



Alexandria, VA

Community Livability Report
2016



NRC
National Research Center Inc

2955 Valmont Road Suite 300
Boulder, Colorado 80301
n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002
icma.org • 800-745-8780

Contents

Conclusions 1

About..... 2

Quality of Life in Alexandria 3

Community Characteristics 4

Governance 6

Participation 8

Special Topics..... 10

Conclusions

Alexandria residents enjoy a high quality of life.

Most residents (83%) rated the overall quality of life in Alexandria as excellent or good. More than 9 in 10 gave Alexandria positive ratings as a place to live and would recommend Alexandria to someone who asks and 8 in 10 participants gave high marks to their neighborhoods as places to live and planned to remain in Alexandria for the next five years. Ratings for the overall image of Alexandria were higher than comparison communities, with almost 9 in 10 awarding positive ratings.

Economy is a priority for Alexandria residents.

Alexandria residents indicated that Economy is an important area of focus for the next two years. Overall, Alexandria had very strong economy ratings with many aspects being rated higher than the comparison communities including the vibrancy of Alexandria's downtown area, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities, Alexandria as a place to visit and the City as a place to work. However, the cost of living in Alexandria was rated favorably by less than 2 in 10 residents, a rating lower than ratings in other communities. When asked about priorities for the City, about 8 in 10 respondents indicated that housing affordability would be an essential or very important area for Alexandria to focus on in the future.

Alexandria residents value Safety.

Respondents also indicated that Safety was a key focus area for Alexandria in the next two years. All of the facets within Safety were rated similarly to or higher than communities across the nation. The overall feeling of safety in Alexandria was rated highly by about 8 in 10 residents and at least 9 in 10 felt safe in their neighborhoods and Alexandria's downtown area. Police, fire and ambulance/EMS services were also rated very highly with 9 in 10 respondents awarding strong, positive ratings to these aspects. Animal control services were rated as excellent or good by 84% of residents, a rating higher than comparison communities. Additionally, at least 8 in 10 participants reported that they had not reported or been the victim of a crime in the previous 12 months. Residents were also asked if they had been in contact with an Alexandria police officer in the last year and to rate the officer if contact had been made. About 3 in 10 respondents indicated that they had contact with an officer and 9 in 10 rated the police officer as excellent or good.

Mobility is an important and positive feature of Alexandria.

Many aspects of Mobility received strong and positive ratings from Alexandria residents. The overall ease of travel was favorably rated by about three-quarters of residents and was similar to communities elsewhere. About 7 in 10 or more residents gave excellent or good ratings to the availability of paths and walking trails, ease of walking, travel by bicycle and public transportation and bus or transit services, all ratings that were higher than ratings in similar communities. Alexandria residents also reported high levels of participation for public transportation use and walking instead of driving (83% and 71% respectively); these levels were higher than comparison communities. The only aspect of Mobility to be rated lower than elsewhere was public parking, which was rated positively by about one-quarter of residents. When asked about priorities for the City, participants placed high importance on parking and traffic management, with 77% of residents ranking the issue as essential or very important.

About

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

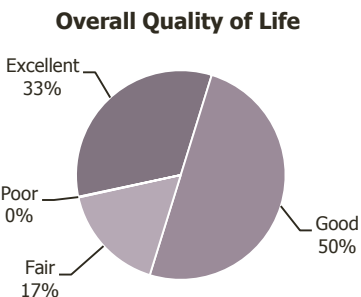
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 357 residents of the City of Alexandria. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 5% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Quality of Life in Alexandria

Most residents rated the quality of life in Alexandria as excellent or good. This rating is similar to 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.



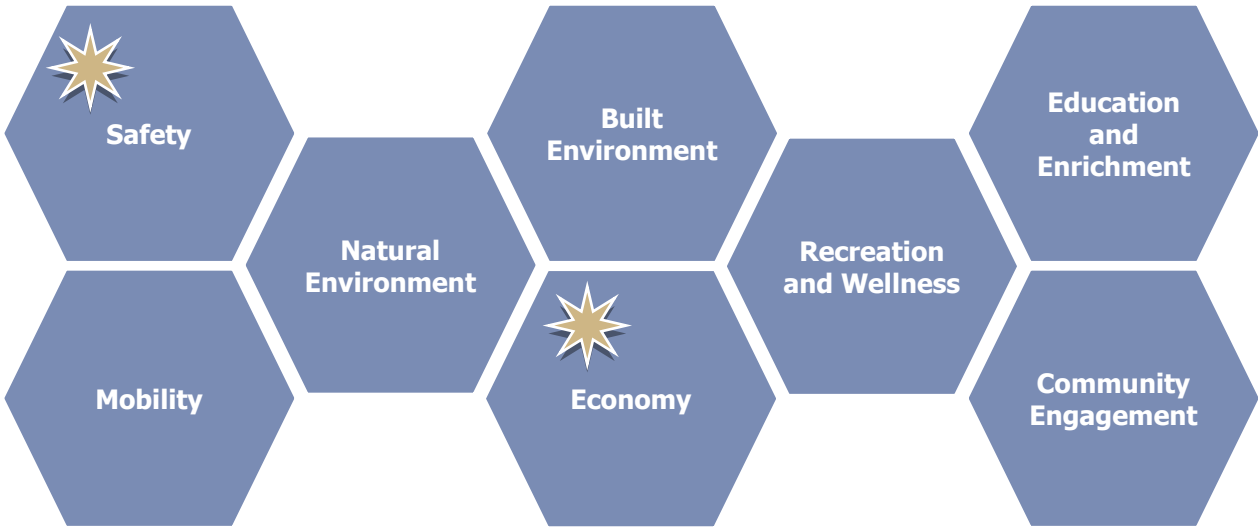
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety and Economy as priorities for the Alexandria community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Alexandria residents gave favorable ratings to both of these facets of community. Ratings for all the 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 Alexandria's unique questions.

