

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

**Montgomery County, MD**  
Community Livability Report

2017



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# Contents

About..... 1

Quality of Life in Montgomery County ..... 2

Community Characteristics ..... 3

Governance ..... 5

Participation ..... 7

Special Topics..... 9

Conclusions ..... 13



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# About

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

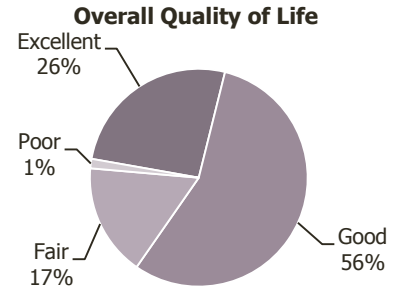
Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central 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 1,075 residents of Montgomery County. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 3% 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 Montgomery County

About 4 in 5 residents rated the quality of life in Montgomery County as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the national benchmark comparison (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.

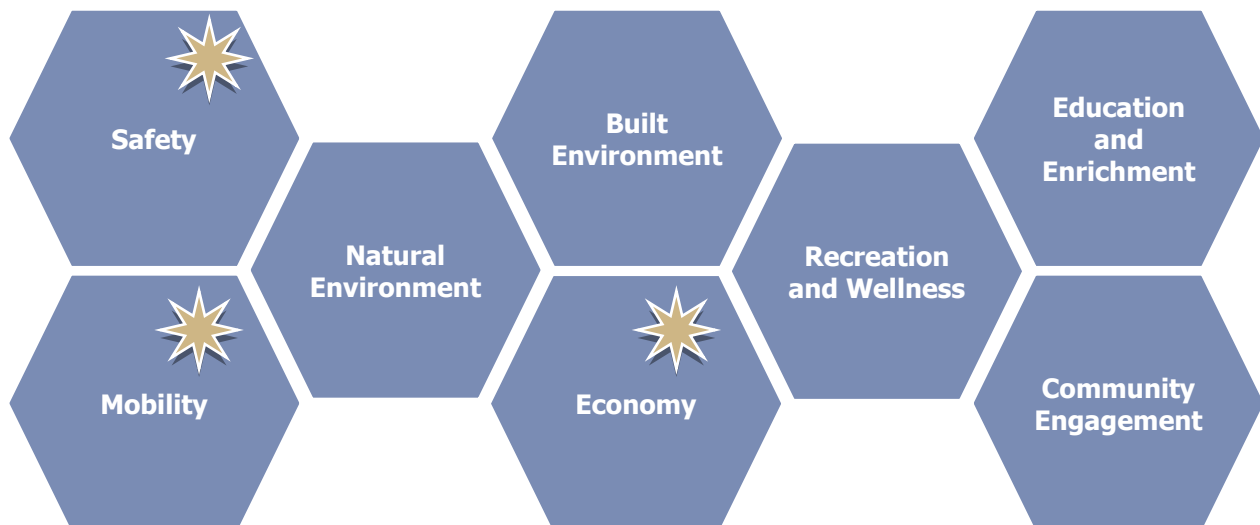
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Mobility and Economy as priorities for the Montgomery County community in the coming two years. Ratings 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 Montgomery County’s unique questions.

## Legend

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

- Most important



# Community Characteristics

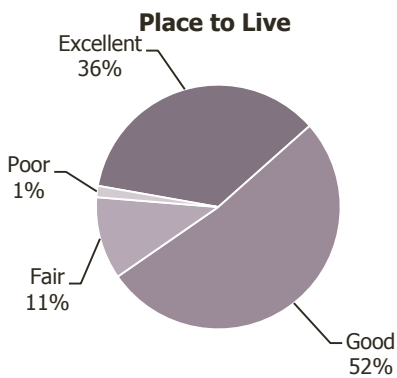
*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

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 Montgomery County, 88% rated the County as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Montgomery 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 Montgomery County as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Montgomery County and its overall appearance. About 8 in 10 residents gave high marks to the overall image, their neighborhoods, the County as a place to raise children and to the overall appearance of Montgomery County. These ratings were all similar to ratings in comparison communities. About 4 in 10 respondents positively rated the County as a place to retire and this rating was lower than the national benchmark.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Ratings within the facets of Safety, Natural Environment, Recreation and Wellness and Community Engagement were all positive and similar to the benchmark

