

# The National Citizen Survey™

## Polk County, IA

Community Livability Report

2014

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The National Citizen Survey™  
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# About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Polk 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).

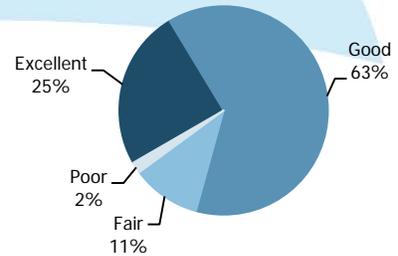
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 248 residents of Polk County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 6% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Polk County

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Polk County as excellent or good. Overall quality of life received similar ratings when compared to communities across the nation (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Overall Quality of Life



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.

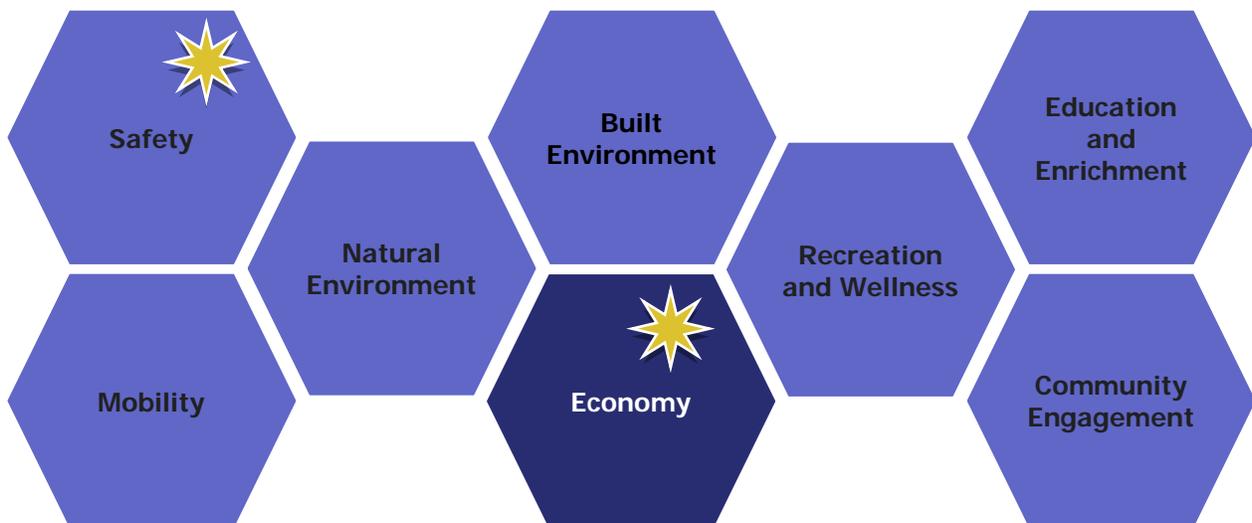
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Polk County community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Polk County residents gave strong ratings to Economy. Ratings for Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, 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 Polk County’s unique questions.

**Legend**

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

Most important



# Community Characteristics

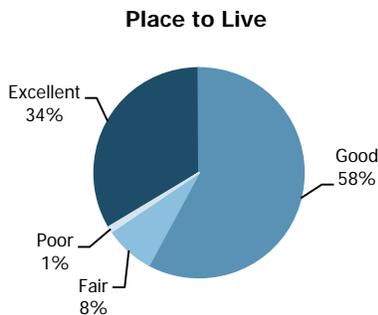
*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

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 Polk County, 92% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Polk County as a place to live were similar 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 Polk County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Polk County and its overall appearance. About 8 in 10 respondents gave positive ratings for their neighborhoods, Polk County as a place to raise children and the overall appearance of Polk County. Three-quarters of respondents were pleased with the overall image of Polk County and 61% of respondents thought of Polk County as an excellent or good place to retire.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. All facets within Community Characteristics were rated at least similar to the benchmark and a majority of participants gave positive ratings to all aspects of Community Characteristics. Safety and Natural Environment received positive ratings from over 7 in 10 participants and were similar to other communities. Mobility ratings varied; the lowest rated aspect of Mobility was travel by public transportation (54% excellent or good) and the highest rated aspect was overall ease of travel (88% excellent or good). Paths and walking trails also received positive ratings was rated higher than other communities in the nation.

