

Los Alamos County, NM

The National Community Survey

Report of Results
2024

Report by:



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National Research Center at Polco is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

About The NCS™

The National Community Survey™ (The NCS™) report is about the “livability” of Los Alamos County. A livable community is a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live. The survey was developed by the experts from National Research Center at Polco.

Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions considering ten central facets of a community:

- Economy
- Mobility
- Community Design
- Utilities
- Safety
- Natural Environment
- Parks and Recreation
- Health and Wellness
- Education, Arts, and Culture
- Inclusivity and Engagement



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The report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 419 residents of Los Alamos County collected from August 2nd, 2024 to September 6th, 2024. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 12% for all respondents and the response rate for the 2024 survey was 5%. Survey results were weighted so that the demographic profile of respondents was representative of the demographic profile of adults in Los Alamos County.



How the results are reported

For the most part, the percentages presented in the following tabs represent the “percent positive.” Most commonly, the percent positive is the combination of the top two most positive response options (i.e., excellent/good, very safe/somewhat safe, etc.). On many of the questions in the survey respondents may answer “don’t know.” The proportion of respondents giving this reply is shown in the full set of responses included in the tab “Complete data.” However, these responses have been removed from the analyses presented in most of the tabs. In other words, the tables and graphs display the responses from respondents who had an opinion about a specific item.

Comparisons to benchmarks

NRC's database of comparative resident opinion is comprised of resident perspectives gathered in surveys from over 500 communities whose residents evaluated the same kinds of topics on The National Community Survey. The comparison evaluations are from the most recent survey completed in each community in the last five years. NRC adds the latest results quickly upon survey completion, keeping the benchmark data fresh and relevant. The communities in the database represent a wide geographic and population range. In each tab, Los Alamos County's results are noted as being "higher" than the benchmark, "lower" than the benchmark, or "similar" to the benchmark, meaning that the average rating given by Los Alamos County residents is statistically similar to or different (greater or lesser) than the benchmark. Being rated as "higher" or "lower" than the benchmark means that Los Alamos County's average rating for a particular item was more than 10 points different than the benchmark. If a rating was "much higher" or "much lower," then Los Alamos County's average rating was more than 20 points different when compared to the benchmark.

Trends over time

Trend data for Los Alamos County represent important comparison data and should be examined for improvements or declines.¹ Deviations from stable trends over time represent opportunities for understanding how local policies, programs, or public information may have affected residents' opinions. Changes between survey years have been noted with an arrow and the percent difference. If the difference is greater than six percentage points between the 2022 and 2024 surveys, the change is statistically significant.

1. In 2020, The NCS survey was updated to include new and refreshed items. Consequently, some of the trends may be impacted due to wording modifications that could have potentially altered the meaning of the item for the respondent.

Key Findings

Highest-performing areas:

- Nearly all Los Alamos County residents rated the overall feeling of safety as excellent or good, with similarly high scores for feeling safe in neighborhoods and commercial areas during the day.
- Residents value Los Alamos County's natural environment, with 9 in 10 rating cleanliness and air quality as excellent or good, both higher than national benchmarks.
- Recreational opportunities are highly valued, with 9 in 10 respondents rating walking trails and fitness opportunities much higher than national averages. Public library services were rated positively by virtually all participants, higher than the national benchmark.

Lowest-performing areas:

- While significantly increasing 2022, several ratings related to the local economy and businesses remained lower than the national benchmark, including:
 - Overall quality of business and service establishments
 - The variety of business and service establishments
 - The vibrancy of downtown/commercial area
 - Shopping opportunities
- Affordability stood out as a priority, with the cost of living and availability of affordable quality housing, health care, health services, and food scoring lower than national averages, however economic outlook improved since 2022.
- Some ratings related to community design scored lower than the national benchmark, including well-planned residential and commercial growth, variety of housing options, and overall quality of new development.

Other notable results:

Custom questions provided valuable insights into the community's evolving needs.

- Residents highlighted community housing and local business as a priority, followed by quality of governance with a focus on fiscal stewardship and effective, effective and reliable services
- Traditional media (print and online new sources, television, radio) as a primary source of information about Los Alamos County.
- About 1 in 10 participants have downloaded the Los Alamos Now App, and those that had were satisfied with the app's ease of navigation and use.

Areas of greatest change since 2024:

Of the 122 evaluative questions included on both the 2022 and 2024 surveys, 84 were statistically similar to previous results. Significant upward trends were seen in 31 items, while 2 ratings decreased significantly since 2022. The most significant of those trends are listed below.