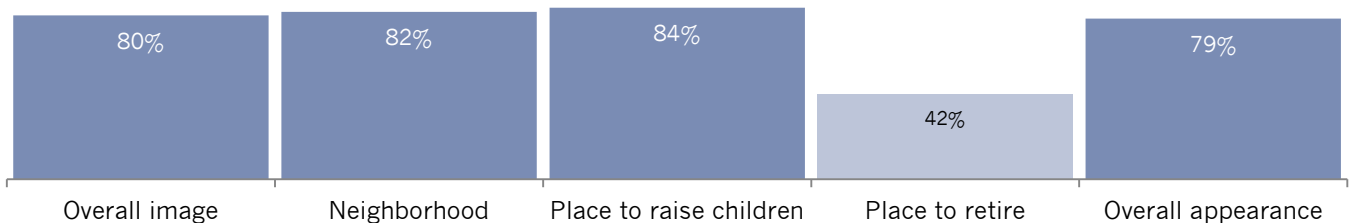
comparisons. The only features of the community that received ratings lower than the national averages were ease of travel by car, traffic flow and cost of living in Montgomery County. More residents gave high marks to vibrant downtowns/commercial areas, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities, the County as a place to work and to cultural/arts/music activities than residents in other communities across the U.S.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



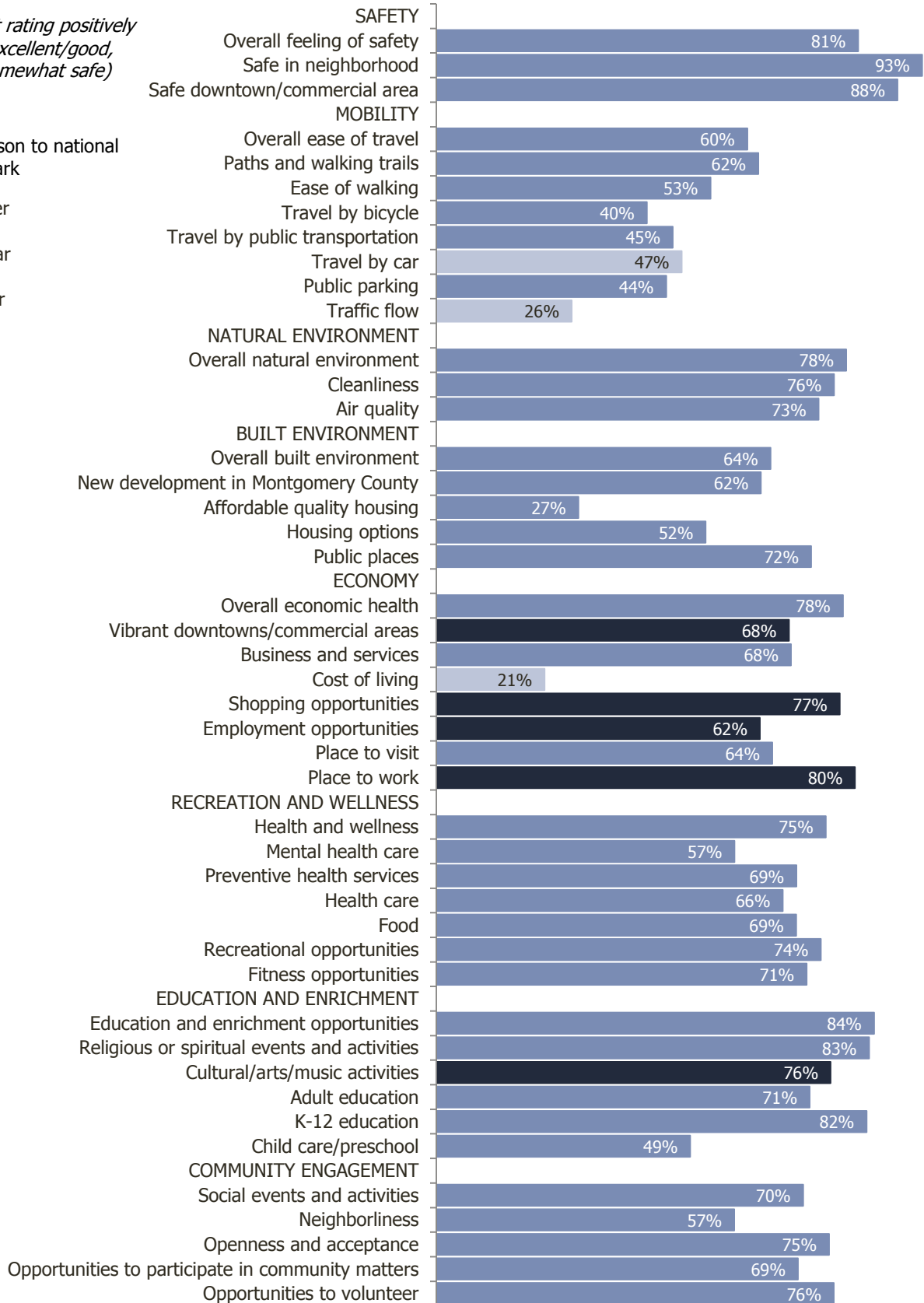
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



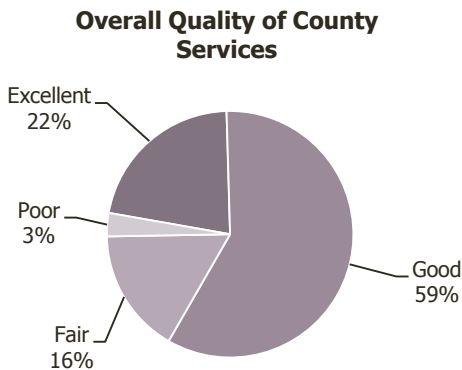
# Governance

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Montgomery County as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 4 in 5 respondents positively rated the overall quality of County services, while about half gave high marks to the services provided by the Federal Government. Both ratings were similar to the national benchmark comparisons.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Montgomery County’s leadership and governance. All aspects tended to be rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to the national benchmark comparisons.

