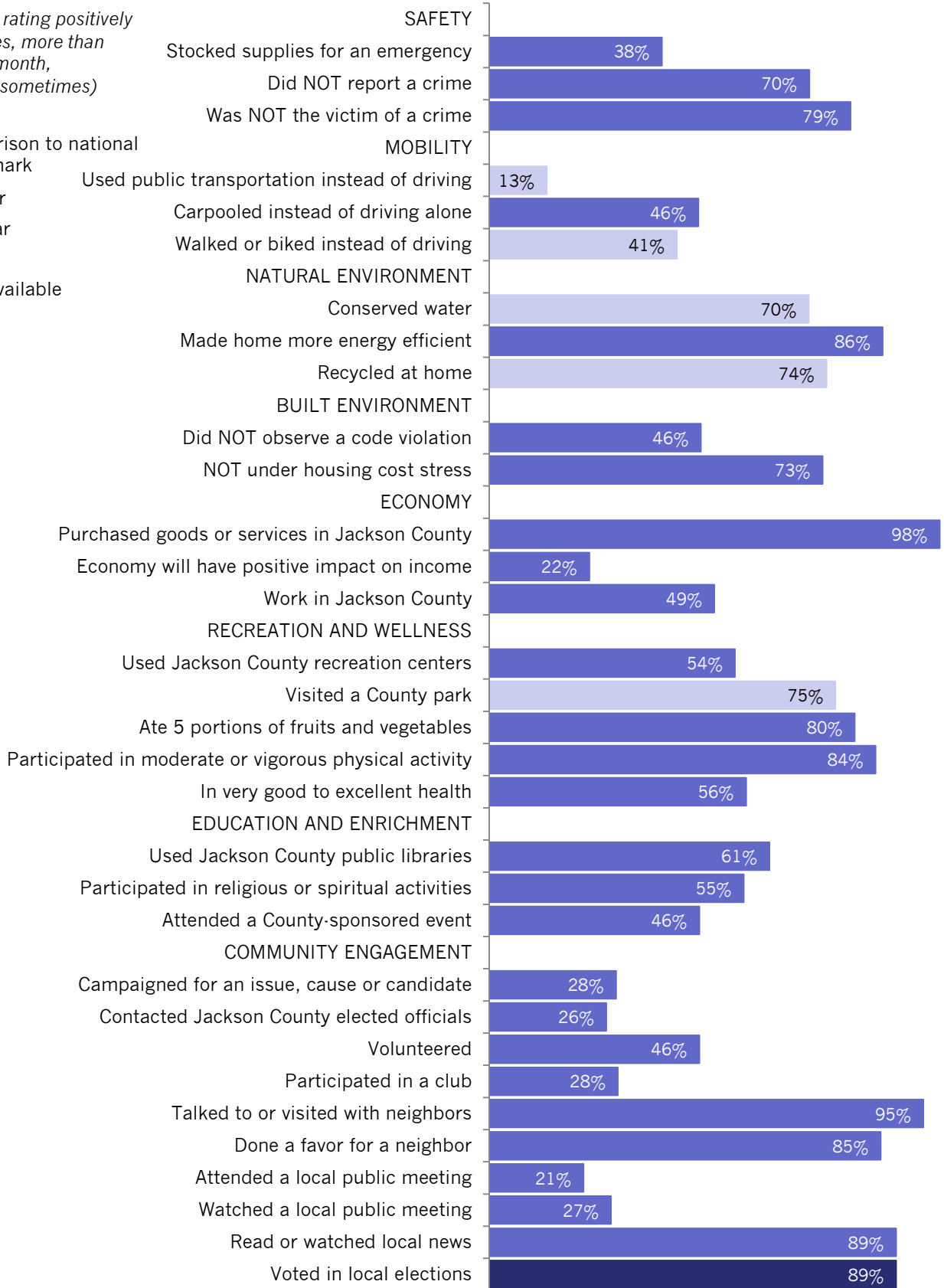


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

Percent rating positively  
(e.g., yes, more than  
once a month,  
always/sometimes)

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available



# Special Topics

Jackson County included six questions of special interest on The NCS. Topic areas included strategic planning priorities for the County, perspectives on priorities for adult services and sources for information on the County. The questions also addressed residents' history of testing for radon and well water, along with types of contact with the Jackson County Office of the Sheriff.

