



THE NCSTM
The National Community SurveyTM

Marion, IA

Community Livability Report

2019



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Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Marion 2

Community Characteristics 3

Governance 5

Participation 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions 11



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The NCS™ is presented by NRC in collaboration with ICMA.

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

About

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

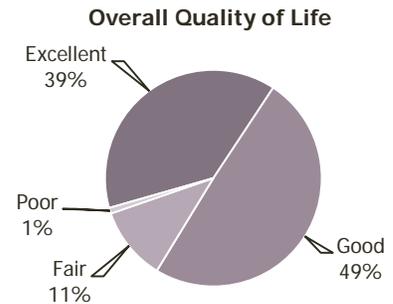
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 509 residents of the City of Marion. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 4% for all respondents. 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 Marion

Most residents (88%) rated the quality of life in Marion as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark (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.

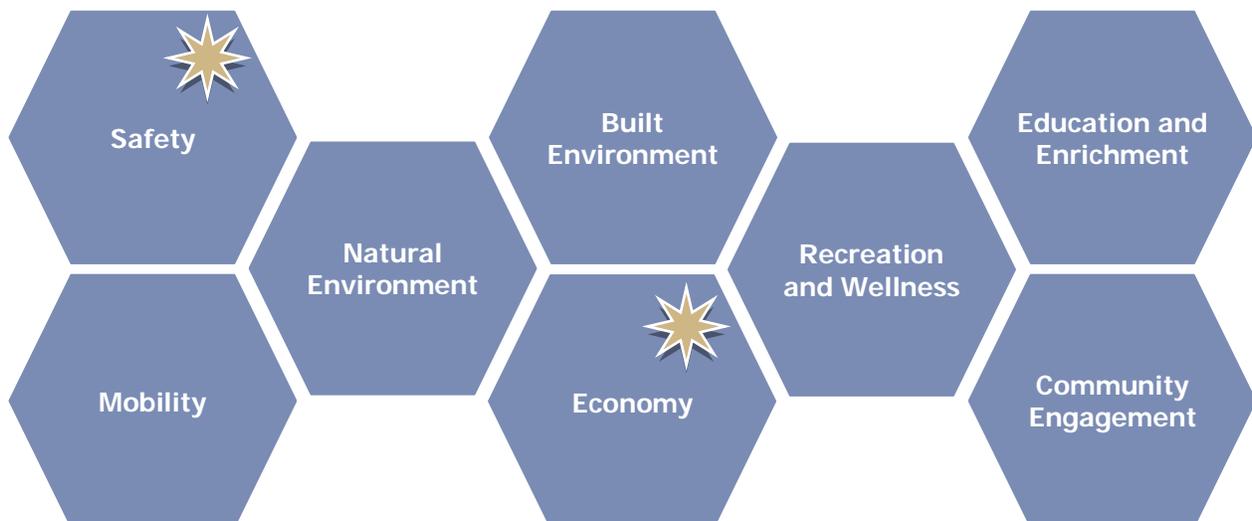
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. As in 2017, residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Marion community in the coming two years. Ratings for all eight facets of community livability were positive and similar to other communities across the nation. 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 Marion’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 Marion, 93% rated the city as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Marion as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the city as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality. Ratings for Marion as a place to raise children outshined comparison communities nationwide, with 94% scoring this positively. About 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Marion and its overall appearance, while 7 in 10 favorably reviewed Marion as a place to retire. These ratings were on par with national averages.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Overall, at least half of respondents reviewed most aspects of Community Characteristics positively and ratings tended to be similar to other benchmark comparisons.

As a highlight within Community Characteristics, assessments of availability of affordable quality housing, variety of housing options and K-12 education were strong and higher than the national average, with at least 6 in 10

residents giving high marks. Respondents' ratings for ease of travel by bicycle (53% excellent or good) and public transportation (36%), opportunities to attend cultural/arts/music activities (71%) and opportunities to participate in social events and activities (66%) improved from 2017 to 2019 (see the *Trends over Time* report provided under separate cover for more details).