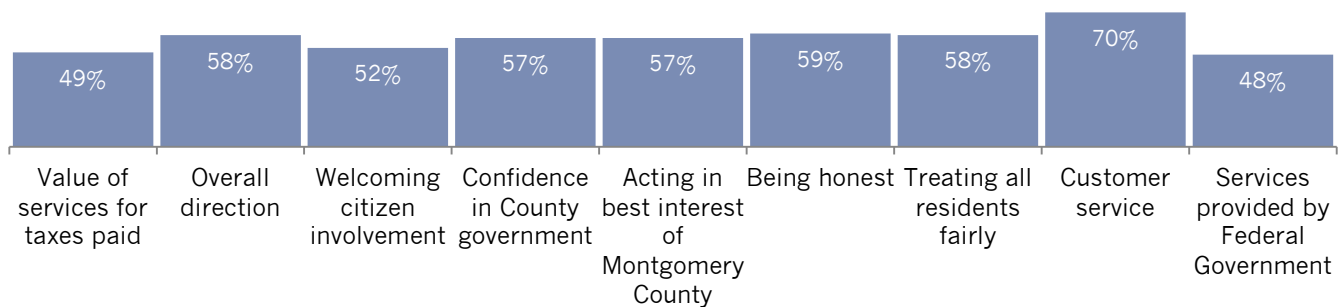
Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Montgomery County. All of the services and amenities rated were similar to ratings in comparison communities and they tended to be rated as excellent or good by a majority of residents.



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

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



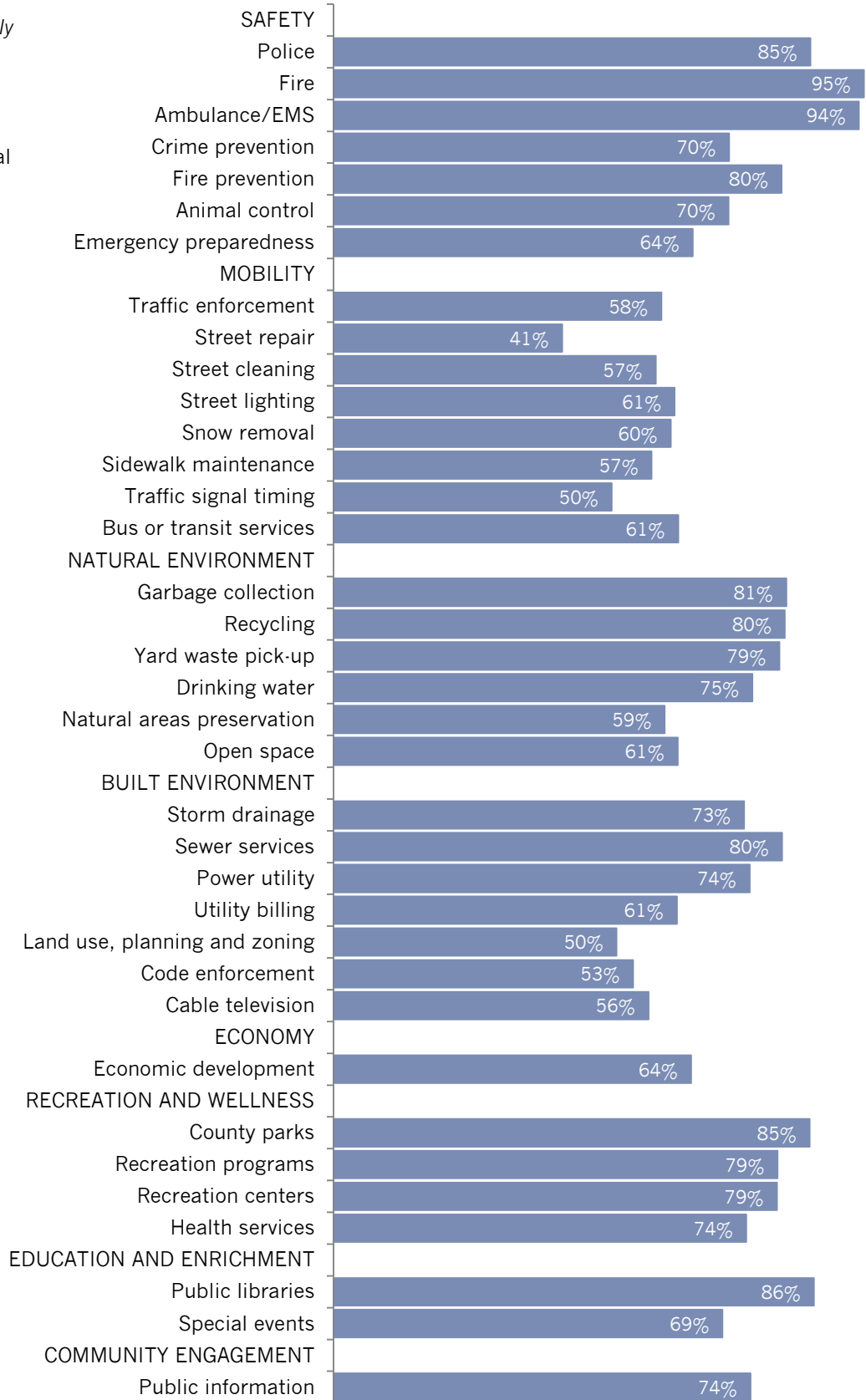
# The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower





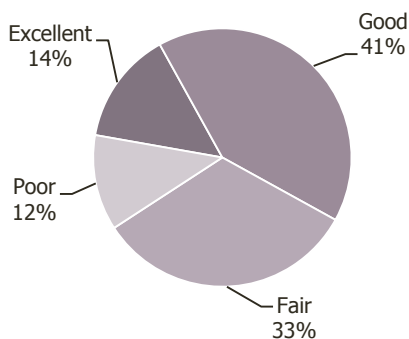
# Participation

*Are the residents of Montgomery 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. Most residents gave excellent or good marks to the overall sense of community and this rating was similar to the national benchmark. About 4 in 5 respondents were likely to recommend living in Montgomery County and planned to remain living in the County for the next five years.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. All reported rates of Participation were similar to or higher than rates reported in comparison communities. More Montgomery County residents had used public transportation instead of driving and recycled at home than residents in other communities, while fewer Montgomery County respondents had observed a code violation in the last 12 months compared to residents in other communities.

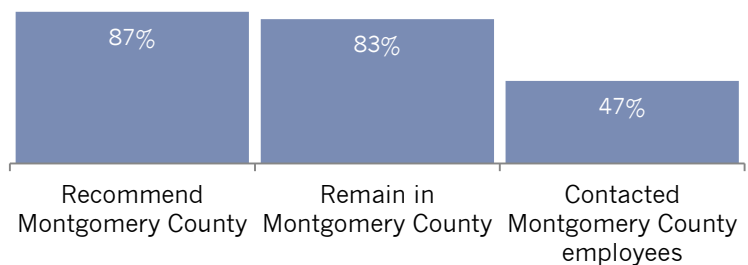
**Sense of Community**



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

Comparison to national  
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



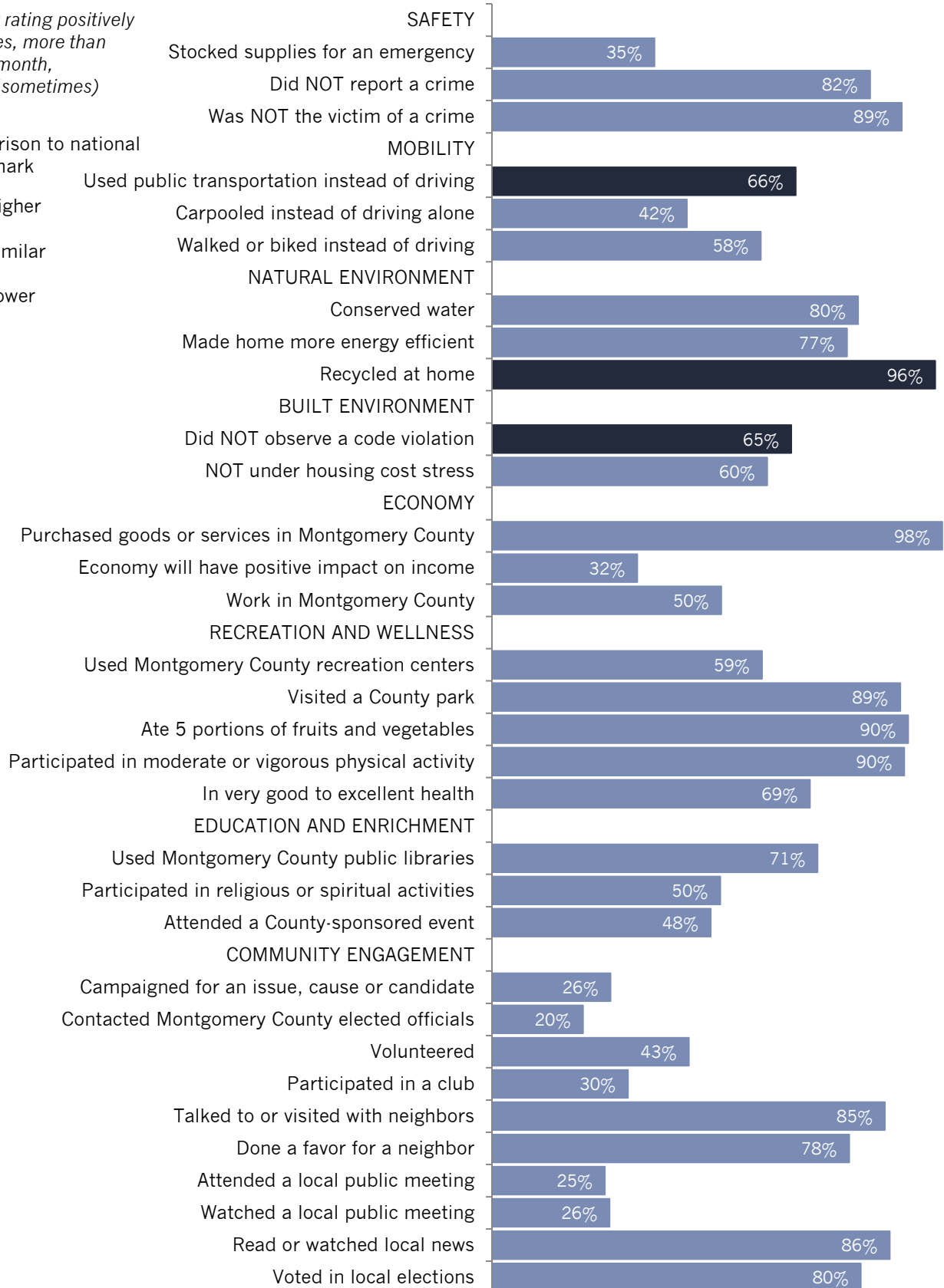
## The National Citizen Survey™

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

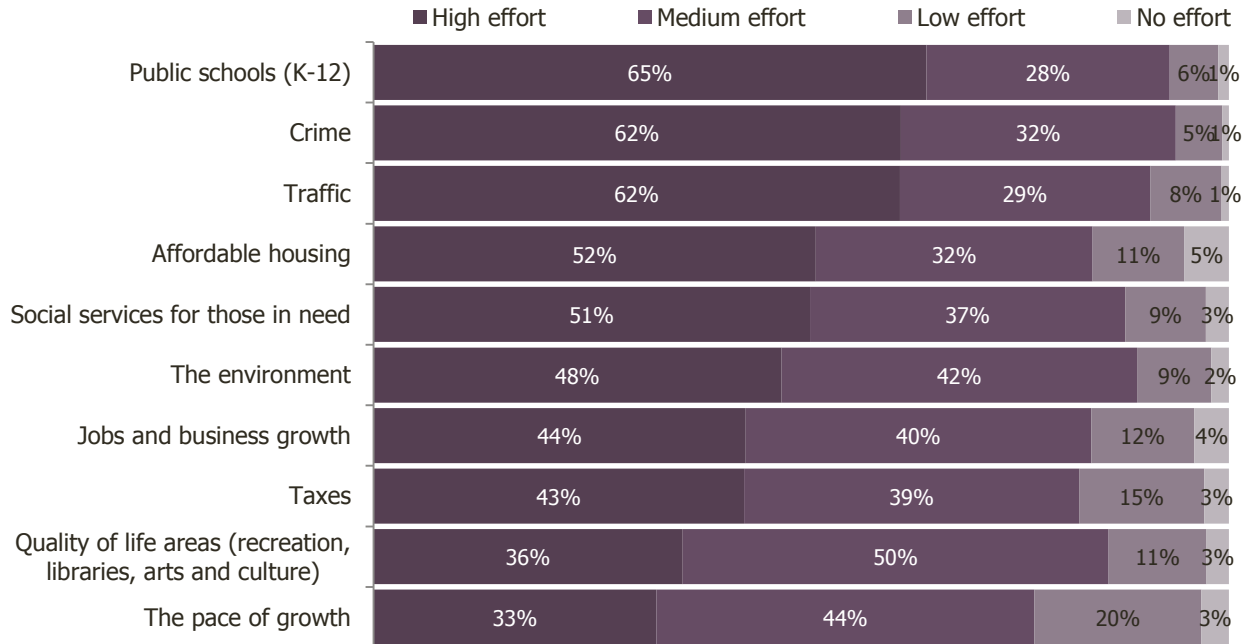


# Special Topics

Montgomery County included seven questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents to rate the level of effort they would like the County to place on several different potential areas of focus. About half or more of respondents felt the County should place high effort on making changes to public schools, crime, traffic, affordable housing and social services for those in need. A majority thought each area should have at least medium effort placed on it.

