



Athens-Clarke County, GA

Community Livability Report
2016



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

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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Athens-Clarke 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 364 residents of Athens-Clarke County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% 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.



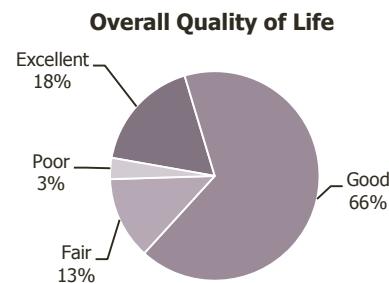
Quality of Life in Athens-Clarke County

A vast majority of residents rated the quality of life in Athens-Clarke County as excellent or good, which 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. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Athens-Clarke County community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Athens-Clarke County residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets. Ratings for all facets 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.

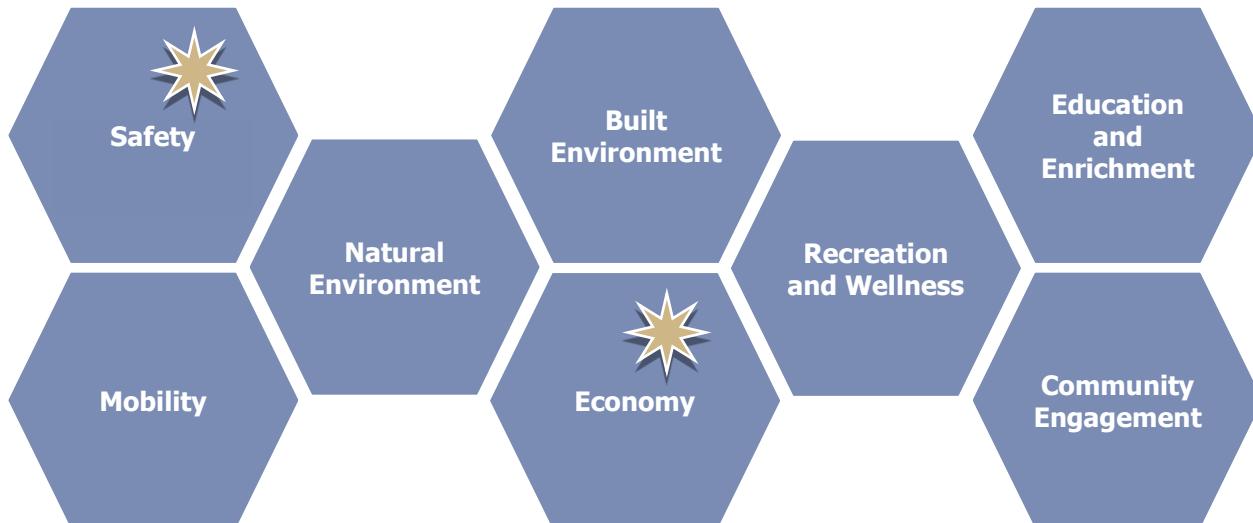
Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for Athens-Clarke County's unique questions.



Legend

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

- Most important



Community Characteristics

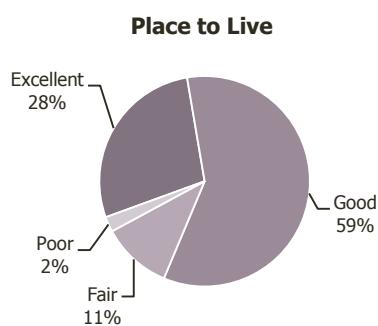
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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 Athens-Clarke County, 87% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Athens-Clarke County as a place to live were similar to 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 Athens-Clarke County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Athens-Clarke County and its overall appearance. Around 3 out of 4 residents gave positive ratings to Athens-Clarke County as a place to retire and their neighborhood as places to live, while about two-thirds residents gave positive ratings to the overall image and overall appearance of Athens-Clarke County; these ratings were similar to comparison communities. At least 6 out of 10 residents rated Athens-Clarke County as an excellent or good place to raise children, which was lower than in communities elsewhere.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. In the facet of Safety, around 9 in 10 reported that they felt safe in their neighborhoods and safe in the downtown/commercial area; these ratings were similar to other communities across the U.S. However, the overall feeling of safety was rated positively by only 58% of residents and was rated lower than comparison communities. Mobility was rated strongly as about three-quarters of participants gave positive ratings to the overall ease of travel, and almost 7 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to travel by car. Lower ratings were given to travel by bicycle (33%) and public parking (39%). Ratings for Natural Environment were rated highly by a majority of respondents, with at least half of residents giving positive ratings for cleanliness (a rating lower than the national benchmark) and 3 out of 4 residents giving excellent or good ratings for air quality and overall natural environment, which were similar to those found elsewhere. The facets of Built Environment and Recreation and Wellness also had positive ratings that were similar to comparison communities with over half of residents giving favorable ratings to each of the different aspects. Economy and