Economy was an especially well-rated feature; the vibrant downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities and Polk County as a place to work all received ratings higher than the benchmark. A majority of participants also gave positive ratings to the remaining aspects of Economy, which were similar to the benchmark. Most participants were pleased with Recreation and Wellness; six of the seven aspects of Recreation and Wellness received positive ratings from 7 out of 10 respondents. Education and Enrichment ratings were positive; cultural/arts/music activities and the availability of affordable quality child care/preschool were rated above the benchmark.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

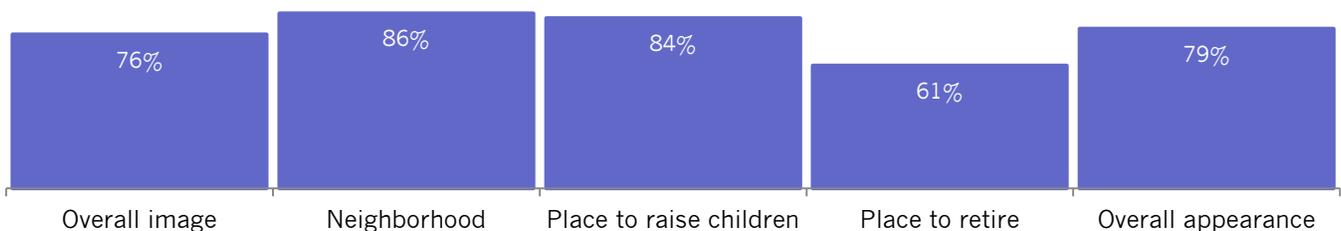
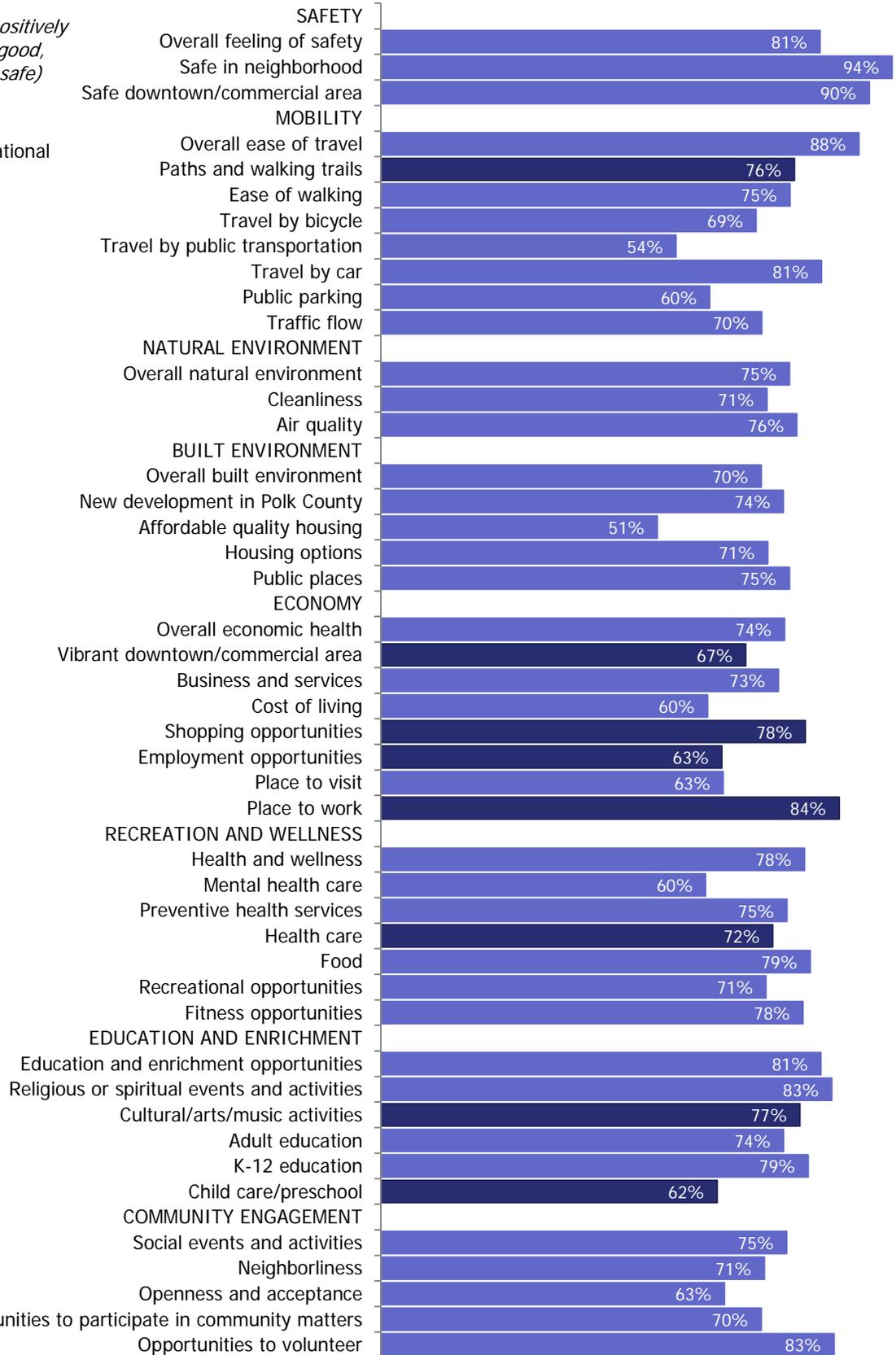


Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Governance

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

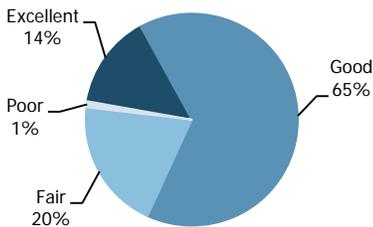
The overall quality of the services provided by Polk County as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. Over three-quarters of respondents gave positive ratings for the overall quality of County services, while only about half of participants gave positive ratings for the Federal Government services. Both were similar to the benchmark.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Polk County's leadership and governance. Customer service received the highest rating (71%), while being honest received the lowest rating (45%). A majority of participants gave positive ratings for the overall direction, welcoming citizen involvement, and acting in the best interest of Polk County. All aspects of Polk County leadership and governance were similar to other communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Polk County. The facet of Safety received positive ratings from a majority of participants with police, fire and ambulance/EMS services all receiving positive ratings from at least 8 in 10 participants. Natural Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement all received positive ratings from a majority of participants and all aspects of these facets were rated similar to other communities, with the exception of Economy which was rated higher than other communities. Mobility ratings varied; traffic enforcement, snow removal and bus or transit services received the highest ratings, while street repair received the lowest rating.

Built Environment ratings ranged from 44% (cable television) to 79% (power utility); all aspects of the Built Environment were similar to the benchmark.

