Quality of Life

in the Kansas City area

MID-AMERICA REGIONAL COUNCIL
OCTOBER 2017

Executive Summary

In January 2017, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation commissioned a survey of 1,003 adults in the Kansas City area regarding perceptions of their quality of life. For these purposes, the Kansas City area was defined as Cass, Clay, Jackson and Platte counties in Missouri and Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas. The survey respondents are broadly representative of the regional population:

- About 48 percent of respondents were male while 52 percent were female.
- Participants who were white, non-Hispanic comprised 74 percent of the sample, while blacks were 13 percent and Hispanics, Asians and other races were 12 percent, with the remaining 2 percent choosing not to specify.
- The sample was split fairly evenly according to educational attainment, with 34 percent having a high school degree or less, 31 percent with some college or an associate degree, and 33 percent with a bachelor's degree or above. The remaining 2 percent chose not to answer.
- As might be expected, respondents were more sensitive when asked about their income, as 27 percent preferred not to provide this information. Of those who did, 19 percent lived in households with total incomes below $25,000 per year; 18 percent had incomes between $25,000 and $50,000; 23 percent had incomes between $50,000 and $100,000; and 14 percent lived in households with incomes of $100,000 or more. By way of comparison, the metro median income is about $60,000.

While the survey was conducted to meet the Foundation's internal needs, there was a desire to make the data available and relevant to the wider Kansas City community. The Foundation subsequently contracted with the Mid-America Regional Council to analyze the data and prepare this report.

The following key conclusions emerge from this analysis:

We all value the same things.

Family emerges as the most important quality of life factor, followed by personal finances and health, and this is remarkably stable across demographic groups, regardless if they are classified by gender, age, race, educational attainment or income.

Most of us feel good about our quality of life.

The vast majority of residents rate their current quality of life positively. About three-quarters of residents say their current quality of life is "good" or "excellent."

Yet our experiences differ widely.

This shows up as significant variability in each demographic group's rating of its quality of life and which factors are most influential. Relatively low proportions of blacks and low-income residents report a high quality of life compared to whites, people with bachelor's degrees and high-income residents. The likelihood of Hispanics and Asians rating their quality of life highly is typically in between whites and blacks, though most often closer to blacks. It is harder to generalize about the influence of age, but millennials are often less likely to report a high quality of life than other age groups. Gender seems to most often affect which factors are most important rather than the likelihood of achieving a high quality of life.

Those differences narrow when we talk about progress.

Race, education and income differences narrow when evaluating whether progress is being made. Nearly half of residents think things have gotten better over the last five years, a rate that does not vary much by race or education. In addition, the influence of income on perceptions of progress is about half as large as its effect on perceptions of current quality of life.

Education has a big impact on one's quality of life.

The path to a high quality of life flows strongly through one's level of education, as higher levels of education typically result in higher incomes, which then allow one greater choices of communities in which to live. People tend to choose communities with lower crime rates and better schools that make them good places to raise children. The one thing that higher-income communities tend to lack is a good transit system, and high-income respondents chose this amenity most often as the one they'd like to see more of.

Top community issues are the economy, public schools and crime.

The economy, public schools and crime were the community issues most often selected as directly affecting residents' quality of life. However, women were almost as likely to choose health care. Millennials were the most likely to choose the economy, while blacks, Hispanics and Asians were more likely to choose crime. Those individuals with a bachelor's degree or in high income households selected public schools more often as the issue most affecting their quality of life.

Income and race have the strongest influence on perceptions of community quality.

Blacks are less than one-half as likely to rate their communities "good" or "excellent" with respect to public safety or the economy, and two-thirds as likely to rate their public schools positively. Similarly, low-income residents are only about half as likely as high-income residents to rate their communities' public safety, schools and economy positively.

Most residents feel connected to their communities, but fewer feel able to change them.

About 60 percent of residents say they are accepted by their communities and are treated fairly. But only about 40 percent feel like they can make a difference, and less than a quarter actively participate or feel like they have a voice in improving schools.

The region has room for improvement on family friendliness and affordability.

Despite its reputation as a low cost, family friendly place in which to live, the region needs to improve its performance on these two characteristics. Being a good place to raise children and offering an affordable cost of living were both selected as being very important when deciding where to live by 80 percent of respondents. Yet only one-half to one-third of residents, respectively, thought those characteristics described the region very well. As a result, residents experience the largest "satisfaction gap" with respect to affordability and family friendliness of all the characteristics surveyed, where "satisfaction gap" is defined as the difference between how important an characteristic is and how well it describes the region. Reliable public transportation was the only other issue where the responses of the region's overall population identified a significant satisfaction gap. Some differences emerge by demographic group, however. For example, younger adults appear to have a satisfaction gap regarding

the accessibility of parks and open spaces, while blacks have a satisfaction gap with respect to people being proud to live here. Satisfaction gaps are smallest for whites, the highly educated and those with high incomes.

Talent attraction and retention may be an issue for the region.

About one in five residents see themselves leaving the region in the next five years. This appears to be a result of multiple influences — life cycle, a prior propensity to move or dissatisfaction with their current quality of life. Those who are thinking about moving tend to be younger adults, adults who moved to the region within the last 10 or 20 years, minorities and those with low incomes. Of those who say they plan to move, younger adults are more likely say it is for a better life while older adults say it is for personal reasons or the weather. Blacks intend to move for a better job or greater safety, while Hispanics and Asians say they would leave for personal reasons and a better life. Whites and the well-educated plan to leave for a better job.

A majority or residents believe the region is headed in the right direction.

The Kansas City area is doing better than the nation in terms of whether or not it is on the right track. A majority of regional residents believe the region is headed in the right direction, while national polls say that less than a third of U.S. residents think the country is similarly headed. However, the longer someone lives here, the less likely the resident is to think the metropolitan area is continuing to make forward progress.

Residents want more mass transit.

Mass transit was most often chosen as the single amenity residents would like to see more of. This was true for many individual demographic groups as well — men, women, the youngest and oldest adults, whites, the highly educated and the well off. However, the preferences of millennials, minorities and those with low incomes or educations were much more evenly divided among the various amenities surveyed. Many of the other top amenity choices were outdoor and recreational in nature. If combined together instead of listed separately, this category would have accounted for nearly half of respondent choices.

We face a trust deficit, and this makes regional progress difficult.

To deliver mass transit and any other major public investment requires developing trust across jurisdictions and across interests in order to develop the necessary support. Unfortunately, more residents think you can't be too careful around people than think that people are trustworthy, and the disparities are largest around each one of the demographic fault lines highlighted in this report. Women, millennials, minorities, those with less than a bachelor's degree and those with incomes below $50,000 per year all are highly distrustful of others, often being twice as likely to believe you can't be too careful as to believe in people's basic trustworthiness.

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Analysis

1. Individual Quality of Life: How are you doing?

What is the most important consideration in your quality of life?

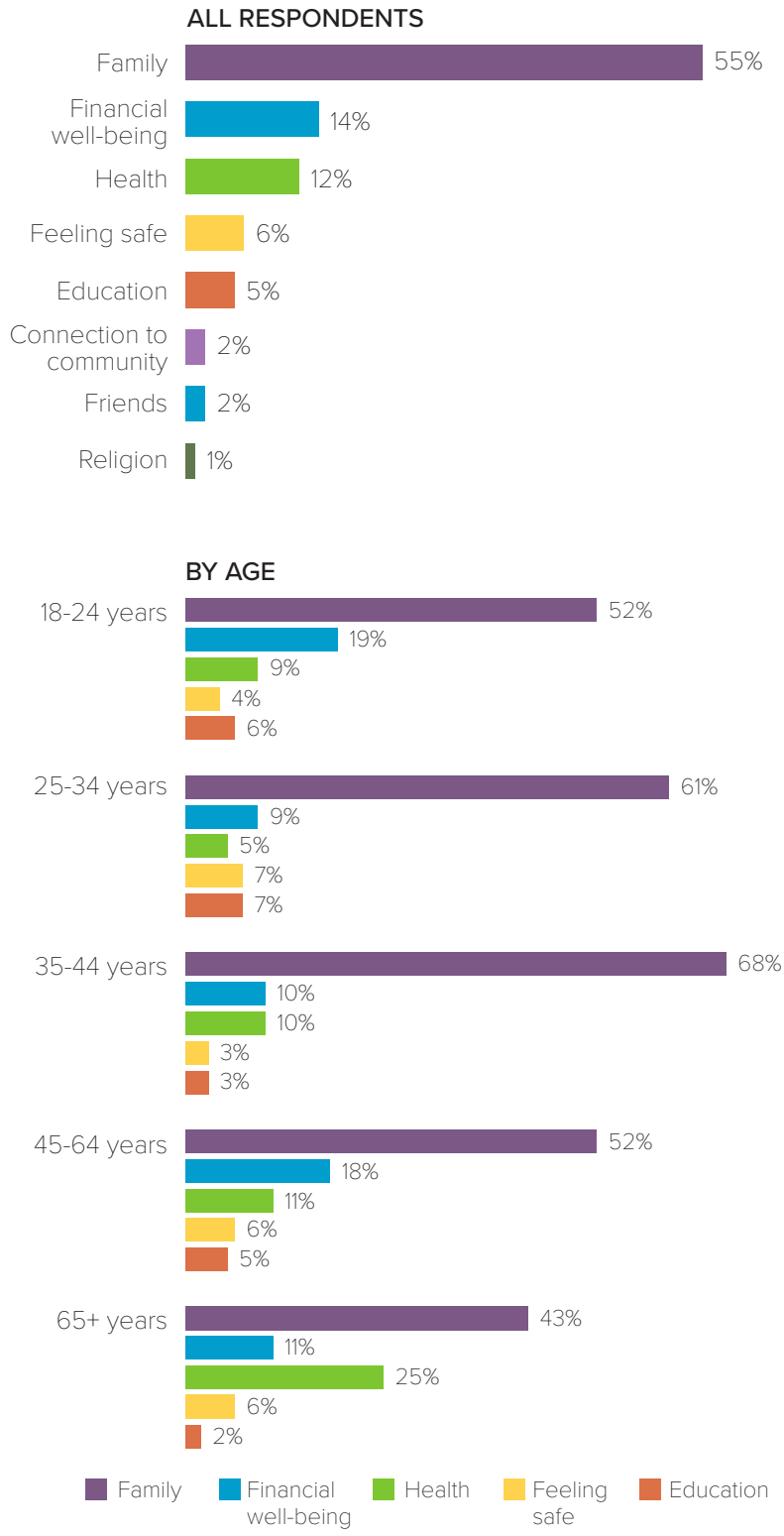
Family is far and away the most important factor in determining the quality of life of Kansas City area residents, with 55 percent choosing it as their top consideration. This is nearly four times greater than financial well-being, which was the factor chosen second-most frequently as the top consideration, and nearly five times greater than health, which was third. Note that this categorization of "family" combines those selecting either "family" or "family health or safety" as their top consideration.

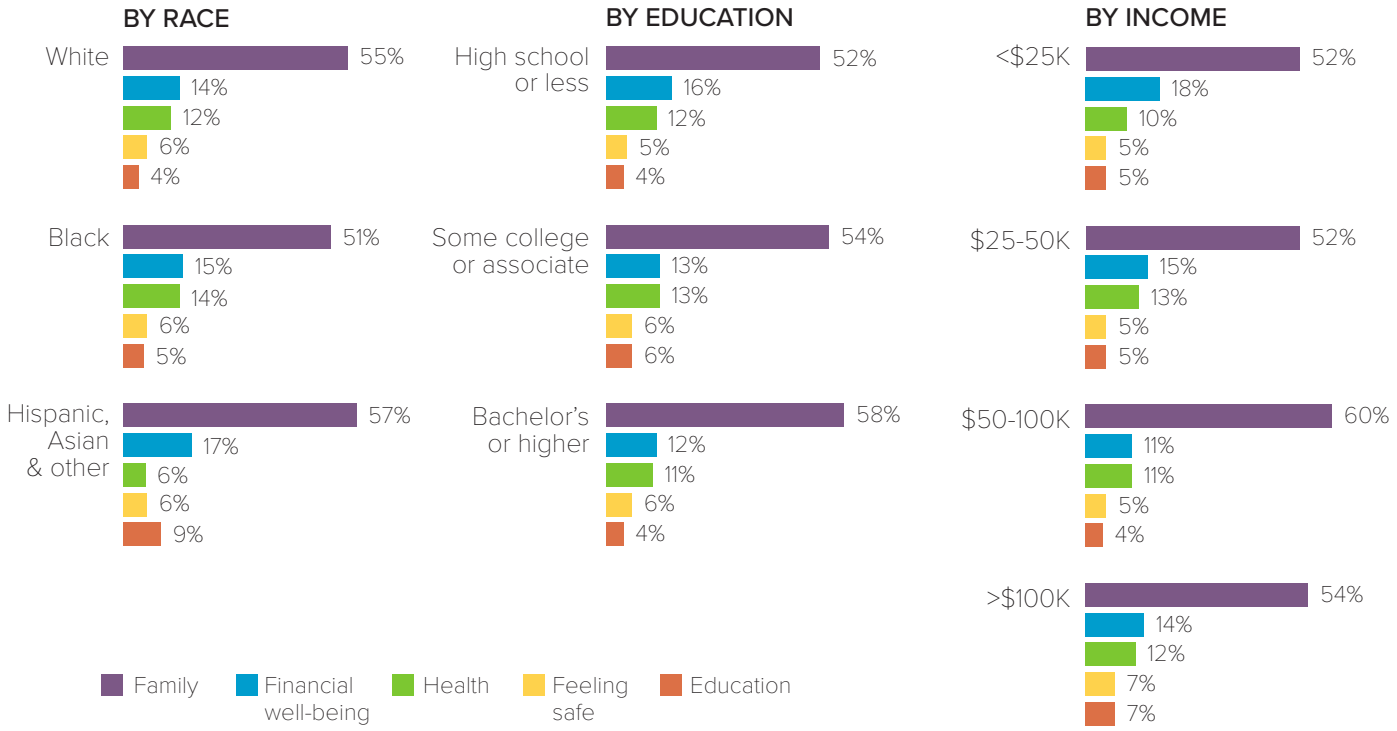
The selection of family as the top quality-of-life consideration remains remarkably stable across demographic groups, including gender, age, race, educational attainment and income. There are some differences in its relative magnitude, however.

For example, family is even more important for those between the ages of 25 and 44, when they are most likely to have children in the home, and somewhat less important for younger and older adults.

Other quality-of-life considerations also vary somewhat across age groups. For example, compared to other age groups, financial well-being appears to be relatively more important for the young and for middle-aged adults approaching retirement, while health is a much larger concern for older adults.

Nonetheless, the overall stability of what is valued by residents can be seen in the graphs on the following page, which show tabulations by race, education and income.



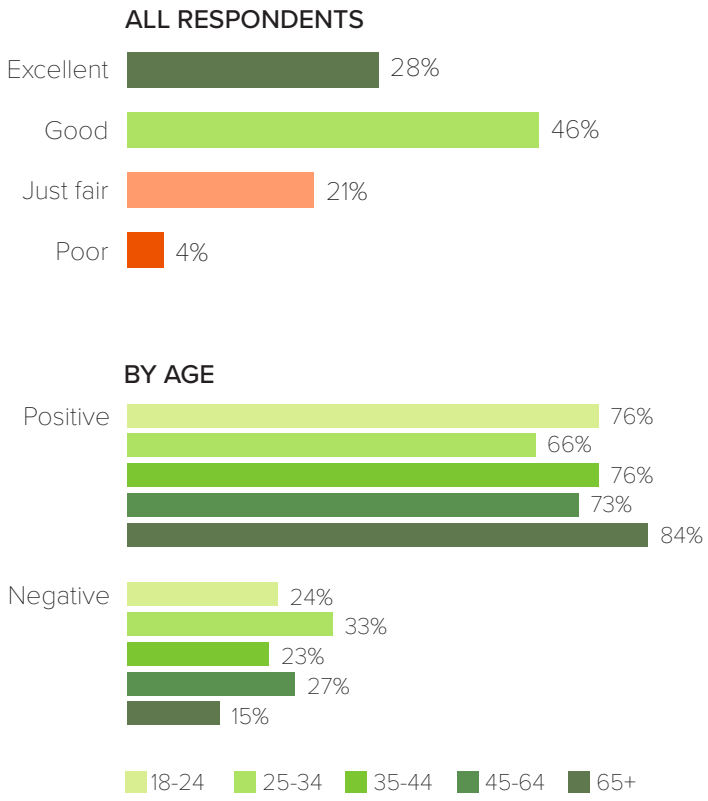


How would you rate your quality of life?

More than a quarter of the region's residents rate their quality of life as excellent, and nearly half rate it as good. As a result, **about three-quarters of adults living in Greater Kansas City view their quality of life positively**, while only one-quarter rate it negatively.

Significant differences exist among demographic groups in their perception of quality of life, however.

AGE: While two-thirds of millennials, or those between the ages of 25 and 34, rate their quality of life positively, **this is the smallest proportion of any age group**. Conversely, older adults are most likely to have a positive perception of their current quality of life, with 84 percent rating it good or excellent.

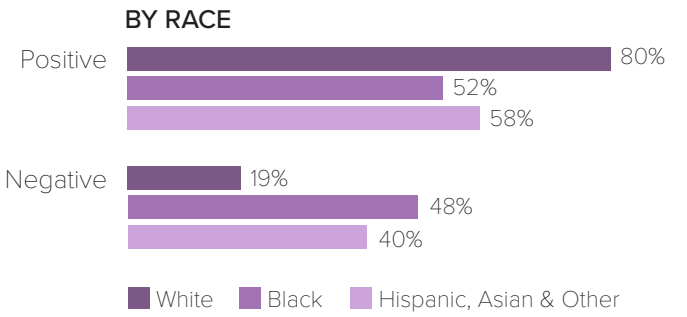


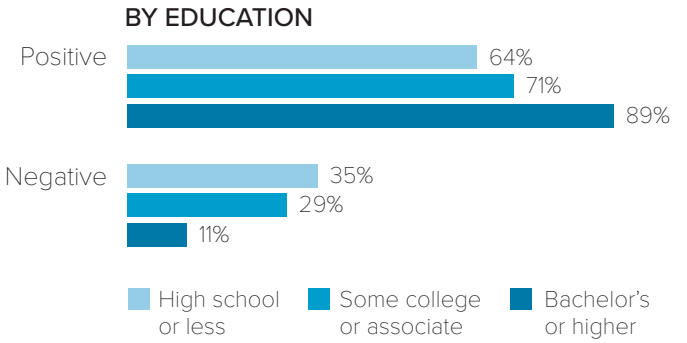
RACE: There are wide disparities in perceptions of quality of life by race. While **whites view their quality of life positively four times more often than they do negatively**, blacks rate their quality of life positively and negatively in nearly equal proportions. Meanwhile, a solid majority (58 percent) of Hispanics and Asians rank their quality of life positively, a rate that falls in between whites and blacks, though closer to blacks.

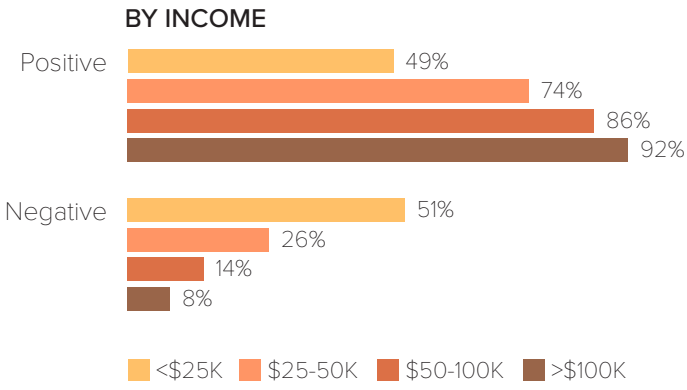
EDUCATION: Educational attainment is strongly associated with the proportion of residents rating their quality of life highly. **The percentage of those who view their quality of life positively is nearly 50 percent larger for those with a bachelor's degree and above compared to those with a high school degree or less**, 89 percent and 64 percent respectively. The percentage of those with some college or an associate degree who view their quality of life positively falls in between these two figures, with a rating 7 points higher than those with high school degrees but 18 points lower than those with bachelor's degrees.

INCOME: Money can't buy you happiness, but income is highly correlated with perceptions of quality of life. **Those with the highest incomes rate their quality of life good or excellent nearly twice as often as those with the lowest incomes**. While the proportion rating their quality of life negatively is essentially equal to those rating it positively for those with the lowest incomes, those with the highest incomes are 11½ times more likely to rate their quality of life positively than negatively.

The biggest jump in quality of life appears to occur at $25,000, where the proportion rating their quality of life good or excellent jumps from about half the population to about three-quarters. This level of income is just under half the region's median household income of $60,000, and likely represents when residents are beginning to achieve middle class status.







Has your quality of life gotten better or worse over the last five years?

Nearly half (47 percent) of the region's adults say they have seen their quality of life improve over the last five years, about three times the proportion who said it has gotten worse. A little over a third of adults report no change in their quality of life during this period. (Note: Components may not add to totals due to rounding.)

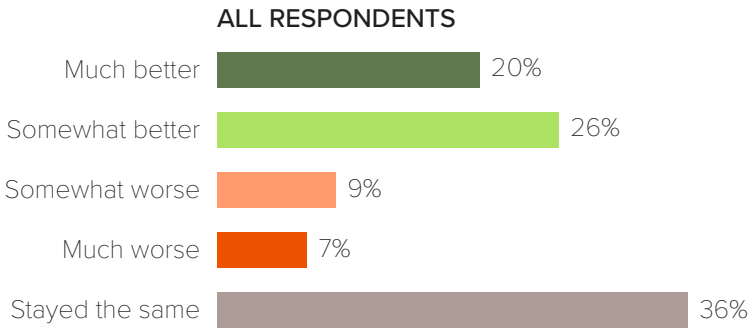
GENDER: Taken **overall, there is little difference in these percentages by gender,** with 48 percent of men and 46 percent of women reporting that their quality of life is either much or somewhat better than five years ago, three times more than the 16 percent of each gender who say it is somewhat or much worse. **However, women are nearly twice as likely as men to say their quality of life has gotten much worse** over the period, while men are 50 percent more likely to say their quality of life is only somewhat worse.

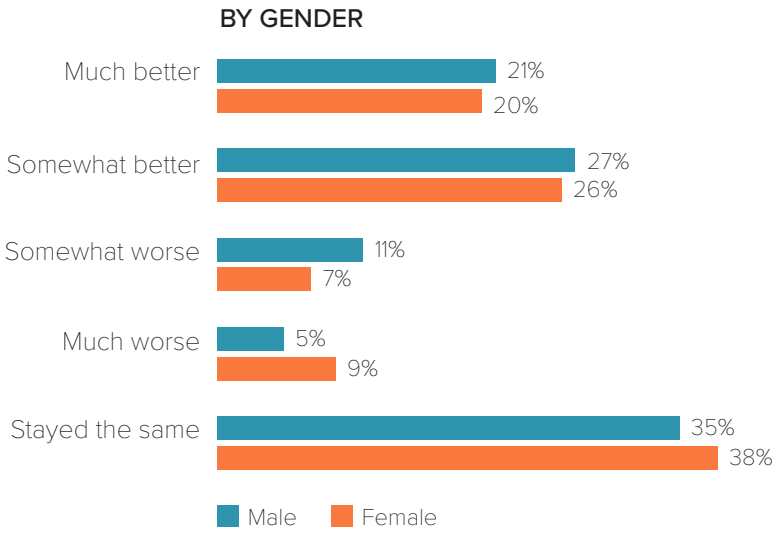
AGE: Perceptions of whether quality of life has improved generally vary inversely with age. **Though a lower proportion of millennials rated their current quality of life highly, they were the most likely to say their quality of life improved**, as nearly two-thirds rated it as better than five years ago. Conversely, older adults, who most often ranked their current quality of life high, were the least likely to say their quality of life improved and most likely to say that it had gotten worse. About a quarter of older adults are in each camp, while nearly half say they have seen no change.

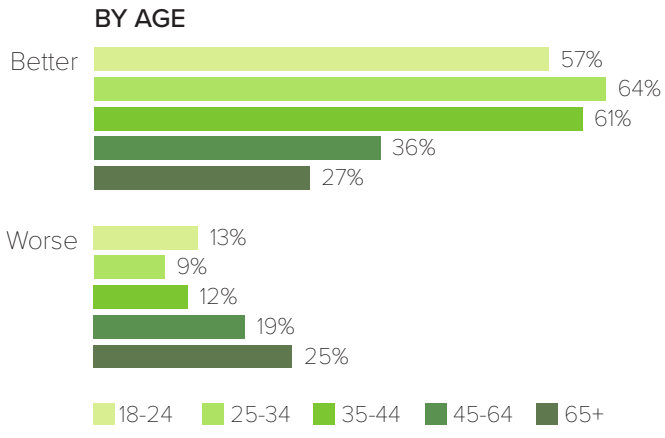
A note about age groups:

Naming conventions for generations are often inconsistent. Though they may slightly disagree with definitions elsewhere, for convenience, we generally use the following guide to refer to the age groups surveyed:

Age 65+ — Older Adults
Age 45-64 — Baby Boomers
Age 35-44 — Generation X or GenX
Age 25-34 — Millennials
Age 18-24 — Generation Z or GenZ



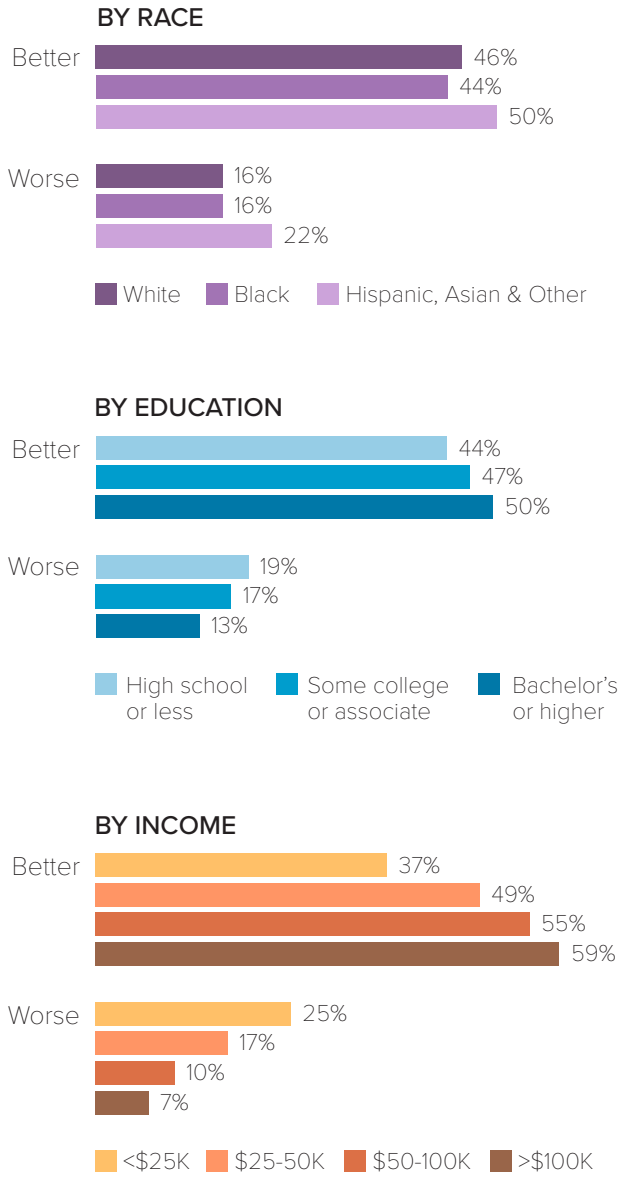




RACE: Despite having much lower perceptions of their current quality of life, **blacks are about as likely as whites to say their quality of life has improved over the last five years, while Hispanics and Asians are more likely**. Half of Hispanics and Asians say their quality of life has improved, slightly more than the 46 percent of whites who do. Hispanics and Asians are also much less likely to say their quality of life has stayed the same, and somewhat more likely to say their quality of life has worsened than blacks or whites.

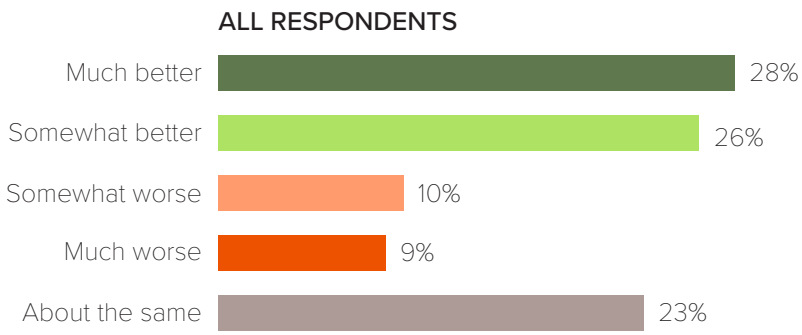
EDUCATION: Educational attainment is positively associated with residents saying their quality of life has improved over the past five years. However, similar to race and age, this relationship is much weaker than it was when area adults rated their current quality of life. The proportion rating their change in quality of life as positive only differs by six percentage points between the lowest and highest levels of educational attainment, 44 percent to 50 percent, respectively. This contrasts with the 25-point spread in the assessment of their current quality of life between those with a high school degree or less and those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

INCOME: Improvement in quality of life exhibits a strong relationship with residents' current incomes. **Those with the highest incomes are 60 percent more likely to report their quality of life has improved over the last five years than those in the lowest income group**, while those in the second-highest group are nearly 50 percent more likely. Meanwhile, those in the highest two income groups are approximately one-third as likely to report declines in their quality of life.



Has your quality of life improved compared to your parents at your same age?