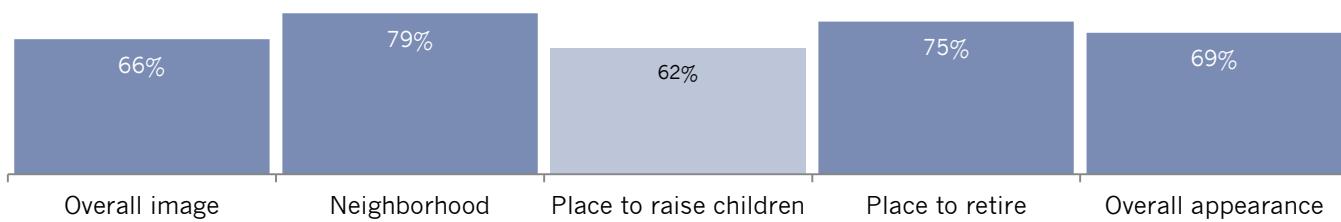
Education and Enrichment ratings tended to be mixed; strong ratings were given to the vibrancy to the downtown/commercial area (75%), cost of living (60%), Athens-Clarke County as a place to visit (81%), opportunities to attend cultural/arts activities (87%) and adult education (73%); all of these were rated higher than the national benchmark. However, the overall economic health and K-12 education were rated positively by about 4 in 10 residents, which were lower than in comparison communities. Community Engagement ratings were given excellent or good marks by at least 6 out of 10 respondents. It is worth noting that social events and activities was given high ratings by over three-quarters of participants and was rated higher in Athens-Clarke County than in other communities across the U.S.



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

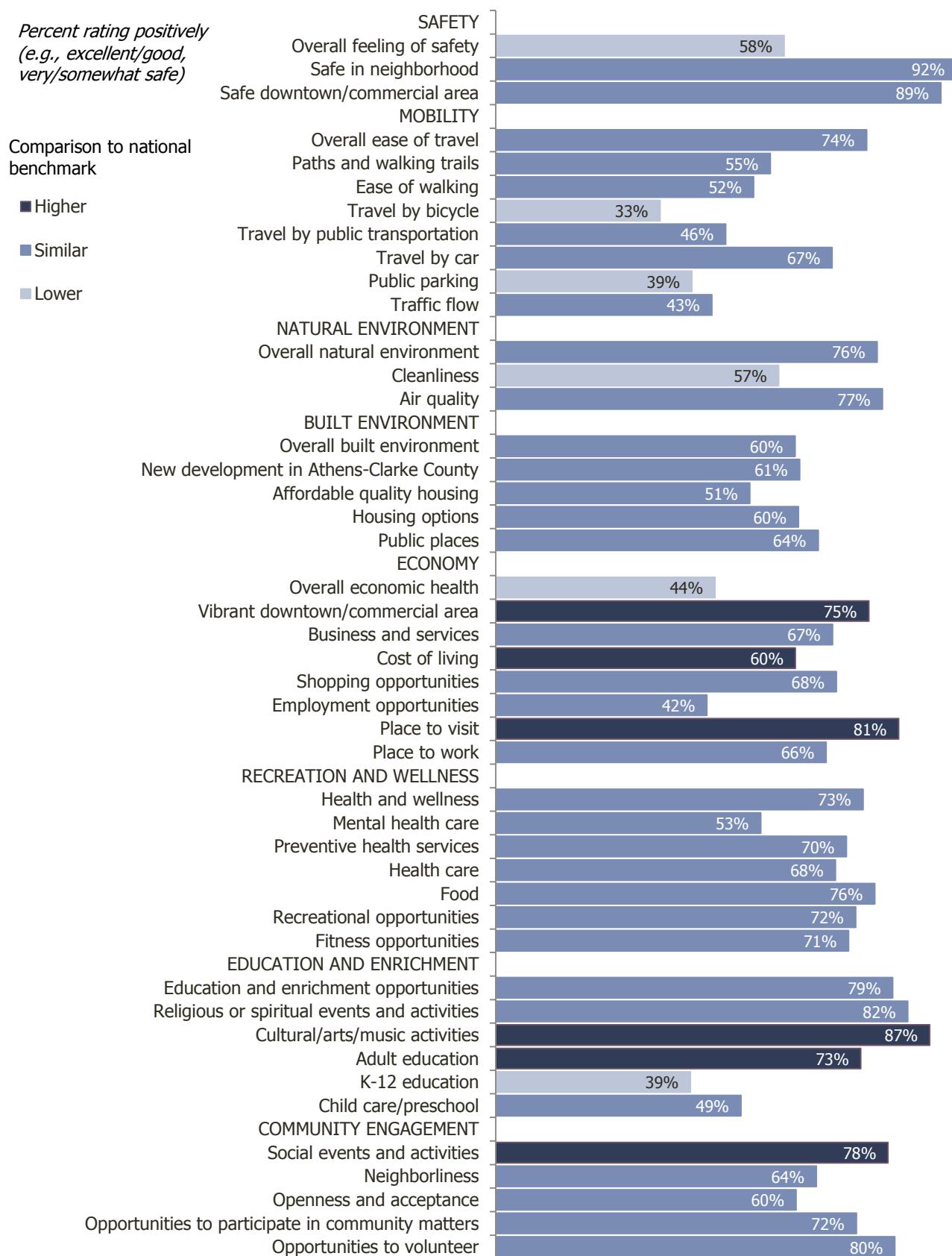
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