**Overall Quality of County Services**



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower

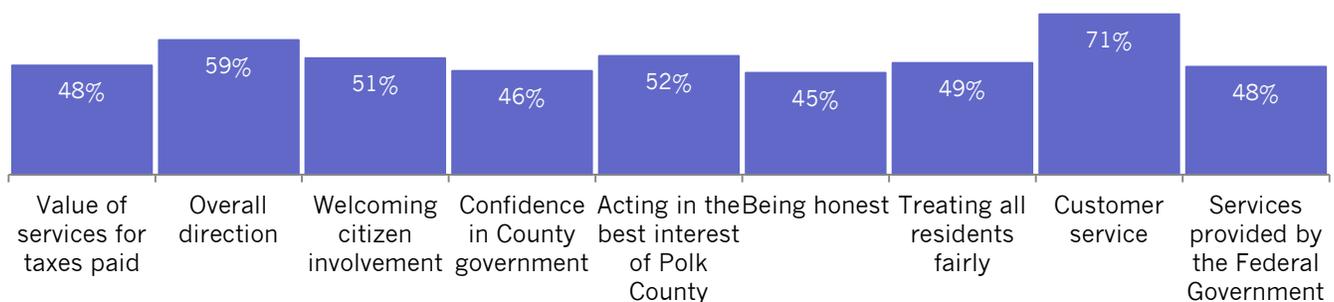
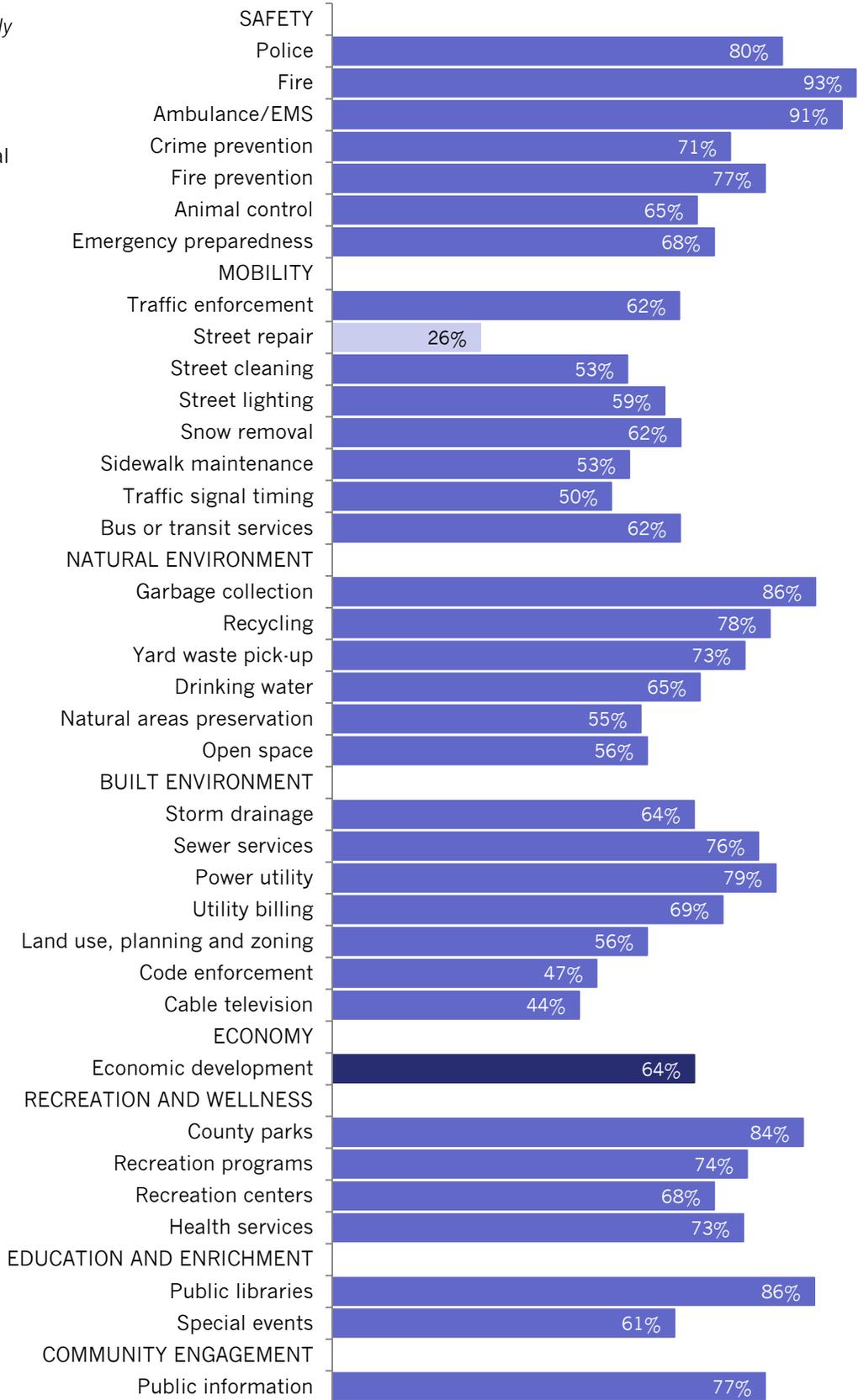


Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

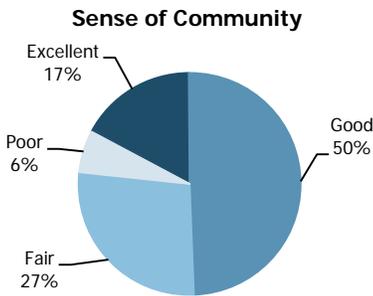


# Participation

*Are the residents of Polk 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. Around two-thirds of participants gave positive ratings for the sense of community, which was a rating similar to the benchmark. Almost all participants would recommend Polk County to others and 88% of respondents plan on remaining in Polk County. Only one-third of participants had contacted a Polk County employee, a rating that is lower than what's typically seen in other communities.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. While most participants had not been the victim of a crime or reported a crime, only about one-quarter of participants had stocked supplies for an emergency. Less than half of participants carpooled or used public transportation, but over half had reported walking or biking instead of driving. A majority of respondents participated in activities related to the Natural Environment, Built Environment and Recreation and Wellness and all aspects of participation in these facets were at least similar to the benchmark. Aspects of Economy were all similar to the benchmark, with the exception of those reporting to work in Polk County, which was higher than the benchmark. Participation in Education and Enrichment activities varied; a majority of participants used the public libraries and participated in spiritual or religious activities, but only one-third had attended a County-sponsored event. And while participation in aspects of Community Engagement ranged from 12% (contacted an elected official) to 95% (read or watched local news), all aspects of this facet were similar to other communities across the nation.