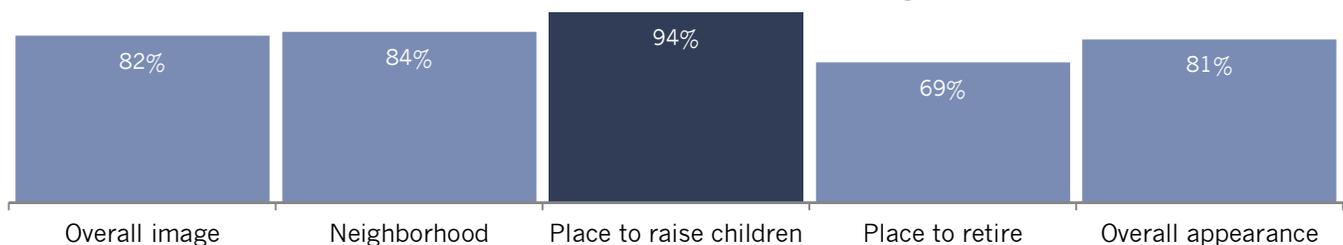


Residents' reviews for shopping opportunities were lower than those observed in other communities. Compared to 2017, survey participants' marks for the overall quality of business and service establishments in Marion and the availability of affordable quality food declined in 2019.

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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



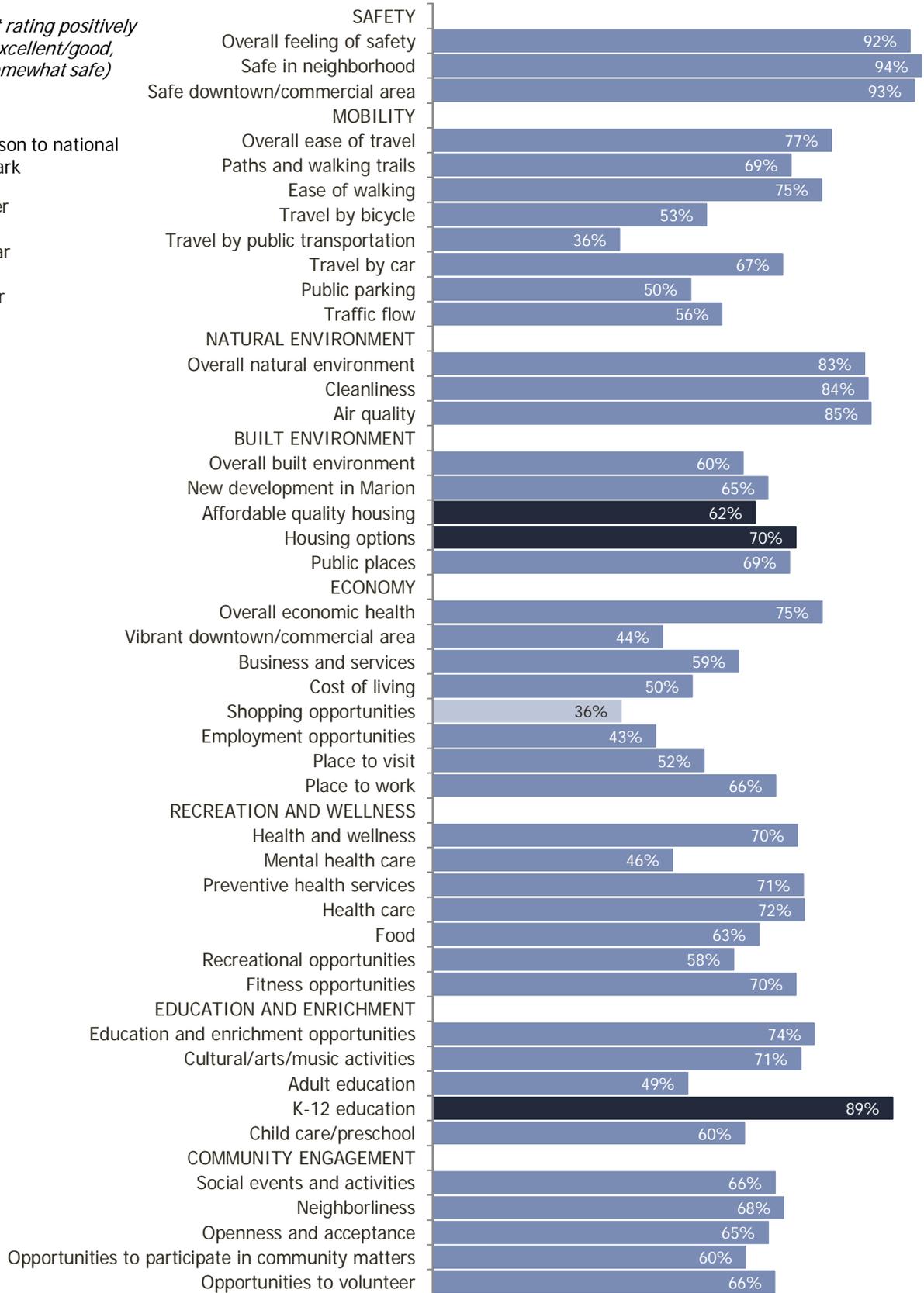
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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