Overall, most residents felt that each of the County's seven strategic planning areas were important. Safety, economic development and education were considered "essential" by the most respondents. Further, economic development was considered the single most important planning area by 4 in 10 residents.

Figure 4: Question 14, part 1

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

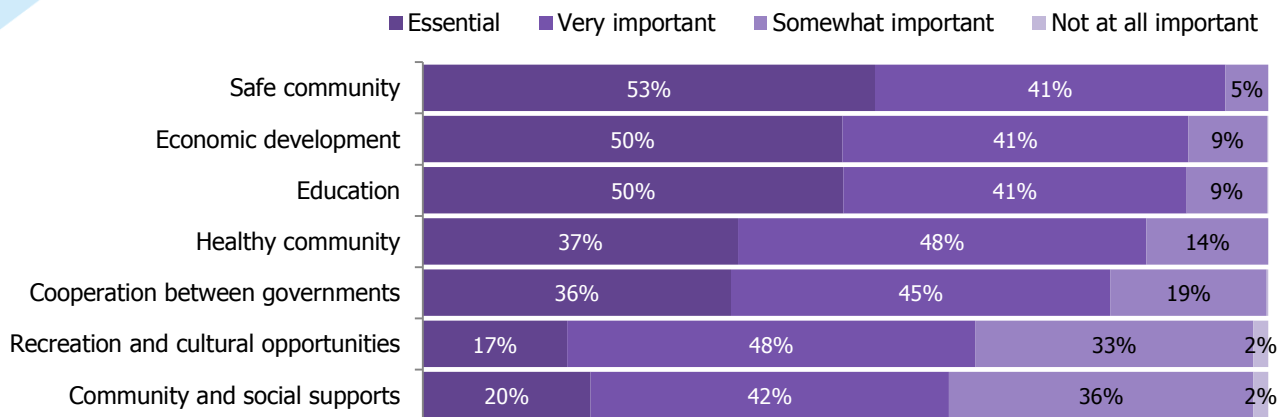
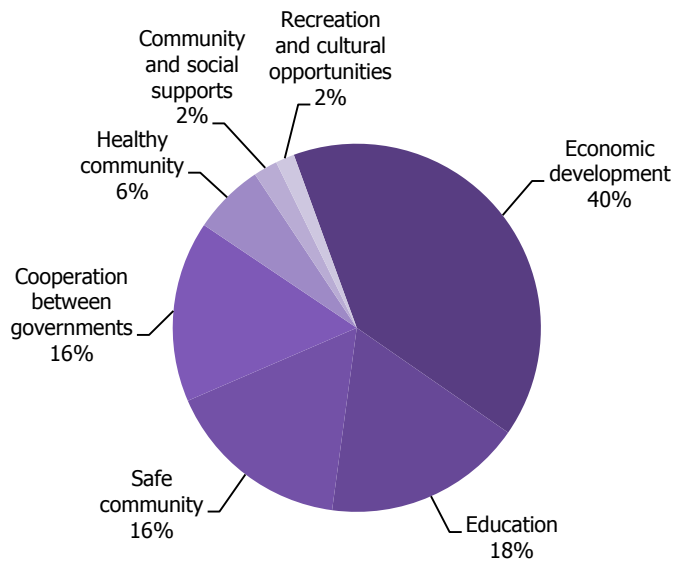


Figure 5: Question 14, part 2

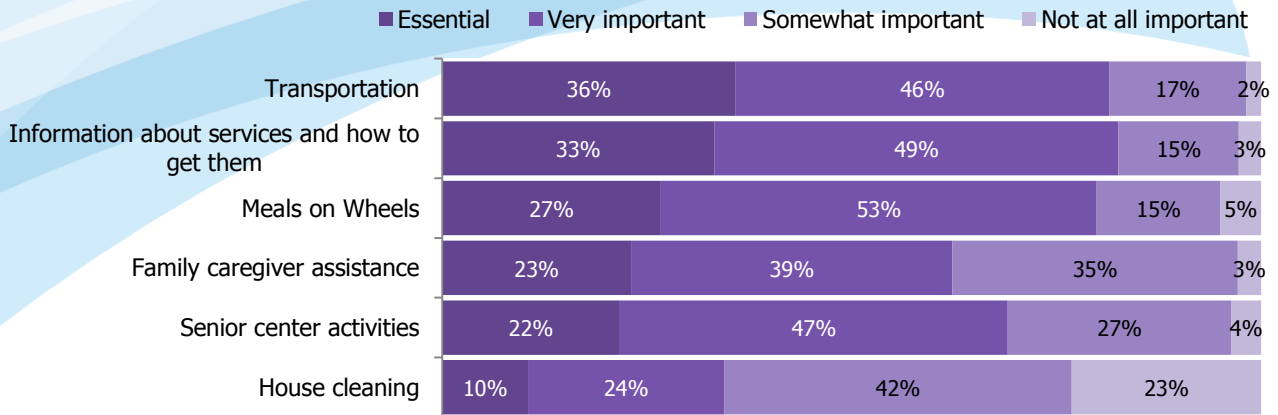
*Then, please check which ONE is the most important.*