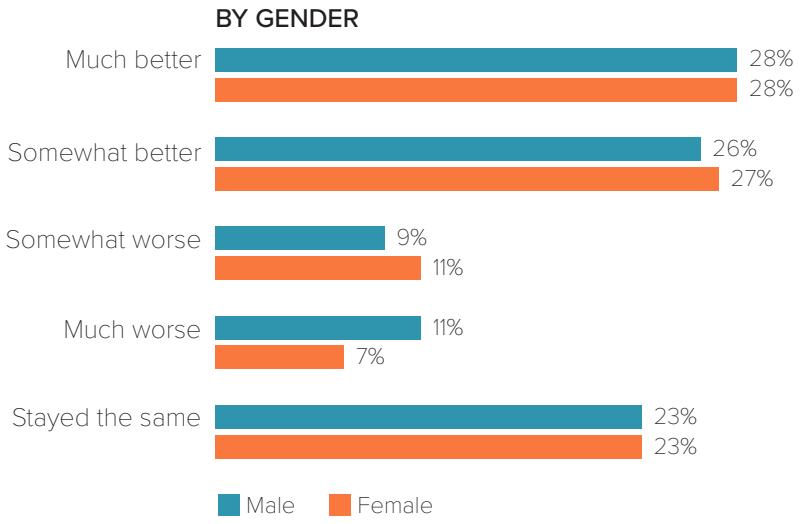
A majority of adults, 55 percent, say their quality of life is either much or somewhat better than their parents' quality of life at their same age, compared to only 19 percent who say it is somewhat or much worse. Nearly one-quarter of residents say their quality of life is about the same as that experienced by their parents.

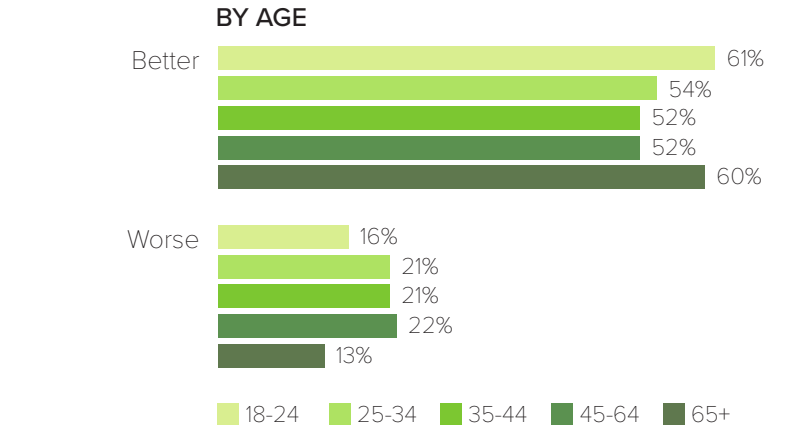


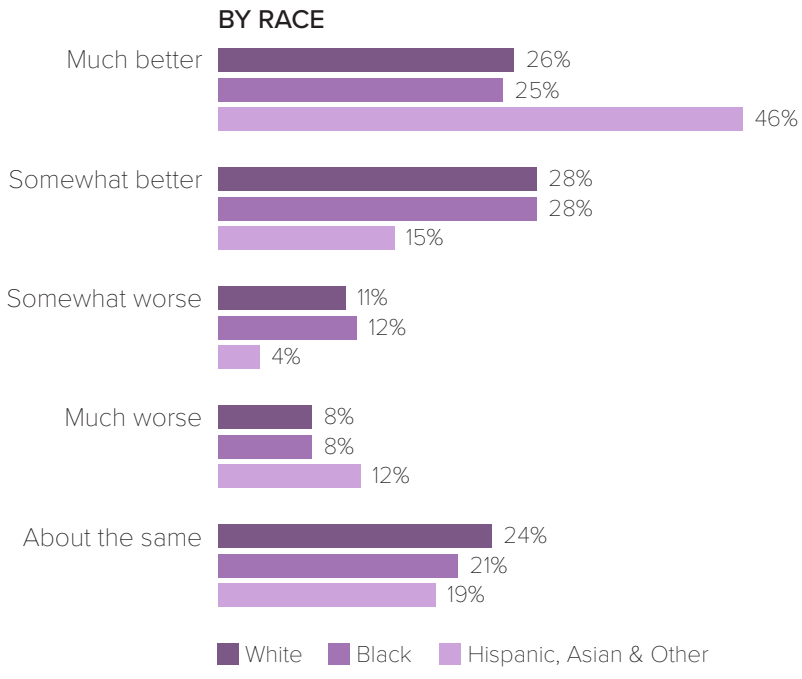
GENDER: Similar to the comparison to five years ago, **there is no significant difference overall in how men or women respond to whether they are experiencing a better quality of life than their parents** did when they were the same age. About 54 percent of men and 55 percent of women say their quality of life is either much or somewhat better, compared to only 19 percent who say it is somewhat or much worse. **Yet here, it is men who are more likely than women to say their quality of life is much worse** than their parents, 11 percent to 7 percent respectively, while women are more likely to say it is only somewhat worse, by a margin of 11 percent to 9 percent.

AGE: The youngest and oldest adults are most likely to say their quality of life is better compared to their parents, with about 60 percent of adults in each age group saying it is better. A majority of those between the ages of 25 to 64 also agree their lives are better than their parents, but not by as wide a margin.

RACE: Hispanics and Asians are most likely to report their quality of life being much or somewhat better than their parents, at 62 percent compared to 54 percent for whites and blacks. Even more striking is **the proportion of Hispanics and Asians say their life is much better than their parents. At 46 percent, this rate is nearly double that of whites and blacks.** Given the Hispanics outnumber Asians by 2-to-1, most of this differential is probably attributable to improvements to Hispanics' quality of life.

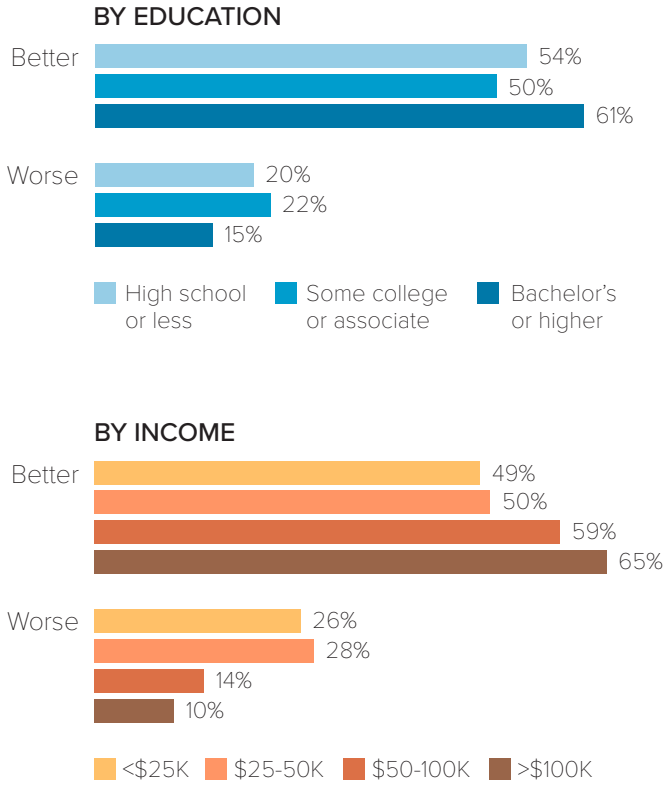






EDUCATION: Those with the highest levels of educational attainment are more likely to perceive their quality of life as higher than their parents. **At 61 percent for those with a bachelor's degree or above, this exceeds those who think their quality of life is worse by a 4-to-1 margin**. For those with some college or an associate degree, however, the proportion reporting a higher quality of life than their parents falls to half, which is slightly lower than average and below that of those with a high school degree.

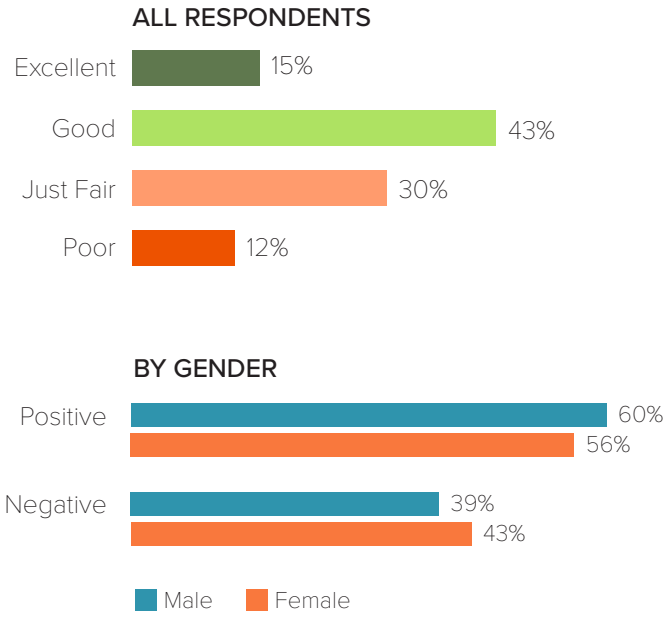
INCOME: There is a much stronger relationship to income than education, however, as 65 percent of those in the highest income group perceive their quality of life to be higher than their parents at the same age, compared to 49 percent of those in the lowest income group. Still, even for low-income households, those who view their quality of life as better outnumber those who view it as worse by a nearly 2-to-1 margin.



How would you rate the state of your personal finances?

A plurality of residents rate the current state of their personal finances as good, while 15 percent rate it as excellent. Combined, **58 percent of adults rate their personal finances positively**, while only 41 percent rate it negatively, a 17-point spread.

GENDER: Personal finance, though, is one area where there appears to be gap between the perceptions of men and women. About 60 percent of men view their financial condition positively compared to 39 who view them negatively, a 21-point spread. For women, the spread is only 13 points, as they are 4 percent less likely to have a positive view of their finances and 4 percent more likely to have a negative view.

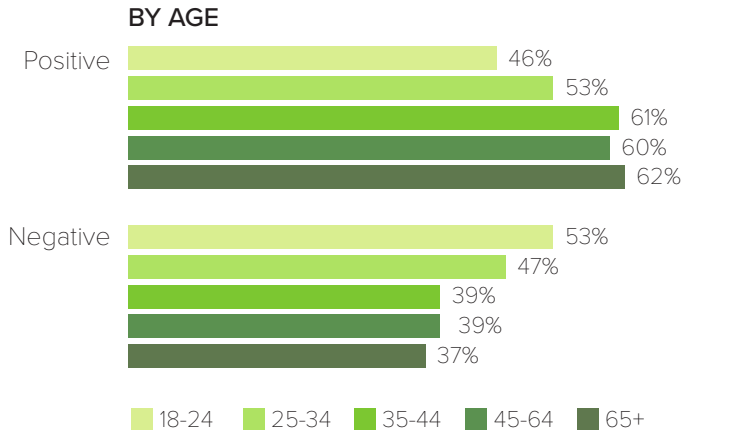


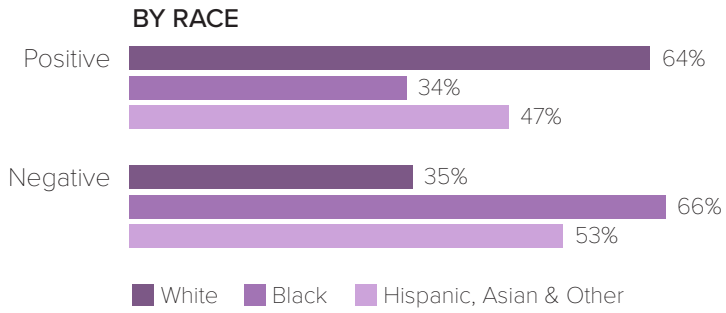
AGE: When examined by age, the view of personal finances breaks cleanly into two groups — those under the age of 35 and those 35 and over. **Adults below the age of 35 are split about evenly between those who rate their personal finances as "good" or "excellent" and those who rate them more negatively**. However, a 60 percent or better majority of those 35 and over have a positive view of their finances, while 40 percent or less have a negative view.

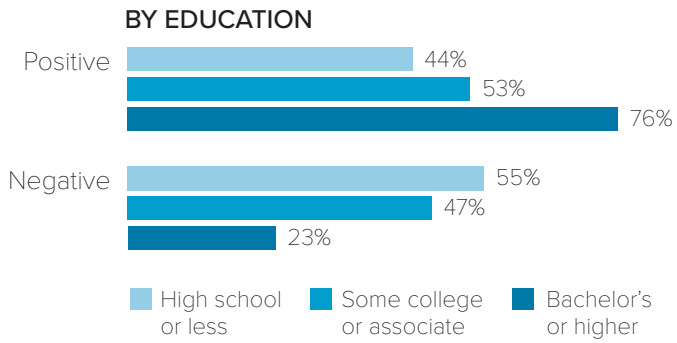
RACE: Strong disparities exist by race in perceptions of the condition of personal finances. While whites generally have a favorable view of their finances by a nearly 2-to-1 margin, with 64 percent positive and 35 percent negative, the opposite is true for blacks. **Blacks' 34 percent positive and 66 percent negative views of their personal financial condition are a near mirror-image of whites**. Meanwhile, Hispanics and Asians are much more evenly split in their view of their finances, though a majority perceive them as negative.

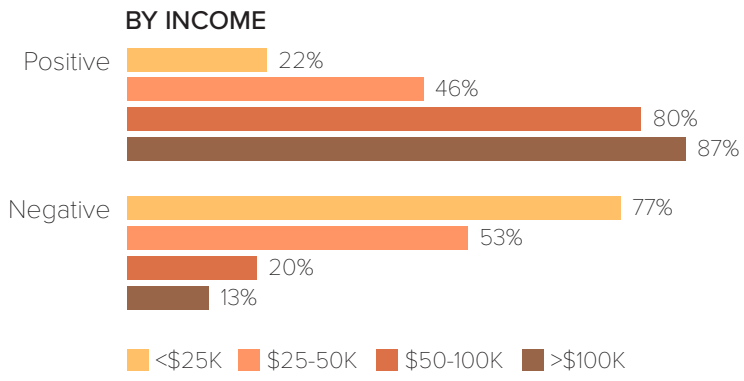
EDUCATION: Similar to age, level of education also splits perceptions of personal finances into two groups. **Those with less than a bachelor's degree are divided roughly 50/50 on their view of personal finances**, though a slight majority of those having a high school degree or less have a negative view and the opposite is true for those with some college or an associate degree. However, **those with a bachelor's degree or above rate their finances positively by a 4-to-1 margin**, indicating that a bachelor's degree provides a significant gateway to the middle class and beyond.

INCOME: It appears that $50,000 is the income threshold that needs to be crossed before personal finances are typically viewed positively by Kansas City area residents. Those earning incomes less than $25,000 view their personal finances negatively by a 3-to-1 margin, and a majority of those earning between $25,000 and $50,000 say the state of their finances is negative. But once the region's adults earn $50,000 or more, their view of their finances turns dramatically positive by at least a 5-to-1 margin.







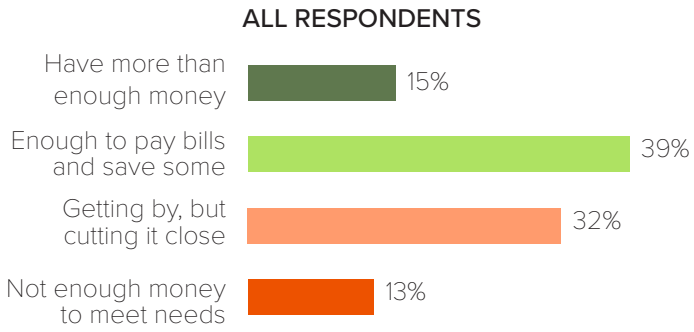


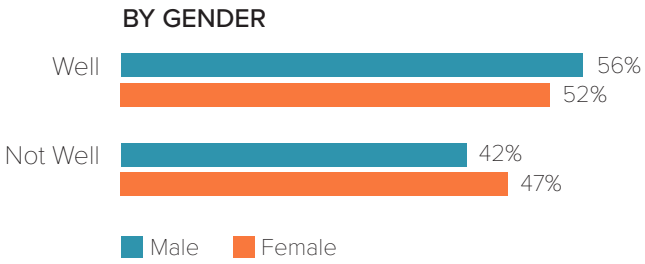
How well does your total income meet your needs?

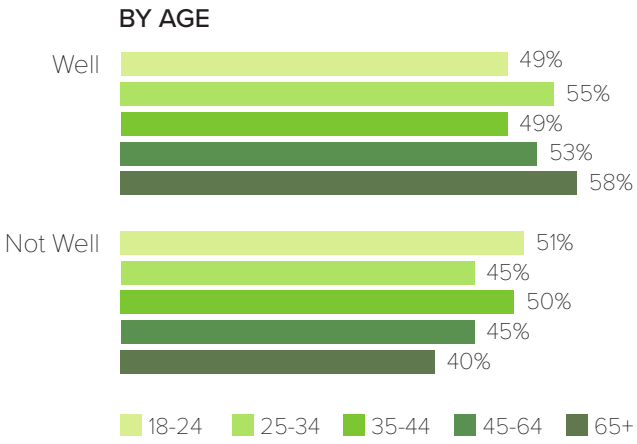
Compared to the prior question, this one elicits a slightly more negative response. Whereas 58 percent of adults rated their current finances positively, only **54 percent say their total income meets their needs well** — meaning either they have more than enough money or enough to pay their bills plus add to savings. **However, a third of residents say they are barely getting by** and about one in eight simply don't have enough money to meet their needs.

GENDER: Similar to the prior question, a larger majority of men than women say their income meets their needs well, but specifically mentioning needs in the question produces much smaller majorities for each gender. For men, the 14-point gap between the 56 percent who think their needs are being well met and the 42 percent who don't is still substantial. But **women's views are split 52 percent to 47 percent, a separation of only five percentage points between those who see their incomes as adequate to meet needs and those who don't.**

AGE: When asked about income relative to needs, the relationship with age breaks down a bit compared to the prior question. **The share of younger adults (18-24 and 25-34) who say their incomes meet their needs well is larger than the share who say the state of their finances is positive**, while the converse is true for all other age groups. This likely reflects the fact **financial needs increase with age due to the expenses of raising children, saving for retirement and meeting medical challenges**. That only 49 percent of those who are 35-44 rate their incomes as adequate to meet their needs, compared to the 61 percent who rated their finances positively, indicates that this may be the age when those financial responsibilities increase most rapidly. In later years, it appears that incomes catch up for most, as those 45-64 and 65 and over say their incomes meet their needs well by comfortable majorities, 53 to 45 percent and 58 to 40 percent respectively.



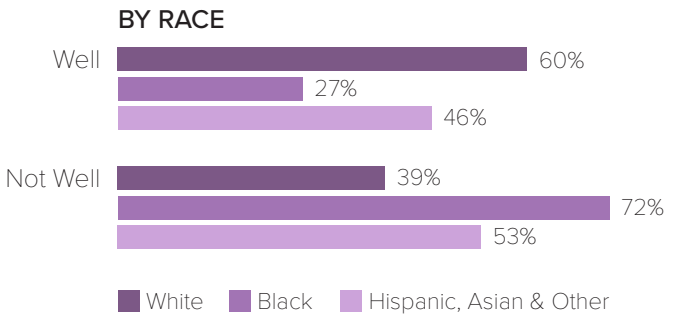


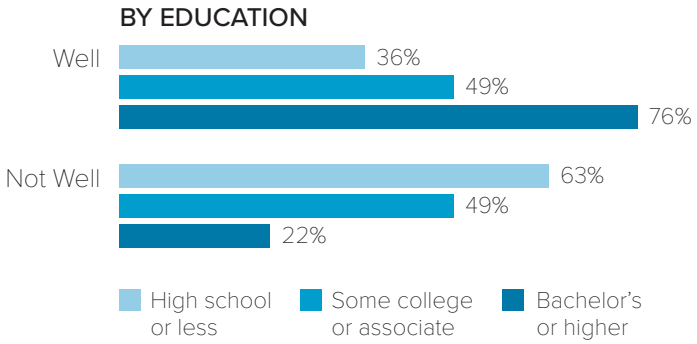


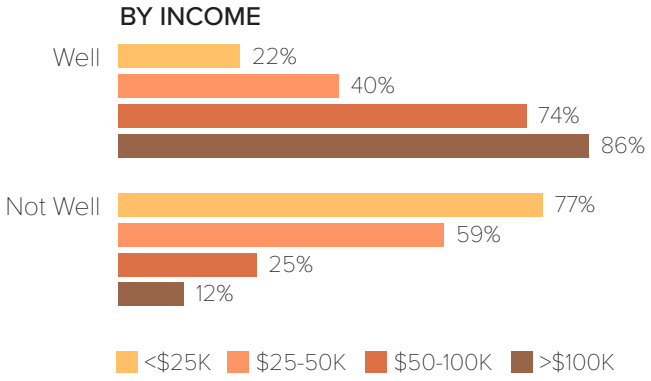
RACE: Whites are the only racial group where a majority of adults say their incomes meet their needs well, 60 percent to 39 percent. Conversely, nearly three-quarters of blacks say their income is inadequate to meet their needs. Hispanics and Asians are more evenly split, but a majority of 53 percent also say their income is inadequate to meet their needs.

EDUCATION: There is a strong relationship between level of education and earning income adequate to meet needs. **Three-quarters of those with a bachelor's degree say their incomes meet their needs well, compared to a little over one-third of those with a high school degree or less.** Adults in the region with some college or an associate degree are split evenly, with 49 percent saying their income is adequate to meet their needs, and 49 percent saying it isn't.

INCOME: Of course, the strongest relationship with whether income is adequate to meet needs is with income itself. Fewer than one in four of those earning household incomes less than $25,000 per year say their incomes meet their needs well, compared to seven out of eight of those earning incomes greater than $100,000 per year. Interpolating the survey results, **the shift from a majority believing income is inadequate to meet needs to a majority believing it is adequate occurs once annual incomes exceed approximately $65,000**, which is somewhat higher than the region's median household income of $60,000.







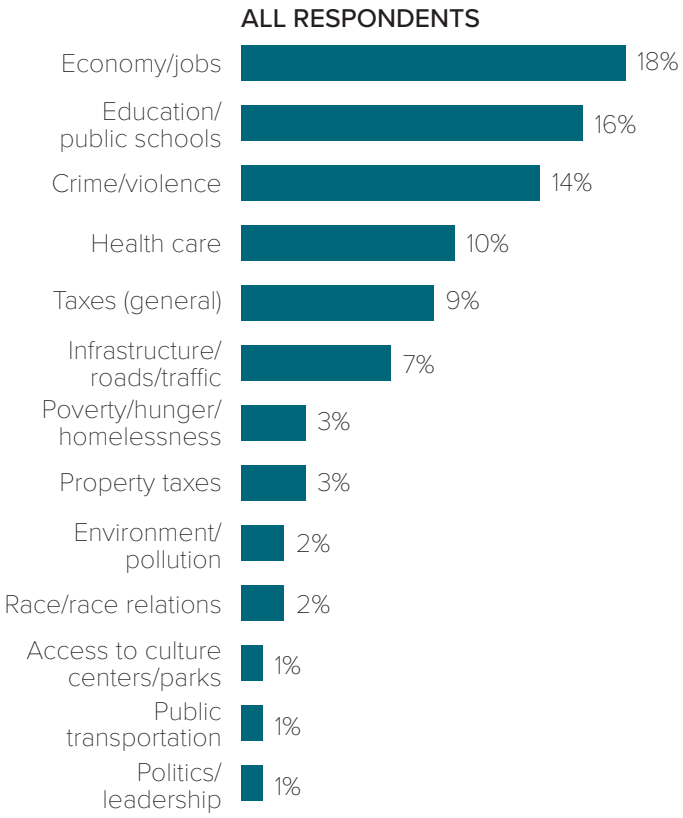
2. Community Quality of Life: How well is your community supporting you?

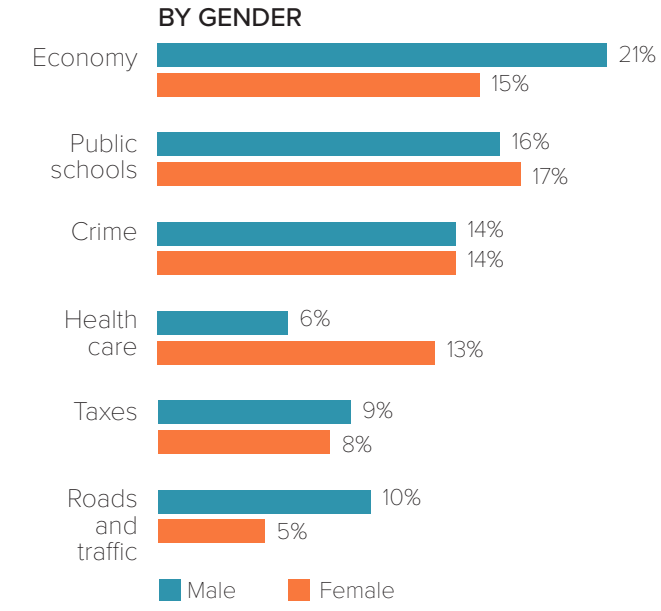
What is the most important community issue affecting your quality of life?

While a strong family, sound finances and good health are the most important contributors to a high quality of life, community conditions can significantly help or hinder residents' capacity to achieve them. When asked to name the single-most important community issue directly affecting their quality of life, **the economy was the issue chosen most often**, selected by 18 percent of adults. This was **followed by education and public schools**, with 16 percent, **and then crime and violence**, with 14 percent. Together, these three issues were selected as most important by nearly half of residents.

The next three most selected issues are health care, taxes and infrastructure (defined here explicitly as roads and traffic; transit is considered separately), with 10 percent, 9 percent and 7 percent of adults, respectively, rating them most important. Combined, the top six issues account for nearly three-quarters of residents' responses.

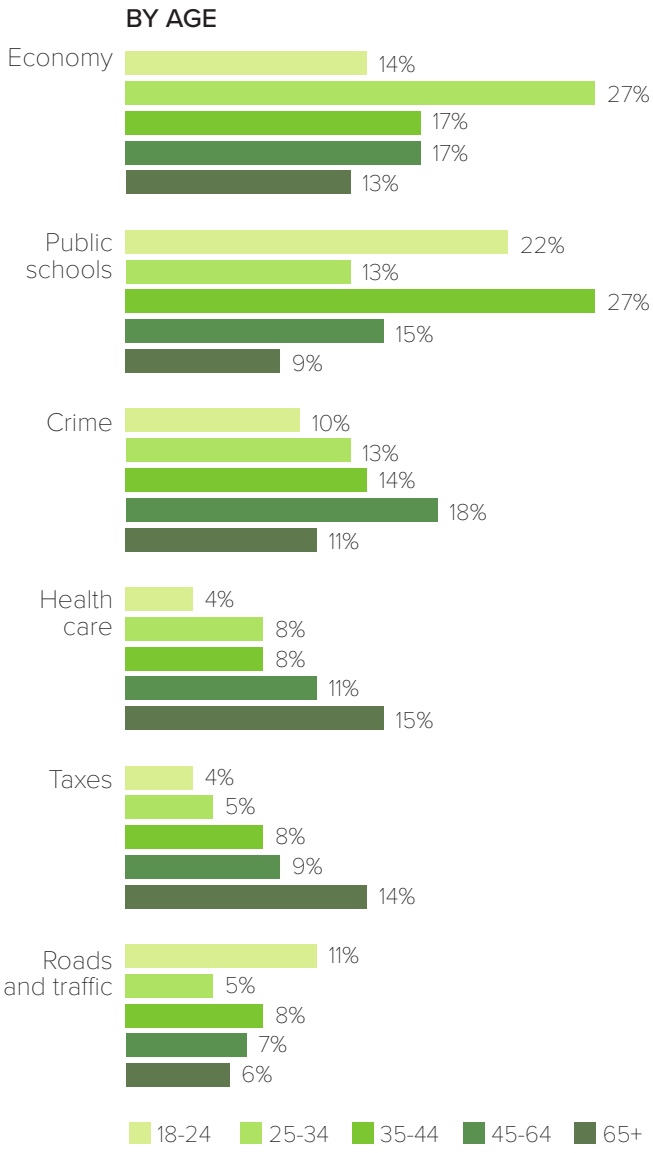
GENDER: Some significant differences in which community issues are most important arise when examined by gender, with the economy being most often chosen by men while women most often selected public schools. At 21 percent, the proportion of men rating the economy as their top issue is one-third higher than the proportion of women, and at 10 percent, their proportion rating infrastructure/roads and traffic as most important is double the female rate. Meanwhile, the converse is true regarding **health care, where the percentage of women selecting it as their top issue (13 percent) is double the male rate**.

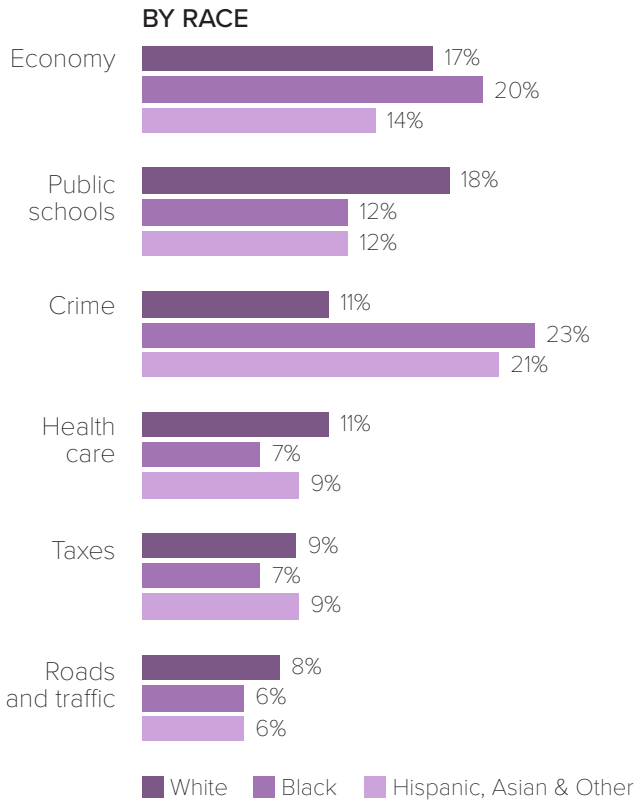




AGE: When examined by age, significant differences concerning which issue is most important emerge. **Some 27 percent of millennials identify the economy as the most important issue, nearly twice the rate of any other age group, likely reflecting their entrance into the labor market in shadow of the Great Recession**. Public schools are most important to GenZ, many of whom are still in school, and GenX, many of whose children are, at rates — 22 percent and 27 percent respectively — that are also nearly double those of other age groups. The issues of health care and taxes tend to increase in importance with age and are the most important issues for older adults. Baby boomers' top concern appears to be crime, though the economy is right behind. Interestingly, concerns over roads and traffic tend to diminish with age.