Governance

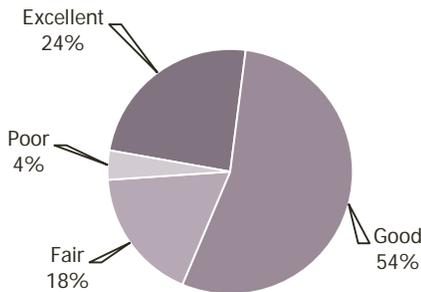
How well does the government of Marion meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Marion as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 8 in 10 residents gave favorable evaluations to the overall quality of services provided by the City, while 4 in 10 were pleased with the services provided by the Federal Government. Both of these evaluations were similar to those observed elsewhere.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Marion’s leadership and governance. About 8 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall customer service provided by the City. Roughly 6 in 10 residents gave positive reviews to all other aspects of government, except the value of services for taxes paid, which half of residents positively rated. These reviews were similar to those given in other communities. Additionally, respondents gave higher marks to the overall direction the City is taking, the government welcoming resident involvement and treating all residents fairly in 2019 compared to 2017.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Marion. Broadly, at least half of respondents reviewed most government services positively and ratings tended to be similar to those observed in other benchmark communities. The highest-rated services included fire, ambulance/EMS, police, fire prevention and City parks, with at least 85% of residents assigning positive scores and each being on par with averages nationwide. Further, evaluations of crime prevention were strong and surpassed the national benchmark. Notably, reviews for recreation centers or facilities improved from 2017 to 2019.

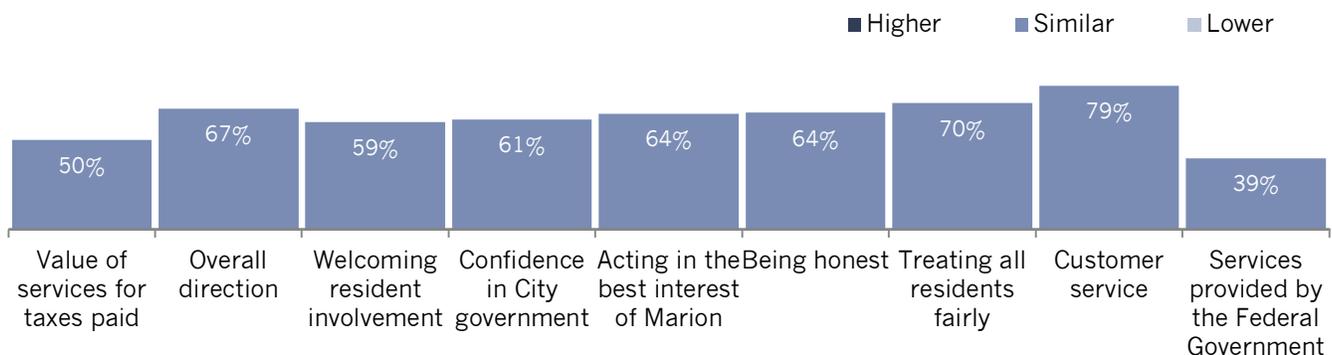
Overall Quality of City Services



Respondents were less pleased with assessments of drinking water (51% excellent or good), which was lower than the national benchmark. Ratings for three aspects of Built Environment declined from 2017 to 2019: storm drainage, power utility and code enforcement. Other areas where ratings decreased were street cleaning, snow removal and public libraries.