Of the six adult services presented in the survey, most respondents felt that nearly all were “essential” or “very important” for the County to provide. Residents considered transportation and information about adult services as most critical for the County to offer, while fewer felt the same about the house cleaning service.

Figure 6: Question 15

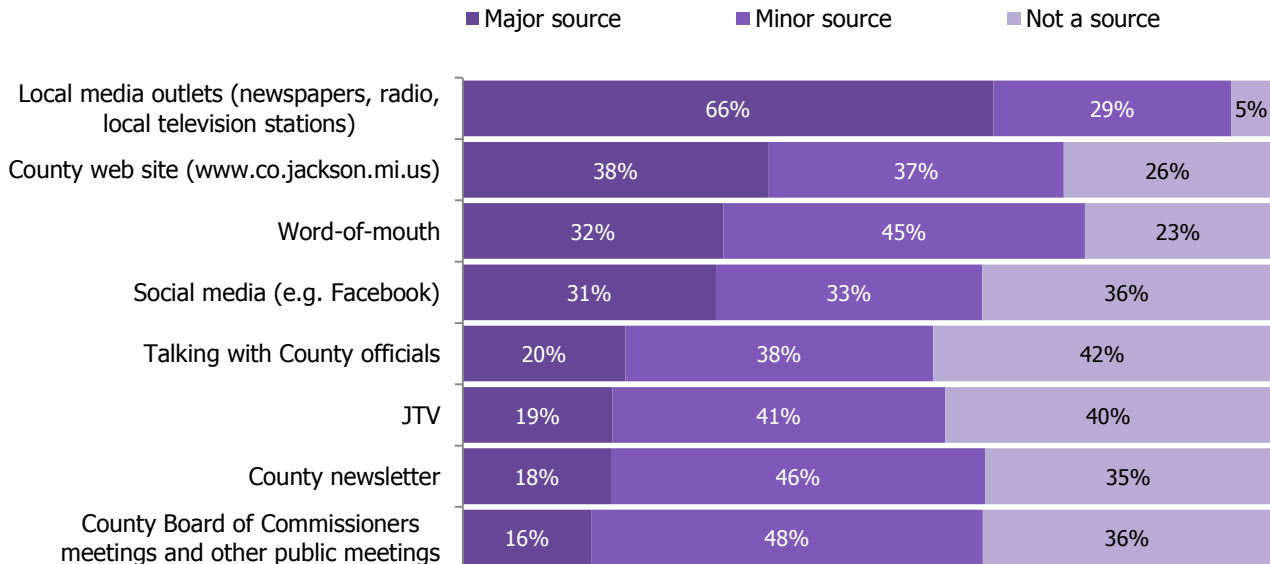
*Please indicate how important, if at all, each of the following adult services are for the County to provide:*



Jackson County residents reported using various sources of information about County government and its activities, events and services. County residents said they were most likely to use local media outlets. Additionally, at least 3 in 10 residents reported that they used the County web site, word-of-mouth and social media as major sources of information on the County.

Figure 7: Question 16

*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:*



Among those residents of the County for whom it applied, most had not tested their home for radon nor had their private well water tested for bacteria in the recent past.