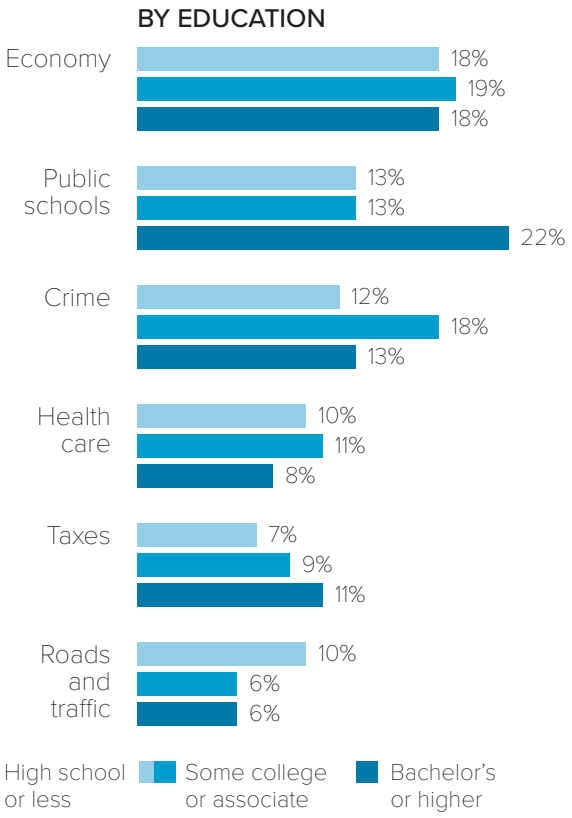
RACE: Significant differences also emerge when the top community issue is considered by race. The economy and public schools are the issues most often selected by whites, chosen by 17 percent and 18 percent, respectively. This rate for public schools is 50 percent higher than that of blacks and Hispanics and Asians. In part, this is because **minorities chose crime as the most important issue at rates that are roughly double that of whites** — 23 percent of blacks and 21 percent of Hispanics and Asians. The economy was the second-most selected issue for both blacks and Hispanics and Asians. However, at 20 percent, blacks selected the economy nearly as often as they selected crime and more often than whites. Meanwhile, Hispanics and Asians selected the economy one-third less often than crime and put more emphasis on health care and taxes than blacks.

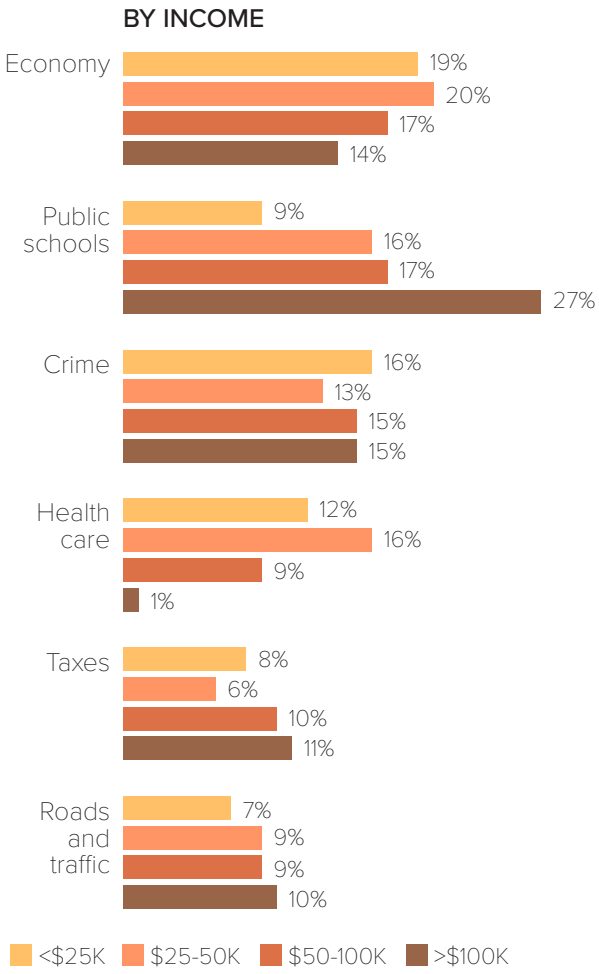




EDUCATION: The economy was chosen as the most important community issue by 18 to 19 percent of adults regardless of their education level. But once the issue moves beyond the economy, some significant differences emerge when considered by educational attainment. **For those with a bachelor's degree, the economy's share was surpassed by the 22 percent who thought public schools were the most important,** a rate that is nearly three-quarters higher than the 13 percent of those with lower levels of education. Those with some college or an associate degree are as likely to be concerned about crime as they are the economy, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Concerns about health care and traffic tend to decline as educational attainment rises, while concerns about taxes increase.

INCOME: Which issue is most important to area residents appears related to their incomes. The proportion selecting the economy as the most important issue declines with income, from 19 percent for the lowest incomes to 14 percent for the highest, as does the proportion selecting health care, from 12 percent to 1 percent. On the other hand, concerns about public schools, taxes and roads tend to increase with income. **Public schools show the strongest relationship, as the 27 percent of those with the highest incomes who selected it as most important is three times the rate of those with the lowest incomes**. Crime is the lone issue that is selected at relatively uniform rates, about 15 percent, regardless of income level





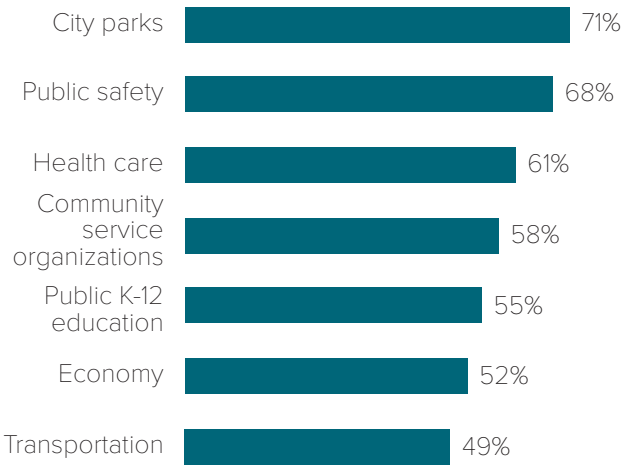
How would you rate your community on this issue?

When asked about characteristics of their community, about 7 in 10 rated city parks and public safety positively, as "good" or "excellent." This was followed by roughly 6 in 10 who rated health care and community service organizations positively. A majority of residents ranked public schools and the economy in their community positively, while residents were evenly split regarding whether transportation was a positive or a negative for their community.

AGE: The percentage of individuals rating their community positively tends to increase with age, except for GenZ. These youngest adults are often as optimistic about their communities as any age group. **Across all issues, millennials are typically the least likely to rate their communities positively while older adults are most likely**, with a 15 percentage point gap between the two groups, on average. Transportation is an exception, where about half of both millennials and older adults rate it positively. However, 61 percent of GenZ rates transportation positively, exceeding all other groups by a 10 percent margin.

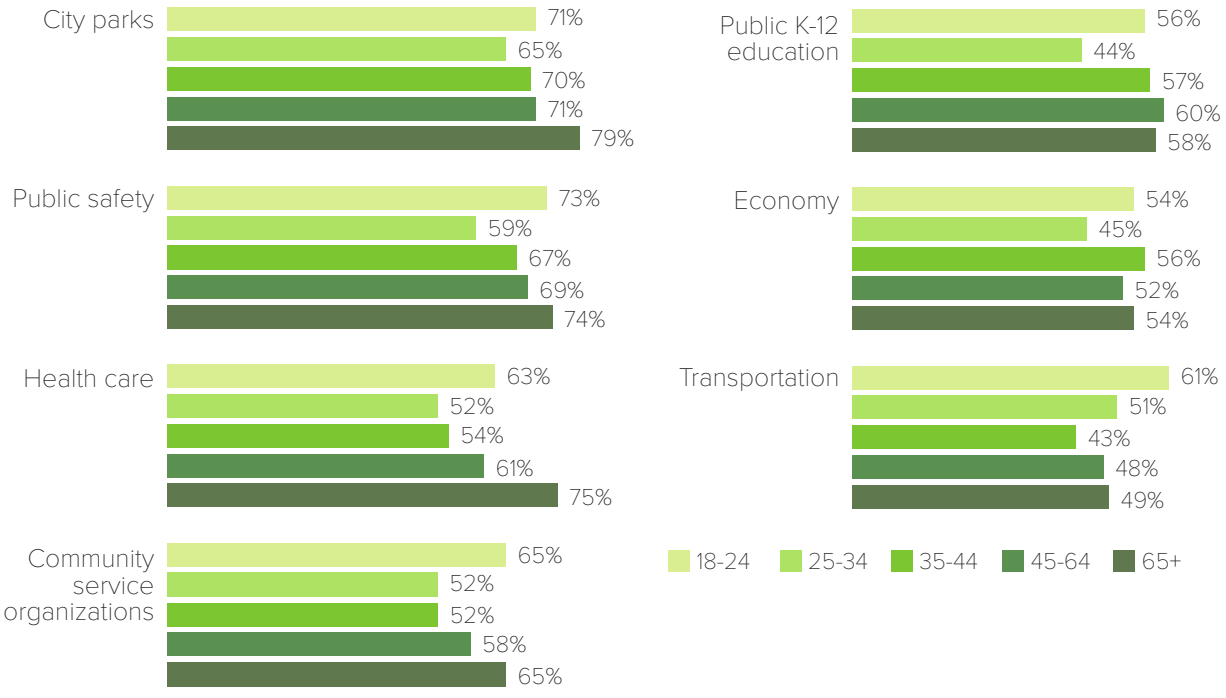
ALL RESPONDENTS

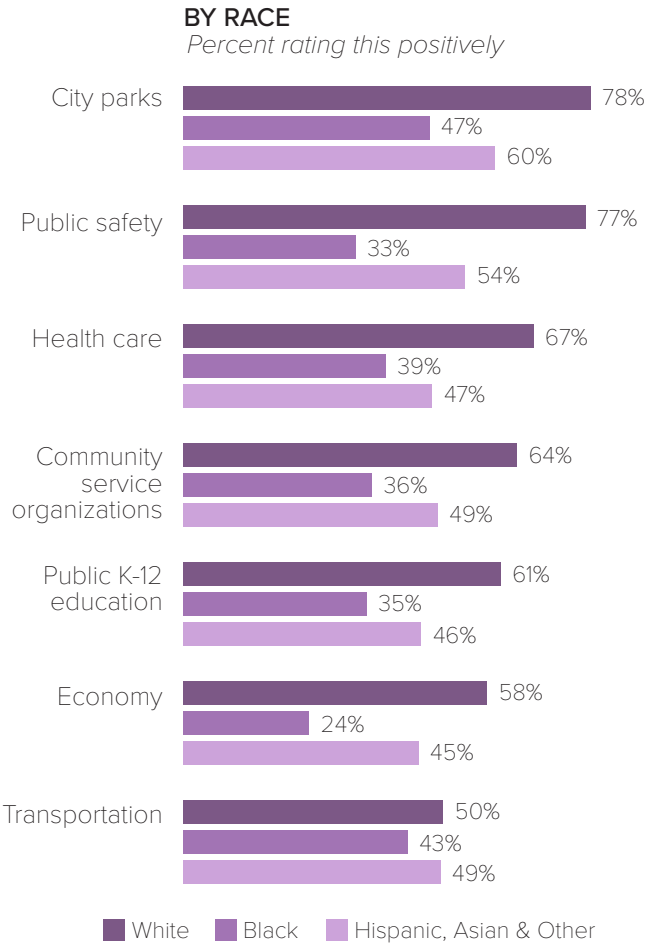
Percent rating this positively in their community

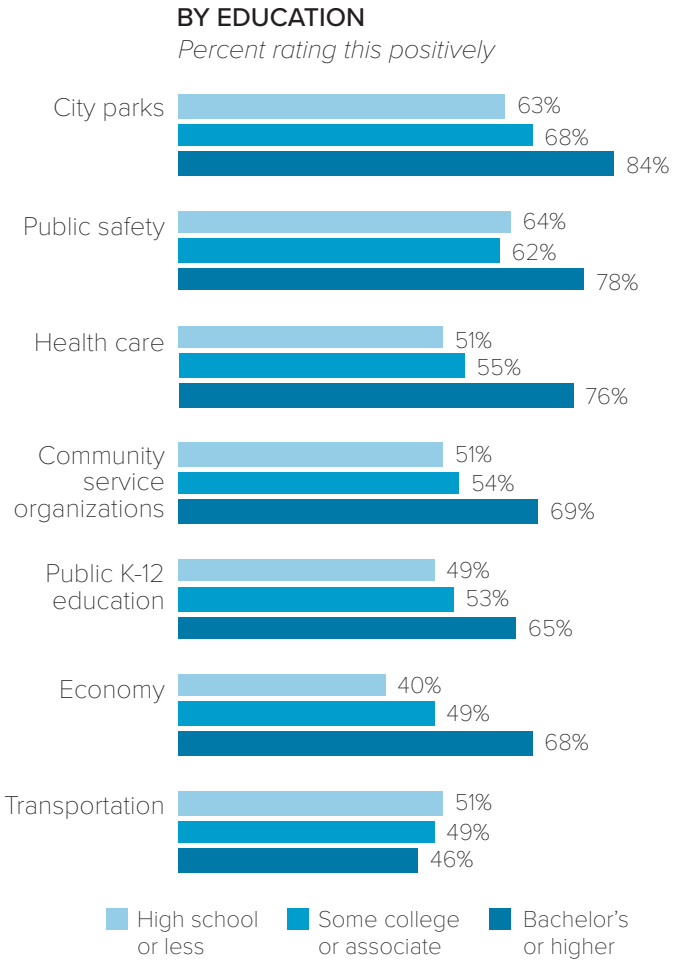


BY AGE

Percent rating this positively







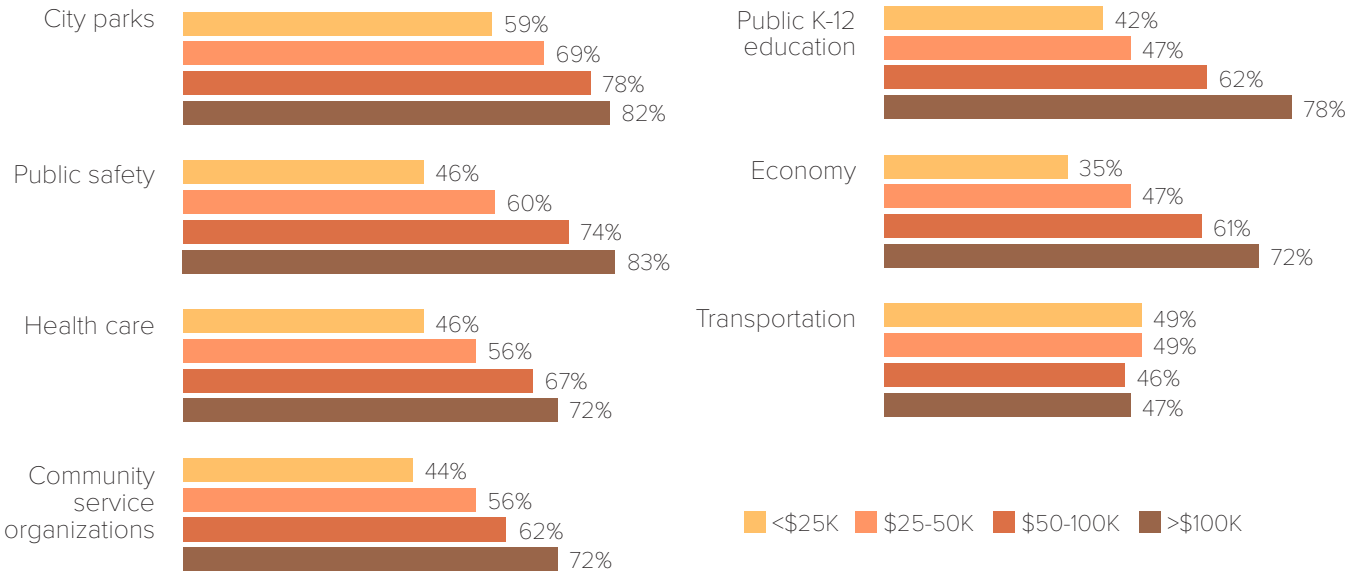
RACE: White and black perceptions of their communities are so starkly different that it seems they must live isolated from each other, likely a result of the region's pattern of residential racial segregation. Only a third of blacks rate their community's public safety positively, compared to over three-quarters of whites. Similarly, a quarter of blacks rate their community's economy positively while nearly 60 percent of whites do. On average, the share of residents rating their community "good" or "excellent" is 32 percentage points higher for whites than blacks. The average disparity between whites and Hispanics and Asians is just over half that, or 17 percentage points. Only transportation is rated similarly across race and ethnicity, as about half of both whites and Hispanics and Asians rate it positively and 43 percent of blacks do.

EDUCATION: Those with the most education are also the most positive about their communities across most issues, by an average of 16 percentage points relative to those with lower levels of education. To a lesser degree, residents with some college or an associate degree are generally more positive about their communities than those with a high school degree or less, by an average of 4 percentage points. The main exception is transportation, where the ordering is reversed and all residents are tightly clustered around the regional average positive rating of 49 percent, regardless of education level.

INCOME: Income has as strong an influence on perceptions of community quality as race, with disparities every bit as large. Those with higher incomes are better able to choose to live in a community that meets their expectations. As a result, across nearly all issues, those with the highest incomes are much more likely to view their community positively than those with the lowest incomes, by an average margin of 31 percent. The lone exception is transportation, which again levels the distinctions between income groups. Only 47 percent of those with the highest incomes rate transportation in their communities positively, which is slightly lower than the 49 percent of those in the lowest income group.

BY INCOME

Percent rating this positively



How safe do you feel?

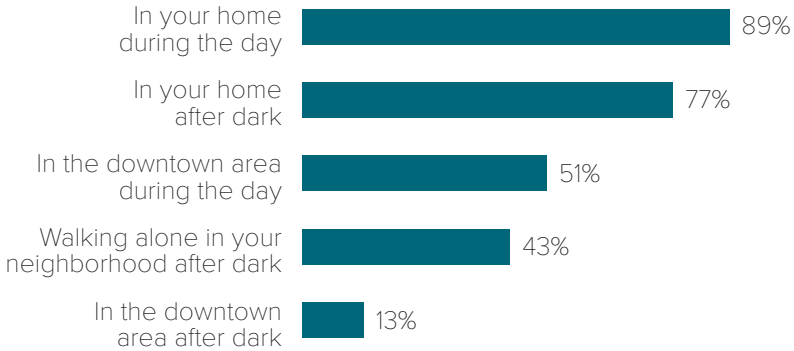
Crime and violence ranked second in the share of residents selecting it as the most important community issue. This question examines where residents feel safe.

The highest proportion, **nearly nine in 10, say they feel very safe in their home during the day**, while about three-quarters say they feel very safe there even after dark. **But only about four in 10 say they feel very safe walking in their own neighborhood alone after dark**.

This is lower than the share of area residents who feel safe walking downtown during the day, a place most residents do not typically frequent since only 10 percent of them work there. An even smaller share actually live downtown, though many may occasionally visit for a concert or other entertainment venue. The combination of an unfamiliar place and large crowds at those venues likely contribute to the low 13 percent share of people who feel very safe walking around downtown at night.

ALL RESPONDENTS

Percent feeling very safe



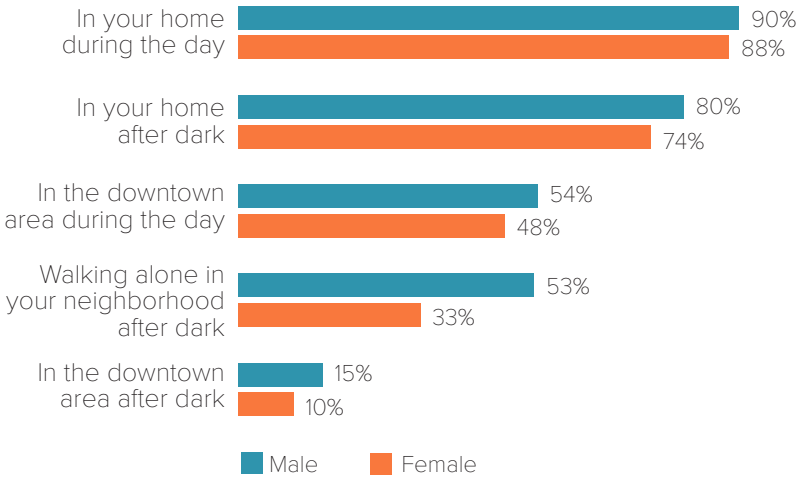
GENDER: Women tend to feel less safe than men, with the exception of when they are in their own home during the day where approximately 90 percent of both men and women feel very safe. In other times and places, however, women are substantially less likely to feel very safe. This is especially true when walking alone in their neighborhood at night. Then, while over half of men feel very safe, only a third of women do. Women are similarly less likely than men to feel safe downtown, either day or night. However, the difference in the share of men and women feeling very safe downtown is much smaller, only 5 to 6 percentage points.

AGE: The percent feeling very safe tends to modestly decline with age. For example, 91 percent of GenZ feels very safe in their homes during the day while 86 percent of older adults do. After dark, these percentages shift downward in a parallel fashion, to 80 percent for GenZ and 74 percent for older adults. Contradicting this general tendency, however, millennials appear to feel slightly less safe after dark than older adults when either at home or walking around their neighborhood alone. At home after dark, 72 percent of millennials feel very safe, compared to 74 percent of older adults. When walking alone in their neighborhoods after dark, 31 percent of millennials feel very safe compared to 34 percent of older adults

RACE: Racial disparities in feeling safe where one lives are large between whites and blacks but more modest between whites and Hispanics and Asians. Disparities exist even when home during the day, as 92 percent of whites feel very safe while only 80 percent of blacks do, and 86 percent of Hispanics and Asians. The disparity between whites and blacks grows from 12 to 20 percentage points once the sun goes down, as 80 percent of whites feel very safe compared to 60 percent of blacks. That gap in feeling safe is maintained when walking in the neighborhood at night as nearly half of whites feel very safe compared to about a quarter of blacks. Interestingly, **differences in perceptions of safety by race and ethnicity essentially disappear downtown**.

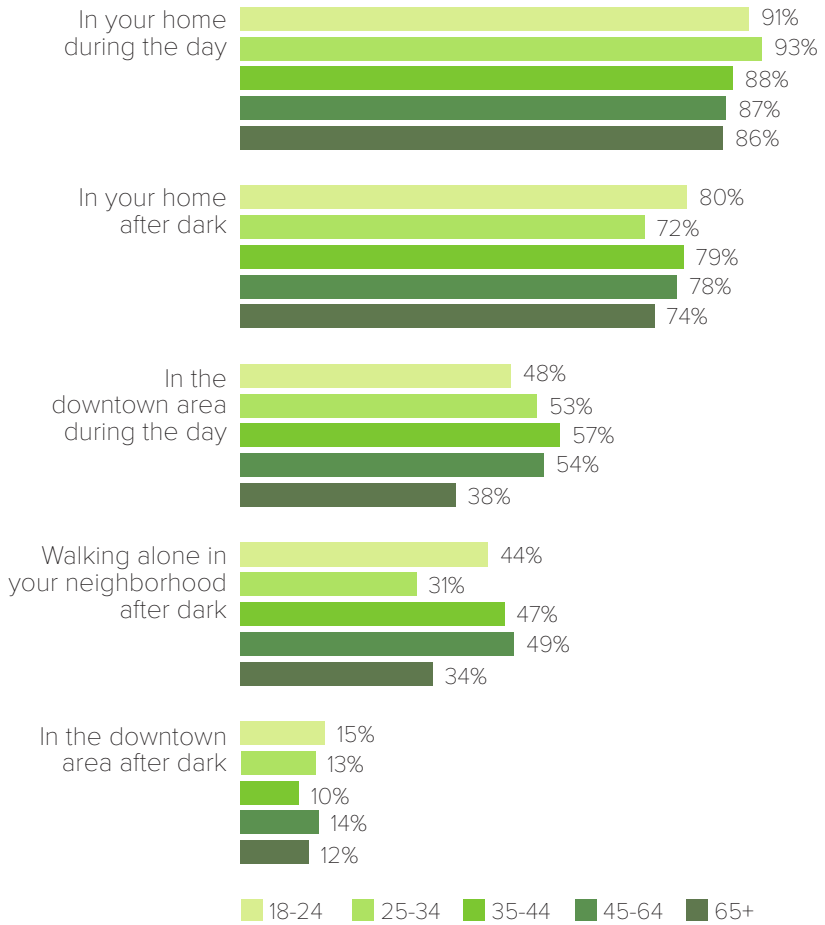
BY GENDER

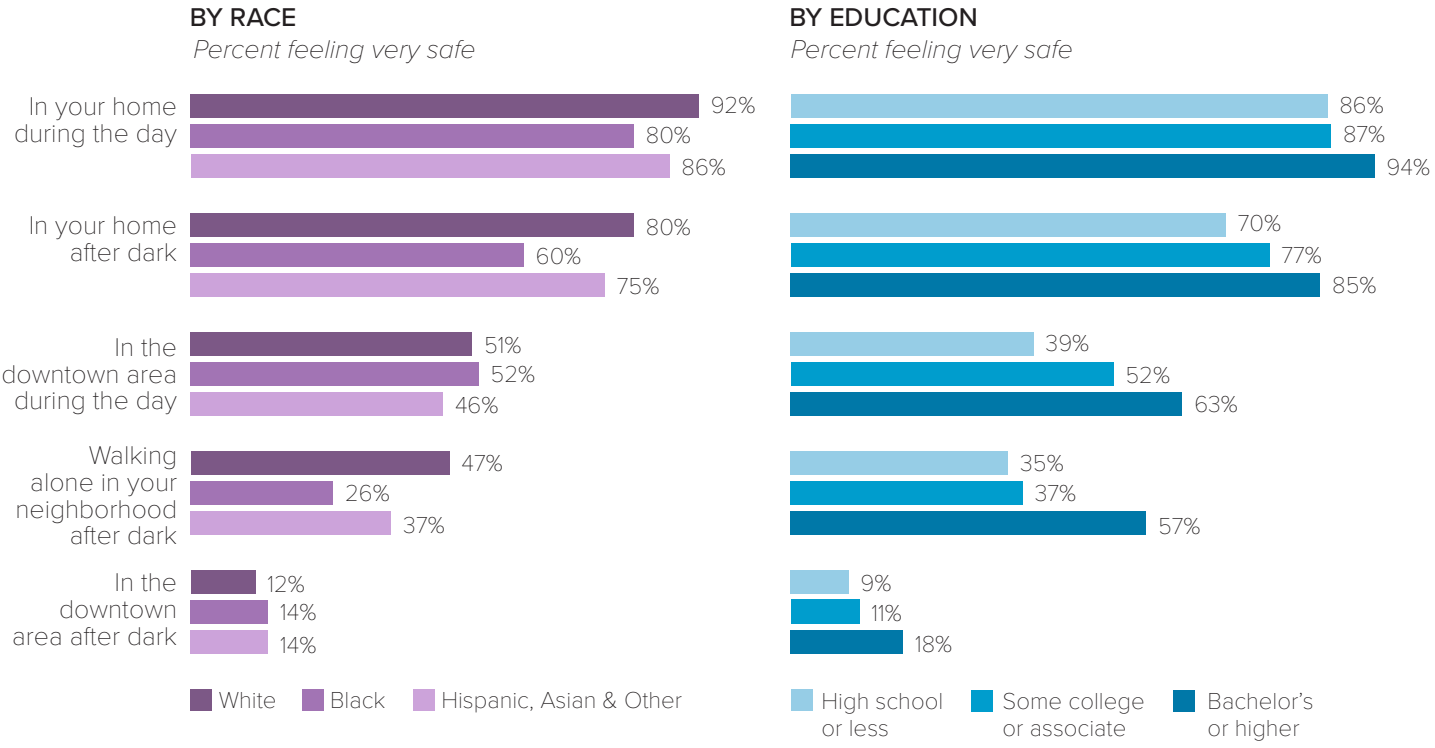
Percent feeling very safe



BY AGE

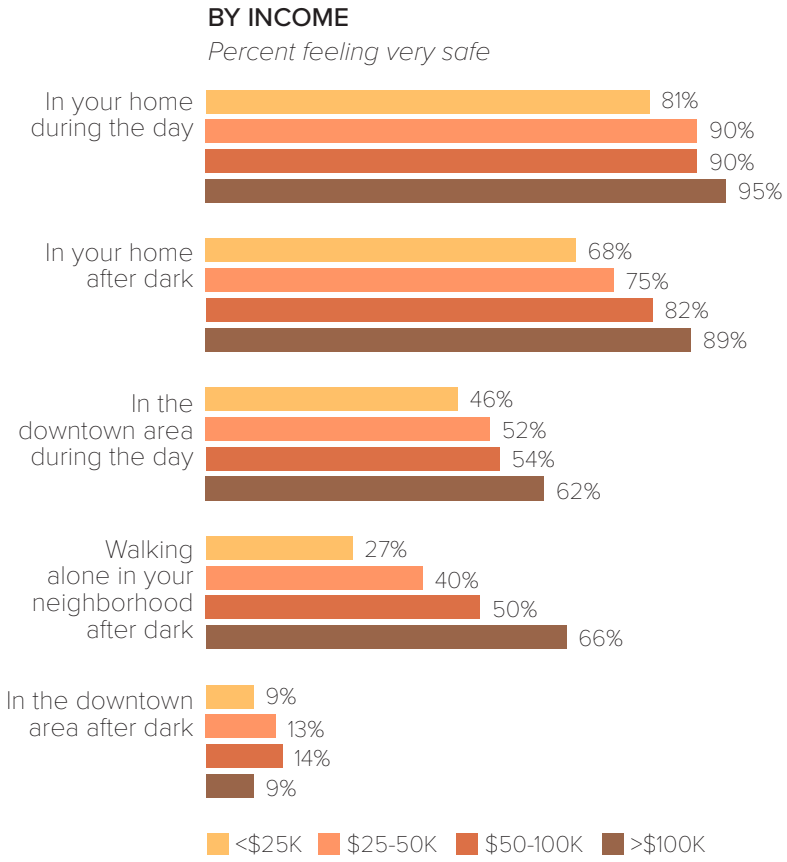
Percent feeling very safe





EDUCATION: Feeling safe generally increases with educational attainment as, for example, 94 percent of those with a bachelor's degree feel very safe at home, compared to 86 percent of those with no more than a high school degree. In fact, a **substantial majority of those with a bachelor's degree feel very safe even when downtown during the day or walking alone in their neighborhood after dark,** compared to under 40 percent for those with a high school degree. The share of bachelor's degree holders who feel very safe downtown after dark (18 percent) is the largest of any demographic group.