Figure 4: Potential County Focus Areas

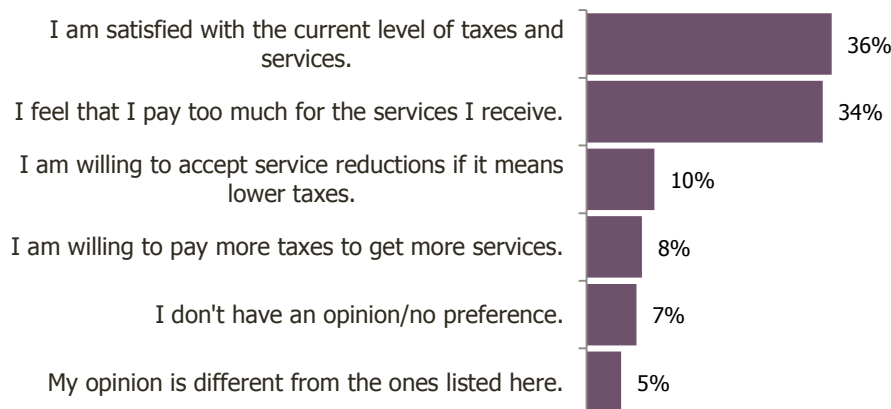
*Thinking now about some more specific potential areas of focus, please indicate the level of effort you would like Montgomery County to place on making changes to each of the following in the coming two years.*



The next question asked residents to select the statement that most described their opinion regarding the level of taxes and services. About one-third of respondents were satisfied with the current level of taxes and services, and about one-third felt they paid too much for the services they received. About 1 in 10 or fewer was will to accept service reductions or pay more taxes to get more services.

Figure 5: Levels of Taxes and Services

*Please select the statement that best describes your opinion.*



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Survey respondents were then asked if they needed the County Government to resolve an issue in the past two years. Only about 21% indicated that they had needed the County's help. Of those that did need the County's help, about half said they contacted the County via MC311. About three-quarters of those that had contacted the County for help thought it was very or somewhat easy to communicate the issue to the County, and about half thought it was very or somewhat easy to resolve the issue.

Figure 6: Needed County Government to Resolve an Issue  
*Have you needed the County Government to resolve an issue or problem in the past two years?*

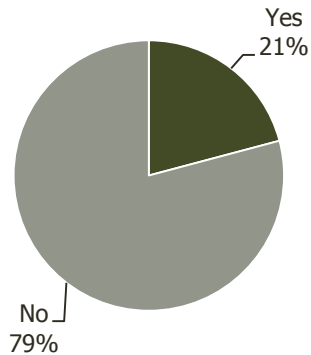
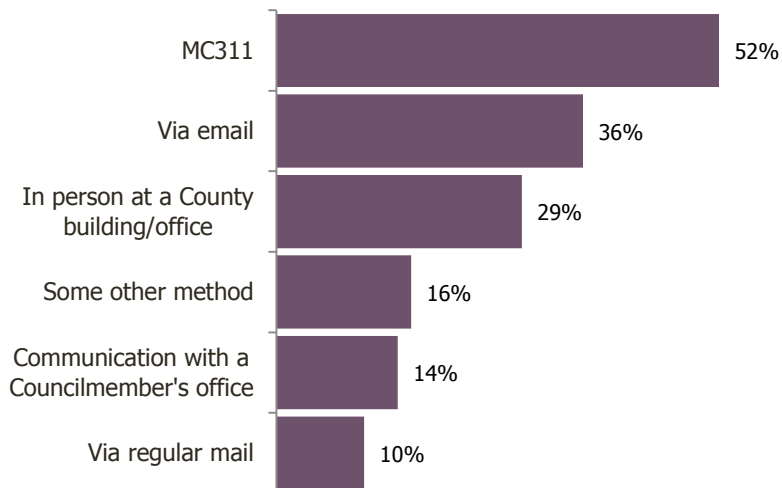
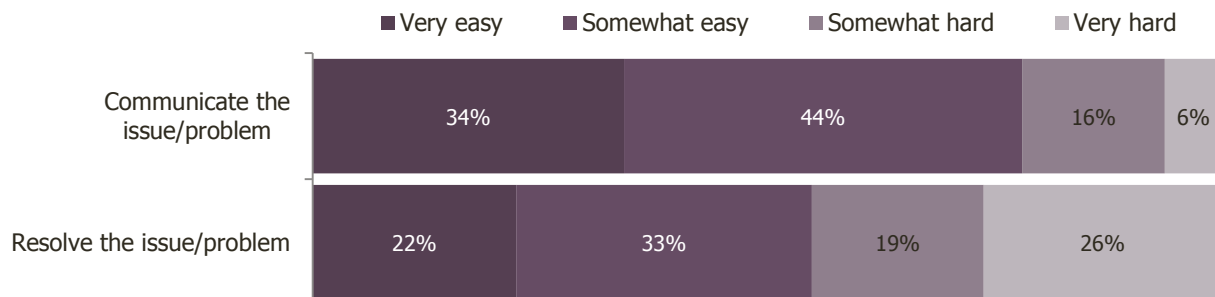