*Percent rating positively (e.g., very/somewhat likely, yes)*

Comparison to national benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

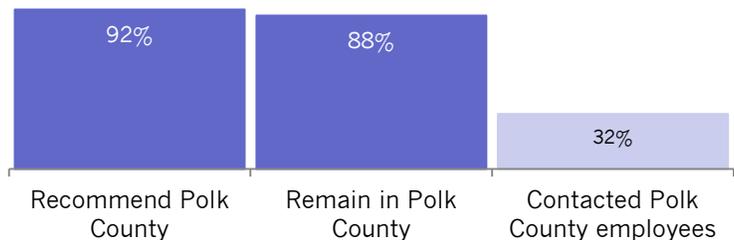
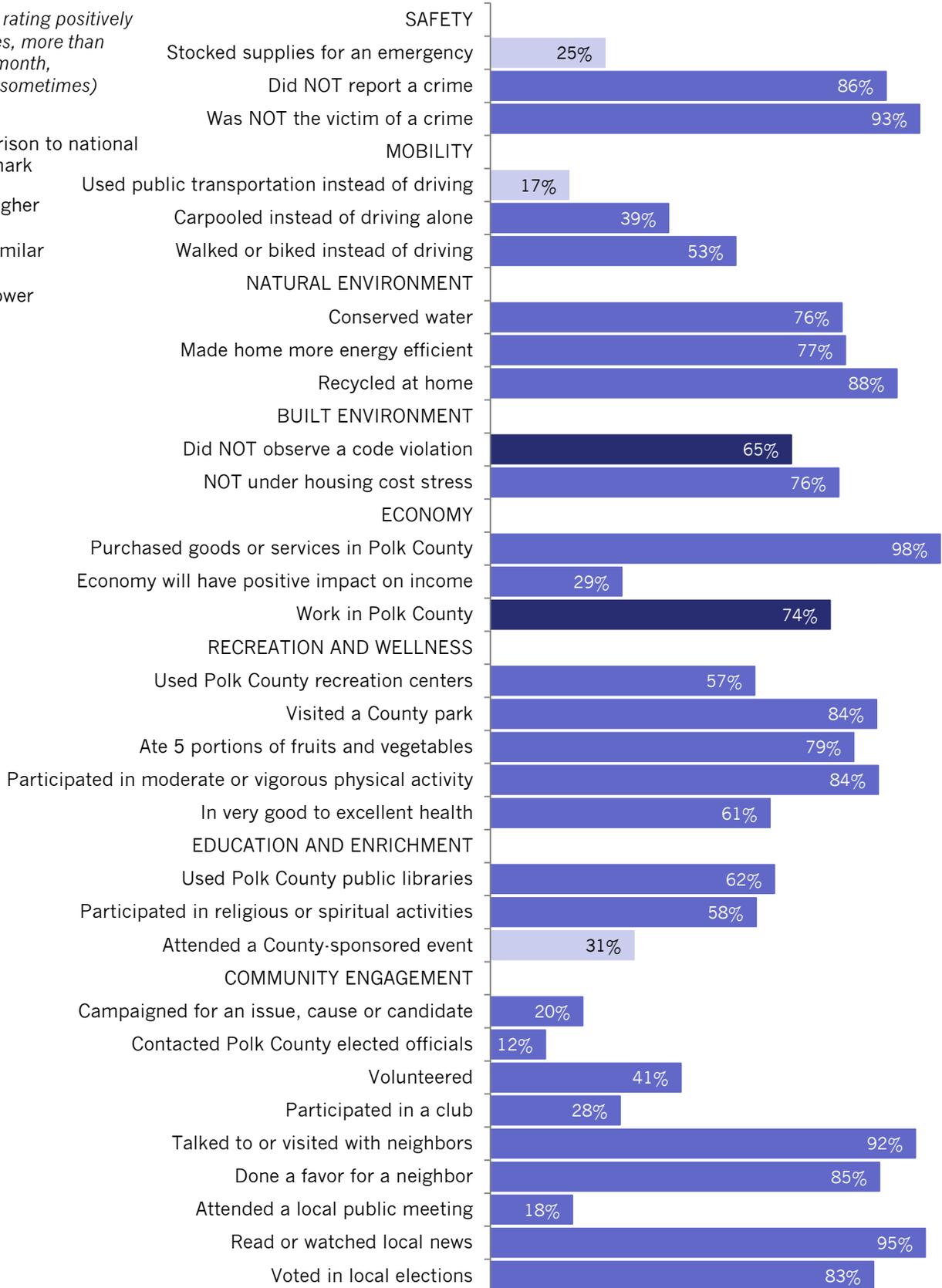


Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



# Special Topics

Polk County included four questions of special interest on The NCS. The first two custom questions asked about Polk County Community or Senior Centers. About 17% of survey participants reported using a Polk County Community or Senior Center. Those who reported using a Community or Senior Center rated building safety, helpfulness of staff, friendliness of staff and the variety of activities/services the most positively. A majority of these participants also gave positive rating for building cleanliness and the nutrition of congregate meals, but less than half of participants gave positive ratings for the taste of congregate meals.

Figure 4: Polk County Community or Senior Center Use  
*Have you or a family member been to a Polk County Community or Senior Center?*

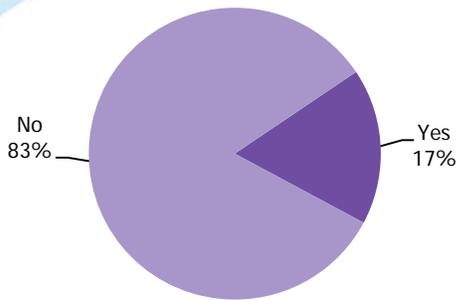
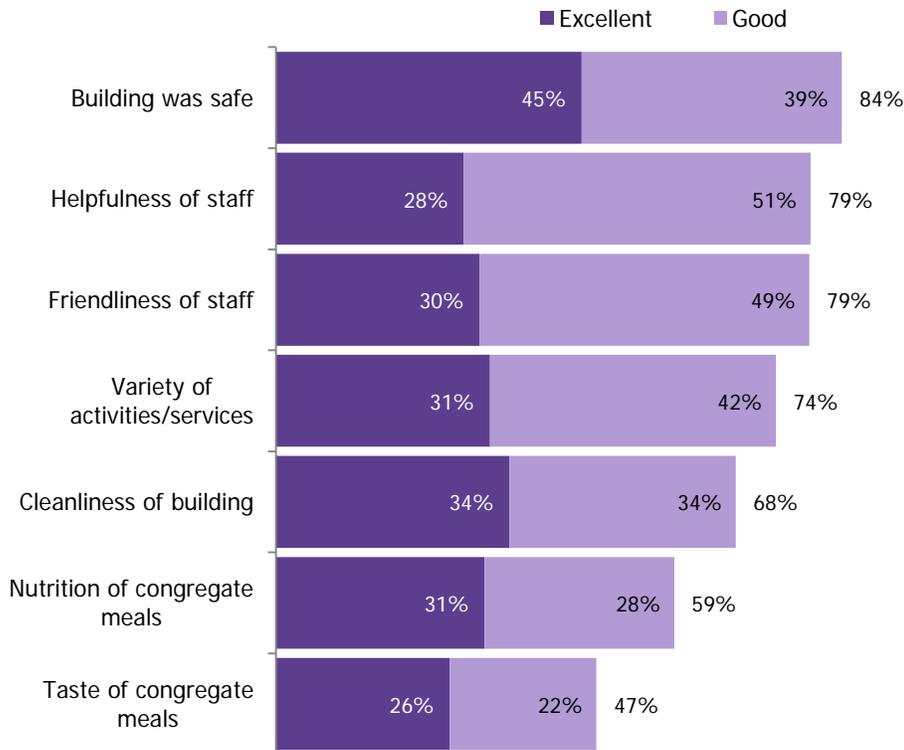