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

Comparison to national benchmark



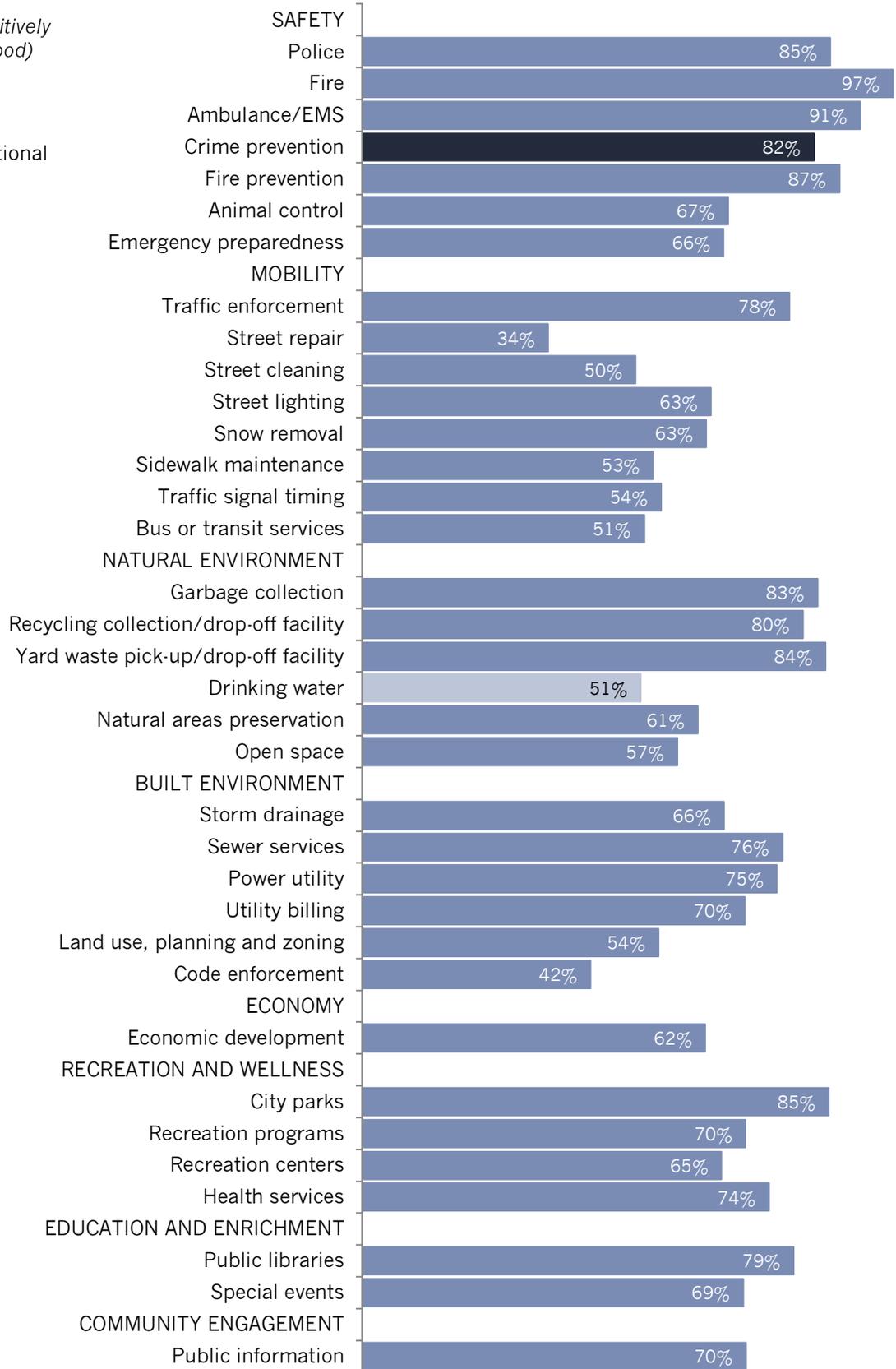
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



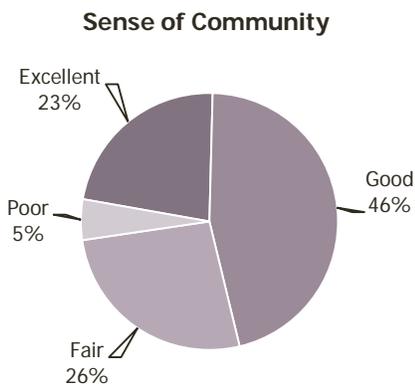
Participation

Are the residents of Marion connected to the community and each other?