Legend

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

Most important



Community Characteristics

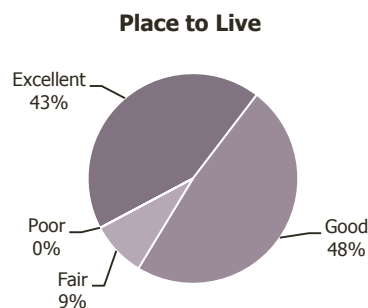
What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?

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 as well as their community as a place to live can be an excellent indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Alexandria, 83% positively rated the overall quality of life and 91% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Alexandria 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 including Alexandria as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Alexandria and its overall appearance. Almost 9 in 10 residents gave favorable ratings to the overall image (higher than the national benchmark) and overall appearance (similar to comparison communities) of Alexandria. About 8 in 10 gave positive ratings to their neighborhoods as places to live, nearly three-quarters gave excellent or good ratings to Alexandria as a place to raise children and about half rated Alexandria highly as a place to retire; these ratings were similar to ratings given in other communities across the U.S.

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, about 8 in 10 gave positive ratings for overall feeling of safety while at least 9 in 10 gave positive ratings for feelings of safety in their neighborhoods and in Alexandria's downtown area. These ratings were similar to the national benchmark. In Mobility, nearly all the ratings were similar or higher than comparison communities with 73% of residents awarding excellent or good ratings for overall ease of travel, and about 7 in 10 gave positive ratings for travel by public transportation and travel by bicycle. Close to 8 in 10 gave high ratings to ease of walking and the availability of paths and walking trails. Measures of Natural Environment received positive ratings with around 8 in 10 residents rating overall natural environment, cleanliness, and air quality strongly. Ratings for Built Environment tended to be more mixed. About three-quarters of residents reported favorably for overall built environment and over 8 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to public places, which was rated higher than the national benchmark. However, the availability of affordable quality housing was given excellent or good ratings by 21% of residents, which was lower than ratings in other communities. The facet of Economy tended to be rated very highly with the exception of cost of living (18% excellent or good). Alexandria residents gave ratings that were higher than the benchmark to the vibrancy of the downtown and commercial area, shopping opportunities, employment opportunities, and

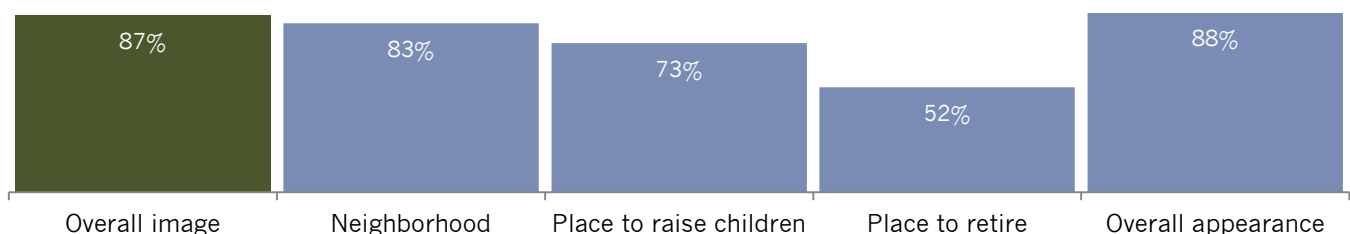
Alexandria as a place to visit and as a place to work. The ratings for Recreation and Wellness and Community Engagement were positive and strong with every measure being rated positively by a majority of respondents and each item was similar to comparison communities. Education and Enrichment ratings tended to vary, but it is worth noting that opportunities to attend cultural, art and music activities were rated higher than the benchmark.