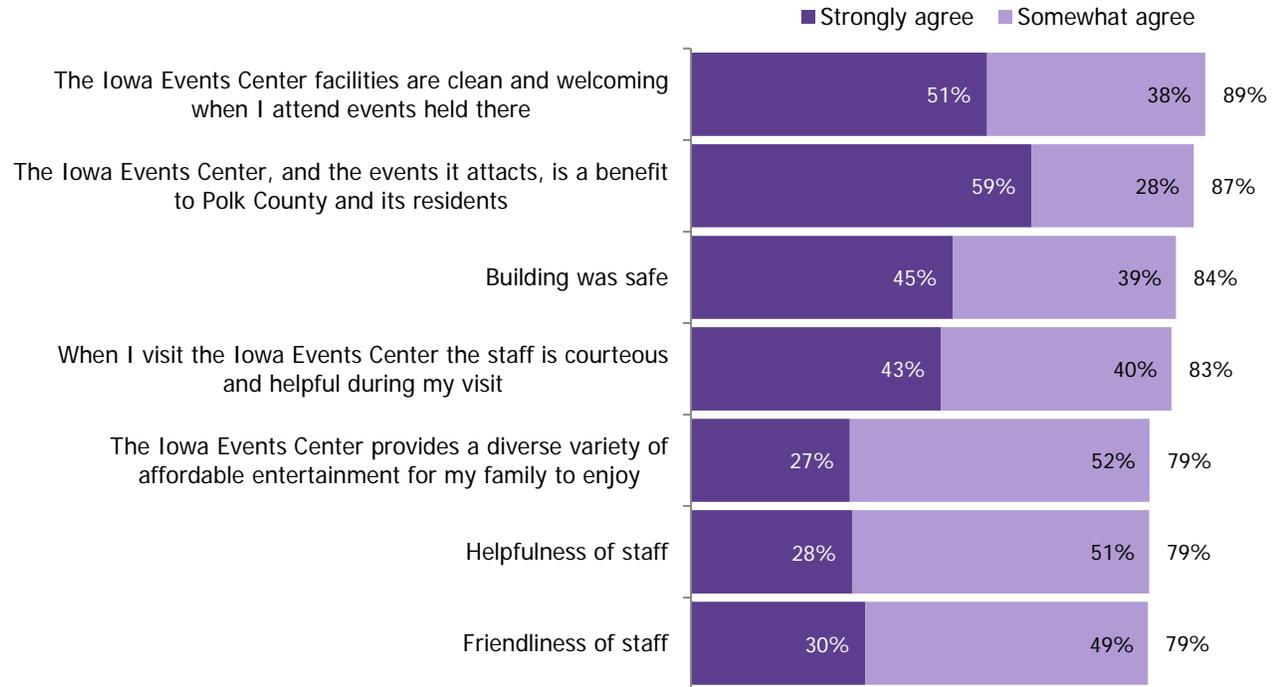
Figure 5: Polk County Community or Senior Center Ratings  
*If yes, please rate them on the following:*



About 8 in 10 respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with each statement about the Iowa Events Center. Almost all the participants agreed that the Iowa Events Center facilities are clean and welcoming and a similar number also agreed that the events it attracts are a benefit to Polk County and its residents.