INCOME: Income is strongly positively associated with feeling safe. The share of those with the highest incomes who feel very safe at home during the day, at home after dark and walking alone in their in their neighborhoods, at 95 percent, 89 percent and 66 percent, respectively, are the highest of any demographic group. **Conversely, the share of those with the lowest incomes who feel very safe are on par with the low levels experienced by blacks**. Only in downtown after dark do those with incomes above $100,000 per year feel less safe than other income groups.



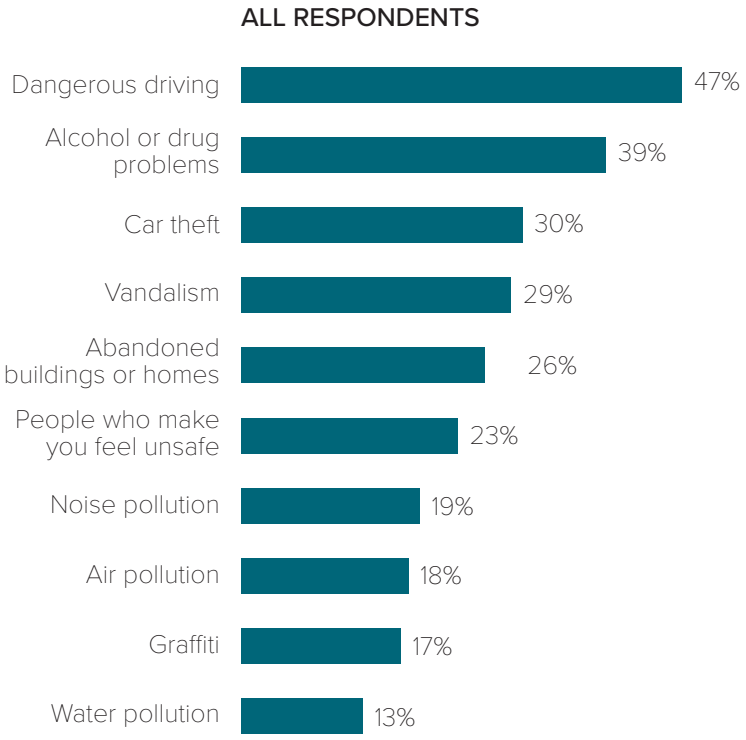
What's been a problem in your neighborhood?

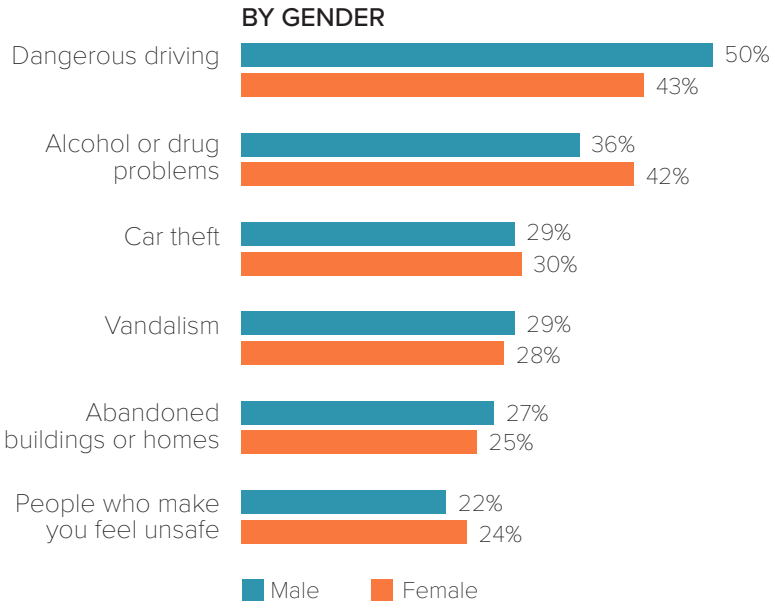
Probing further on neighborhood conditions that might make one feel unsafe reveals that **dangerous driving was most often cited as a problem, by 47 percent of residents, followed by alcohol or drugs** at 39 percent. Between 20 and 30 percent of residents also thought that car theft, vandalism, abandoned buildings and threatening people were problems in their neighborhood. Pollution and graffiti were problems for 10 to 20 percent of the adult population.

GENDER: Men more often think dangerous driving is more of a problem than alcohol and drugs, 50 percent compared to 36 percent, while **women see them as equally important** problems in their neighborhood, with 42 or 43 percent saying each is a problem. Relatively equal shares of men and women say car theft, vandalism, abandoned buildings and threatening people are problems.

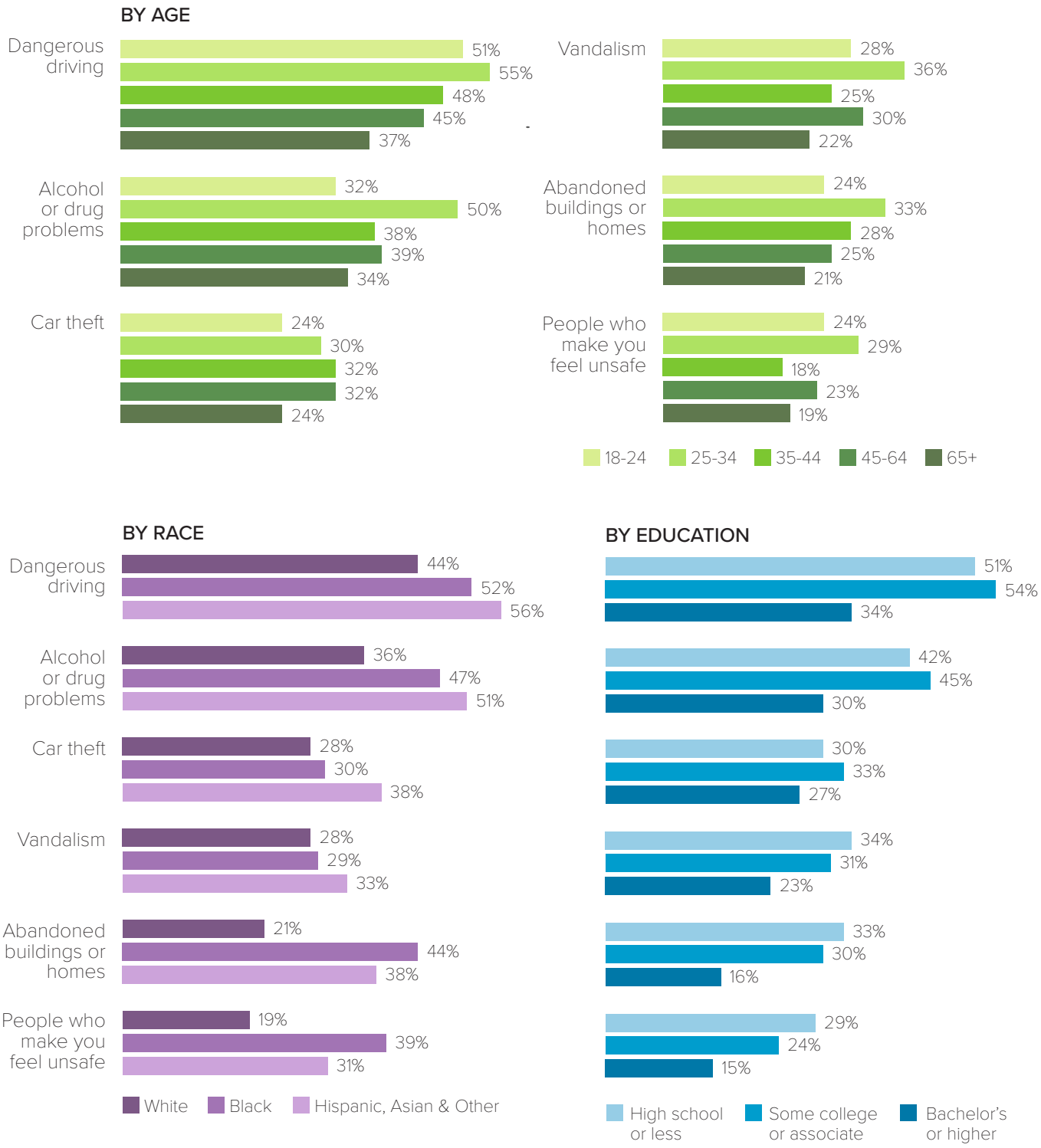
AGE: Millennials, who were the least likely to rate their community positively, are often the most likely to experience problems in their neighborhoods, with at least half identifying issues with dangerous drivers and alcohol or drugs while about a third must deal with vandalism, abandoned buildings or threatening people. Conversely, older adults and GenZ are among the least likely to experience neighborhood problems, which is consistent with them also being the most likely to rate their communities positively.

RACE: Blacks, Hispanics and Asians identify problems in their neighborhoods much more frequently than whites, but the minority experiencing the greatest disparity varies depending on the issue. Some 56 percent of Hispanics and Asians say dangerous driving is a problem in their neighborhoods, compared to 44 percent of whites, a difference of 12 points. Compared to whites, Hispanics and Asians also experience problems with alcohol and drugs, car theft and vandalism at rates higher than whites, by 15 percent, 10 percent and 5 percent, respectively. **The largest racial disparities exist, however, with respect to abandoned buildings and people that residents feel unsafe. Blacks experience these problems at rates that exceed whites by 20 percent or more**.





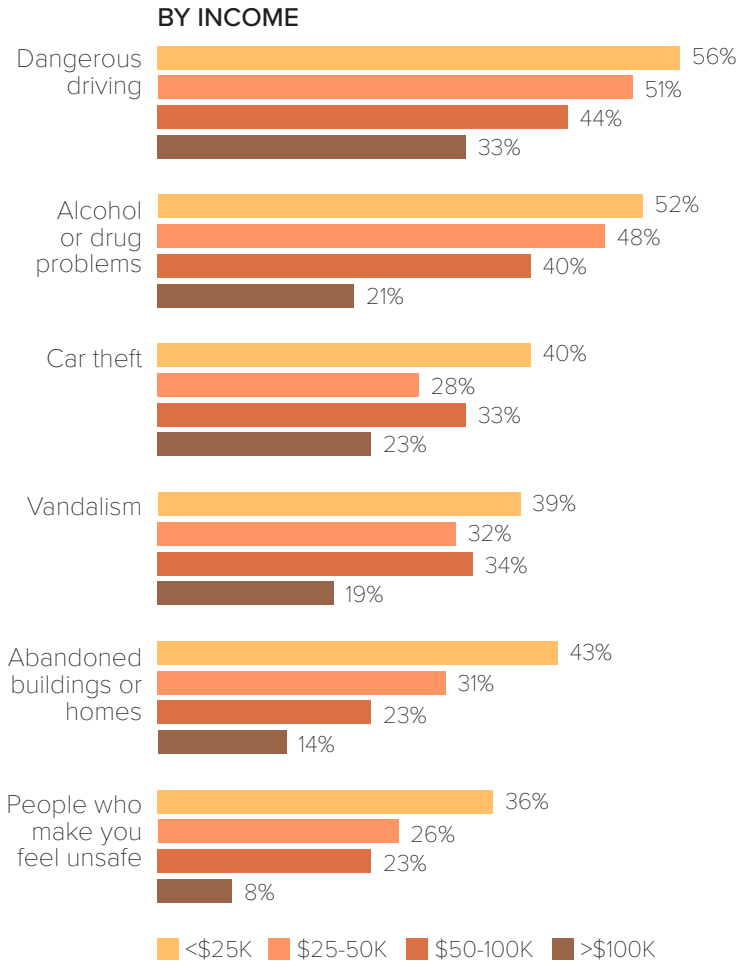
EDUCATION: Residents with a bachelor's degree or above are much less likely to live in neighborhoods where there are safety problems than those with an associate or high school degree. Acquiring some college or an associate degree does not seem to allow residents to live in a neighborhood that is



consistently more safe, however, compared to those who have only a high school education. **Dangerous driving is the most common neighborhood problem for all education levels, and it also has the largest discrepancy across education levels**, as there is a 20-point spread between those with some college or associate degree who rate this as a problem and those with a bachelor's degree. Abandoned buildings has the second-highest disparity, with a 17-point spread between those with a high school degree or less and those with a bachelor's degree.

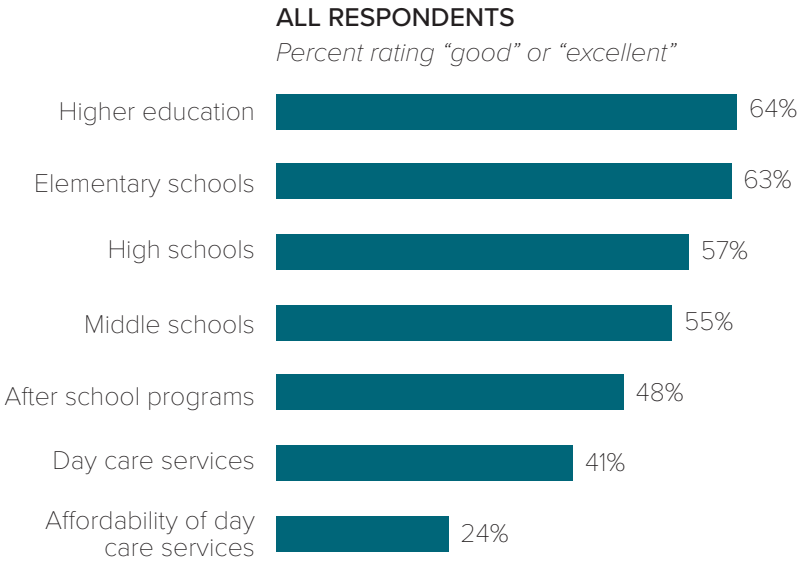
INCOME: Similar to education, **those with the highest levels of income are much less likely to experience neighborhood safety problems than those with the lowest levels**. Dangerous driving and alcohol and drugs are cited most frequently as problems by all income levels. They also exhibit large disparities between those with high and low incomes, 23 percent and 31 percent respectively. **While the disparity for alcohol and drugs is the largest, it is followed closely by differences in low vs. high income residents experiencing abandoned buildings (29 percent) and threatening people (28 percent) in their neighborhoods.**

While safety issues tend to decline with income, this is not entirely consistent across all issues. For example, those with upper-middle incomes ($50,000 to $100,000) say car theft and vandalism is a problem slightly more often than those with lower-middle incomes ($25,000 to $50,000).



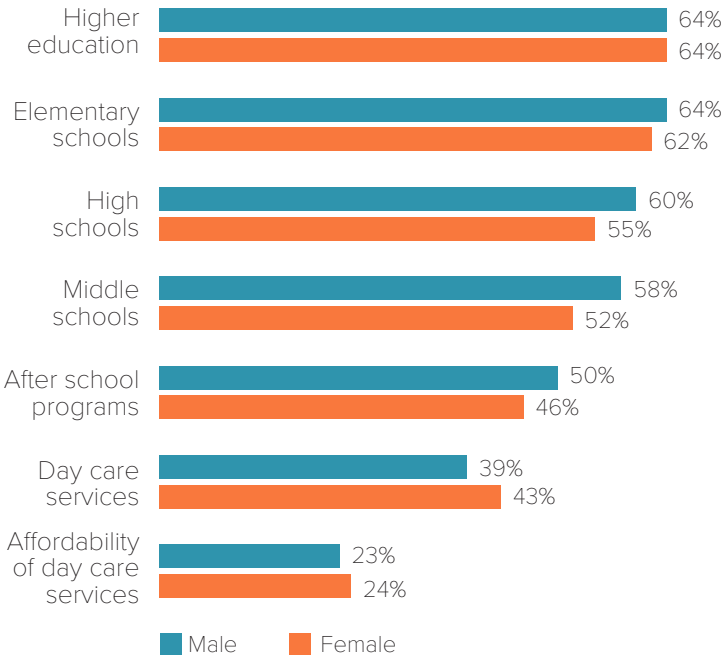
How would you rate the quality of education?

Higher education and elementary schools in the region are rated "good" or "excellent" by nearly two-thirds of area residents, the highest among educational institutions. High schools and middle schools are rated positively by solid majorities of residents, while after school programs are rated positively by slightly less than a majority. **Day care services and affordability were rated positively least often by area residents**, with just 41 percent saying the services are "good" or "excellent" and only 24 percent saying the same about affordability.



BY GENDER

Percent rating "good" or "excellent"

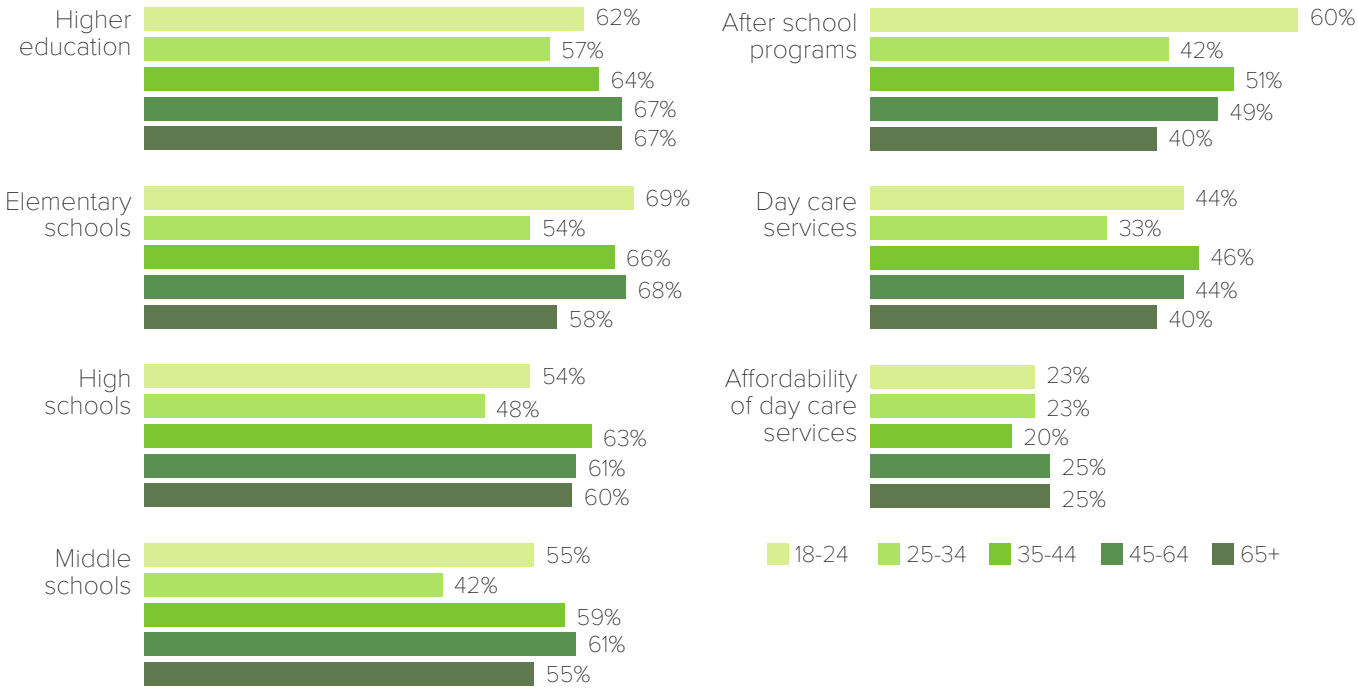


GENDER: Men and women share similar perceptions about the quality of the region's educational institutions. Men are somewhat more likely than women to have a favorable view of high schools (60 percent to 55 percent), middle schools (58 percent to 52 percent) and after school programs (50 percent to 46 percent). Women are somewhat more likely to have favorable views of day care services (43 percent to 39 percent).

AGE: Compared to other age groups, **millennials consistently have the smallest proportion rating the quality of educational institutions "good" or "excellent," while GenX and baby boomers typically have among the highest proportions.** For example, slightly over half of millennials rate elementary schools positively, compared to two-thirds of GenX and baby boomers and nearly 60 percent of older adults. Given that GenX and younger boomers are the primary consumers of primary and secondary education, their relatively high levels of support can be considered good news. The share of GenZ giving educational institutions a positive rating is always higher than millennials. The GenZ share is usually less than that of GenX and baby boomers, but roughly equal for elementary schools and higher for after school programs.

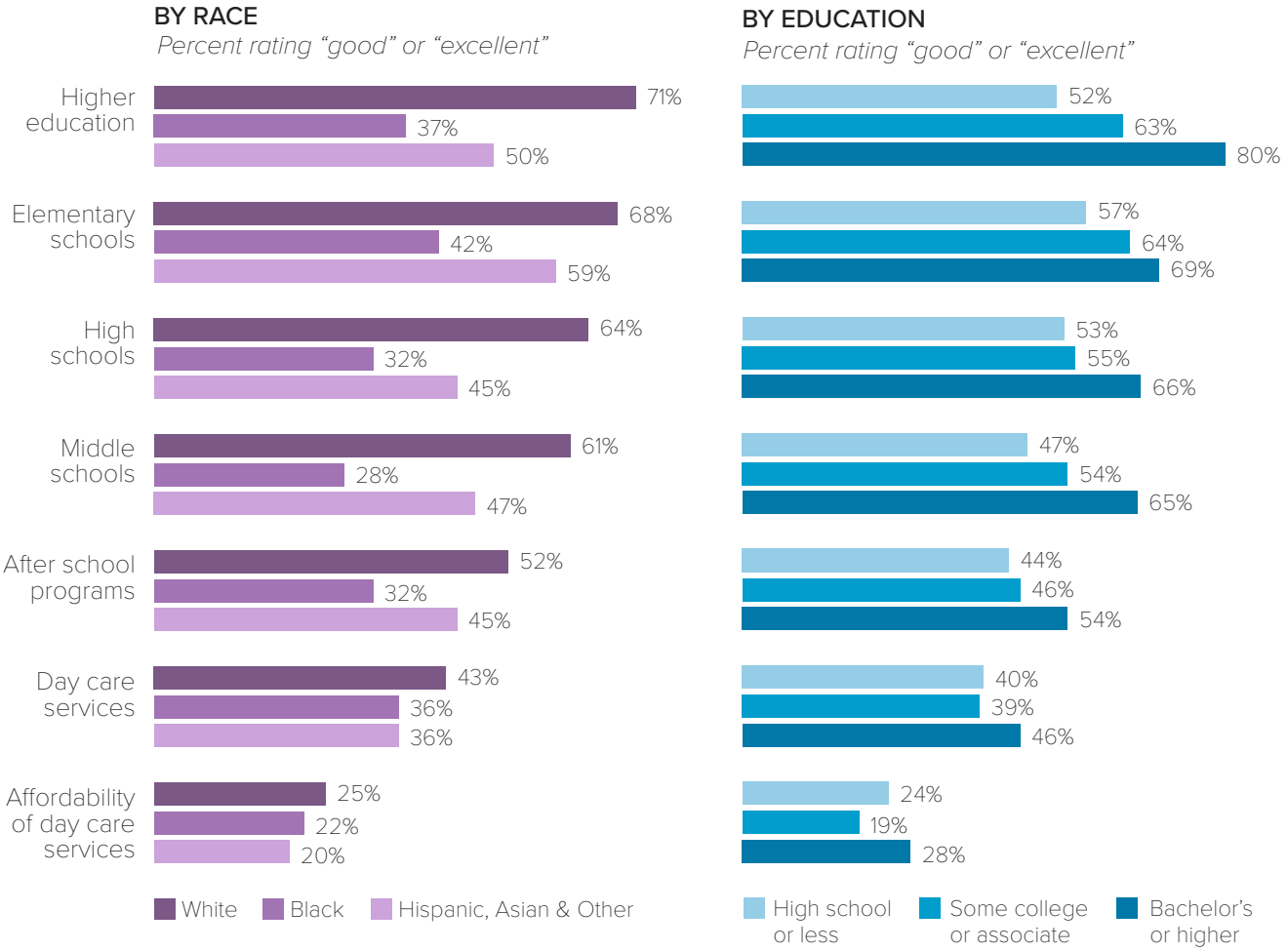
BY AGE

Percent rating "good" or "excellent"

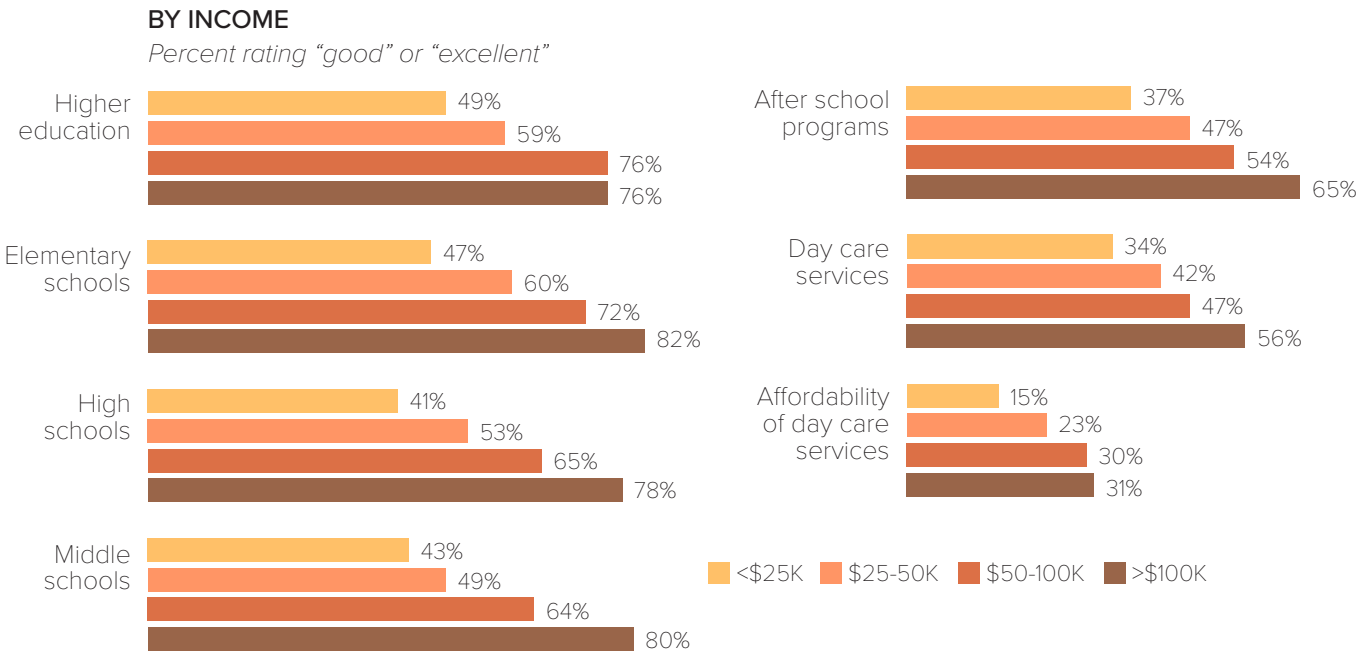


RACE: Racial disparities are large with respect to perceptions of school quality, but less so for after school programs and day care. For example, 64 percent of whites and 32 percent blacks rate high schools "good" or "excellent," making **blacks half as likely as whites to rate their middle and high schools positively**. Similar levels of disparity exist between whites and blacks in their perceptions of middle school and higher education while differences are somewhat narrower for elementary schools. In general, the **disparities between whites and Hispanics and Asians regarding school quality are about half that of whites and blacks**. For day care services and day care affordability, the difference in the share of positive perceptions between whites and either blacks or Hispanics and Asians is at most 6 percent, much less than the difference in school or after school perceptions.

EDUCATION: Residents' level of education is strongly related to positive perceptions of the quality of the region's educational institutions. This is especially true for higher education where 80 percent of those with a bachelor's degree rate area colleges and universities positively, compared to roughly half of those with a high school degree or less and 63 percent of those with some college or an associate degree. But this relationship also holds for all the other school levels, after school programs and, to a lesser extent, day care. On average, the difference in the share of people rating schools positively between those with the highest and lowest educational attainment is 16 percent, while the difference in the ranking of day care positively between the two groups averages 5 percent.