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Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



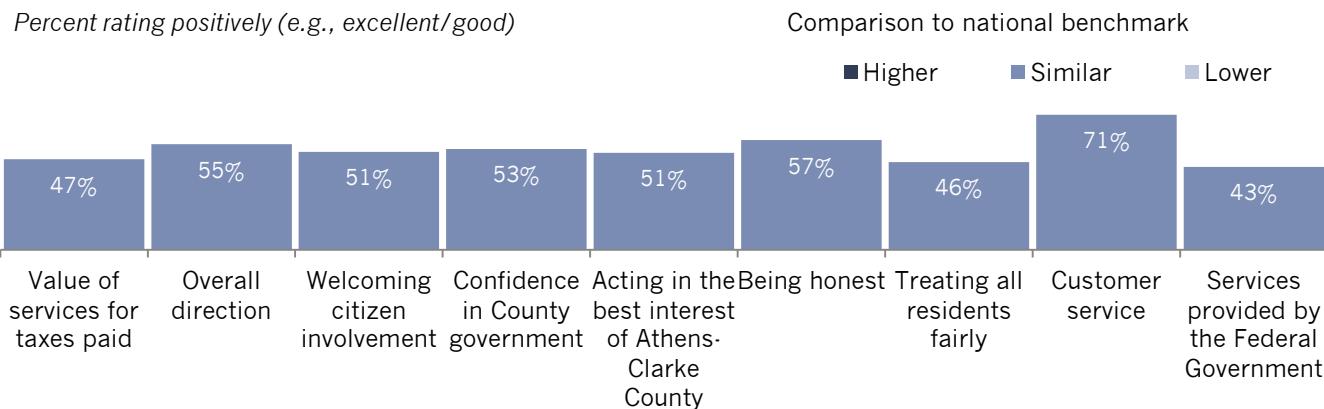
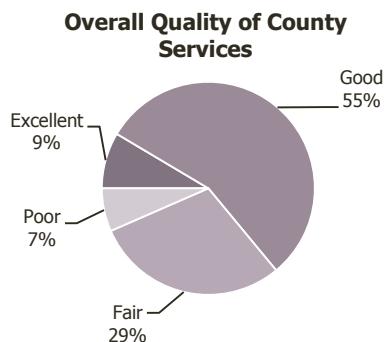
Governance

How well does the government of Athens-Clarke County meet the needs and expectations of its residents?

The overall quality of the services provided by Athens-Clarke 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 6 out of 10 residents gave excellent or very good ratings for overall quality of services provided by Athens-Clarke County, while only 42% gave positive ratings to the overall services of the Federal Government. Ratings for the County and the Federal government were similar to the national benchmark.