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

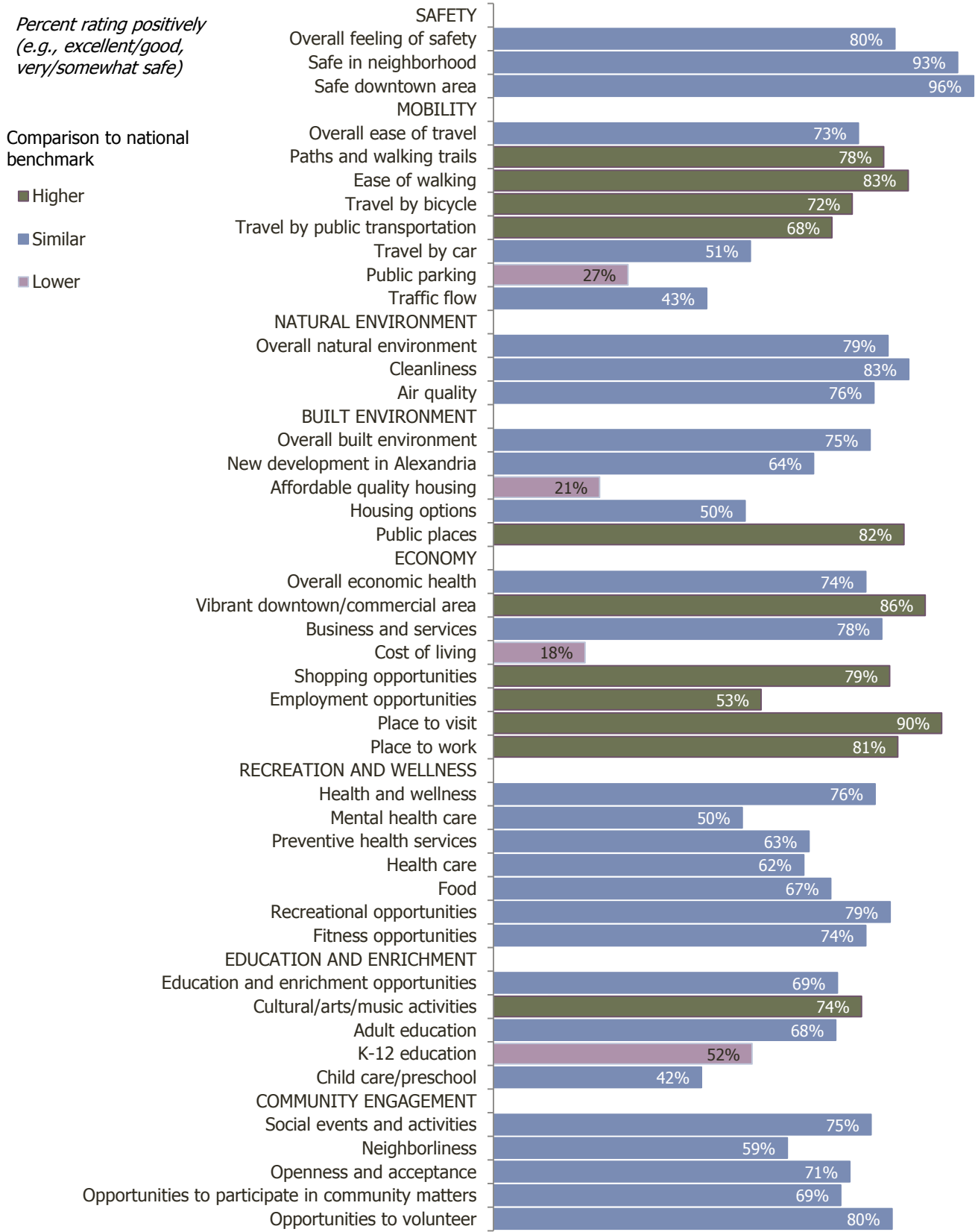
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics¹



¹ For the item K-12 education, of those respondents who had an opinion (N=166), only 95 respondents indicated that they have children under the age of 17 living in their households.

Governance

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

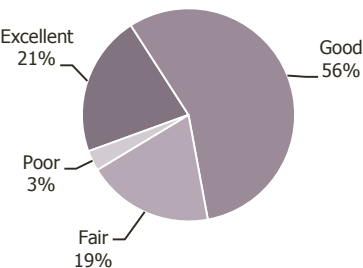
The overall quality of the services provided by Alexandria as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. The overall quality of services provided by the City of Alexandria was rated as excellent or good by 83% of residents (similar to the national benchmark), while 57% gave positive ratings to the services provided by the federal government (higher than comparison communities).

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Alexandria's leadership and governance. Nearly 7 in 10 residents gave positive ratings to customer service provided by City employees, while at least half of residents gave favorable ratings to the value of services for taxes paid, government welcoming resident involvement, confidence in the City government and treating all residents fairly. Almost 6 in 10 gave positive ratings for the overall direction of the City, acting in the best interest of Alexandria and being honest. All of these ratings are similar to the national benchmark.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Alexandria. Within Safety, ratings tended to be similar to those given in communities across the nation, with at least 9 in 10 residents giving high ratings to police, fire and ambulance/ems services. Animal control was rated higher than the national benchmark with 84% awarding excellent or good marks. The facet of Mobility had strong ratings that were similar to

comparison communities, and most items were given favorable ratings by a majority of respondents. Alexandria's bus and transit services were rated exceptionally well, as about three-quarters of residents gave positive ratings to this aspect, a level higher than the national benchmark. Measures for Natural Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were rated positively by at least two-thirds of residents and were rated similarly to other communities. Built Environment aspects were more mixed with at least 6 in 10 residents giving positive ratings to land use, planning and zoning, code enforcement, storm drainage, and sewer services. However, cable television was rated lower than the national benchmark, with 32% excellent or good ratings.