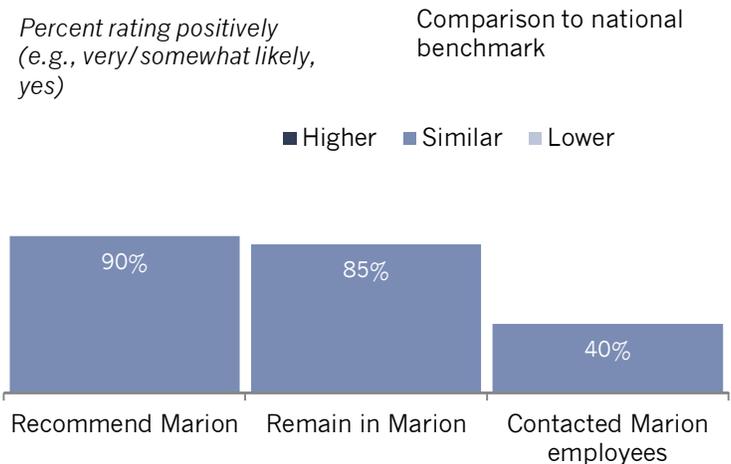
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. Similar to other communities in the U.S., about 7 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good scores to the sense of community in Marion.

About 9 in 10 survey respondents indicated they would recommend living in Marion to someone who asked and 8 in 10 planned to remain in the community for the next five years. About 4 in 10 residents reported they had contacted Marion employees. These ratings were similar to those reported across the nation.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Levels of Participation varied widely across the different facets, making the benchmark comparisons, as well as comparisons to Marion over time, useful for interpreting the results. About 9 in 10 respondents had recycled at home, purchased goods or services in Marion, and talked to or visited with a neighbor. Fewer residents were under housing cost stress in Marion compared to levels observed in other communities.



Compared to municipalities across the country, fewer residents reported stocking supplies in preparation for an emergency, using public transportation instead of driving, conserving water, volunteering or listening to a local public meeting. In 2019, fewer residents carpooled instead of driving; conserved water; voted in local elections; campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate; or read or watched the local news since the last survey iteration. Additionally, more residents observed code violations in 2019 compared to 2017.



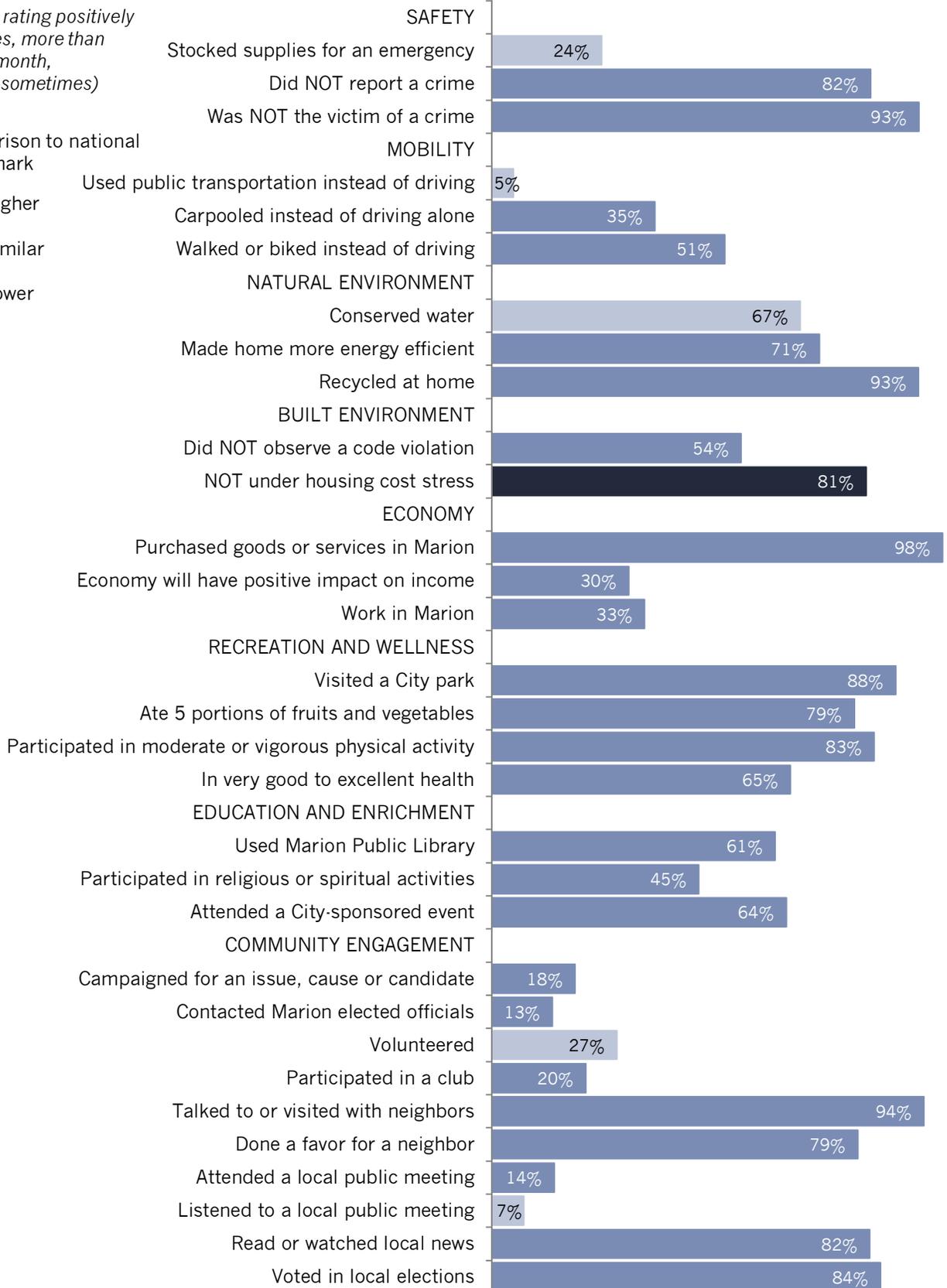
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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