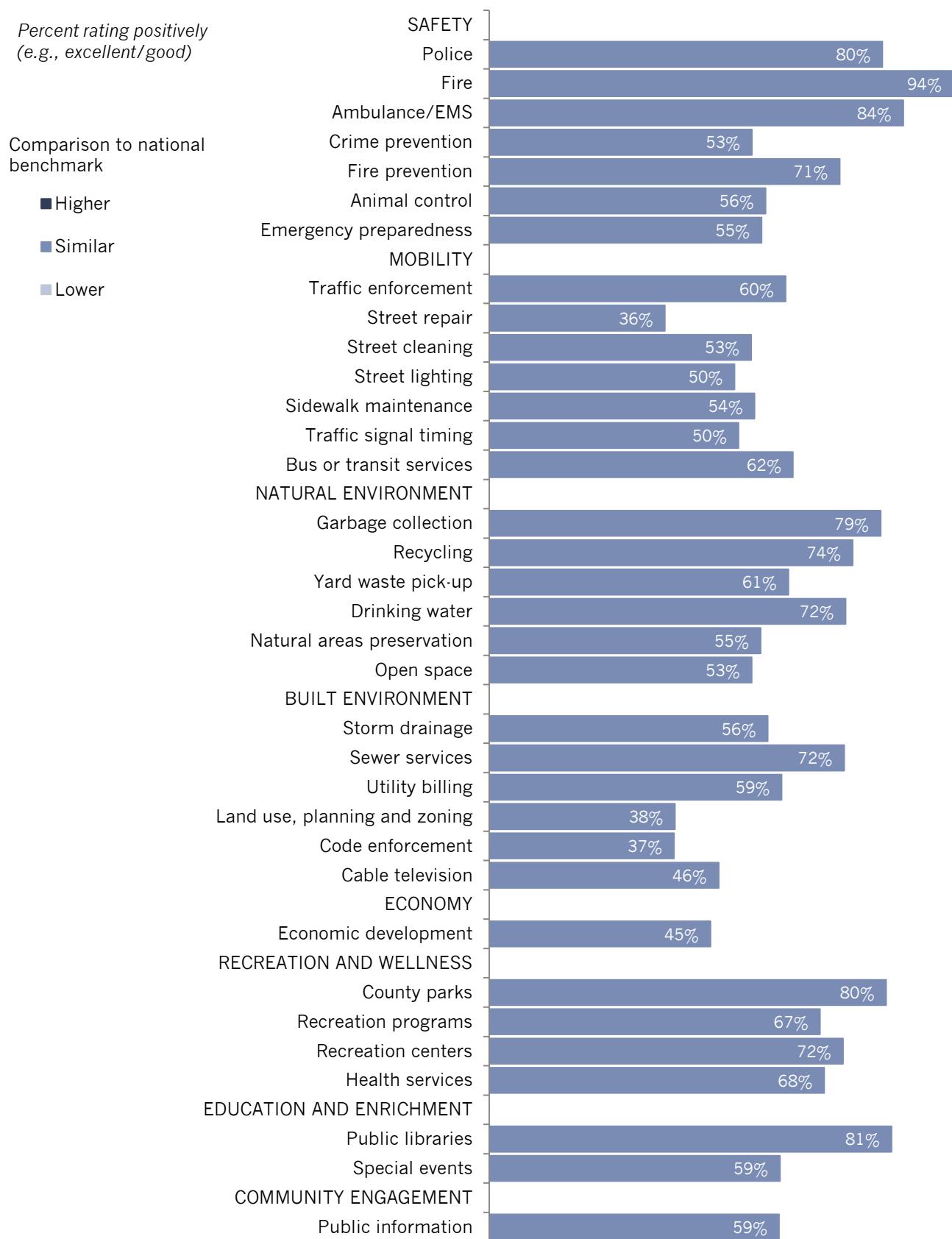
Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Athens-Clarke County's leadership and governance. About half of respondents gave favorable ratings to each of the aspects, including value of services for taxes paid, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in County government, acting in the best interest of the County, being honest, treating all residents fairly and to the overall direction of Athens-Clarke County government and around 7 in 10 gave high marks to the customer service provided by County employees. All of these ratings were similar to comparison communities

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Athens-Clarke County. Overall, Governance services were rated positively by a majority of residents and all were similar to the national benchmark. The services with the highest ratings included police, fire, ambulance/EMS services, garbage collection, County parks and public libraries with about 8 in 10 giving each of these measures an excellent or good rating. The lowest rated aspects were street repair, land use, planning and zoning and code enforcement, with about one-third or more rating these items favorably.



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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance



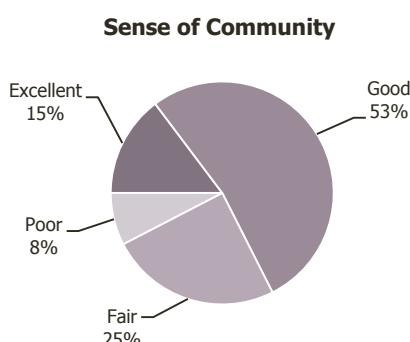
Participation

Are the residents of Athens-Clarke County connected to the community and each other?

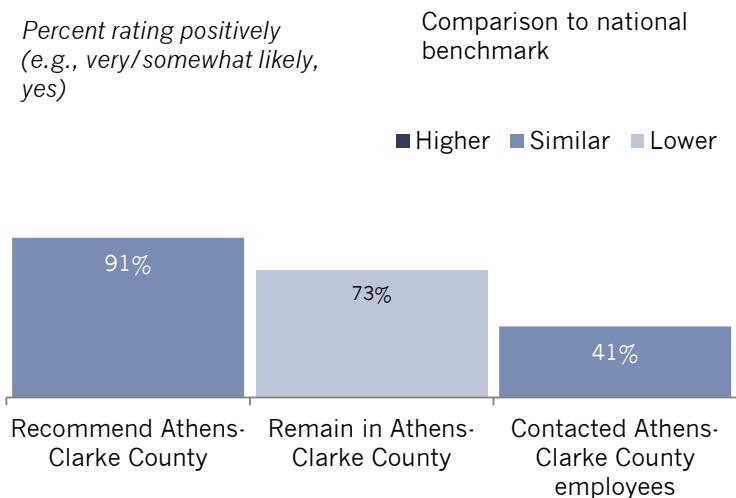
An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community; a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. About two-thirds of residents gave positive ratings for the sense of community in Athens-Clarke County, which was similar to comparison communities. About 4 out of 10 residents reported they had contact with Athens-Clarke County employees, while around 9 out of 10 respondents would recommend living in Athens-Clarke County; these were both similar to the national benchmark. About 7 out of 10 residents planned to remain in Athens-Clarke County, a rating lower than comparison communities.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Athens-Clarke County residents gave favorable ratings for Safety with about three-quarters who indicated that they had not reported a crime and almost 9 in 10 reported that they had not been the victim of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey. These were similar to ratings in comparison communities. Within Mobility, at least 6 in 10 residents reported that they had carpooled instead of driving alone, a rating that was higher than the national benchmark. Measures of Natural Environment and Built Environment were favorably rated by most respondents and similar to comparison communities; at least 8 in 10 residents indicated they had recycled and conserved water in their homes. About two-thirds of residents reported that they worked within Athens-Clarke County, a rate higher than those reported in communities across the nation. Recreation and Wellness also had strong ratings where at least two-thirds of participants indicated they had participated in