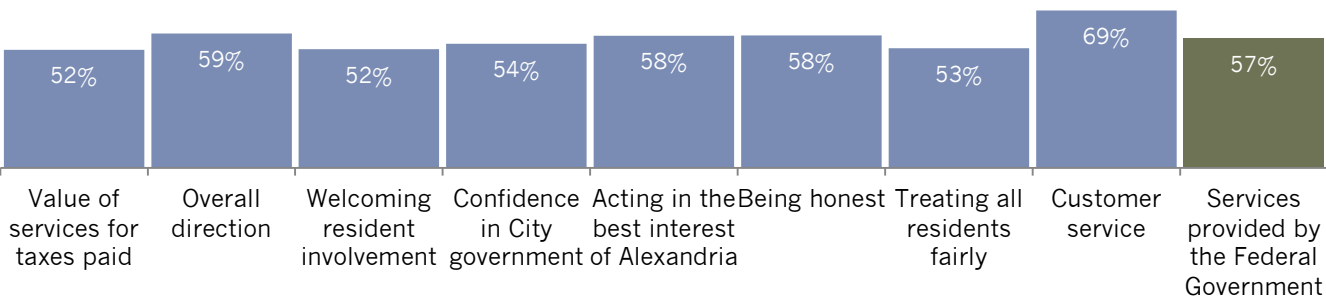
Overall Quality of City Services



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

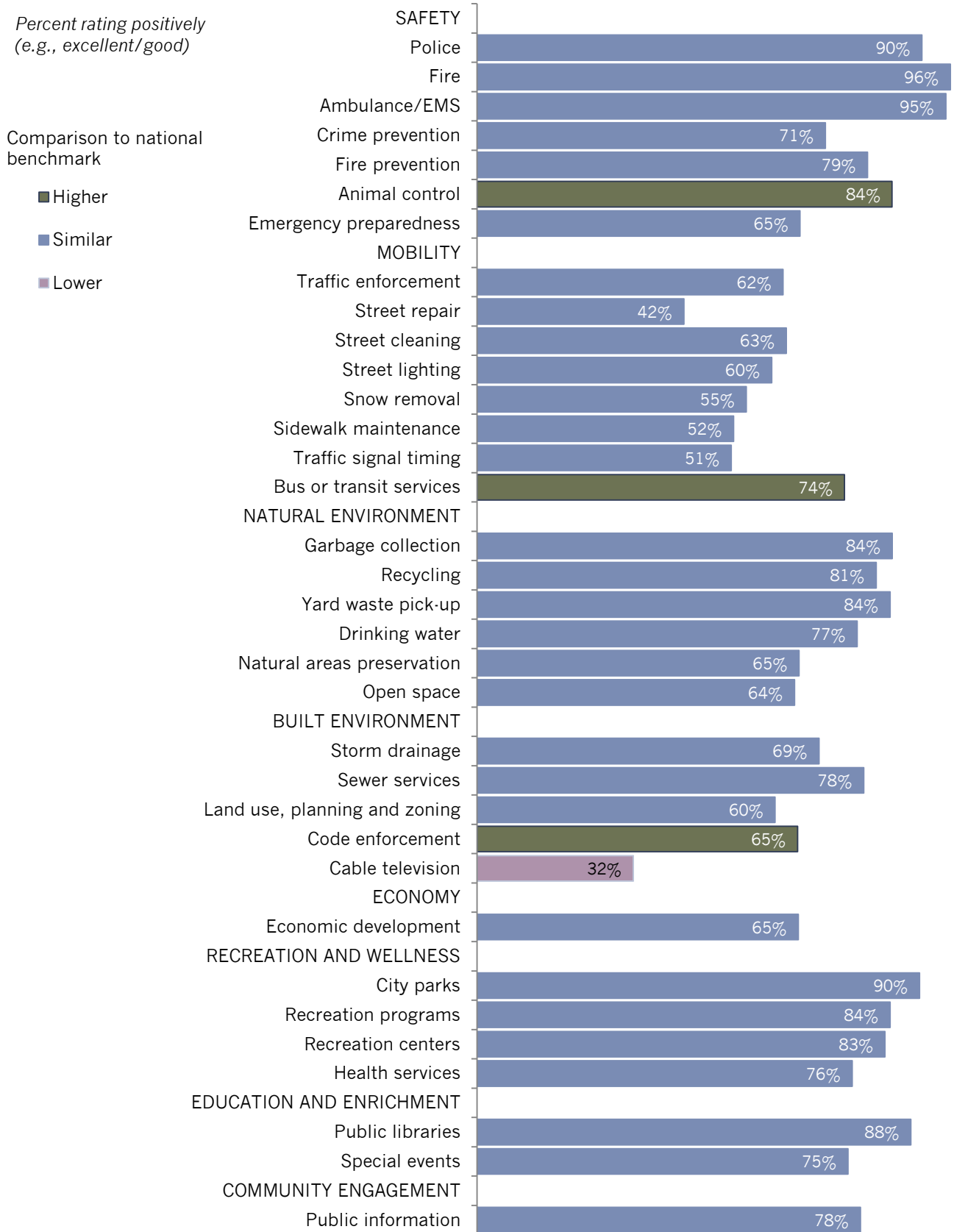
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 2: Aspects of Governance