Figure 6: Iowa Events Center

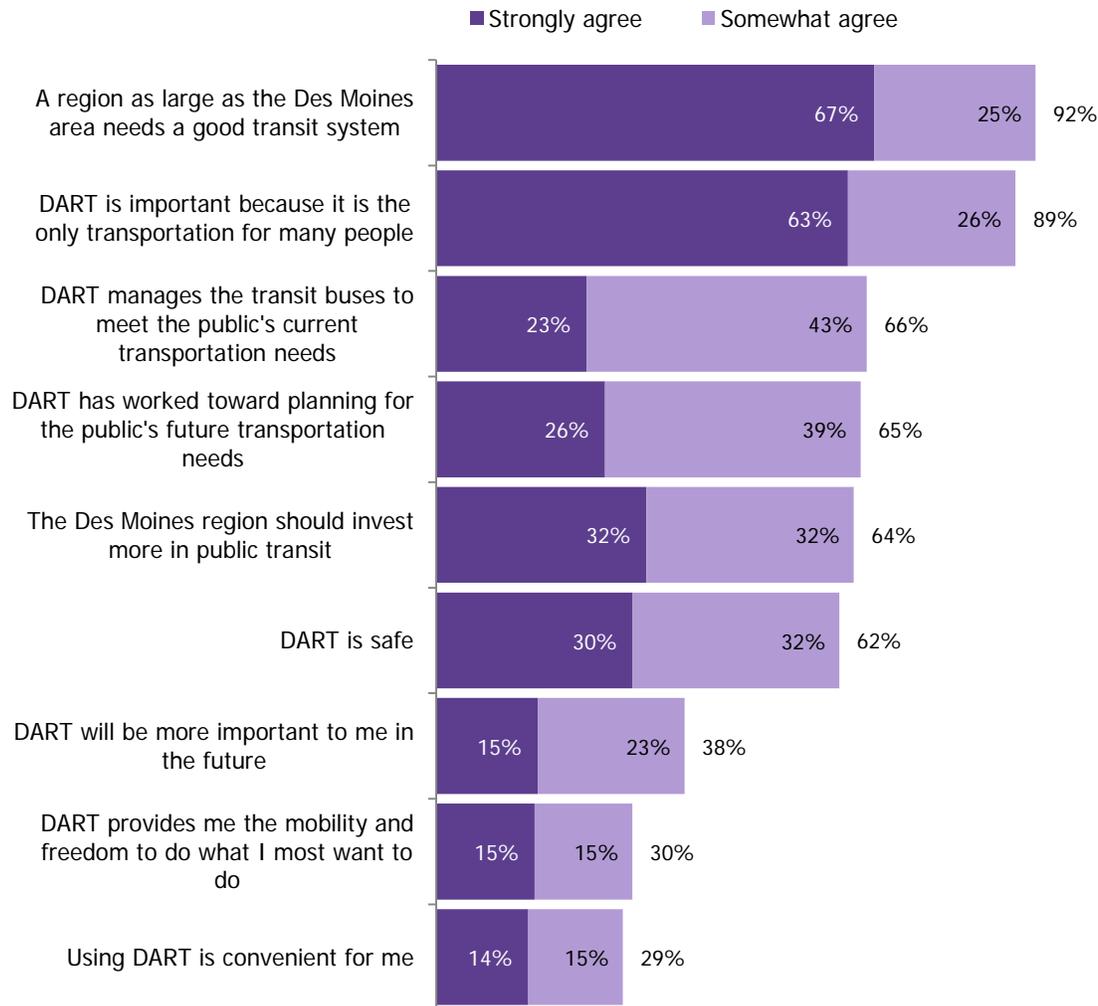
*Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Iowa Events Center (including Community Choice Credit Union Veterans Hall, HyVee Hall, and Wells Fargo Arena):*



Almost all participants agreed that the Des Moines area needs a good transit system and also agreed that DART is important since it is the only transportation option for many people. About 6 in 10 participants agreed that DART manages transit buses to meet the public’s current transportation needs, DART has worked toward planning for future transportation needs, that the Des Moines region should invest more in public transit and that DART is safe. Fewer participants agreed that DART would be important to their future, that it provides them the mobility and freedom to do what they want and that DART is convenient.

Figure 7: Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART)

*Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART):*



# Conclusions

## Polk County's Economy is strong.

Residents indicated that the Economy is an important focus area over the next two years and a majority of aspects within Economy were rated higher compared to other communities. Over 6 in 10 participants were pleased with the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities, Polk County as a place to work and economic development; all of these aspects of economy received higher ratings compared to the benchmark. Other features that were also rated positively by a majority of participants, but were similar to the benchmark included the overall economic health of Polk County, cost of living, businesses and services, and Polk County as a place to visit.

## Polk County residents have a high quality of life.

Almost all participants gave positive ratings to their overall quality of life and also gave high ratings to Polk County as a place to live. Over three-quarters of respondents gave positive ratings to Polk County's overall image and appearance, their neighborhood and Polk County as a place to raise children. Most residents would recommend Polk County to others and plan on remaining in Polk County. Most participants were pleased with the overall quality of County services, but Polk County's governance and leadership ratings (such as being honest, value of services for taxes paid, etc.) varied.

## Polk County is safe.

Participants felt safe in Polk County overall, especially in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area. Most participants also gave high ratings for safety services, particularly police, fire and ambulance/ems. Also, almost all respondents indicated that they had not been the victim of a crime or had reported a crime. But very few participants indicated that they had stocked supplies for an emergency. Overall, residents believed that Safety is an important facet for the community to focus on.