moderate or vigorous physical activity, ate five portions of fruits or vegetables a day, visited a County park and used Athens-Clarke County recreation centers (a rating higher than the national benchmark). Ratings for Education and Enrichment tended to be favorable ratings with at least half of residents indicating that they had attended a County-sponsored event, participated in religious or spiritual activities and used County public libraries, a rating that was lower than seen elsewhere. Community Engagement ratings were more varied; nearly 4 in 10 residents had participated in a club and over half of residents had volunteered, and these ratings were higher than the national benchmark. Only about 1 in 10 who indicated they had contacted Athens-Clarke County officials, and 2 in 10 residents reporting they had campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate, attended a local public meeting or watched a local public meeting. All of these are similar to comparison communities. On the other hand, while 8 in 10 respondents indicated they had talked to or visited with their neighbors and 7 in 10 had done a favor for a neighbor, these ratings were lower than the ratings in comparison communities.

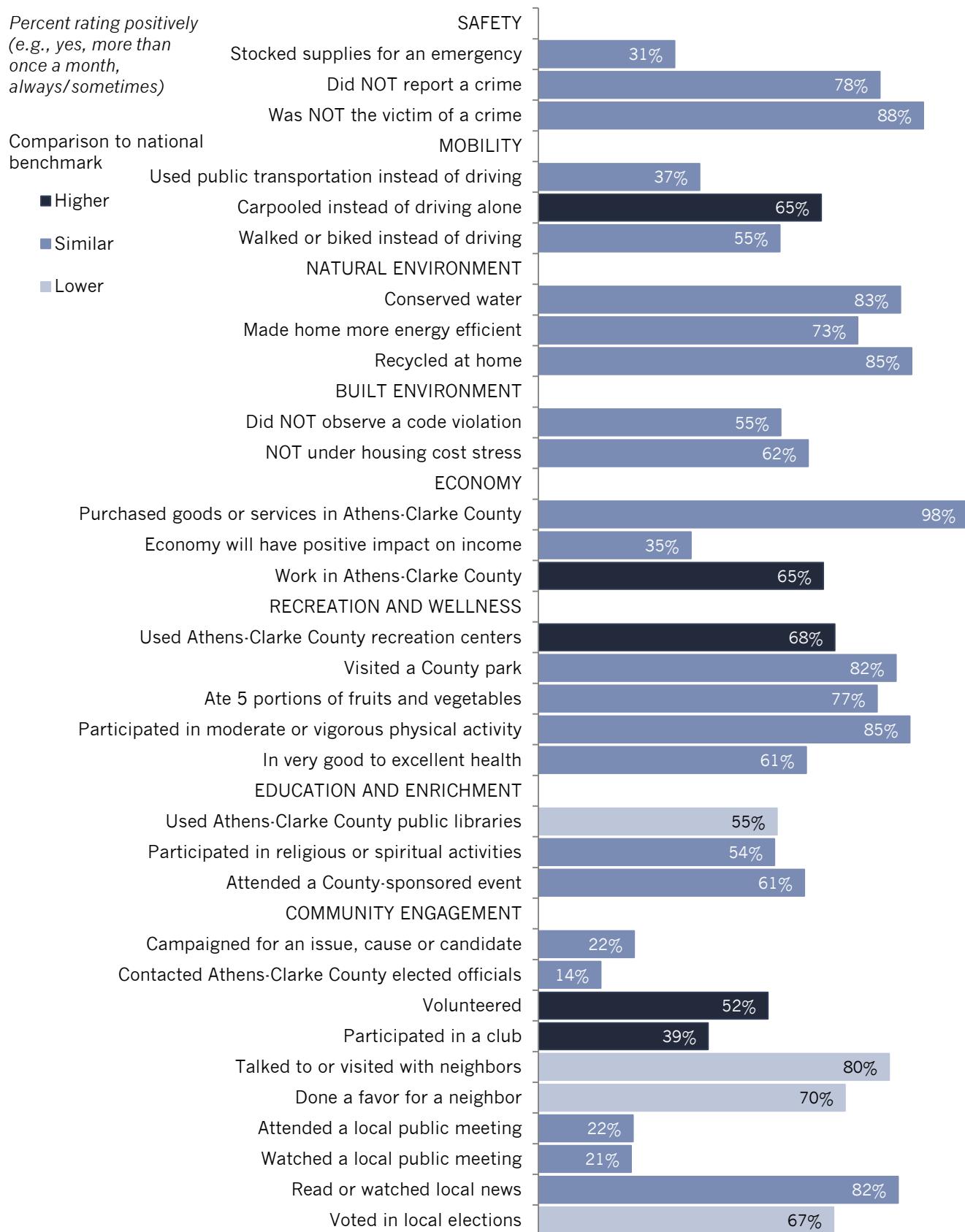


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Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