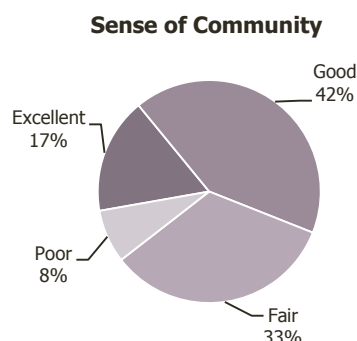
Participation

Are the residents of Alexandria 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. Nearly 6 in 10 residents gave positive ratings for the sense of community in Alexandria, and this level was similar to other benchmark communities. About 9 in 10 respondents indicated they would recommend Alexandria to others and 8 in 10 reported they were likely to remain in the City for the next five years. Almost half of residents reported that they had contacted employees of the City of Alexandria, a level similar to levels reported in other communities.

The survey included nearly 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. In Safety, ratings were strong with around 9 in 10 residents indicating that they had not reported a crime or been the victim of a crime in the last 12 months. In Mobility, residents reported similar levels of Participation in carpooling instead of driving alone (38%), but reported higher levels for having used public transportation instead of driving (83%) and walked or biked instead of driving (71%) compared to levels in comparison communities. Within Natural Environment at least 6 out of 10 residents reported that they had made their home more energy efficient, three-quarters reported that they had conserved water in their homes and almost 9 out of 10 reported that they had recycled. In Built Environment about 3 out of 4 respondents indicated they had not observed a code violation, which was higher than the national benchmark; however, just over half of residents reported that they were not under housing cost stress, which is a level lower than levels seen elsewhere. Within the facet of Economy, nearly all residents had purchased goods in Alexandria (94%), while about one-third of respondents indicated that they worked in Alexandria and believed that the economy would

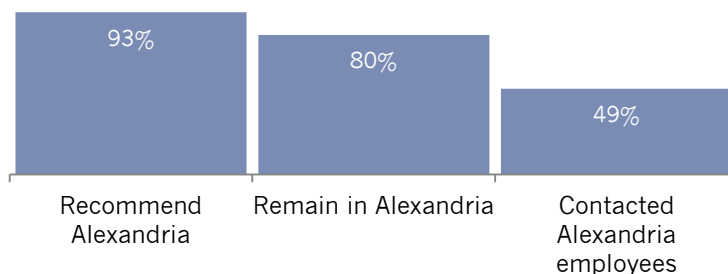
have a positive impact on their income. Measures for Recreation and Wellness and Education and Enrichment both had strong and positive ratings from a majority of participants and these ratings were similar to the national benchmark. Participation within Community Engagement tended to vary, as at least three-quarters had read or watched the local news and voted in local elections and around 1 in 5 residents reported that they had contacted Alexandria elected officials, participated in a club, attended a local public meeting or watched a local public meeting; all of these ratings were similar to communities across the nation. About one-third of residents reported they had volunteered and about three-quarters reported they had talked to or visited with their neighbors or done a favor for neighbors, which were levels lower than levels in benchmark communities.