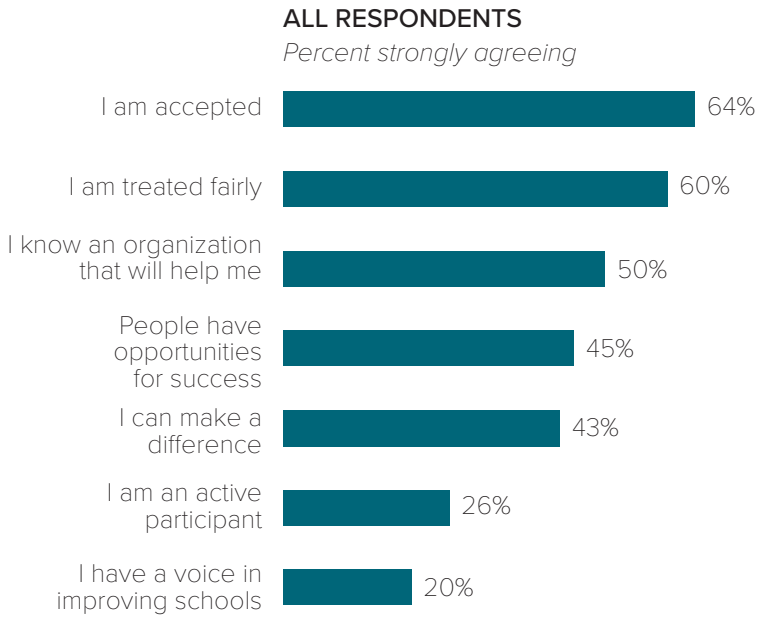


INCOME: Income is the variable most consistently related to the perceived quality of the region's educational institutions, as the share of residents rating them positively rises with income across all educational institutions, even day care. This relationship produces some of the largest differences in the share of people rating these institutions positively. For example, 82 percent of those with high incomes rate them "good" or "excellent," compared to only 47 percent of those with the lowest incomes, a 35 percent difference. The situation is similar for high schools and middle schools, each with a 37 percent difference in how those schools are perceived by high and low income adults. Even though less than a third of high income residents say day care affordability is good or better, this is still 16 points better than the 15 percent of low income households who rate it that high.



How strongly do you feel connected to your community?

How strongly people feel that they are a part of their community significantly impacts their quality of life. Various aspects of what it means to feel connected are considered in this question, and the responses break into three groups. At the top end, **most people strongly agree they are accepted by their community (64 percent) and that they are treated fairly** (60 percent). In the middle group, between 40 and 50 percent of residents strongly agree they know an organization to turn to if they have an urgent need, that people have opportunities for success in their community and that they can personally make a difference in it. However, only a quarter of residents strongly agree they are active participants in their community, and **only one in five strongly agree they have a voice in improving their community's schools**.

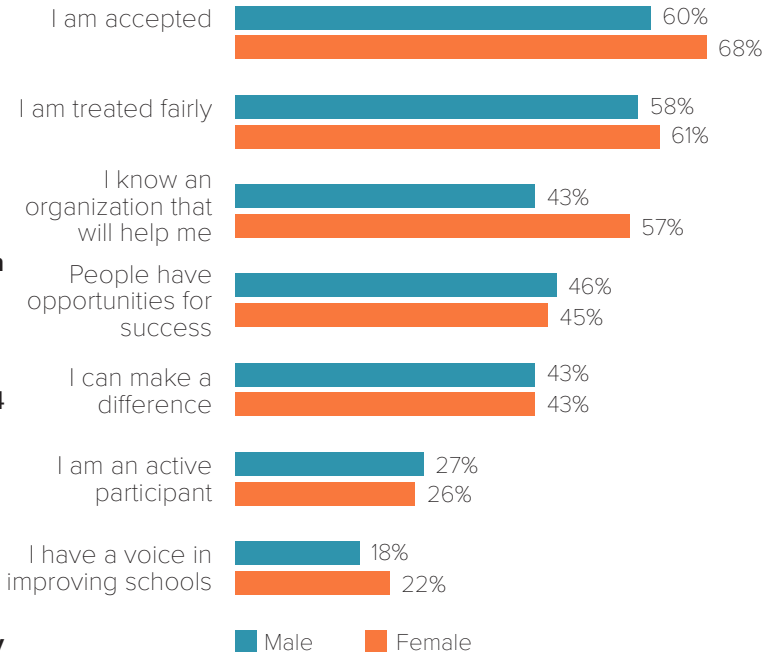


GENDER: Women appear to be somewhat more connected to their communities than men, as 68 percent strongly agree they are accepted, compared to 60 percent of men. More strikingly, 57 percent of women strongly agree they know of an organization in their community they can turn to for help, but only 43 percent of men do. Also, slightly higher proportions of women than men agree they are treated fairly and have a voice in improving schools.

AGE: The relationship between age and connection to community varies depending on the aspect of connection being probed. The proportion of residents strongly agreeing they are accepted is uniformly high regardless of age, between 62 and 64 percent, while the proportion who say they actively participate in their community is uniformly low, between 23 to 25 percent —except for GenX, whose participation rate is 35 percent. The proportion strongly agreeing they are treated fairly in their community tends to rise with age, from 55 to 63 percent, while **the proportion knowing a community agency to turn to for help and believing that they can make a difference declines with age**, from 54 to 45 percent and 49 to 38 percent, respectively. The proportion strongly agreeing they have a voice in improving schools has mixed relationship with age, ranging from a high of 31 percent for GenZ to a low of 16 percent for millennials.

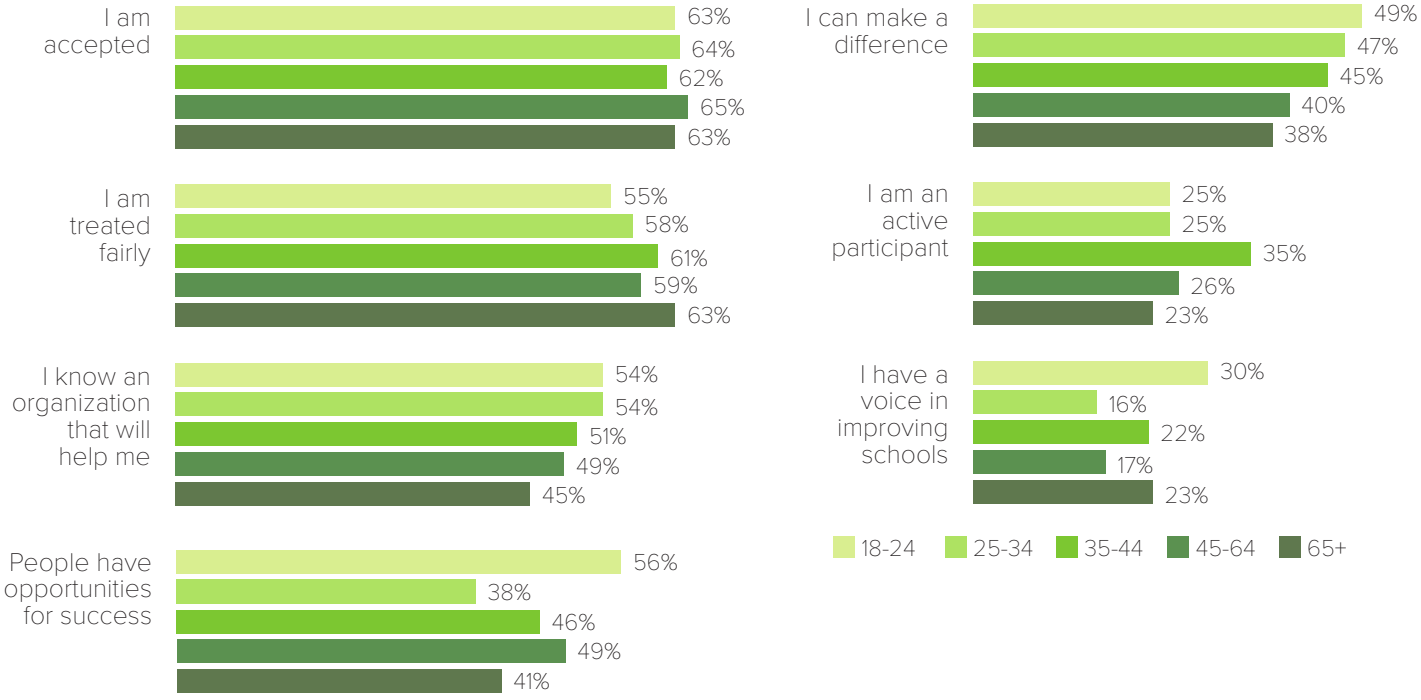
BY GENDER

Percent strongly agreeing



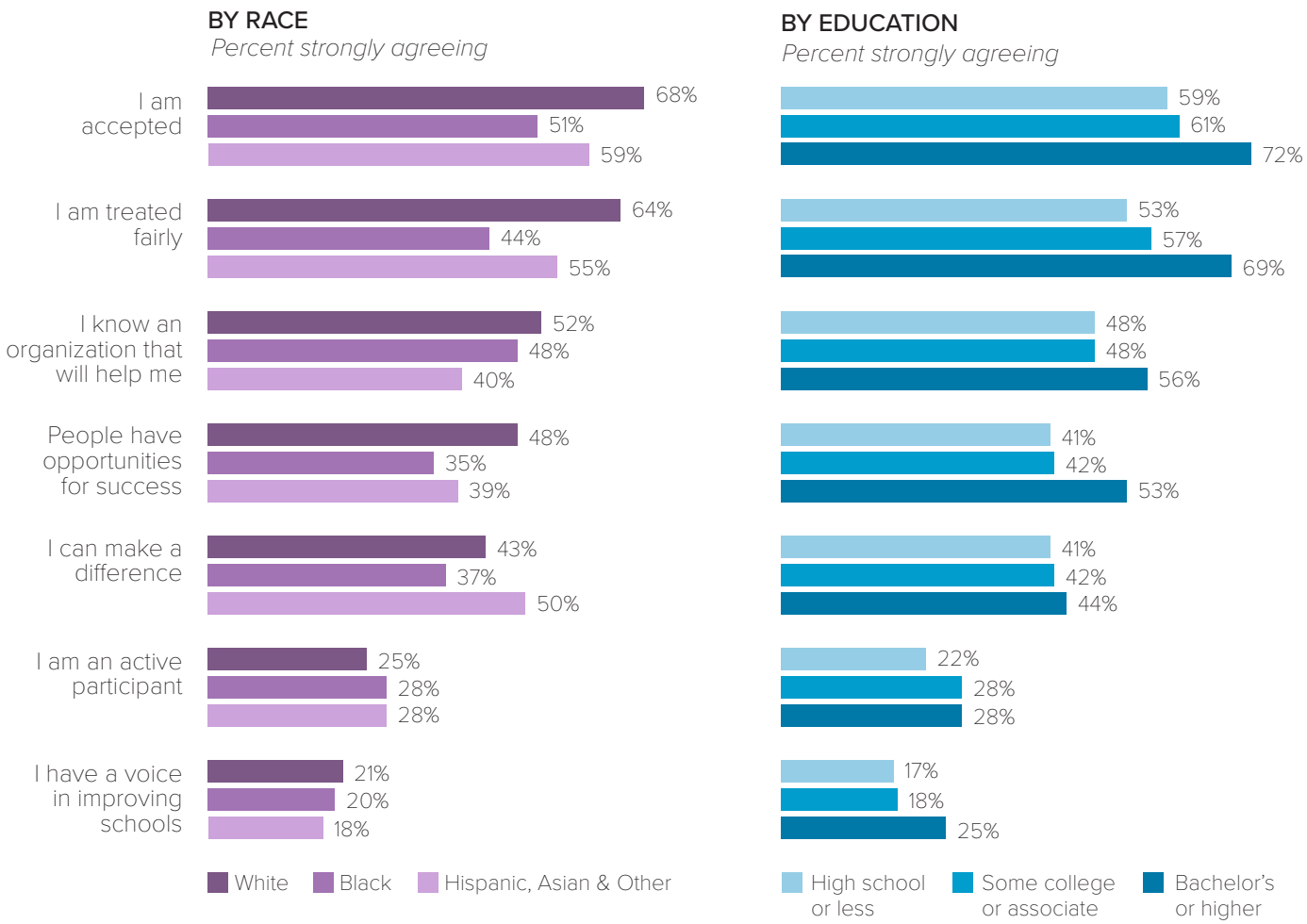
BY AGE

Percent strongly agreeing



RACE: Racial disparities exist with respect to perceptions of connection to community, but the differences are not as stark as other perceptions. **The biggest gap is in the perceptions of whites and blacks with respect to being treated fairly**, where 64 percent of whites strongly agree but only 44 percent of blacks do, a 20-point difference. The gap is similarly large, 17 percent, with respect to feeling accepted, where 68 percent of whites strongly agree but only 51 percent of blacks do. A somewhat smaller 13 percent difference separates whites and blacks regarding whether people in their community have access to opportunities. On these three aspects of community connection, the gap for Hispanics and Asians is close to half that of blacks. **But, with respect to their capacity to make a difference in their community, Hispanics and Asians strongly agree at higher rates than whites**, 50 percent to 43 percent. They also strongly agree they are active participants at higher rates than whites. The two situations where Hispanics and Asians appear less connected to their communities than whites or blacks are their knowledge of an organization to help them in times of need, and to a lesser extent, their voice in improving schools.

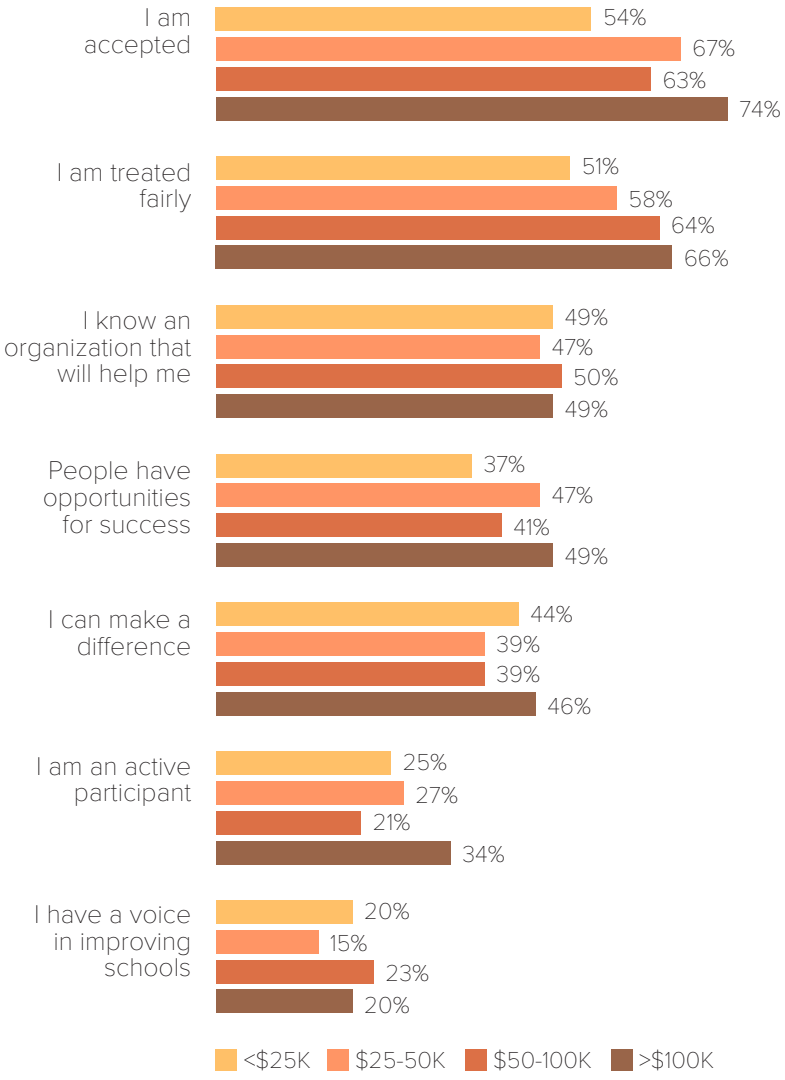
EDUCATION: Educational attainment is positively related to a sense of community connection. Some 72 percent of those with a bachelor's degree strongly agree they are accepted in their community, compared to 59 percent of those with a high school degree or less, a 13-point difference. This gap widens to 16 percent with respect to being treated fairly, while it narrows to 6 to 8 percent concerning whether they know where to turn for help, whether people have opportunities to succeed, whether they participate actively in their community or whether they have a voice in improving schools. **There is closest agreement among levels of education concerning whether they can make a difference in their community**, to which 41 percent of those with a high school degree and 44 percent of those with a bachelor's degree strongly agree.



INCOME: Unlike education, income's relationship to a sense of community connection is, at best, mixed. A positive correlation is clearest for those who agree they are being treated fairly, where 66 percent of those with high incomes strongly agree compared to 51 percent of those with low incomes. The relationship is still positive, but not as consistently so, with respect to whether they are accepted, believe people have opportunities to succeed or are active community participants. In these cases, those with the highest incomes strongly agree more often than those with the lowest incomes by 20-point, 12-point and 9-point margins, respectively. Yet in each case, those with lower-middle incomes strongly agree more often than those with upper-middle incomes. Finally, there appears to be little relationship with income concerning how much residents strongly agree they know an organization to turn to for help, they can make a difference in their community, or have a voice in improving schools.

BY INCOME

Percent rating "good" or "excellent"



3. Metro Quality of Life: How well is the region providing what residents need?

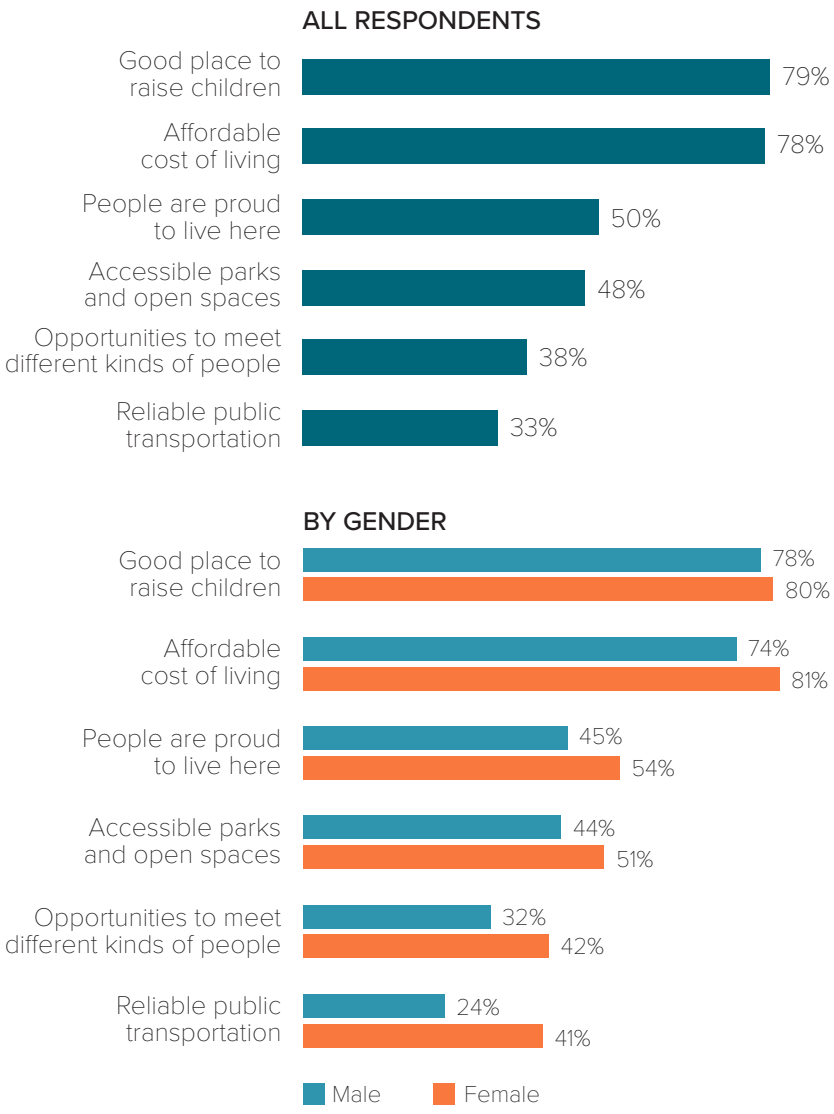
How important are these characteristics for a metro region when deciding where to live?

One half of survey participants were asked which metro characteristics are very important when deciding where to live. For residents of the Kansas City area, **two characteristics stand out — being a good place to raise children and an affordable place to live, both of which were selected by nearly 80 percent of respondents** and are in line with the area's reputation.

About half of respondents cited people being proud to live here and accessible parks and open spaces as very important. Providing opportunities to meet different kinds of people was thought to be a very important characteristic by nearly 40 percent of the population, **while reliable public transportation was very important to one-third of the public**.

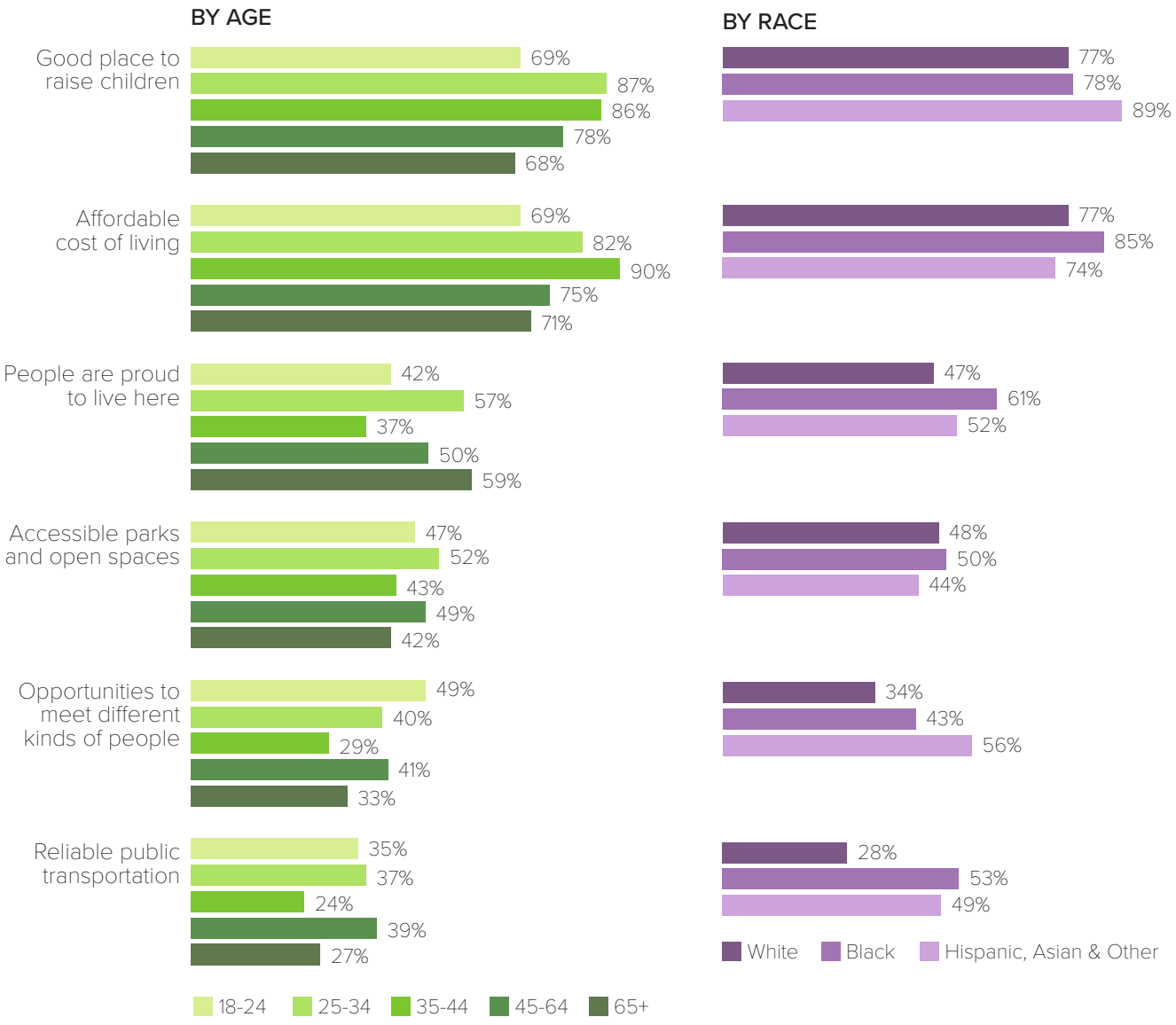
GENDER: Women tended to be more emphatic than men about what is important when deciding where to live, as **the female proportion saying these characteristics are very important was consistently higher than the male proportion**. It's not that men didn't think they were important at all, but they were more likely than women to rate the characteristics as only somewhat important.

While an insignificant 1 percent separates the share of men and share of women who think being a good place to raise children is very important, this separation grows to 7 percent for both affordable cost of living and accessible parks. Fully 9 percent more women than men think being proud to live here is very important, and 10 percent more women think similarly about meeting different kinds of people. Meanwhile, **the share of women who think reliable public transportation is very important when choosing a metro in which to live is higher than the share of men by a 17-point margin**.



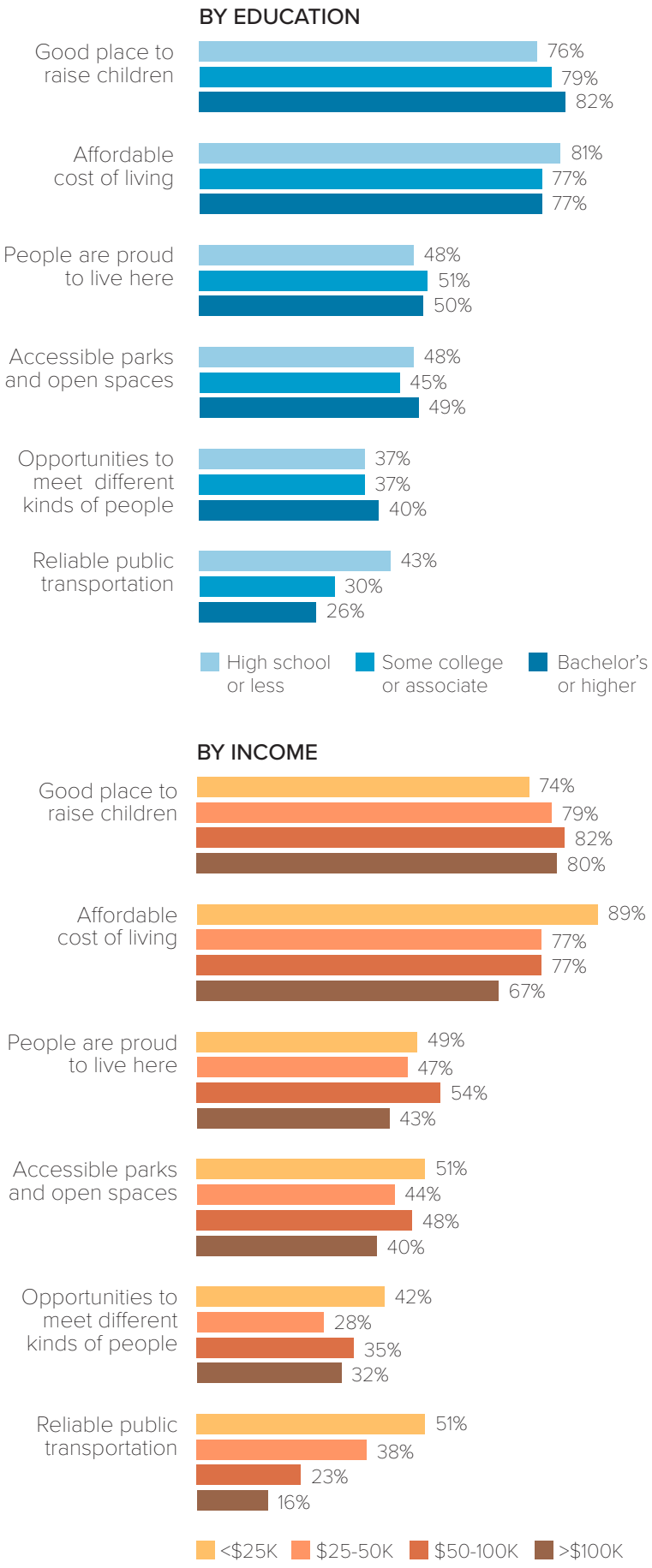
AGE: Unsurprisingly, **being a good place to raise children is most likely to be valued most by the adults most likely to have children — millennials and GenX**, where 86 to 87 percent rated it as a very important metro characteristic when deciding where to live. **GenX, which is the age where needs seem to grow faster than income** (see page 12), **is also the most likely to value an affordable cost of living**, with 90 percent saying it is very important. The remaining characteristics show less of a relationship to age. That people are proud to live here is more important to millennials and older adults, while GenZ is more likely to value opportunities to meet different kinds of people.

RACE: Hispanics and Asians are the most likely to say that being a good place to raise children is very important when deciding where to live, at 89 percent compared to the 77-78 percent for whites and blacks. **Blacks, on the other hand, are more likely to value a metro with an affordable cost of living**, as 85 percent rate it very important compared to 77 percent of whites and 74 percent of Hispanics and Asians. **But the largest racial disparities occur regarding the importance of meeting different kinds of people**, where a 22-point gap exists between whites and Hispanics and Asians, **and the importance of reliable public transportation**, where a 25-point gap exists between whites and blacks.