Figure 7: Communication Methods  
*Which communication method(s) did you use? Please check all that apply.*



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

Figure 8: Ease of Communicating and Resolving Issue  
*Please indicate how easy or hard it was to do each of the following.*

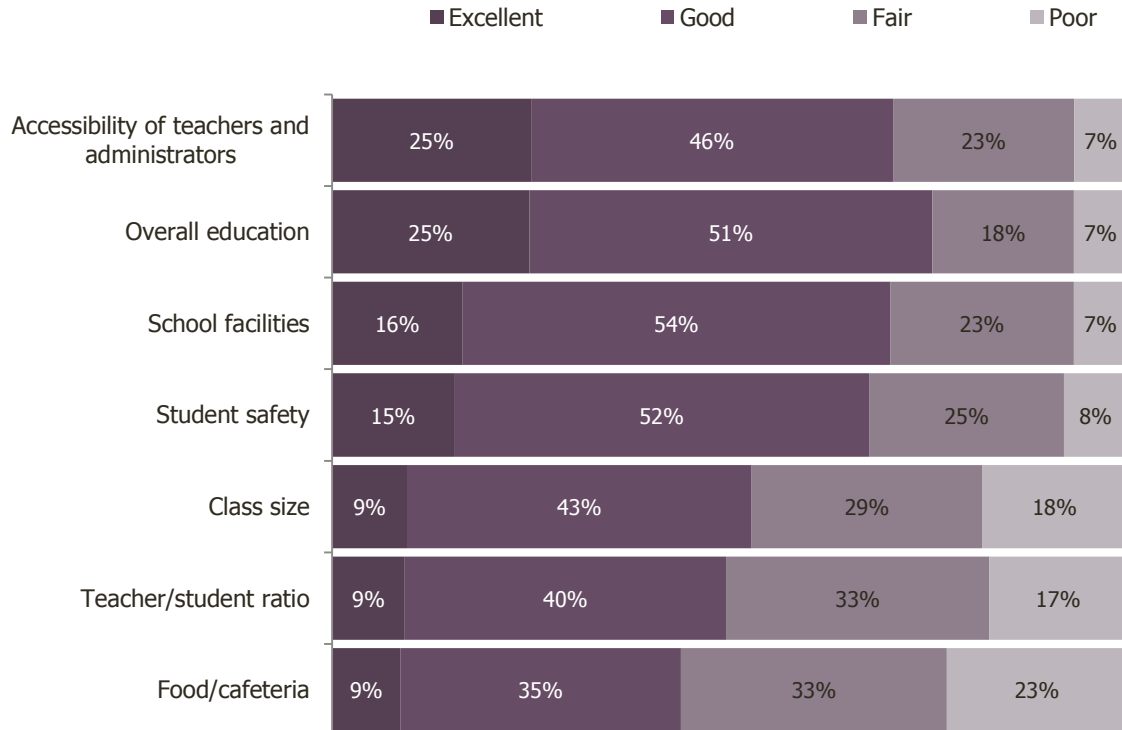


## The National Citizen Survey™

The next question asked residents to rate several aspects of Montgomery County’s K-12 public schools. While those that did have an opinion tended to give positive marks to each aspect, it’s worth noting that about half or more of all respondents answered “don’t know” to each aspect.

Figure 9: Aspects of Montgomery County K-12 Public Schools

*Please rate each of the following aspects of Montgomery County K-12 public schools.*