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

Comparison to national
benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



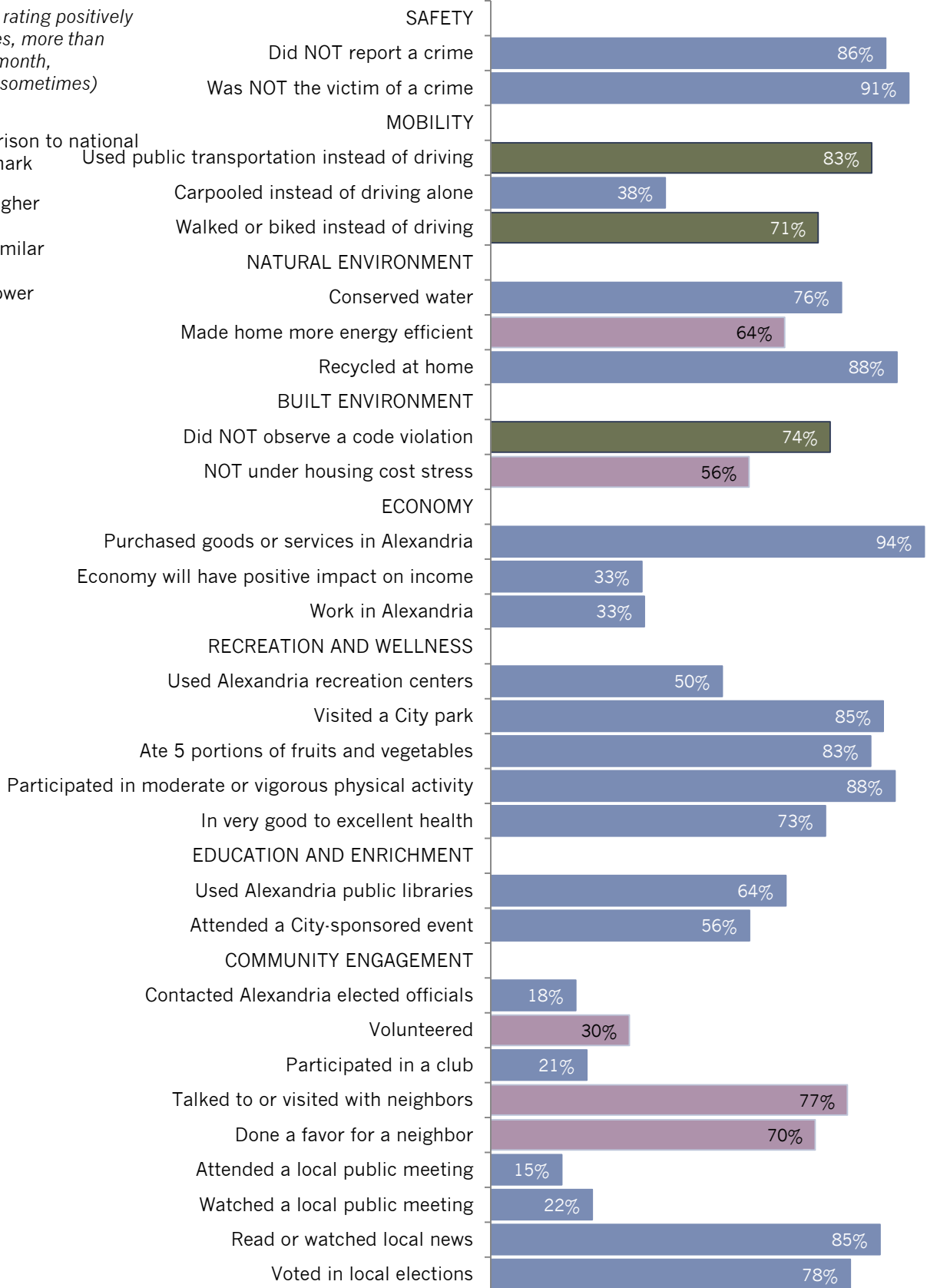
The National Citizen Survey™

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

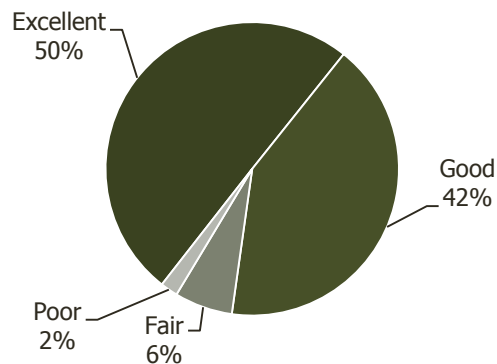


Special Topics

The City of Alexandria included several questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked residents' opinions on the historic character reflected in the built environment, exhibits and events in Alexandria. More than 9 in 10 residents rated Alexandria's historic character positively.

Figure 4: Historic Character of Alexandria

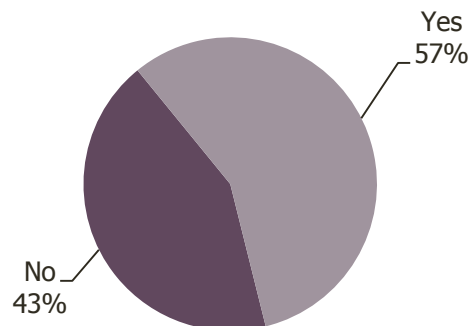
Historic character reflected in built environment, exhibits, and events



The second question asked residents whether or not they had received the flu vaccination in the 12 months previous to the survey. More than half of respondents stated that they had received the vaccination.