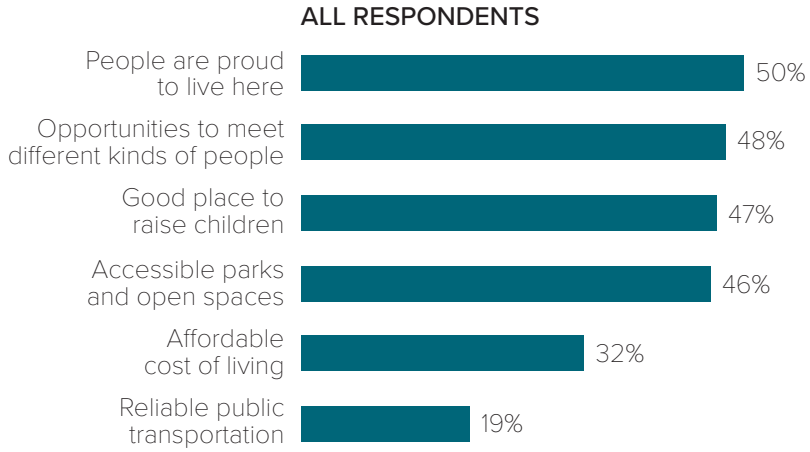
EDUCATION: Educational attainment has only a modest impact on the likelihood of these metro characteristics being very important when deciding where to live. About 82 percent of residents with a bachelor's degree say a good place to raise children is very important, compared to 76 percent of those with a high school degree or less, a 6 percent gap. Conversely, 81 percent of adults with a high school degree say an affordable cost of living is very important, compared to 77 percent of those with a bachelor's degree. The other characteristics have even smaller disparities, except for public transportation. People with a high school degree believe this to be very important for a metro by a wide margin over those with a bachelor's degree, 43 percent to 26 percent, a 17-point difference.

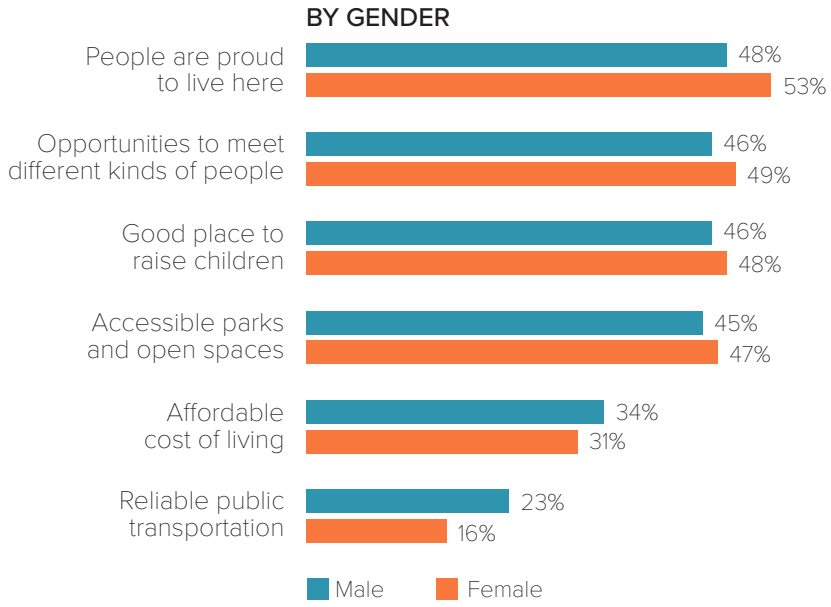
INCOME: The relationship of income to whether these metro characteristics are very important when deciding where to live is mostly negative. This probably makes the most intuitive sense with respect to the importance of having an affordable cost of living, as residents with the least income are much more likely to rate this very important than those with the highest incomes, 89 percent to 67 percent. The negative relationship also makes sense with respect to income and public transportation, since those with the least incomes are much more likely to rely on it. As a result, 51 percent of **those with incomes below $25,000 think it is very important for a metro, compared to only 16 percent of those with incomes above $100,000, a 35-point gap**. Negative relationships also occur between income and the importance of people being proud to live here, the accessibility of parks and open spaces, and the availability of opportunities to meet different kinds of people, although these relationship are both smaller and more inconsistent across income levels. The only metro characteristic where importance is positively related to income is **being a good place to raise children. This is valued highly by all income groups, and the 6 percent difference** between high-income residents (80 percent) and low-income residents (74 percent) who rate it very important **is the smallest among the characteristics examined.**



How well do these characteristics describe the Kansas City metro region?

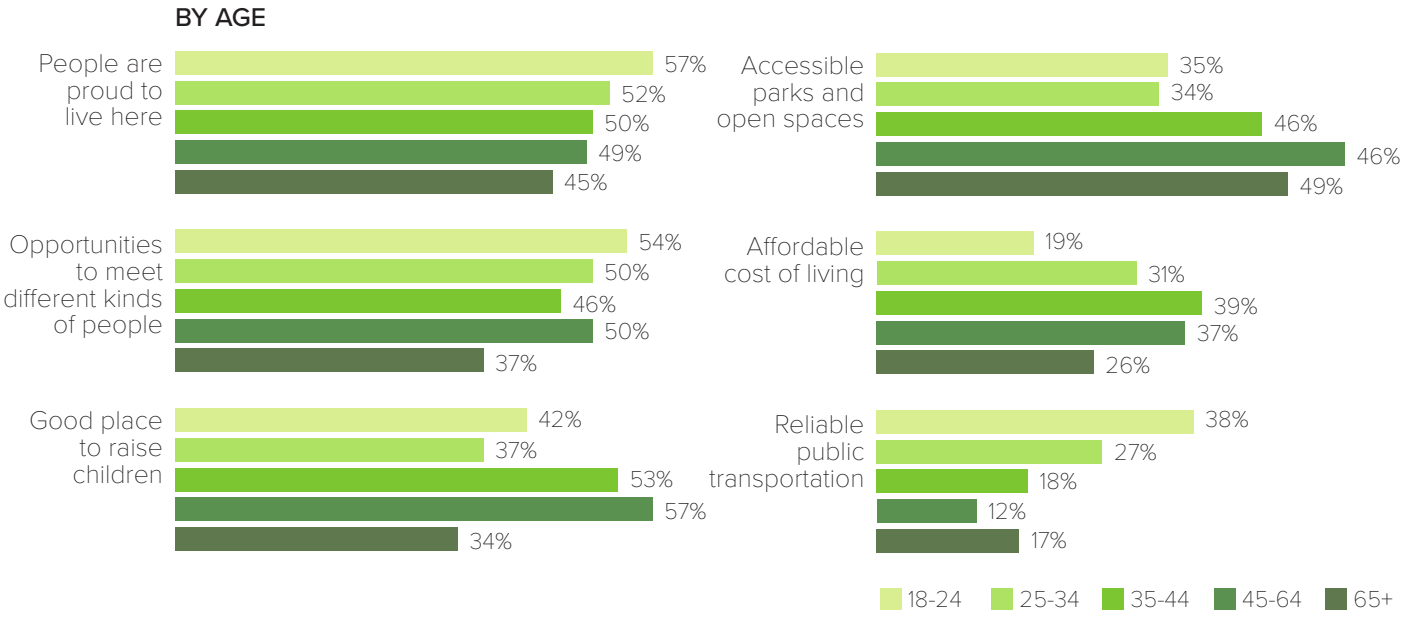
The other half of survey respondents were asked how well the same set of characteristics describe the region. Unlike the response to what was important, **no characteristics stand out as being overwhelmingly chosen by Kansas City area residents as describing the metro very well.** Half, or close to half, of respondents agreed that people being proud to live here, opportunities to meet different kinds of people, a good place to raise children and accessible parks and open spaces are characteristics that describe the Kansas City area very well. However, two characteristics were selected significantly less often. **Only a third of residents said an affordable cost of living described the metro very well, while only a fifth said reliable public transportation accurately described the region**.



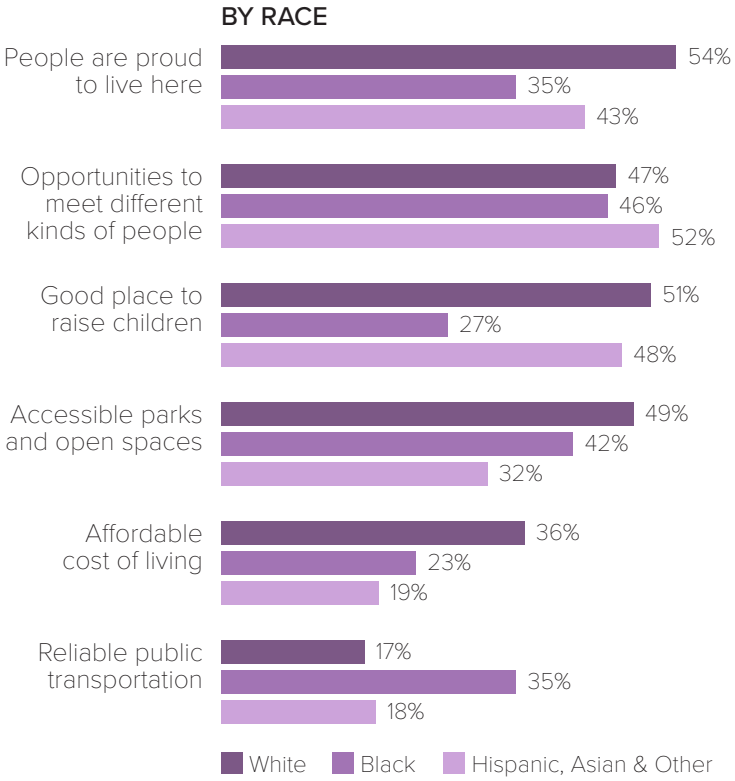


GENDER: Men and women largely concur concerning which characteristics describe the region very well. For the four characteristics most often selected as describing the region very well — people are proud to live here, there are opportunities to meet different kinds of people, it's a good place to raise children, and parks and open spaces are accessible — women agree slightly more often. Of those four, the metro characteristic that generates the biggest gender difference is the still-modest 5-point gap between the 53 percent of women and 48 percent of men who agree that people being proud to live here is a highly accurate description of the region. **Men are more likely to say the two characteristics least often selected — affordable cost of living and reliable public transportation — do, in fact, describe the region very well**, with the largest difference being the 7-point gap between the 23 percent of men and 16 percent of women who agree with this characterization.

AGE: Young adults are more likely than older adults to agree that people are proud to live here, there are opportunities to meet different kinds of people, and that the metro offers reliable public transportation. For example, 57 percent of GenZ say that "people are proud to live here" describes



the region very well, compared to 45 percent for older adults. This 12-point decline is more than matched by the 17-point difference with respect to meeting different kinds of people and the 21-point reduction regarding the quality of public transportation. On the other hand, **the percent of residents saying the region has accessible parks and open spaces tends to rise with age**, as 35 percent of GenZ agrees this describes the region very well, compared to 56 percent of baby boomers and 49 percent of older adults. The relationship to age is more complicated for the remaining two characteristics, where it is the middle generations that most often agree with the accuracy of the description. For example, **only 37 percent of millennials agree that the region is very well described as a good place to raise children, compared to 53 percent of GenX and 57 percent of baby boomers**. Similarly, only 19 percent of GenZ say the region is very well-described as affordable, compared to 39 percent of GenX and 37 percent of baby boomers.

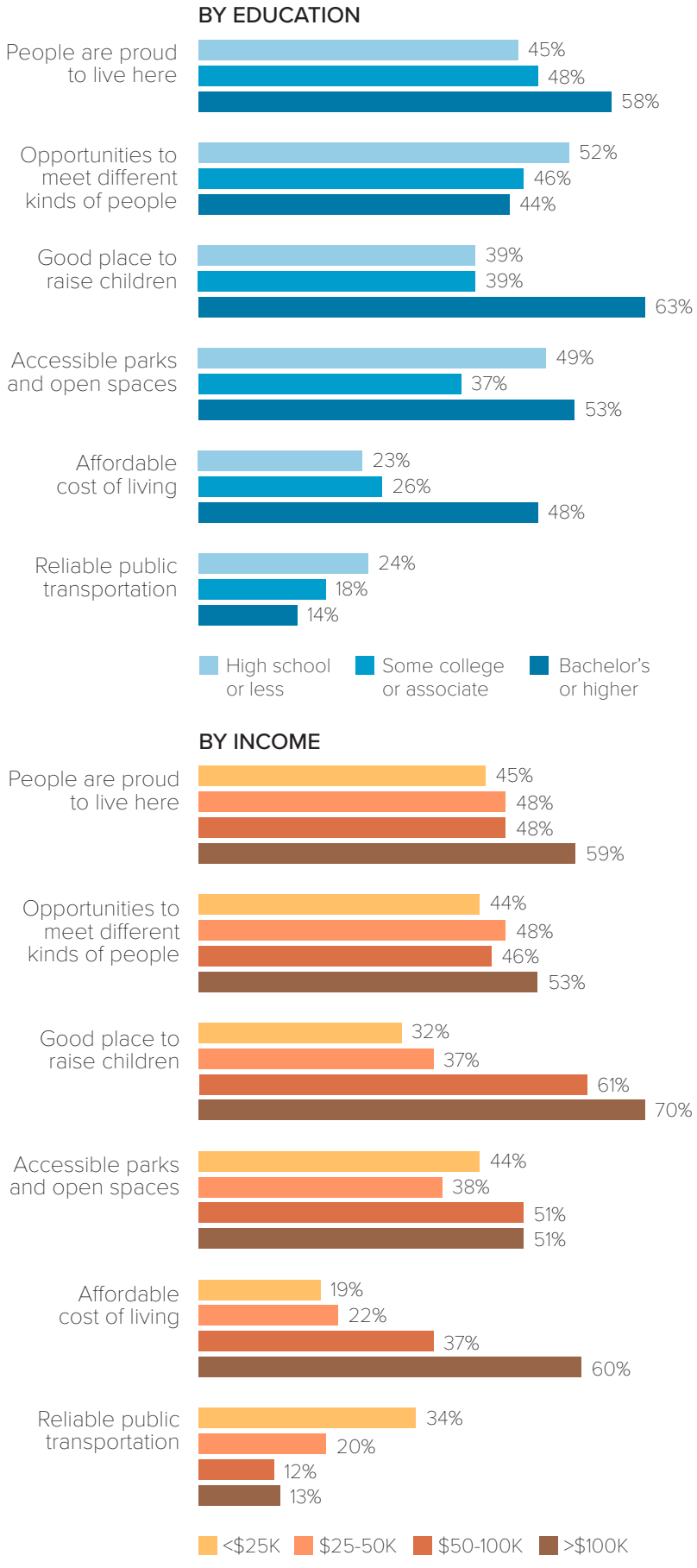


RACE: Racial disparities in which characteristics describe the region very well are considerable. **Whites are nearly twice as likely as blacks to say that the region is very well described as a good place to raise children, 51 percent to 27 percent, while Hispanics and Asians nearly match the likelihood of whites** at 48 percent. Whites are 50 percent more likely than blacks to view the region as a place where people are proud to live, and 50 percent more likely to than Hispanics and Asians to see it as place where parks an open spaces are

accessible. **Whites are also nearly twice as likely as Hispanics and Asians to think the region's cost of living is affordable**, 36 percent to 19 percent. On the other hand, **blacks are twice as likely as whites to respond that "reliable public transportation" describes the region very well**. The region's opportunity to meet different kinds of people is the characteristic with the least disparity. Hispanics and Asians say this describes the region very well modestly more often than whites by a 5-point margin, 52 percent to 47 percent.

EDUCATION: Residents with the highest levels of education are most apt to think these characteristics fit the region. For example, bachelor's degree holders say an affordable cost of living describes the region very well twice as often as those with a high school degree or less, and say 50 percent more often that it is a good place to raise children. **The reverse is true, however, for perceptions concerning whether the region provides opportunities to meet different kinds of people and whether it offers reliable public transportation.** These characteristics are thought to describe the region very well most often by residents with a high school degree and least often by those with a bachelor's degree, by an 8-point margin in the first case and a 10-point margin in the second.

INCOME: Income is strongly related to how well these characteristics are thought to describe the region. This is clearest for whether the region's cost of living is affordable, where those with incomes of $100,000 or more say this describes the region very well by a 3-to-1 margin over those with incomes below $25,000, **and whether the region is a good place to raise children**, where the margin is 2 to 1. Those with high incomes are also more likely than those with low incomes to perceive that people are proud to live here, that the region provides opportunities to meet people, and that its parks and open spaces are accessible, by 14-point, 9-point and 7-point differences, respectively. **Income remains important concerning perceptions of public transportation, but works in the opposite direction as those with the lowest incomes are more likely than those with the highest incomes to say the region's public transportation is reliable**, by almost a 3-to-1 margin.

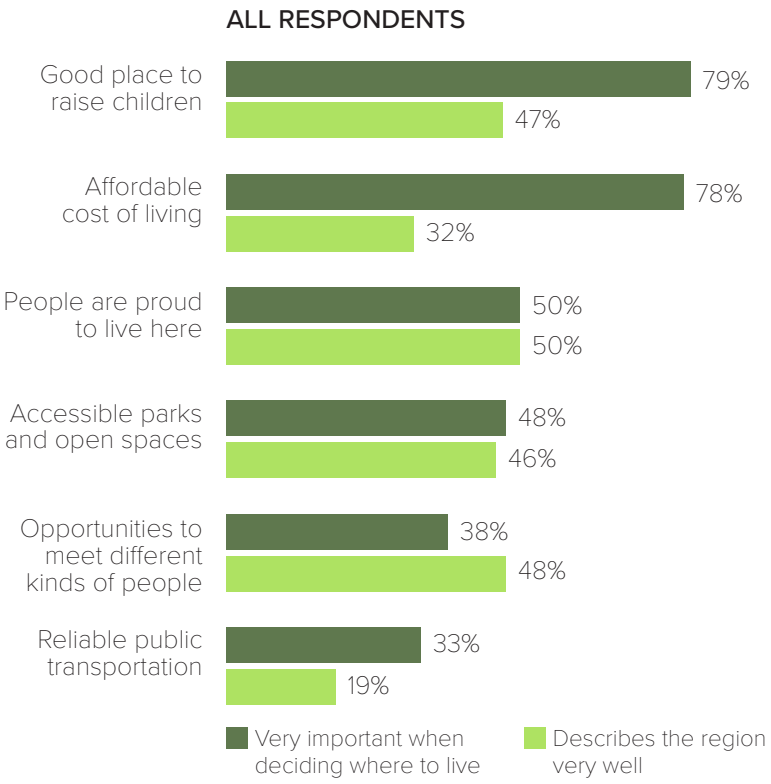


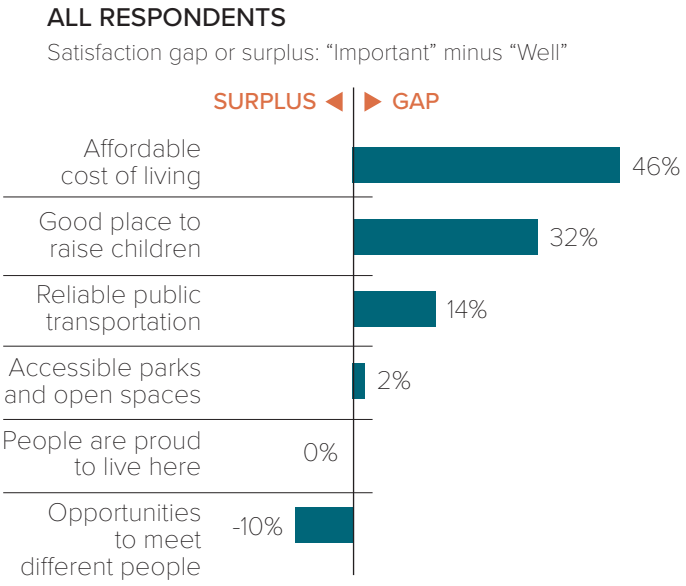
Satisfaction Gap: How important an issue is when deciding where to live compared to how well it describes the region

By comparing the degree to which these characteristics are very important to residents with the degree to which they are perceived as describing the region very well, we can get a sense of **where the region is most falling short of expectations or desires**. We describe such shortfalls as a potential "satisfaction gap." Such a gap exists for three of the six characteristics.

A good place to raise children and an affordable cost of living were the two characteristics that stood out as being very important to the highest number of people, approaching 80 percent of respondents, **yet less than half thought these two characteristics described the reality of living in the region very well.** Reliable public transportation was thought to be very important by one-third of residents, but only a fifth thought that description describes the region's existing public transportation system very well. Virtually no gap exists between how important and how well the characteristics of being proud to live here and able to access parks and open spaces are perceived by the general population. However, more people thought the region provided opportunities to meet people than thought it was important, producing more of a satisfaction surplus than gap.

We can simplify this comparison by actually calculating the satisfaction gap as the difference between the percent rating an issue very important and the percent rating the region as providing it very well, and then reordering the issues according to this gap. We can clearly see that **the biggest issue where the region is falling short of residents' expectations or desires is with its affordability, followed by its success in being a good place to raise children**. This result is surprising, given its reputation and promotion as an affordable, family-friendly place in which to live and work, and suggests there remains work to be done to extend the actual experience of these to larger segments of the population. (Note: the negative number for opportunities to meet different kinds of people is simply how a satisfaction surplus is shown in this kind of visualization.)

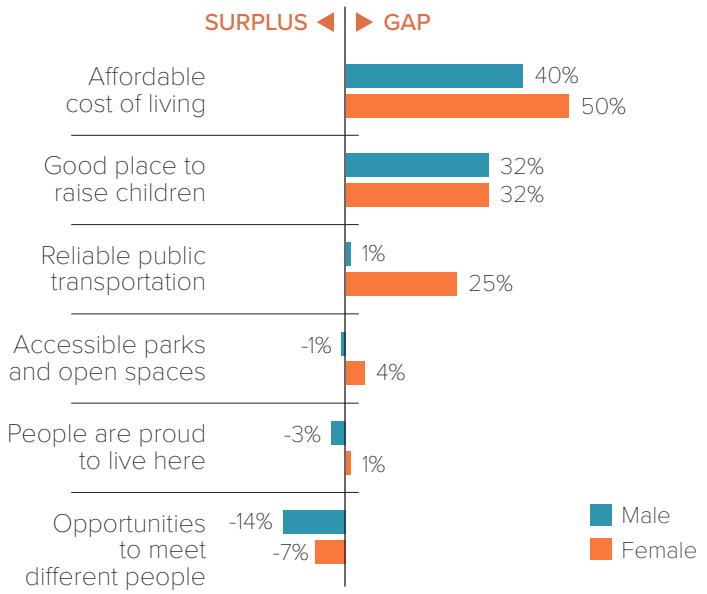




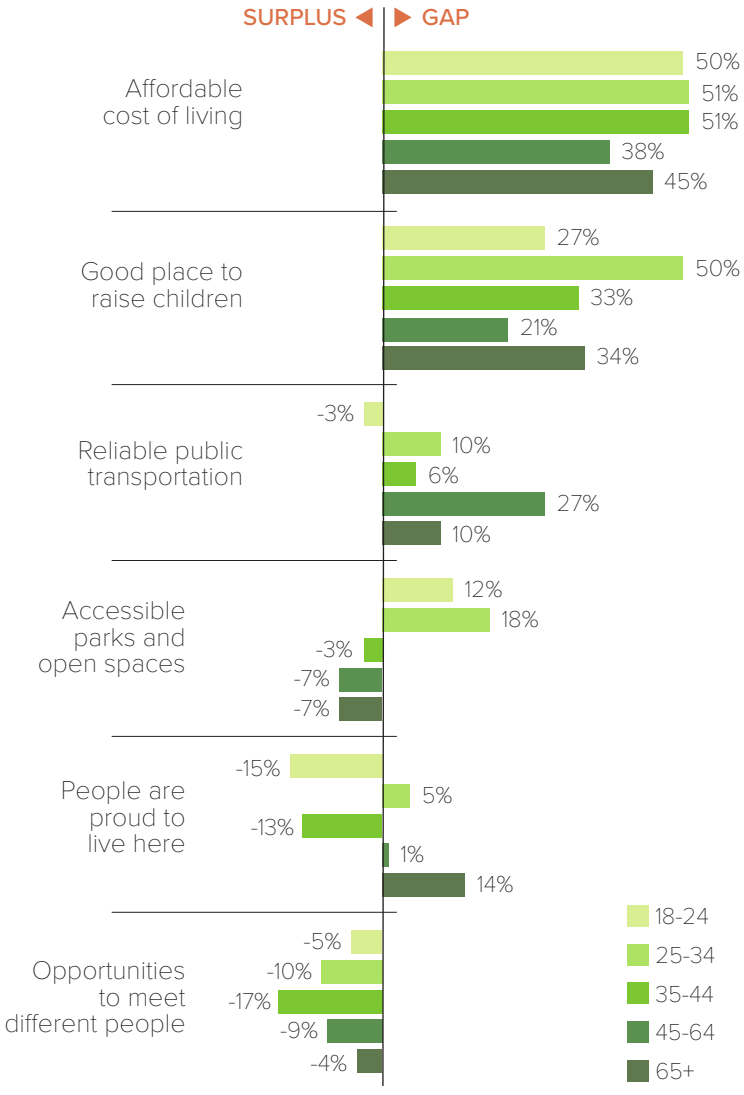
GENDER: Women are somewhat less satisfied than men with respect to the region's affordability, with a satisfaction gap of 50 percent compared to men's 40 percent. Men and women are equally dissatisfied with the region as a good place to raise children. **But the satisfaction gap concerning the public transportation system is being driven almost entirely by women**, as the female gap is 25 percent compared the male gap of 1 percent. This gender difference is the result of women more often thinking transit is very important and less often thinking it is performing very well, while for men, how important transit is and how well it is performing are more equally balanced.

AGE: Some differences emerge when satisfaction gap is calculated by age. For example, baby boomers appear to be least dissatisfied with the region's cost of living, with a satisfaction gap of 38 percent compared to about 50 percent for GenZ, millennials and GenX. **Millennials have the largest satisfaction gap concerning the region's child-friendliness** as, at 50 percent, it is 17 points larger than GenX. **Baby boomers have 2½ times the satisfaction gap of any other age group when it comes to the region's public transportation system**. Meanwhile, even for characteristics where the overall satisfaction gap is minimal, this is not uniform across age groups. For example, **younger adults — both GenZ and millennials — appear to be dissatisfied with the accessibility of parks and open spaces,** showing satisfaction gaps of 12 percent and 18 percent, respectively, while the other age groups appear to be relatively satisfied. In a similar fashion, older adults and millennials seem to be dissatisfied with the degree to which people are proud to live here while the other age groups are not.

BY GENDER Satisfaction gap or surplus: "Important" minus "Well"



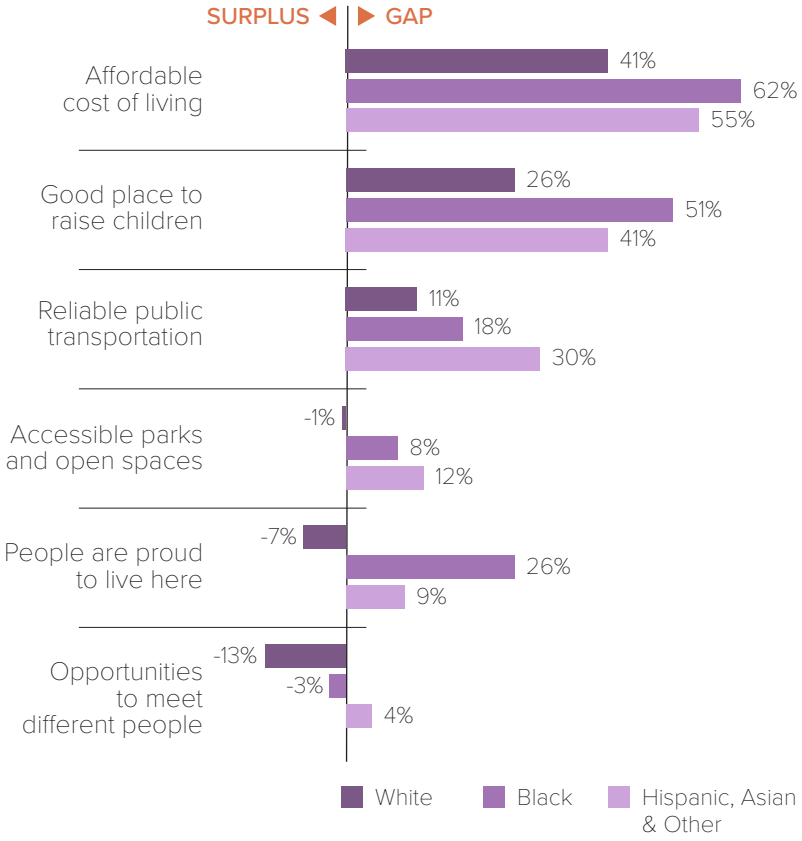
BY AGE Satisfaction gap or surplus: "Important" minus "Well"



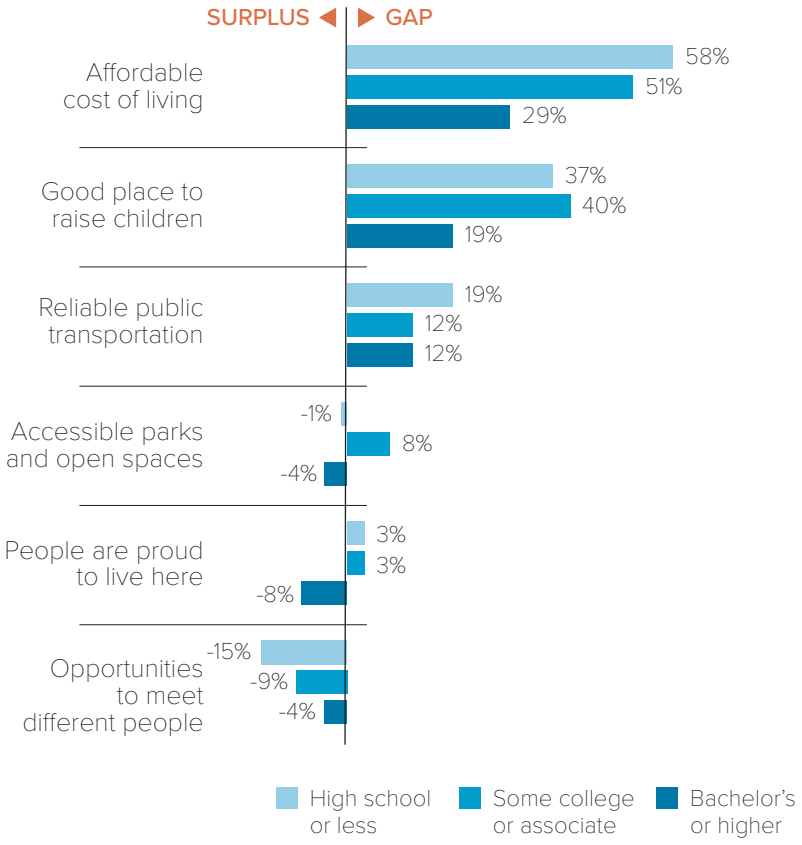
RACE: Blacks, Hispanics and Asians experience larger satisfaction gaps than whites across all metro characteristics with the white/black disparity being largest where the overall gap is largest. For example, **blacks have twice the satisfaction gap of whites with respect to the region being a good place to raise children**, 51 percent to 26 percent, while the black satisfaction gap half again as large as whites with respect to the region's affordability, 62 percent to 41 percent. In both cases, the Hispanic and Asian satisfaction gap falls between white and black levels, though closer to that of blacks. Compared to other races, **Hispanics and Asians have the largest satisfaction gaps with respect to reliable public transportation and the accessibility of parks and open spaces**.