Increases

- Power (electric and/or gas) utility (+23%)
- Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Los Alamos County (water, sewer, storm water, electric/gas, broadband) (+22%)
- What impact, if any, do you think the economy will have on your family income in the next 6 months? (+15%)

Decreases

- Los Alamos County open space (-11)
- The Federal Government (-9%)

Methods

Selecting survey recipients

All households within Los Alamos County were eligible to participate in the survey. A list of all households within the zip codes serving Los Alamos County was purchased from Polco's mailing vendor, Go-Dog Direct, based on updated listings from the United States Postal Service. Since some of the zip codes that serve Los Alamos County households may also serve addresses that lie outside of the community, the exact geographic location of each housing unit was compared to community boundaries using the most current municipal boundary file. Addresses located outside of Los Alamos County boundaries were removed from the list of potential households to survey. Each address identified as being within city boundaries was further identified as being within one of the two areas - Los Alamos or White Rock. From that list, addresses were randomly selected as survey recipients, with multi-family housing units (defined as those with a unit number) sampled at a rate of 5:3 compared to single family housing units.

An individual within each household was randomly selected using the "birthday method". The birthday method selects a person within the household by asking the "person who most recently had a birthday" to complete the questionnaire. The underlying assumption in this method is that day of birth has no relationship to the way people respond to surveys. This instruction was contained in the introduction of the survey.

Conducting the survey

The 3,500 randomly selected households received mailings beginning on June 28th, 2024 and data collection for the survey remained open for five weeks. The first mailing was a postcard inviting the household to participate in the survey. The next mailing was a reminder postcard inviting the household one final time to participate in the survey. All mailings included a web link to give residents the opportunity to respond to the survey online, as well as QR codes to further encourage participation. All follow-up mailings asked those who had not completed the survey to do so, and those who had already done so to refrain from completing the survey again.

The survey was available in English and Spanish. All mailings contained paragraphs in both languages instructing participants on how to complete the survey in their preferred language.

Of the 3,500 households that received the invitations to participate, 419 completed the survey, providing an overall response rate of 12%. The response rate was calculated using AAPOR's response rate #2 for mailed surveys of unnamed persons.²

It is customary to describe the precision of estimates made from surveys by a "level of confidence" and accompanying "confidence interval" (or margin of error). A traditional level of confidence, and the one used here, is 95%. The 95% confidence interval can be any size and quantifies the sampling error or imprecision of the survey results because some residents' opinions are relied on to estimate all residents' opinions. The margin of error for Los Alamos County survey is no greater than plus or minus five percentage points around any given percent reported for all respondents (419 completed surveys).

In addition to the randomly selected "probability sample" of households, a link to an online open-participation survey was publicized by Los Alamos County. The open-participation survey was identical to the random sample survey, with two small updates; it asked a question to confirm the respondent was a resident of Los Alamos County and also a question about where they heard about the survey. The open-participation survey was open to all county residents and became available on August 23rd, 2024. The survey remained open for two weeks. The data presented in the following tabs exclude the open participation survey data, but a tab at the end provides the complete frequency of responses to questions by the open-participation respondents.

Analyzing the data

Responses from mailed surveys were entered into an electronic dataset using a "key and verify" method, where all responses are entered twice and compared to each other. Any discrepancies were resolved in comparison to the original survey form. Range checks as well as other forms of quality control were also performed. Responses from surveys completed on Polco were downloaded and merged with the mailed survey responses.

The demographics of the survey respondents were compared to those found in the 2020 Census and 2022 American Community Survey estimates for adults in Los Alamos County. The primary objective of weighting survey data is to make the survey respondents reflective of the larger population of the community. The characteristics used for weighting were age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, housing type, housing tenure, and area. No adjustments were made for design effects. Weights were calculated using an iterative, multiplicative raking model known as the ANES Weighting Algorithm.³ The results of the weighting scheme for the probability sample are presented in the following table.

NRC aligns demographic labels with those used by the U.S. Census for reporting purposes, when possible. Some categories (e.g., age, race/Hispanic origin, housing type, and length of residency) are combined into smaller subgroups.

		Unweighted	Weighted	Target ⁴
Age	18-34	10%	25%	26%
	35-54	30%	33%	33%
	55+	60%	42%	42%
Area	Los Alamos	69%	71%	71%
	White Rock	31%	29%	29%
Hispanic origin	No, not of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	91%	83%	83%
	Yes, I consider myself to be of Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin	9%	17%	17%
Housing tenure	Own	89%	73%	73%
	Rent	11%	27%	27%
Housing type	Attached	25%	39%	39%
	Detached	75%	61%	61%
Race & Hispanic origin	Not white alone	16%	28%	28%
	White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	84%	72%	72%
Sex	Man	49%	52%	52%
	Woman	51%	48%	48%
Sex/age	Man 18-34	5%	14%	14%
	Man 35-54	15%	17%	17%
	Man 55+	29%	21%	21%
	Woman 18-34	6%	12%	12%

Woman 35-54	15%	16%	16%
Woman 55+	30%	21%	21%

The survey datasets were analyzed using all or some of a combination of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), R, Python and Tableau. For the most part, the percentages presented in the reports represent the “percent positive.” The percent positive is the combination of the top two most positive response options (i.e., excellent/good, very safe/somewhat safe, essential/very important, etc.), or, in the case of resident behaviors/participation, the percent positive represents the proportion of respondents indicating “yes” or participating in an activity at least once a month.