Figure 5: Received Flu Vaccination

Had the flu shot

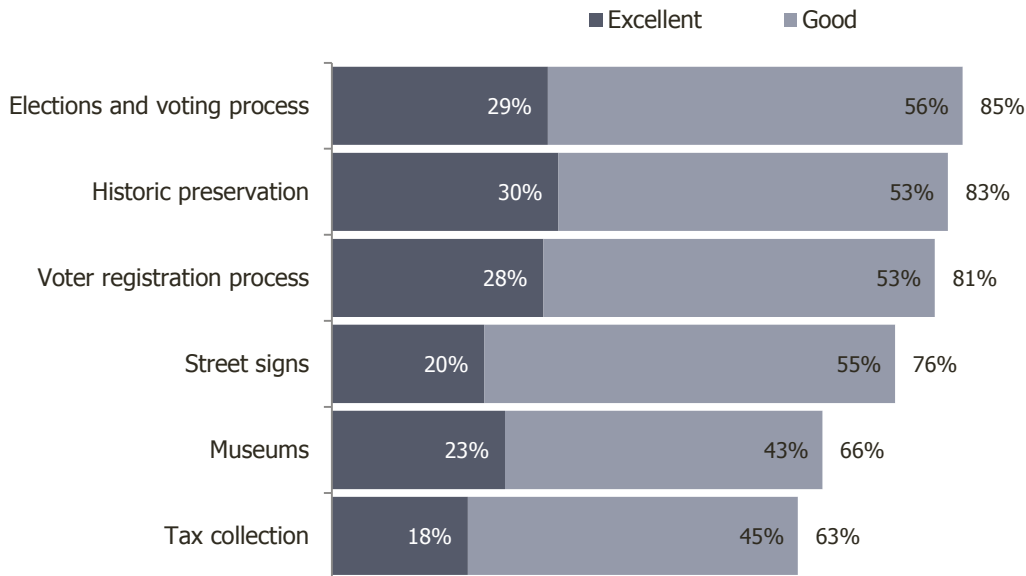


The National Citizen Survey™

The third question of special interest asked residents to rate the quality of various services in Alexandria. The election and voting process, historic preservation and voter registration process received the highest ratings, with at least 8 in 10 residents rating the services as either excellent or good. About three-quarters gave high marks to the quality of street signs and at least 6 in 10 positively rated museums and tax collection services.

Figure 6: Alexandria Services

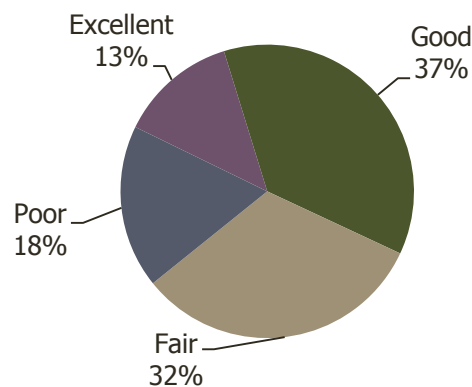
Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Alexandria: museums, historic preservation, street signs, elections and voting process, voter registration process and tax collection.



The next question asked residents to rate the transparency of Alexandria's government. About half of residents rated Alexandria's government transparency to the public as excellent or good.

Figure 7: Alexandria Government Transparency

Transparency to the public

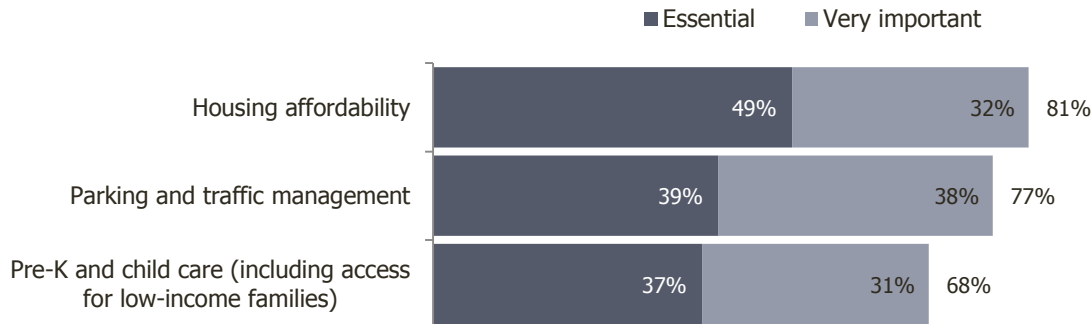


The National Citizen Survey™

The next special interest question asked residents to rate the importance of community priorities for the next two years. At least 8 in 10 residents indicated that housing affordability was an essential or very important focus area and over two-thirds reported that pre-K and child care, as well as parking and traffic management were at least very important.

Figure 8: Alexandria Priorities

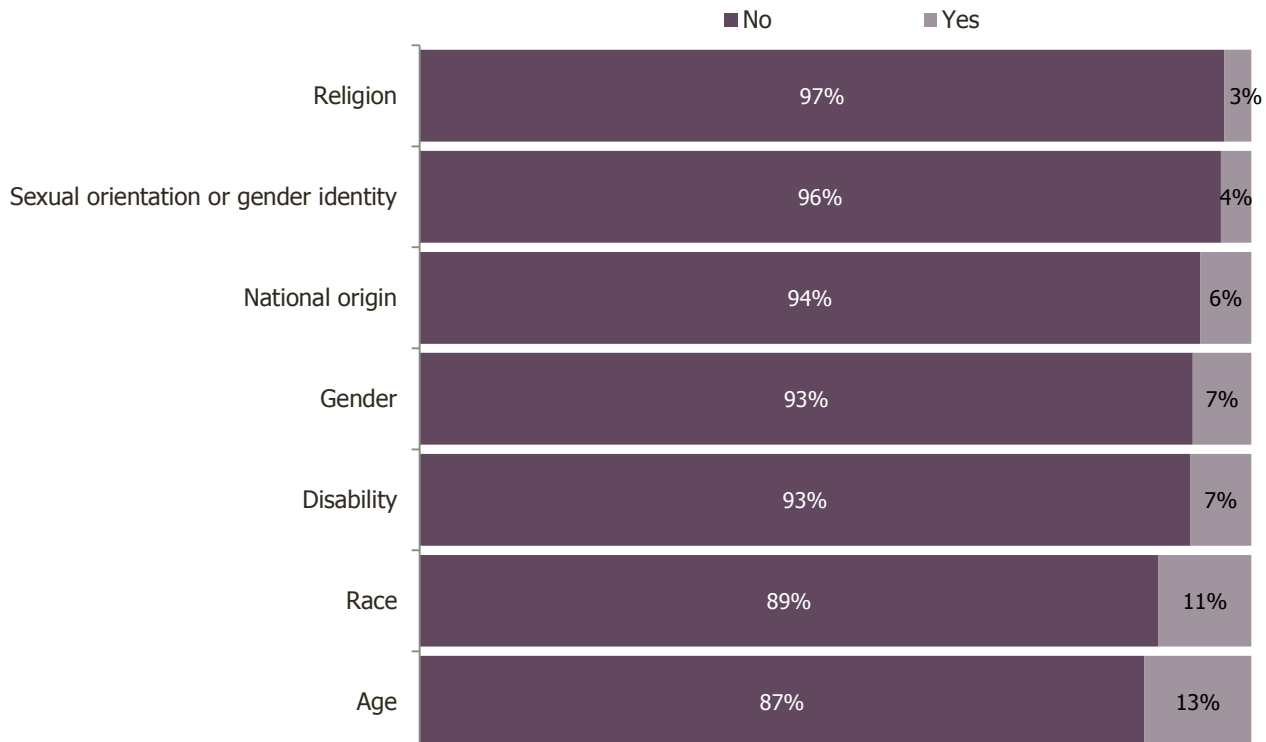
Please rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Alexandria community to focus on each of the following in the coming two years: housing affordability, parking and traffic management and Pre-K and child care (including access for low-income families)