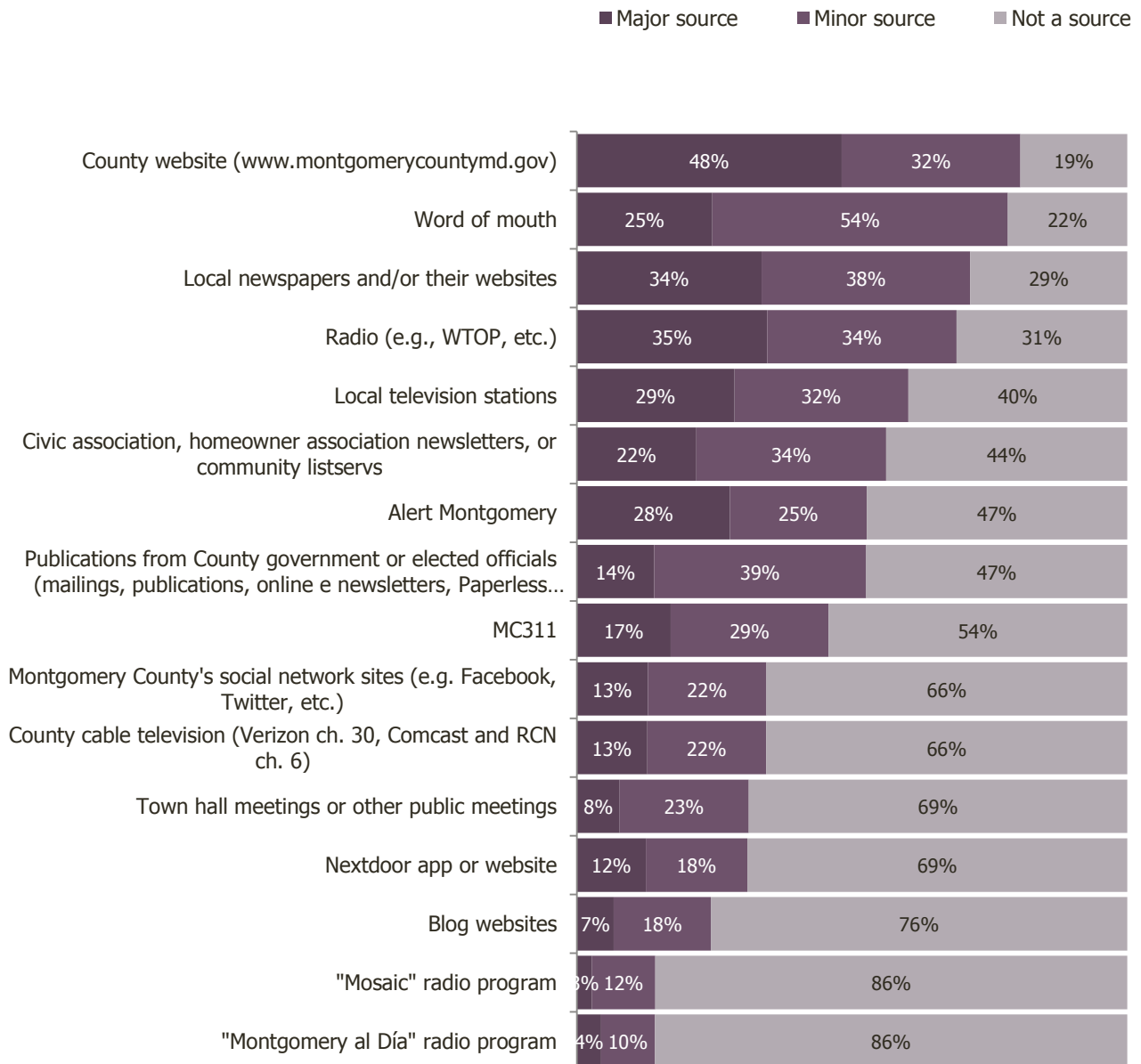


## The National Citizen Survey™

The final question specific to Montgomery County asked residents to indicate the extent to which they would use several potential sources of information about County services, activities and events. The County website was at the top of the list, followed by word of mouth, local newspapers/websites, local television stations and civic associations. Less popular sources of information included the “Montgomery al Día” radio program, “Mosaic” radio program, blog websites and the Nextdoor app or website.

Figure 10: Potential Information Sources

*Please indicate the extent to which you use each of the following potential sources for information about County services, activities and events.*



# Conclusions

## **Montgomery County is a desirable place to live and raise a family.**

About 4 in 5 Montgomery County residents gave an excellent or good rating to the county as a place to live and to the overall quality of life. Additionally, about 8 in 10 respondents were pleased with their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image of the community, the overall appearance of the County and the County as a place to raise children. Resident loyalty ratings were high with a strong majority of respondents reporting they would recommend living in Montgomery County and planned to remain in the community for the next five years.

## **Economy is a top priority.**

Montgomery residents identified Economy as one of the top community focus areas in the coming two years. Almost all ratings of aspects of Economy received high marks and were similar to or higher than national and peer comparisons. Additionally, Montgomery County participants' praise for the County as a place to work, employment opportunities, shopping opportunities and vibrant downtowns/commercial areas were higher than national averages. More Montgomery County residents had a positive economic outlook in 2017 compared to the previous survey in 2009 (see the *Trends over Time* report under separate cover). However, cost of living received positive ratings from only about 1 in 5 respondents and this rating was lower than the national benchmark.

## **Safety is important and Safety ratings are solid.**

Residents also identified Safety as an important area of community focus. About 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to the overall feeling of safety in Montgomery County, and almost all reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and in Montgomery County's downtowns/commercial areas during the day. Further, almost all respondents gave excellent or good marks to fire services and ambulance/ems. Moreover, at least 8 in 10 participants reported they had NOT reported or been the victim of a crime in the previous 12 months.