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

Comparison to national
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



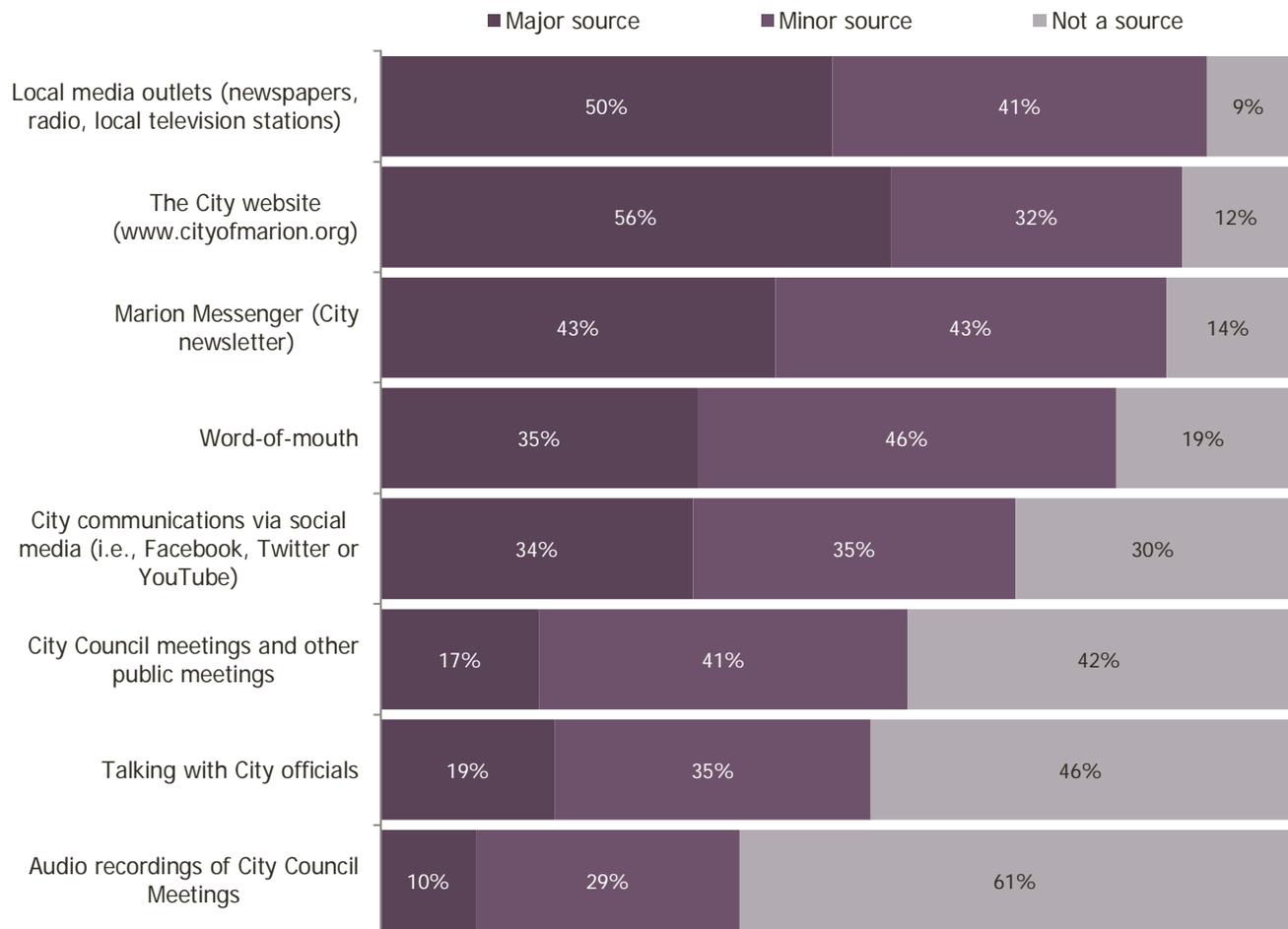
Special Topics

The City of Marion included two questions of special interest on The NCS, with topics related to City information sources and support for funding improvements to City facilities and services.

When asked about sources utilized for obtaining information about the City government and its activities, events and services, at least 4 in 10 residents said they used each source as a major or minor source of information. Local media outlets, the City website and Marion Messenger were utilized the most, while audio recordings of City Council Meetings was the least-used source.