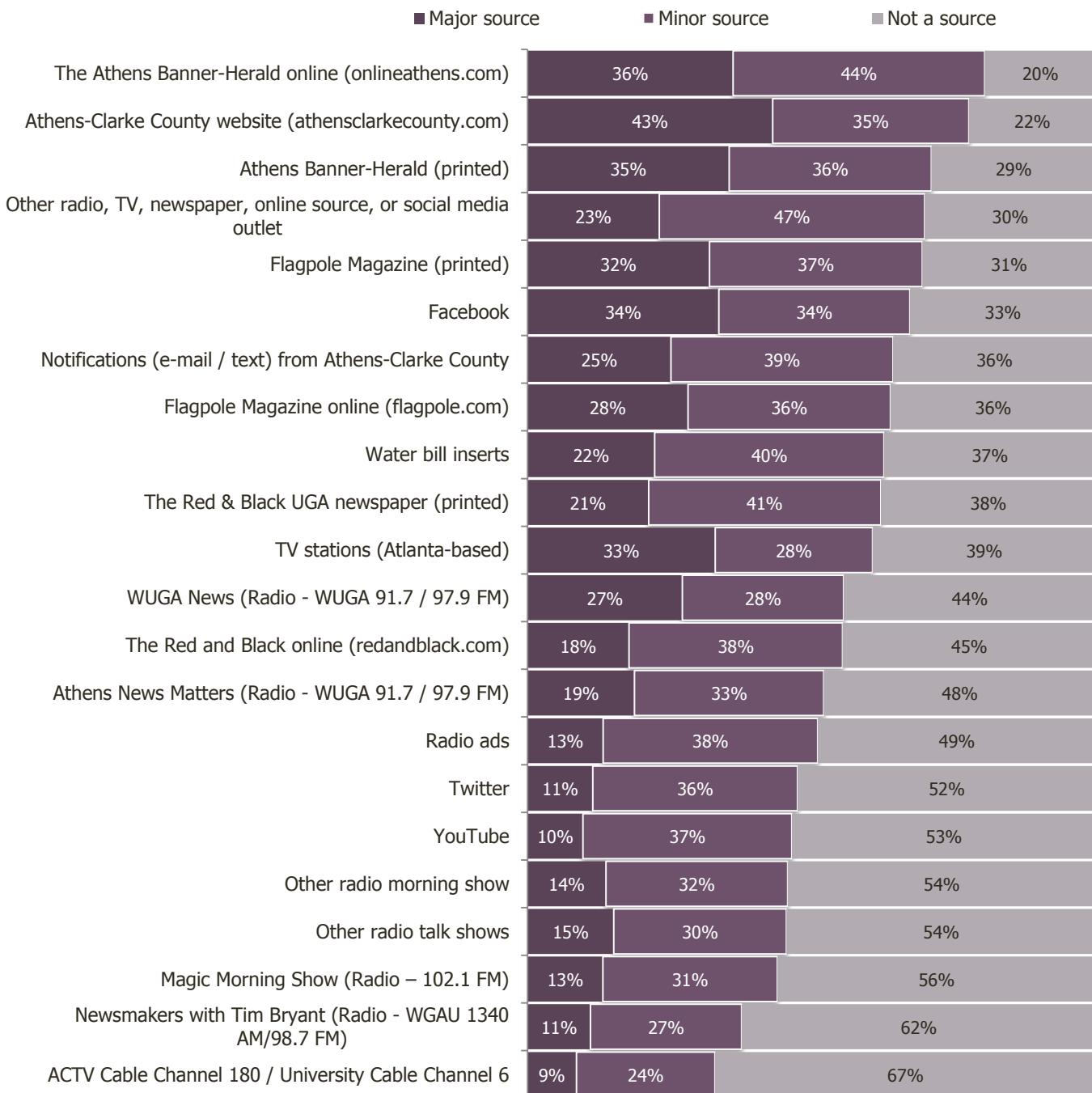


Special Topics

The County of Athens-Clarke County included three questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents how much of a source, if at all, they considered specific sources to be for obtaining information about the Athens community. Nearly 8 in 10 residents indicated that the Athens Banner-Herald online and the Athens-Clarke County website were either a major source or a minor source of information, while Newmakers with Tim Bryant and ACTV cable channel 180 were a source for less than 4 in 10 respondents.