EDUCATION: Those with the lowest levels of education tend to have the largest satisfaction gaps. This is especially true **for the region's affordability, where those with a high school degree or less have twice the satisfaction gap — 58 percent — of those with a bachelor's degree**. The situation is similar concerning whether the region is a good place to raise children, as residents with some college or an associate degree have a satisfaction gap that is twice as large as bachelor degree holders, 40 percent to 19 percent. The difference in satisfaction is smaller concerning public transportation, but remains highest for those with a high school degree at 19 percent, compared to 12 percent for those with some postsecondary schooling.

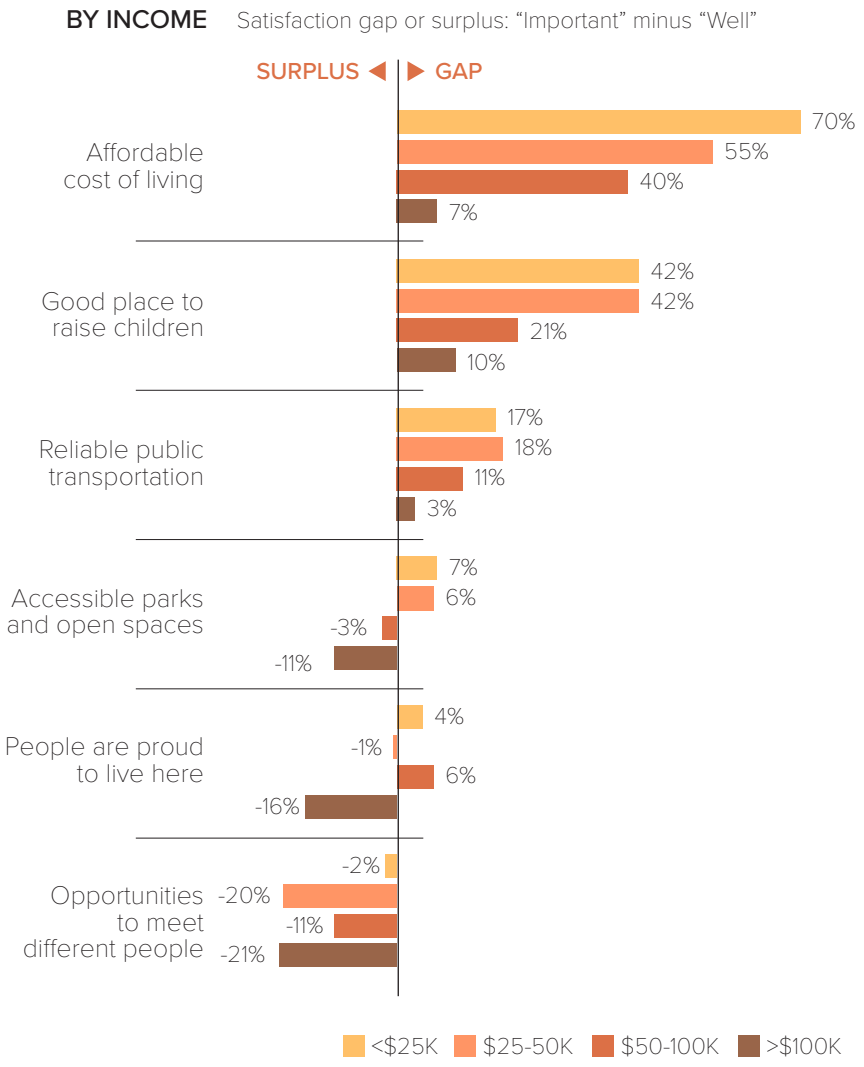
BY RACE Satisfaction gap or surplus: "Important" minus "Well"



BY EDUCATION Satisfaction gap or surplus: "Important" minus "Well"



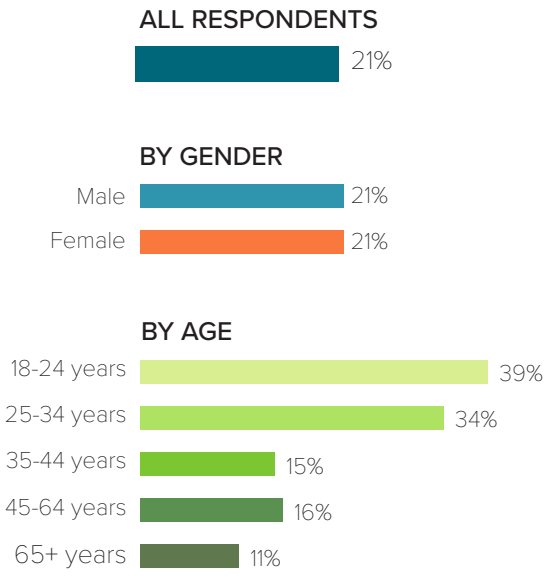
INCOME: Income strongly affects the gap between how important something is and how well the region is perceived as providing it. Unsurprisingly, **this is strongest with respect to the region's cost of living being affordable, where the satisfaction gap is 10 times larger for residents with low incomes than high incomes.** But the satisfaction gap for low-income residents is also **four times larger concerning whether the region is a good place to raise children and six times larger with respect to the reliability of public transportation**, the latter because they are the most likely to rely on it to get where they need to go. **Those with the highest incomes actually have satisfaction surpluses for accessibility of parks and open spaces and whether people are proud to live here**, in addition to providing opportunities to meet different kinds of people.



Do you see yourself leaving in the next five years?

About a fifth of residents see themselves leaving the region in the next five years, a rate that does not vary by gender.

AGE: Young adults are more mobile than older people. Once children are in school and roots into the community are established, the percent moving to another metropolitan area drops significantly. As a result, **the proportion of each age group that expects to move in the next five years drops by more than half between the 34 percent of millennials who plan to move, compared to the 15 percent of GenX.**

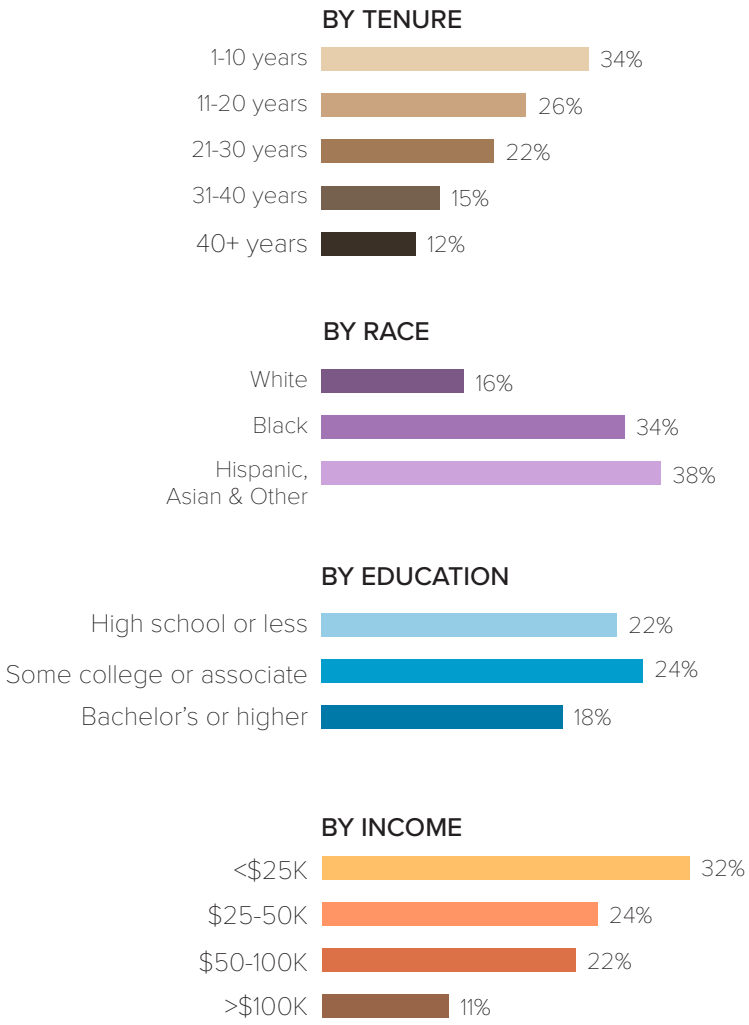


TENURE: Most tabulations by the length of time one has lived in the Kansas City area reveal little more than the impact of age. But the smooth rate of decline in the prospects for moving as years in the region increase indicates that **one of the best predictors of whether someone will move to another metro is whether they have recently moved from another metro**.

RACE: Blacks, Hispanics and Asians are more than twice as likely as whites to see themselves leaving the Kansas City area, at 34 percent and 38 percent, respectively compared to 16 percent. This may reflects differences in satisfaction by race and ethnicity. That Hispanics' and Asians' propensity to move exceeds that of blacks probably also indicates the impact of the younger age distribution of Hispanics and Asians in the metro.

EDUCATION: Interestingly, **educational attainment makes only a modest difference in whether a resident sees themselves leaving the region**. Adults earning less than a bachelor's degree plan to move at rates that are at or slightly above the regional average of 21 percent, while those with a bachelor's degree or higher plan to move at rates that are slightly lower. However, the correlation between moving and the satisfaction gap does not appear as strong for educational attainment as it did for race.

INCOME: Income, on the other hand a strong inverse relationship to prospects for moving and a strong positive correlation with the satisfaction gap by income group. **Residents with incomes below $25,000 are three times more likely to move in the next five years as residents with incomes of $100,000 and above**, 32 percent to 11 percent, while those with middle incomes plan to move at rates that are at or slightly above the regional average.



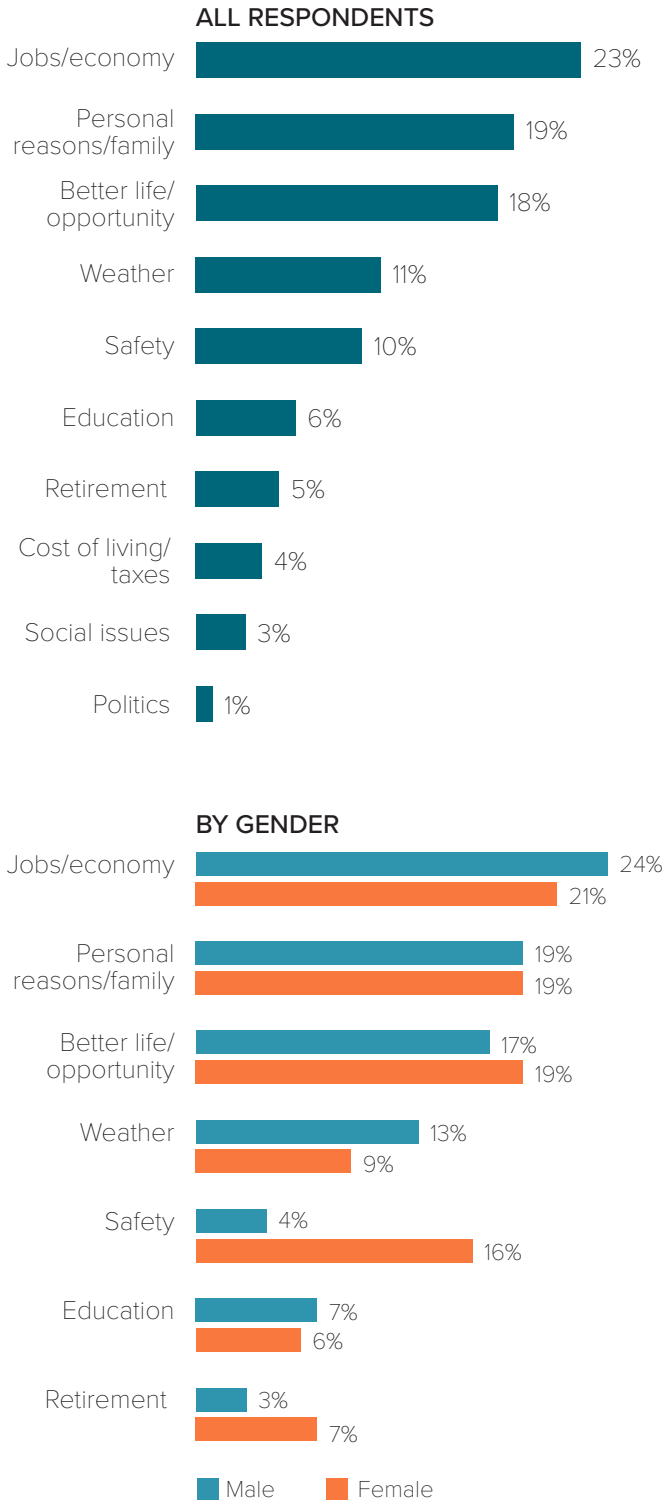
Why would you leave?

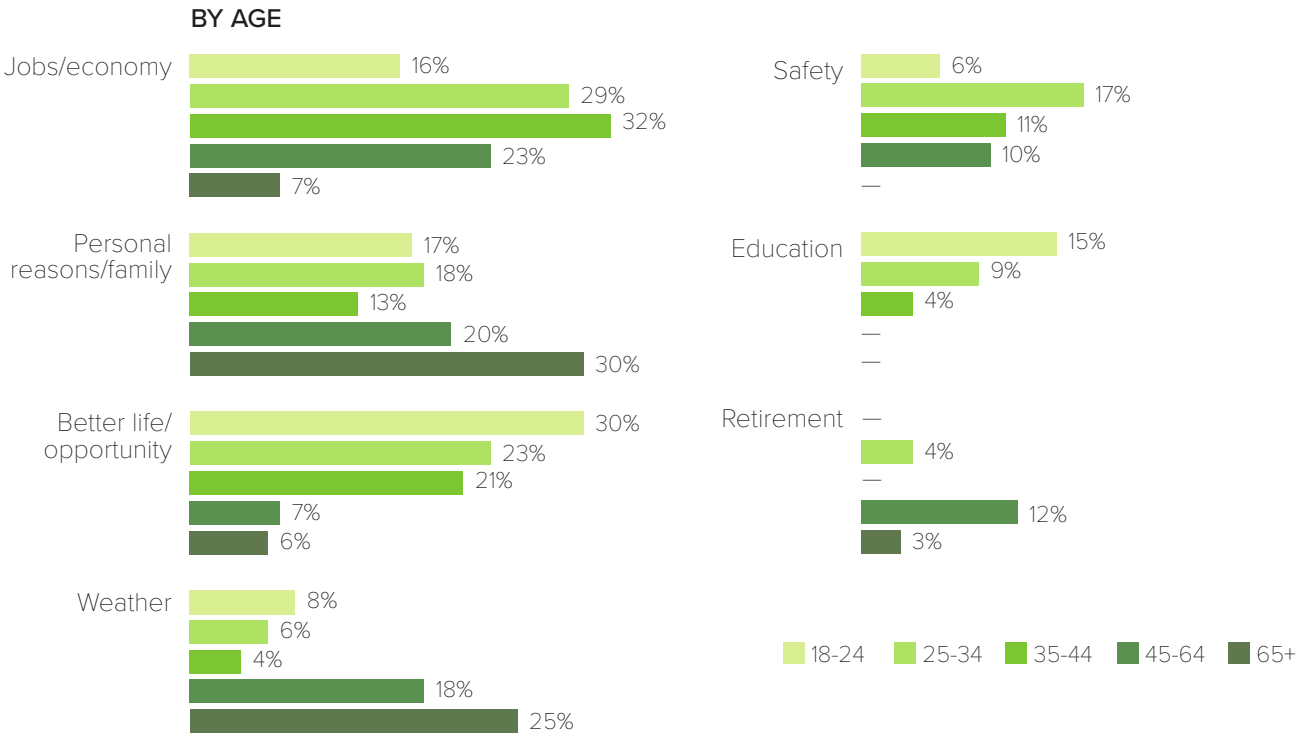
Of those who said they might leave (about 200 of the total sample of roughly 1,000 residents), **nearly a quarter said jobs or the economy would be the main reason, while one-fifth said it would be for personal or family reasons, and another fifth said it would be to find a place that offered a better life or more opportunity**. Interestingly, despite apparently widespread dissatisfaction with the region's cost of living, **only 4 percent said they would leave the Kansas City area** as a result, perhaps because costs are even higher elsewhere.

(Note: because of the small sample size, the cross-tabulations below must be interpreted as suggestive more than definitive.)

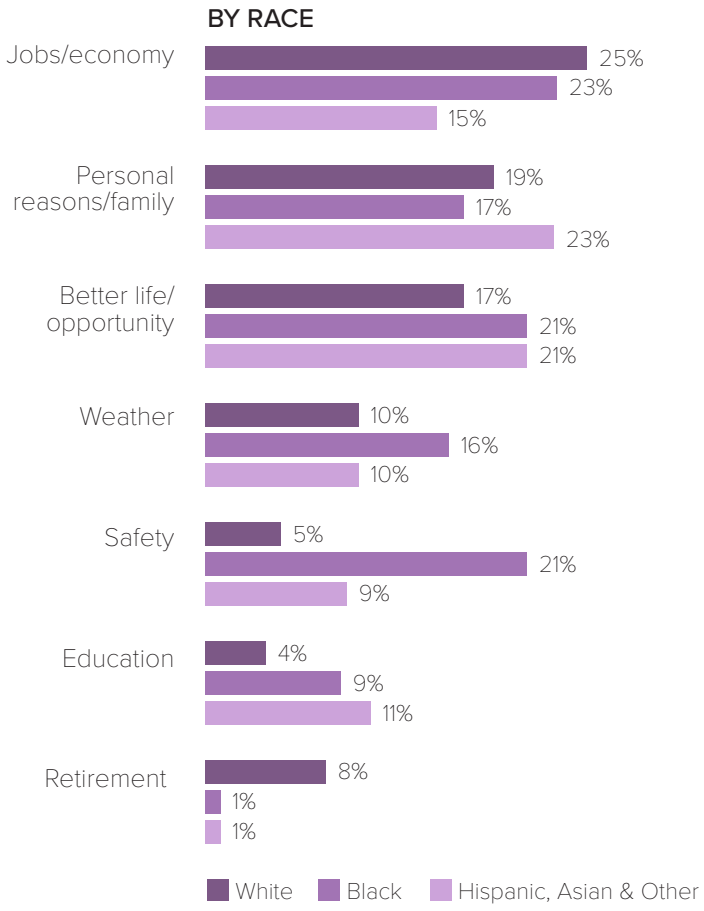
GENDER: Men and women respond similarly with respect to the top three reasons for leaving the region, though men choose jobs and the economy slightly more often, 24 percent to 21 percent, while women choose a better life or opportunity more often, 19 percent to 17 percent. **The biggest difference is that women are four times more likely to choose safety than men**, and twice as likely to choose retirement. Men are 50 percent more likely to say they would move for better weather.

AGE: The middle age groups are the most likely to move for jobs or economic reasons, as about 30 percent of both millennials an GenX selected it, followed by nearly a quarter of baby boomers. **The younger age groups are the most likely to move for a better life or opportunity more generally**, as it was selected by 30 percent of GenZ, followed by between a fifth and a quarter of millennials and GenX. **About 30 percent of older adults say the main motive for them to move is for personal or family reasons**, a rate that is 50 percent larger than the group with the next highest likelihood of moving for this reason, the baby boomers. Older adults and baby boomers are also two to three times more likely to move for better weather than younger age groups. Unsurprisingly, GenZ, many of whom may still be in school, are most likely to move for education reasons, while baby boomers looking at moving over the next five years are most likely to select retirement as a reason. Perhaps most surprising, though, **it is millennials who are most likely to say they would move out of the metro for safety reasons**, indicating public safety issues are a significant deterrent to talent attraction and retention.



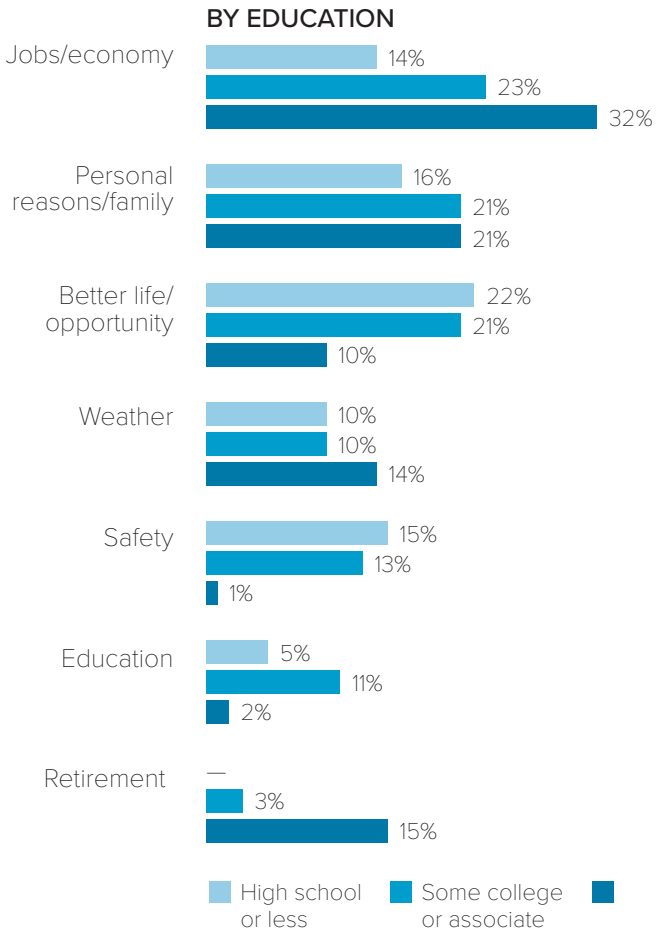


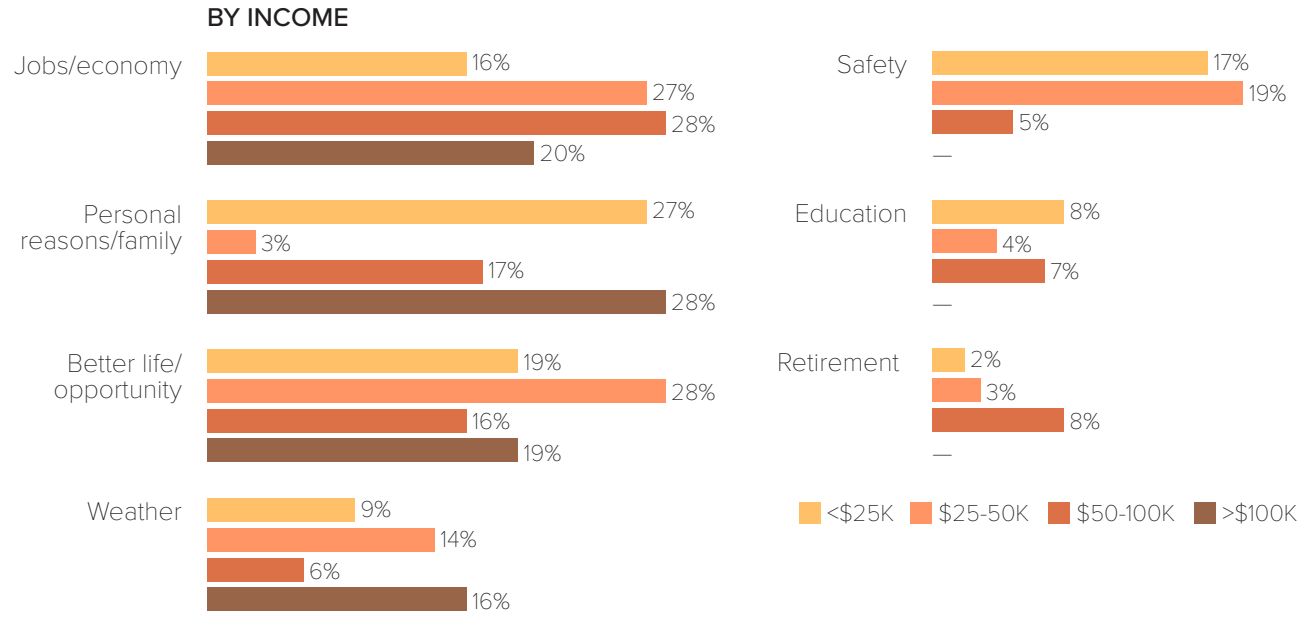
RACE: Whites and blacks appear to be more prone to leave for economic reasons than Hispanics and Asians, while the reverse is true for personal reasons. Of those who said they would move in the next five years, roughly a quarter of whites and blacks said they would move for a better job, while the same percentage of Hispanics and Asians would move to be closer to family. Minorities are somewhat more likely than whites to move for a better life and, perhaps as a way to achieve that better life, for education purposes. Blacks are more likely to move for better weather, while whites are more likely to move for retirement. But perhaps the most telling motivation is that **blacks are four times more likely than whites and twice as likely as Hispanics and Asians to move for safety reasons**.



EDUCATION: Residents with a bachelor's degree or higher are most likely to move for a better job, as a third of those who said they would move selected this as the main reason. This compares to a quarter of those with some college or an associate degree, and 14 percent of those with a high school degree or less. Adults with bachelor's or higher degrees were also more likely to move for weather or retirement than those with less education. Meanwhile, **residents with a high school degree or some college were twice as likely to say they would mainly move for a better life or opportunity**.

INCOME: Of those who said they planned to leave the metro, jobs and **the economy was selected as the main reason most often by those with middle incomes**, about 28 percent of the time, more often than those with either low or high incomes, who chose jobs as their reason 16 percent and 20 percent of the time, respectively. On the other hand, **personal reasons was chosen as the primary motivation for moving most often by those with the low and high incomes**, selected by about 28 percent of each group. Seeking a better life was most attractive to lower-middle income adults as a motivation to move, as 28 percent of those with incomes between $25,000 and $50,000 chose this as their primary reason, while **safety was most attractive to low- as well as lower-middle-income adults**, selected by about 18 percent of them.



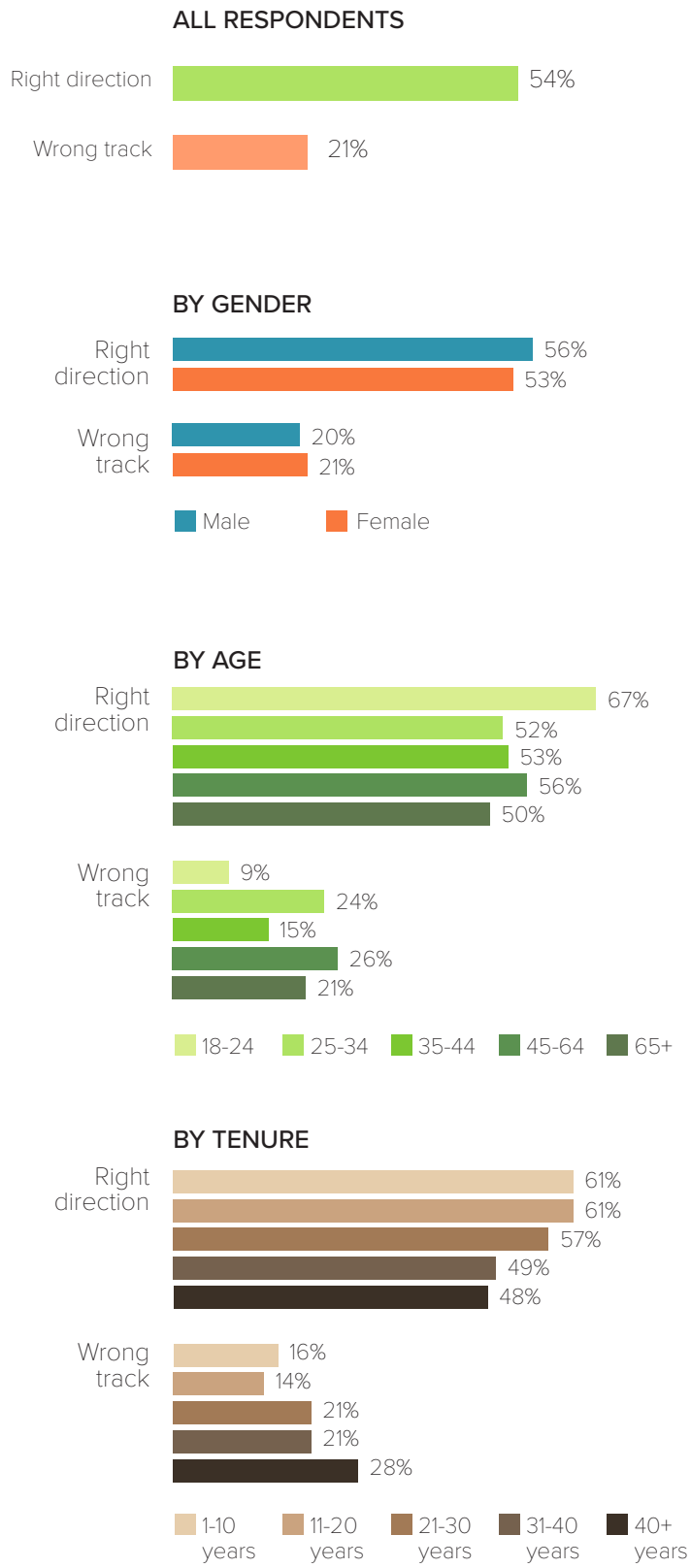


Is the Kansas City metro moving the right direction or on the wrong track?