Figure 4: Sources of City Information

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

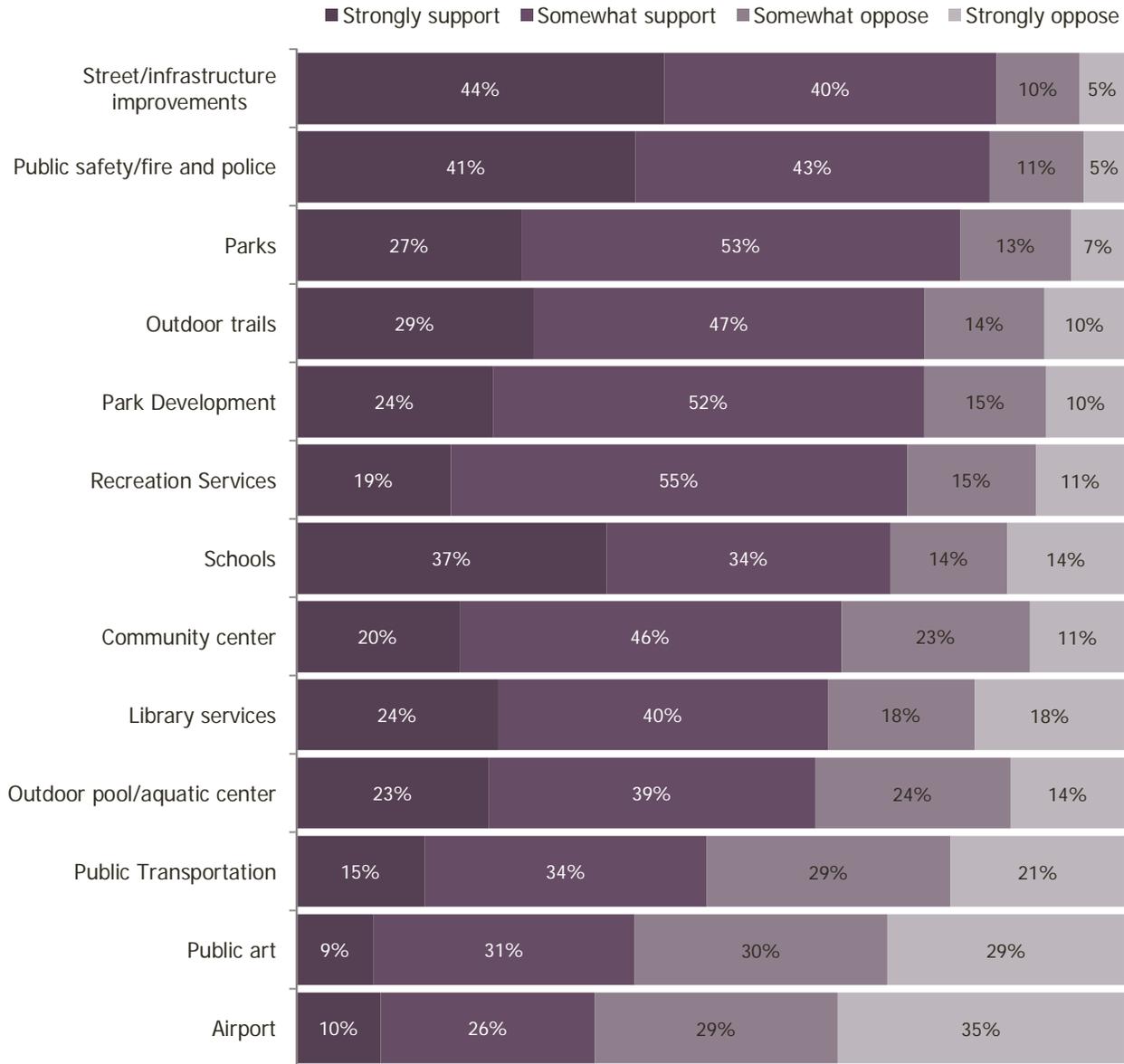


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Residents indicated whether they supported or opposed a property tax or fee increase to fund improvements to various facilities or services. At least half of respondents strongly or somewhat supported funding all facilities or services, with the exception of public art and the airport, which had support from 4 in 10 residents. The most support was shown to fund street/infrastructure improvements, public safety/fire and police, and parks.

Figure 5: Support to Fund Facilities and Services Improvements

Please indicate to what extent you would support or oppose a property tax or fee increase to fund improvements to each of the following facilities or services:



Conclusions

Marion continues to be a desirable place to live, with Safety as a feature that contributes to quality of life.

At least 8 in 10 community members gave high marks to the overall quality of life in Marion, the city and their neighborhood as places to live, the overall image or reputation of Marion and its overall appearance. Evaluations of Marion as a place to raise children outpaced comparison communities, with 94% of residents giving this aspect positive reviews. About 9 in 10 residents were likely to recommend living in Marion to someone who asked and 8 in 10 planned to remain in Marion for the next five years. About 7 in 10 residents favorably assessed the sense of community in the city.

As in 2017, residents indicated that Safety was an important focus area for the City to address in the coming years. About 9 in 10 residents positively rated the overall feeling of safety in Marion and felt safe in their neighborhoods and in the downtown/commercial area. Out of all City services, fire and ambulance/EMS were given the most positive reviews. Demonstrating their commitment to keeping Marion safe, about 8 in 10 residents supported a property tax or fee increase to provide funds for public safety/fire and police.

Residents are pleased with Mobility and support improvements to City streets.

About three-quarters of residents positively assessed the overall ease of travel in Marion. At least two-thirds of respondents gave high marks to ease of travel by car and by walking, availability of paths and walking trails, and traffic enforcement. Half of residents reported they had walked or biked instead of driving, which was on par with comparison communities nationwide. Respondents' ratings of ease of travel by bicycle and public transportation increased from 2017 to 2019.