Figure 4: Information Sources

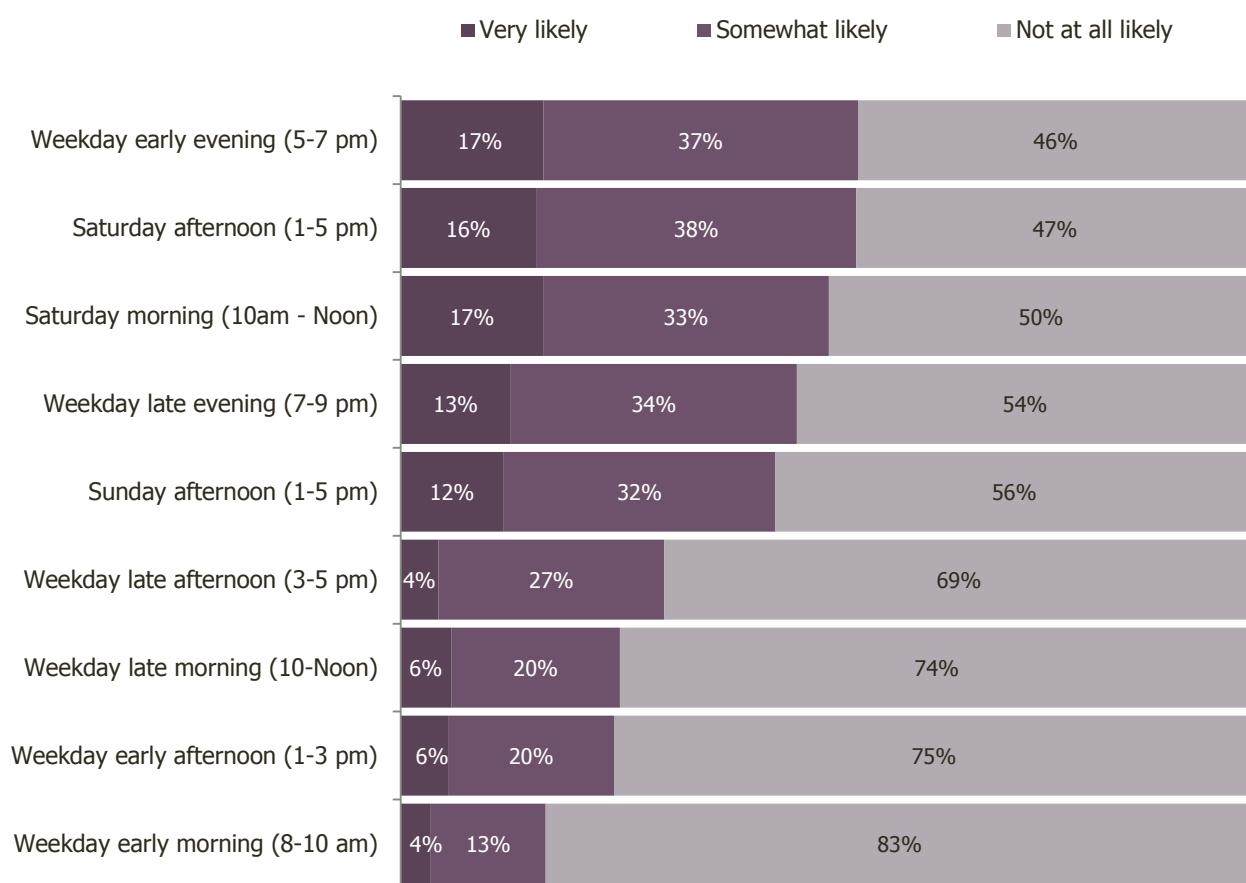
Please indicate how much of a source, if at all, you consider each of the following to be for obtaining information about the Athens community and its activities, events and services:



The second question asked residents to indicate how likely they would be to attend a public forum during various times of the week. Around half of respondents indicated that they would be very or somewhat likely to attend on weekdays during the early evening (5-7 p.m.), and on Saturday afternoons or Saturday afternoons. About three-quarters or more indicated they would not be likely to attend a forum or meeting on a weekday during the early or late morning or early afternoon.