Figure 8: Question 17

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

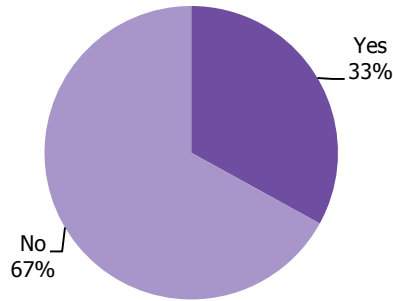
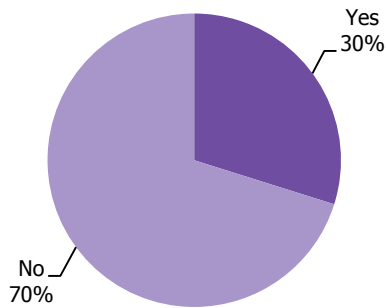


Figure 9: Question 18

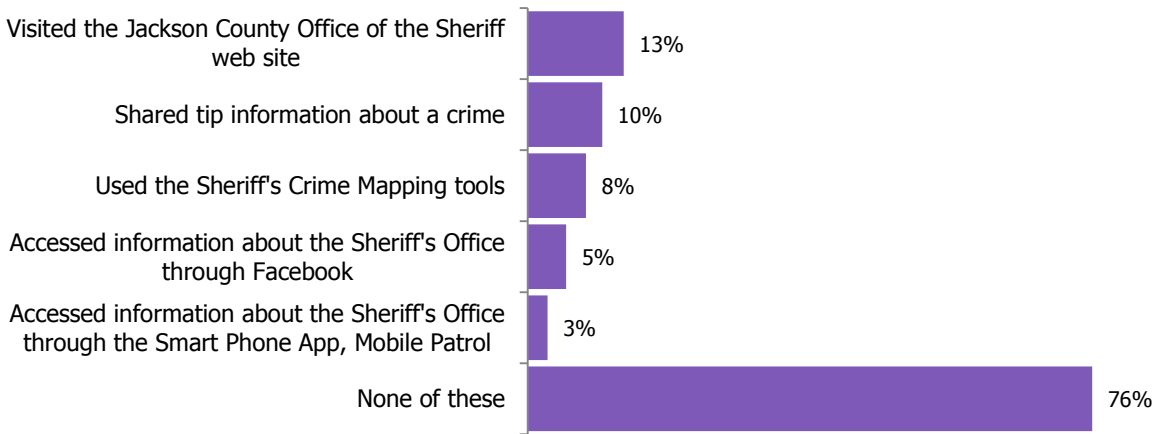
*Have you had your private well water tested for bacteria in the past 5 years?*



Most respondents, about three-quarters, had not had recent contact with the Jackson County Office of the Sheriff. Among those who had, they most commonly made contact through the Office's web site or when sharing information about a crime.

Figure 10: Question 19

*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

## **Jackson County residents enjoy a good quality of life.**

At least half of respondents rated their overall quality of life and Jackson County as a place to live positively in 2013 and both measures were higher than in 2011. While residents of the community appreciated life in Jackson County, they felt that the county's reputation lagged; about one-quarter of participants rated the overall image or reputation of Jackson County positively. Despite this, residents especially enjoyed their neighborhoods and looked forward to remaining in the county for the foreseeable future; these ratings improved between 2011 and 2013.

## **Residents identify Safety as a focus area for Jackson County.**

Residents identified Safety as one area of community livability most important for the County to focus on, and many aspects of Safety garnered solid ratings from respondents. A strong majority of county residents felt safe in their neighborhoods and in downtown/commercial areas. The overall feeling of safety in the community was rated favorably by half of respondents, but this was lower than in other communities nationally. Few Jackson County residents had been the victim of a crime or had reported a crime, both of which were levels similar to other communities. Police, fire and ambulance services received high ratings from two-thirds or more of respondents; safety service ratings tended to be stable between 2011 and 2013. Respondents also prioritized having a safe community as an essential strategic planning area for overall quality of life in the County and reported that they most commonly had contact with the Office of the Sheriff through its web site.

## **Residents of Jackson County are engaged in the community.**

Within the pillar of Participation, Jackson County performed as well as other communities in the nation in the facets of Safety, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement. The facet with the most positive ratings of engagement was Community Engagement. More residents in Jackson County reported voting in local elections than in other communities and at a higher rate than in 2011. While fewer felt that there was a strong sense of community in the county, the vast majority of residents kept up with local news and had contact with their neighbors or had done favor for a neighbor. County residents most commonly used local media outlets to garner information on the County government.