While ratings for streets (street repair, street lighting, street cleaning and snow removal) were on par with the national averages, assessments of street cleaning and snow removal decreased in 2019. When residents were asked to indicate their support for or opposition to a property tax or fee increase to fund various improvements in Marion, they were most supportive of funding street/infrastructure improvements, with 84% of respondents stating they would strongly or somewhat support the measure. Additionally, about half of respondents supported the same initiative to fund improvements to public transportation in the city.

Marion residents emphasize the importance of the Economy and value housing availability and affordability.

As in 2017, survey participants highlighted the Economy as a priority for the City in the next two years. Similar to comparison communities, about three-quarters of residents positively rated the overall economic health of Marion. At least 6 in 10 residents assigned favorable scores to the overall quality of business and service establishments, Marion as a place to work, new development in Marion and economic development. Survey participants were especially pleased with the housing in the city: evaluations of availability of affordable quality housing and variety of housing options outpaced the national benchmarks. Moreover, fewer residents were under housing cost stress in Marion compared to levels observed in other communities.

Recreation and Wellness offerings are an asset to community members.

At least 7 in 10 respondents positively rated a number of Recreation and Wellness-related aspects, including fitness opportunities, availability of affordable quality health care and preventive health services, health and wellness opportunities, health services, recreation programs or classes and City parks. More residents gave high marks to recreation centers or facilities in 2019 compared to 2017. Additionally, residents showed their support for a property tax or fee increase to fund several recreation and wellness-related facilities and services. At least 6 in 10 residents supported allocating funds to make improvements to parks, the community center, the outdoor pool/aquatic center, outdoor trails, recreation services and park development. Further, 8 in 10 respondents strongly or somewhat supported increased monies for park improvements.