Figure 5: Public Forum Times

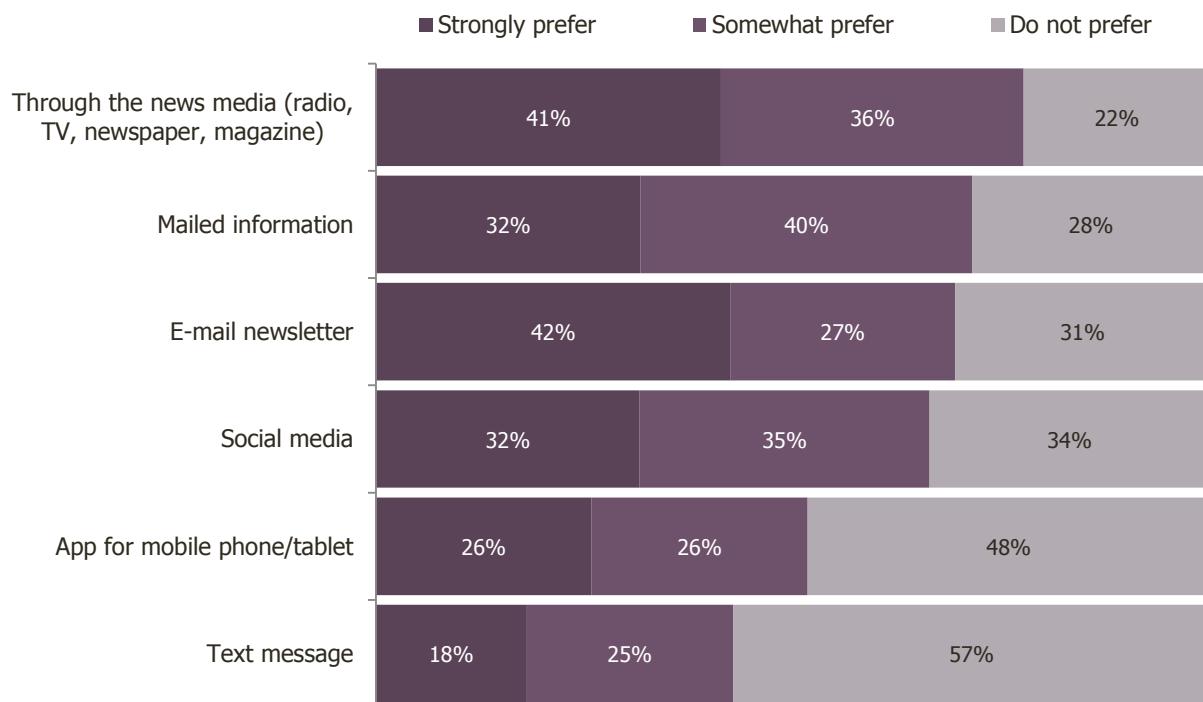
Generally speaking, how likely are you to attend a public forum or government meeting that is of interest to you during these days, times, and locations?



The last question asked about resident preferences for how they receive information about Athens-Clarke County. Participants reported the highest preference for getting information through the news media with about 3 out of 4 residents indicating this source was strongly or somewhat preferred. Text message was given the lowest level of preference, with over half of residents indicating that they would not prefer to get information in this way.

Figure 6: Preferences for Receiving Information

How would you prefer to get information from Athens-Clarke County about services, events, forums, news, and plans?



Conclusions

Athens-Clarke County residents enjoy a high quality of life.

Overall, Athens-Clarke County residents reported a high quality of life with 84% indicating an excellent or good overall quality of life. Nearly 9 in 10 residents gave positive ratings for Athens-Clarke County as a place to live and about 3 in 4 residents gave high marks to Athens-Clarke County as a place to retire and their neighborhoods as places to live. Additionally, at least two-thirds residents gave favorable ratings for the overall appearance and overall image of Athens-Clarke County. When asked if they would recommend the community to others, around 9 in 10 responded that they would and about three-quarters indicated they planned to remain in the community for the next five years.

Safety is a priority for Athens-Clarke County.

Residents rated Safety as an important focus area for the next two years in Athens-Clarke County. It is worth noting that nearly all Safety ratings were given high marks. Nearly 9 in 10 reported that they felt safe in their neighborhoods and in Athens-Clarke County's downtown/commercial area. At least 8 in 10 gave high marks to police, fire and ambulance/EMS services, and 7 in 10 rated fire prevention as excellent or good. Additionally, close to 8 in 10 indicated that they had not reported a crime and almost 9 in 10 had not been the victim of a crime in the previous 12 months. However, only about 6 in 10 residents rated their overall feeling of safety positively, which was lower than comparison communities, and around half gave excellent or good ratings to crime prevention, animal control or the City's emergency preparedness; these ratings tended to be similar to comparison across the nation.

Residents value Economy in Athens-Clarke County.

Athens-Clarke County residents indicated that Economy is a focus area for the next two years. Ratings for Economy were somewhat mixed. Nearly all participants indicated that they had purchased goods or services in Athens-Clarke County and at least 3 out of 4 gave positive ratings to Athens-Clarke County as a place to visit and to the vibrancy of the downtown/commercial area and about 6 in 10 highly rated the cost of living; all of these ratings were higher than communities elsewhere. At least 6 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings for the businesses and services, shopping opportunities and Athens-Clarke County as a place to work. However, around 4 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to overall economic health, which was lower than in other communities. About two-thirds of residents reported that they worked within the County, a level higher than comparison communities.

Athens-Clarke County has strong Community Engagement.

The Athens-Clarke County community is active and values being connected. About 8 in 10 gave high ratings to the opportunities to volunteer and to the social events and activities in the County (a rating that was higher than comparison communities) and a similar proportion that they had talked to or visited with their neighbors and read or watched the local news. Around 7 in 10 indicated that they had done a favor for a neighbor and at least 6 in 10 residents gave positive ratings for openness and acceptance in the community. Nearly 4 in 10 Athens-Clarke County residents reported that they had participated in a club and over half of reported that they had volunteered; both ratings were higher than ratings in communities elsewhere.