More than half of the adults in the Kansas City area think the region is headed in the right direction, at 54 percent, while 21 percent think it is on the wrong track — the same percentage that is contemplating moving in five years. Nonetheless, **that a majority of the region think its direction is positive contrasts markedly with national polls conducted at the same time as this one**. The average of such polls in early January 2017[1] found that only 31.5 percent thought the nation was headed in the right direction, compared to 56.4 percent who thought it was on the wrong track. Locally, there is little difference in this perception by gender.

AGE: There is also **very little difference by age, with the exception of GenZ, who are the most enthusiastic about the direction of the region**. Fully two-thirds of them think it is headed in the right direction, compared to only 9 percent who think it is on the wrong track. Baby boomers are the next most enthusiastic, but a 10 percent gap separates them from GenZ. About 50 percent of the other age groups agree the region is on the right track.

TENURE: The perception of the region's direction is one where the length of time a person has lived in the region seem to matter. Generally, **the longer a resident has lived here, the poorer the perception of whether the region is headed in the right direction or not**. While more than 60 percent of adults who have lived here less than 20 years think the region is moving in the right direction, this drops to under half for those who have lived here more than 30 years. At the same time, the percent thinking the region is on the wrong track doubles as residents live here longer, from 14 percent for those who have lived in the region 11-20 years, to 28 percent for those who have lived here more than 40 years.

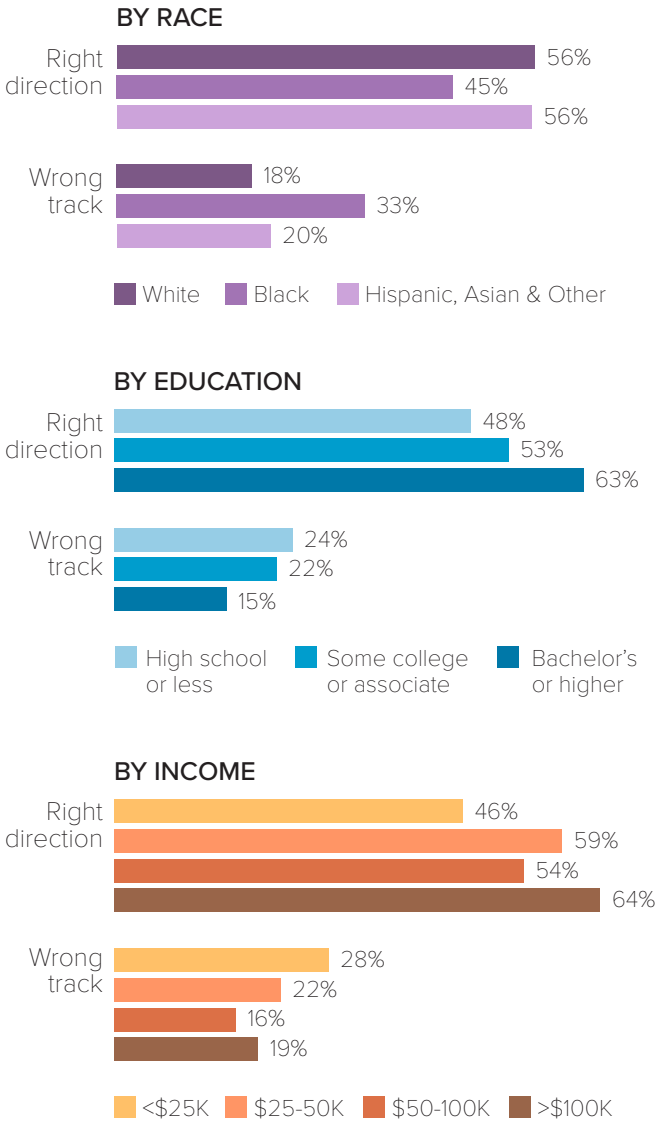


1 See January 4 average of polls at: https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/direction_of_country-902.html

RACE: Both whites and Hispanics and Asians share similar perceptions of the direction of the region, as 56 percent say the region is moving forward properly while only about 20 percent say it is not. **Blacks are more critical, however.** Only 45 percent agree the region is headed in the right direction, compared to a third who say it is on the wrong track.

EDUCATION: Educational attainment is strongly related to how enthusiastically residents embrace the direction of the region. **While 63 percent of adults with a bachelor's degree think the Kansas City area is moving positively, only 48 percent of those with a high school degree or less agree with that assessment**. Residents with some college or an associate degree are in between, saying the metro is headed in the right direction at about the same rate as the regional average.

INCOME: Income is also strongly related to whether residents agree the region is headed in the right direction, with an 18-point gap between the 64 percent of individuals in high-income households and the 46 percent of low-income individuals who agree with this assessment. **Yet the relationship is not as smooth as it is for education**, as those with incomes between $25,000 and $50,000 appear to be somewhat more likely to rate the region's direction favorably than those with incomes between $50,000 and $100,000.

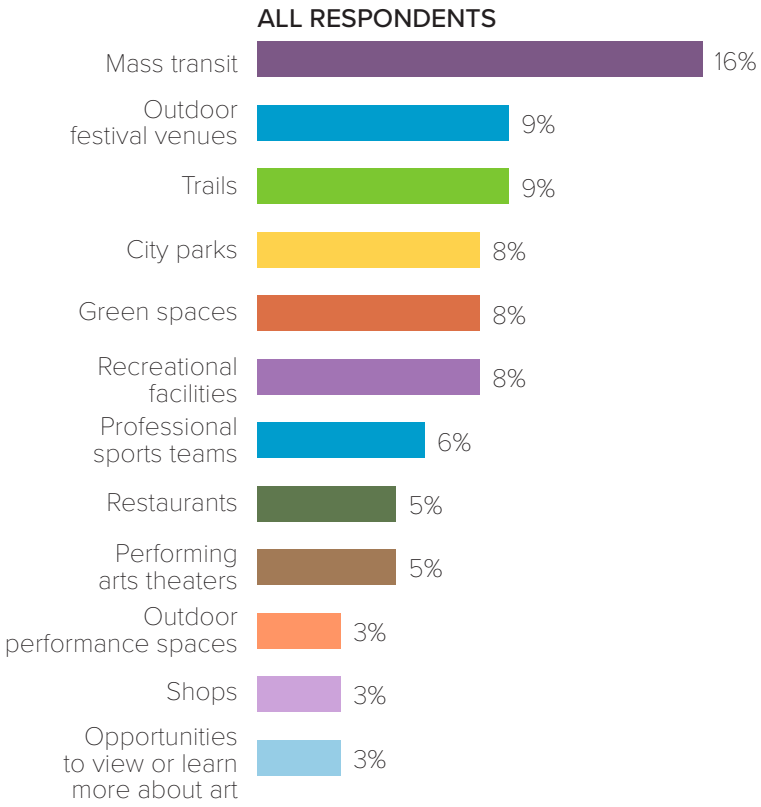


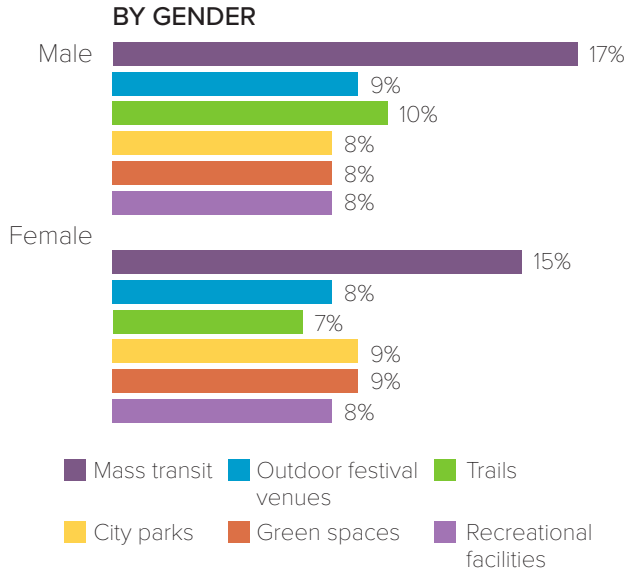
What services and amenities would you like to see more of?

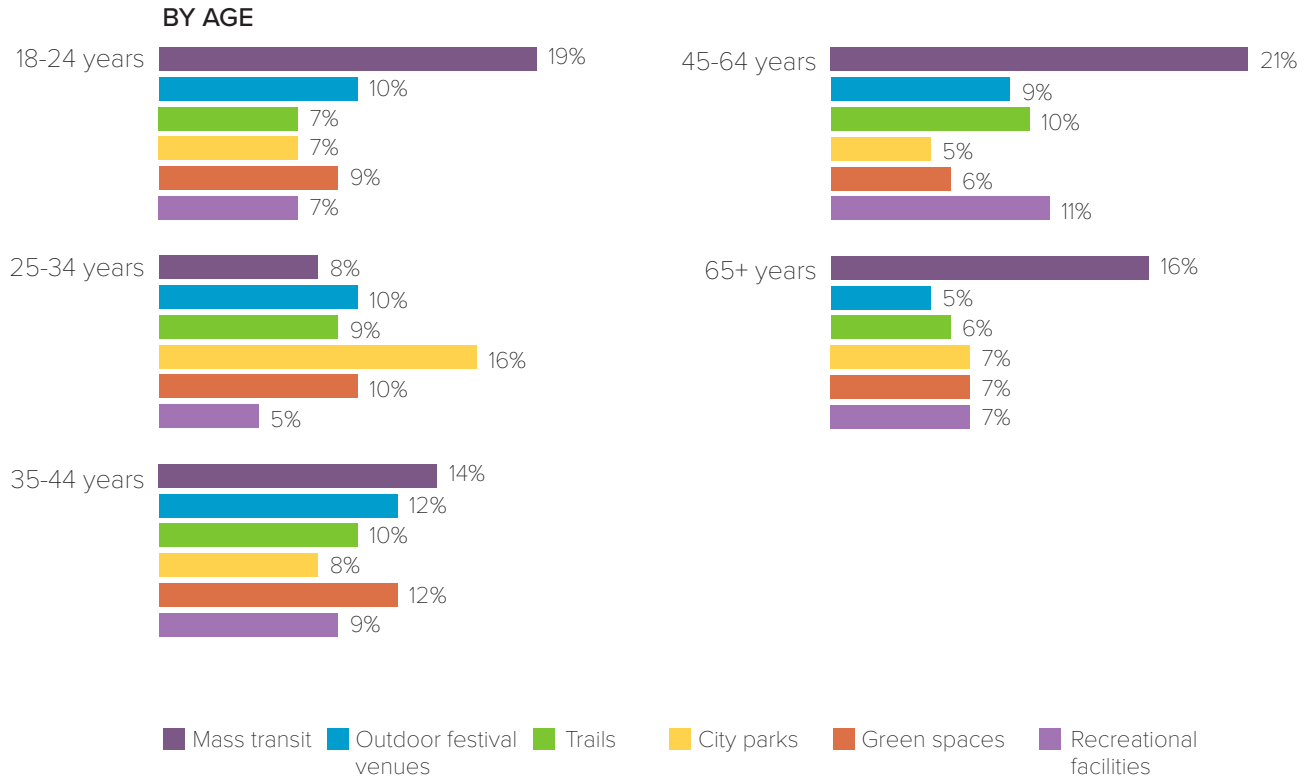
Many of the issues that cause residents to view the Kansas City area as on the right or wrong track, such as the performance of the economy, can only be indirectly influenced by local actions. This question focuses on one area heavily influenced by local decisions — the region's amenities.

Provided a long list of area amenities and services, residents were asked to choose which one they would like to see more of. **Mass transit was selected as the top choice by 16 percent of respondents, nearly double the rate of any other service or amenity** and consistent with its high satisfaction gap. In the second tier, each garnering between 8 and 9 percent of responses, were a set outdoor and recreational amenities — **festival venues, trails, parks, green spaces and recreational facilities. Many of these seem highly related, and combined they represent 44 percent of all responses**. In a third tier, chosen by 5 to 6 percent of residents, are professional sports teams, restaurants and performing arts theaters, amenities that tend to require relatively higher levels of public and private investment.

GENDER: Examining the top six choices by demographic characteristics we find that gender differences are minimal. **Both men and women made mass transit their top pick for the amenity they'd like to see more of at rates that were approximately double the remaining amenities**. Even though the public transit satisfaction gap was significantly different for men and women, both chose mass transit at essentially equal rates of 17 percent and 15 percent, respectively.

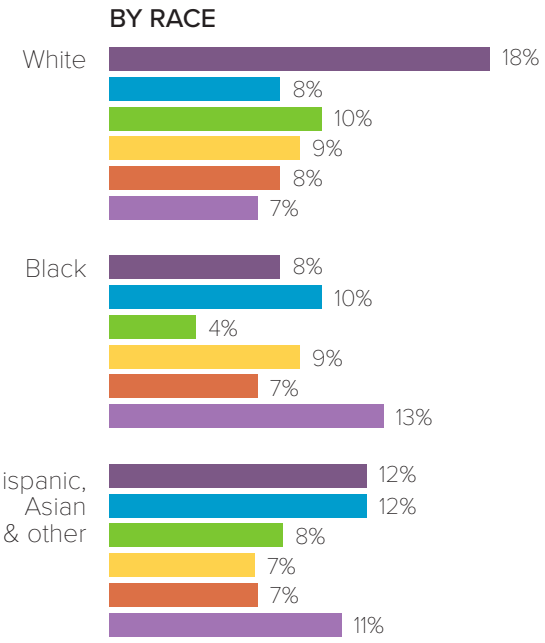






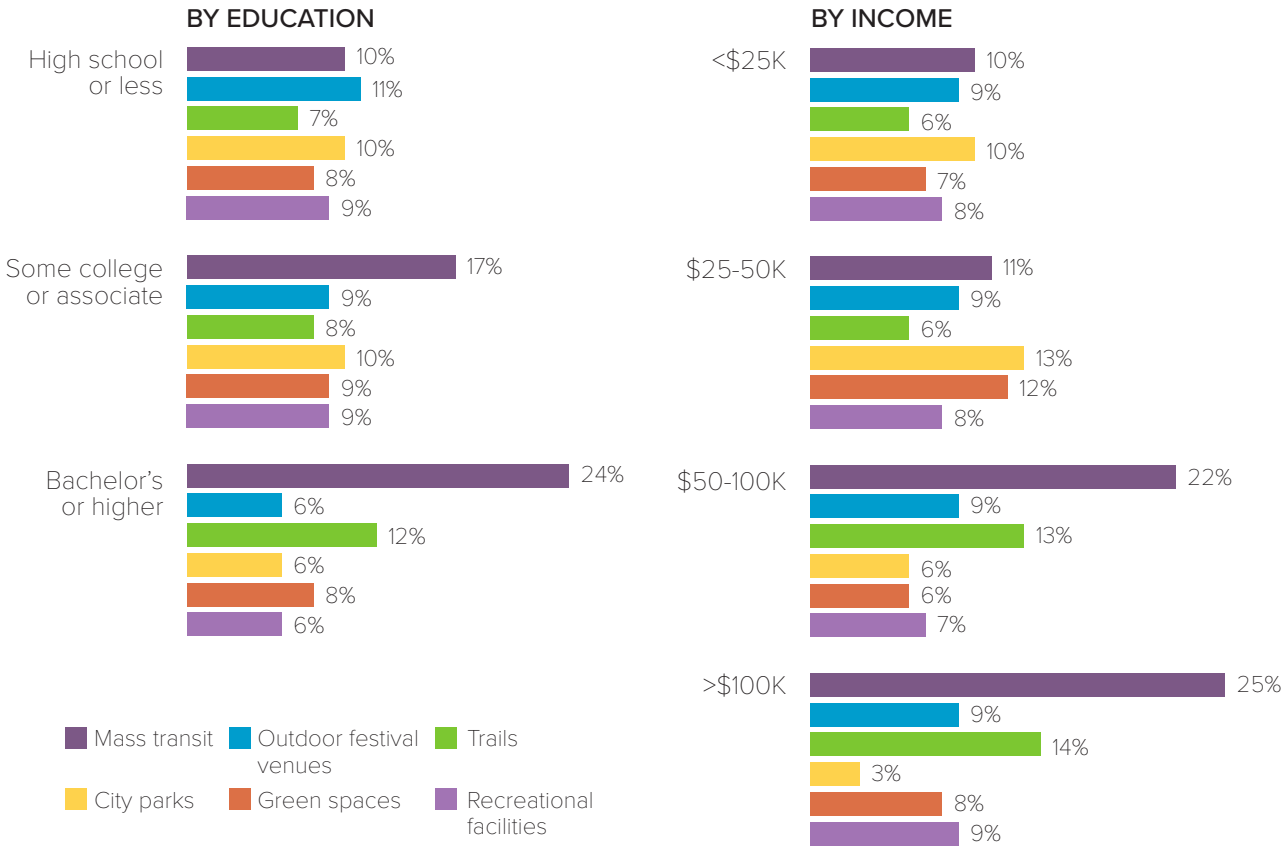
AGE: For most age groups this pattern is repeated. GenZ, baby boomers and older adults all chose mass transit as the amenity they would most like to see more of, at rates between 16 percent and 21 percent, with the remaining issues chosen at no more than half the rate. **GenX exhibits a somewhat different pattern**, however, as no one issue stands out. While mass transit is still chosen most often, at 14 percent, right behind are outdoor festival venues and green spaces, each at 12 percent. **Millennials show a completely different pattern as the amenity they would like to see more of is city parks**, chosen by 16 percent, again followed by outdoor festival venues and green spaces, each chosen by 10 percent.

RACE: Viewed by race, **only whites support seeing more mass transit** in a fashion similar to the regional average, chosen by 18 percent, with trails slightly leading the other amenities, attracting 10 percent support. **Mass transit is essentially tied with outdoor festival venues and recreational facilities as the top choice among Hispanics and Asians,** each with 11 percent to 12 percent support. **For blacks, recreational facilities are the top choice,** at 13 percent, followed by outdoor festival venues and city parks.



EDUCATION: Residents with more education are more likely to select mass transit as the amenity they would most like to see more of, as those with some college chose it 17 percent of the time while those with a bachelor's degree chose it 24 percent of the time. **Area adults with a high school degree or less, however, did not favor any particular amenity more than the others,** with all garnering between 7 percent and 11 percent support.

INCOME: Similar to education, r**esidents with higher incomes selected mass transit far more often than other issues, while those with lower incomes were more uniform in their selections, with $50,000 being the income that separates these two patterns**. For adults with household incomes above $50,000, a region with more mass transit was supported by a fifth to a quarter of respondents. Trails were selected second-most often by these residents, with 13 to 14 percent support. For adults with incomes below $50,000, no one amenity dominated, with city parks, green spaces and outdoor festival venues selected in amounts that roughly equaled or exceeded the 10 to 11 percent who wanted more mass transit in the region.



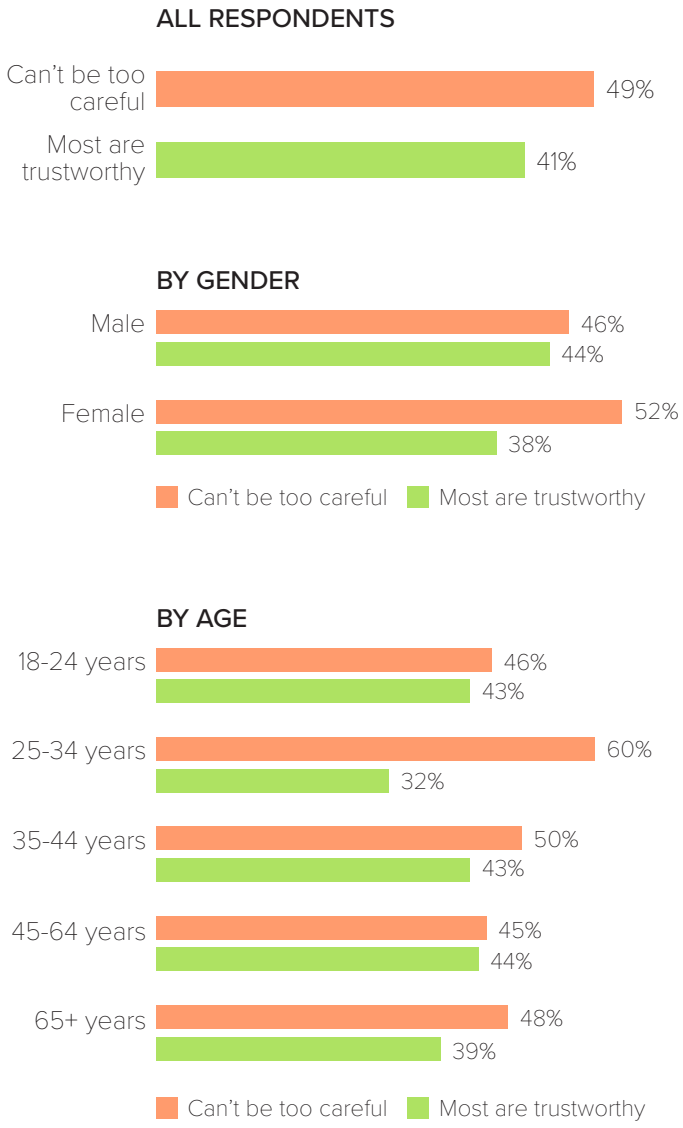
Can most people be trusted?

The Kansas City area is too complex and too interconnected for any one group or community to succeed entirely on its own. To address many of the community issues or enhance many of the regional amenities described above, it will take people coming together in good faith and being willing to listen to and learn from each other. It will take collaboration, negotiation, compromise and, ultimately, the consent of many to make decisions that move the region forward. In a word, it takes trust. To make the progress residents desire on the issues that concern them most, trust is often the real agenda.

Unfortunately, **the region starts from a trust deficit, as more residents believe you can't be too careful than believe that most people are trustworthy**, by 49 percent to 41 percent.

GENDER: While men are equally likely say people are trustworthy as say they aren't, **women are more skeptical.** About 52 percent of women say you can't be too careful, compared to only 38 percent who think most people are trustworthy. This puts female trust levels in the region near the U.S. average for all adults. According to the 2016 General Social Survey, 64 percent of Americans think people can't be trusted, while only 32 percent think they can.

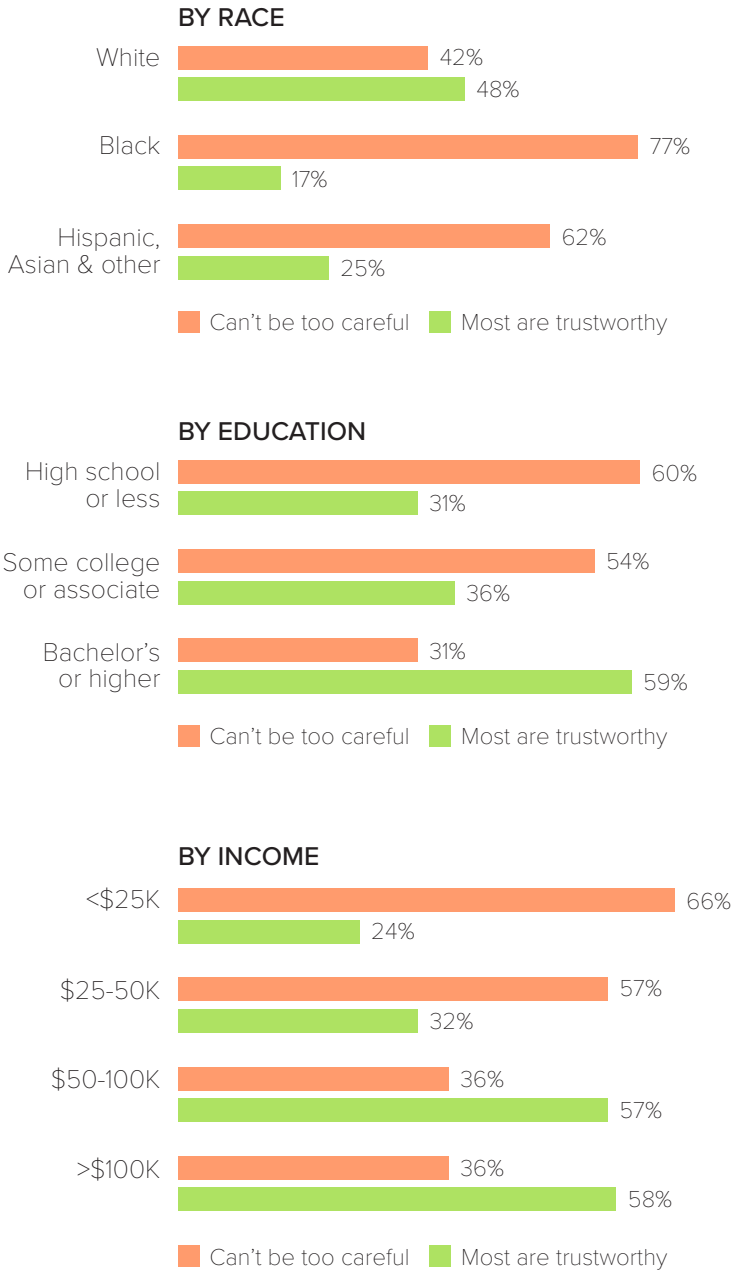
AGE: Most age groups also face a trust deficit, though baby boomers are split evenly between those who do and don't think most people can be trusted. **The gap is largest for millennials,** where the 60 percent who think you can't be too careful when dealing with people is nearly double the 32 percent who think most are trustworthy.



RACE: More whites think people are trustworthy than think they aren't, 42 percent to 48 percent, rates that approximately flip the regional averages. Unfortunately, large majorities of blacks and Hispanics and Asians think people usually can't be trusted. **More than three-quarters of blacks say you can't be too careful, while 62 percent of Hispanics and Asians feel the same.**

EDUCATION: Trust is strongly associated educational attainment. While **twice as many adults with a high school degree or less think you can't be too careful when dealing with people as think people are trustworthy, 60 percent to 31 percent, these percentages essentially reverse for those with a bachelor's degree or above.** Residents with some college or an associate degree have trust levels in between the two, but much closer to those with a high school degree.

INCOME: Trust is also strongly associated with income, with stark differences in trust levels between residents with incomes above and below $50,000. Strong majorities of adults with incomes below this level believe you can't be too careful when dealing with people — two-thirds of those with incomes less than $25,000 and nearly 60 percent of those with incomes $25,000 to $50,000. Conversely, for residents with incomes above $50,000, nearly 60 percent majorities believe most people are trustworthy.



Conclusion

The Kansas City region succeeds in offering a high quality of life to most residents, as nearly 75 percent say their quality of life is good or excellent. Yet some groups — notably millennials, blacks, people with low incomes and those with no more than a high school education — consistently report lower levels of satisfaction with their lives, their communities, and the metro overall. These divides contribute to a lack of trust that holds us back from making steadier and more rapid regional progress.

We all want the same things. Family is far and away the most important factor in determining quality of life across all demographic groups, followed by financial well-being and health. But how well we are able to enjoy these things still depends too much on who we are and how much we have. The challenge is to become a region where all residents have equal opportunity for a high and rising quality of life.

To a certain extent, we are already succeeding. Some of those groups that report lower levels of quality of life, such as millennials and blacks, also report improvements in the past five years that rival the gains experienced by more fortunate groups.

The surest pathway for continuing this improvement seems to be through education. Higher levels of education produce higher incomes that allow more choices as to where to live, as well as provide the places where we already live with the resources to make them safer, greener, easier to get around and more supportive of families and children.

Metropolitan Kansas City is a big and complicated place — 119 cities and nine counties in two states. Its complexity and the complexity of the issues that need to be addressed make it difficult to come together and get things done, a difficulty amplified when there is a deficiency of trust. This difficulty is one of the reasons residents generally feel connected to their communities but don't often participate in them or feel like they are capable of changing them.

A key insight derived from the analysis contained in this report is that, because all walks of life converge on family as the most important determinant of quality of life, the degree to which resolving regional issues can be also tied to helping families raise their children and make ends meet may make garnering the required support easier to achieve. Explicitly linking policy to the one thing we all agree is most important may help build the trust needed to advance these issues.

In a sense, then, all policy is family policy. The recipe for creating a metro where all residents enjoy a high and rising quality of life seems clear — public policy aligned with supporting families, plus education to erase the demographic divides. Of course, education itself is a public policy that supports families — not only children, but parents as well. Higher levels of education are associated with greater family stability and more two-parent families, as well as higher incomes. Additionally, as the economy becomes more competitive and more global, even those currently enjoying high quality lives must find ways to keep their skills sharp and in demand by increasingly technology- and knowledge-oriented businesses.

Our region faces mounting challenges from an increasingly uncertain world grappling with the forces of globalization, technology, climate change and shifting demographics. Here again, education may come to the rescue. Beyond erasing demographic divides, new systems for delivering high-quality continuous education that enable residents and the region to successfully meet these challenges are required. Of all the assets requiring public and private investment, this one seems most essential for the region to continue to be one where the vast majority enjoy a good or excellent quality of life.

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