The next question asked residents whether or not they perceived any barriers to living in Alexandria based on different demographic characteristics. More than 8 in 10 residents indicated that they did not perceive any barriers, regardless of the characteristic. However, at least 1 in 10 residents stated that they had perceived barriers to living in Alexandria based on their race or age.

Figure 9: Perceived barriers in Alexandria

Please indicate whether or not you currently perceive barriers to living in Alexandria based on your...:



The National Citizen Survey™

The next set of questions asked residents if they had contact with a City of Alexandria police officer in the 12 months before the survey and to rate the officer if contact was made. About 3 in 10 respondents indicated that they had made contact with an Alexandria police officer within the last year, and of those who had been in contact, more than 9 in 10 residents gave an excellent or good rating to the police officer.

Figure 10: Contact with Alexandria Police
Have you had contact with a City of Alexandria police officer within the last 12 months?

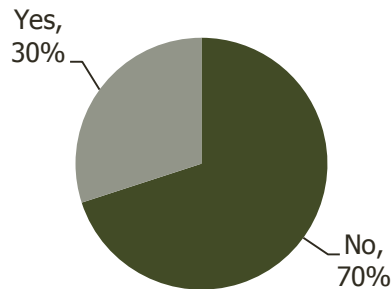
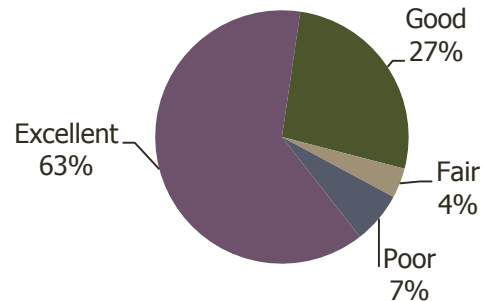


Figure 11: Alexandria Police Officer Rating
Thinking about your most recent contact, how would you rate the police officer?



The City of Alexandria also asked residents about their supplies and plans in preparation for an emergency. A little less than half of participants stated that they had 72 hours' worth of food, water, medicines, and other supplies in case of emergency. However, only 39% of respondents stated that they had discussed a household emergency plan with all members of the household.

Figure 12: Stocked Supplies for Emergency
Do you currently have 72 hours' worth of food, water (three gallons per person), medicines, and other supplies stocked for each person in your household in case of an emergency?

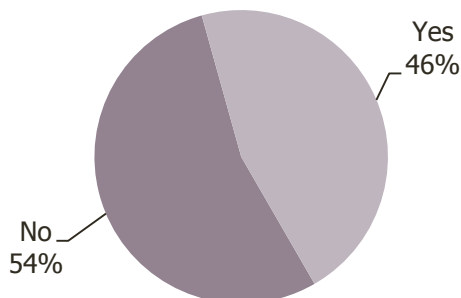
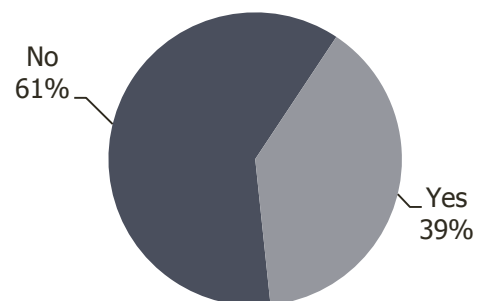


Figure 13: Emergency Preparation
Have you discussed your household's emergency plan, which includes instructions for household members about where to go and what to do in the event of a disaster, with all members of your household?



The last question asked respondents about their cigarette use. More than 9 in 10 residents indicated that they do not smoke cigarettes at all, while less than 1 in 10 residents smoke cigarettes some days or every day.

Figure 14: Cigarette Use
Do you smoke cigarettes...