On many of the questions in the survey respondents may answer “don’t know.” The proportion of respondents giving this reply is shown in the full set of responses included in the tab “Complete data”. However, these responses have been removed from the analyses presented in the reports. In other words, the tables and graphs display the responses from respondents who had an opinion about a specific item.

Contact

Los Alamos County funded this research. Please contact Julie Williams-Hill of Los Alamos County at julie.williams@lacnm.us if you have any questions about the survey.

Study Limitations

All public opinion research is subject to unmeasured error. While the methodologies employed for this survey were designed to minimize this error as much as possible, these other sources of potential error should be acknowledged. **Non-response error** arises when those who were selected to participate in the survey did not do so, and may have different opinions or experiences than those who did respond. **Coverage error** refers to the possibility that some respondents that should have been included in the surveyed population were not (e.g., for a general resident survey, USPS mailing lists may exclude certain types of housing units, such as multi-family buildings where mail is delivered to a common area rather than to a specific unit (though this is rare), or where mail is received at a PO box instead of the at household's physical location. Finally, **recall bias** occurs when respondents may not perfectly remember their experiences in the past year (such as participation in social or civic events), and **social desirability bias** may cause respondents to answer in ways they think cast their responses in a more favorable light.

Survey Validity

See the Polco Knowledge Base article on survey validity at <https://info.polco.us/knowledge/statistical-vali>

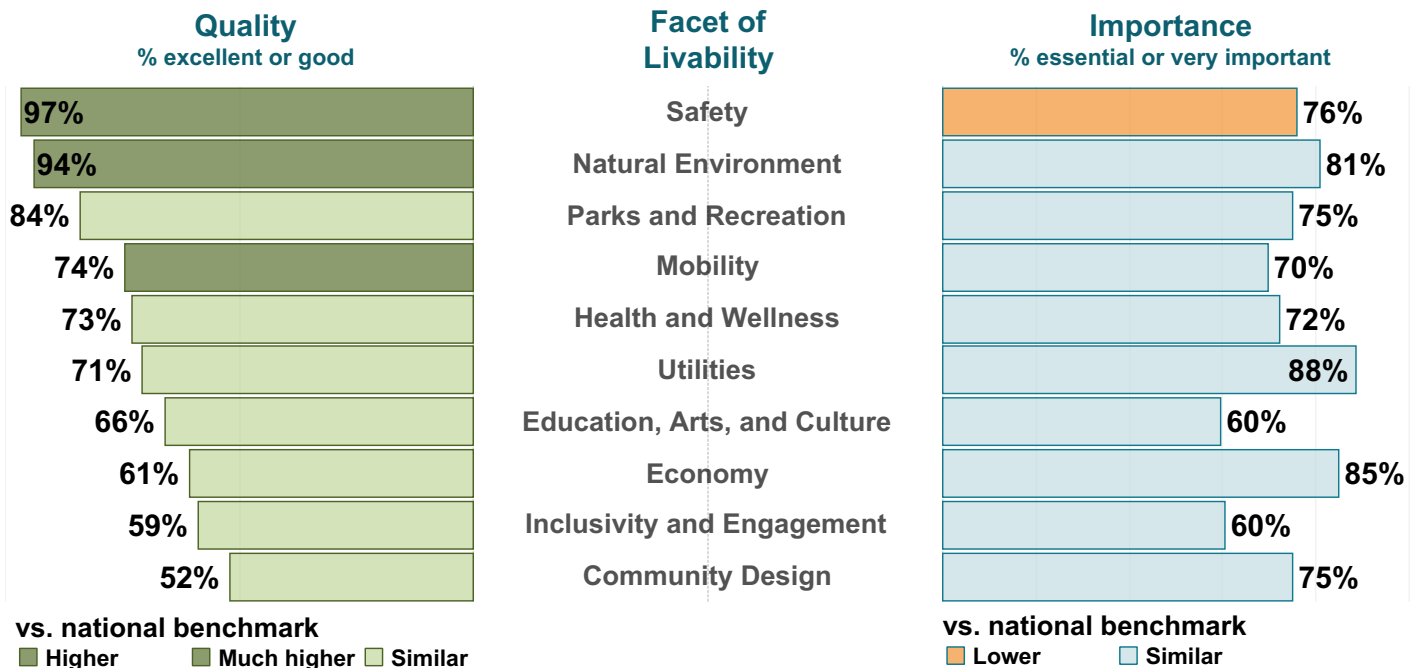
2. See AAPOR's Standard Definitions for more information at <https://aapor.org/standards-and-ethics/standard-definitions/>
3. Pasek, J. (2014). ANES Weighting Algorithm. Retrieved from <https://surveyinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Full-anesrake-paper.pdf>
4. Targets come from the 2020 Census and 2022 American Community Survey

Facets of Livability

Every jurisdiction must balance limited resources while meeting resident needs and striving to optimize community livability. To this end, it is helpful to know what aspects of the community are most important to residents and which they perceive as being of higher or lower quality. It is especially helpful to know when a facet of livability is considered of high importance but rated as lower quality, as this should be a top priority to address.

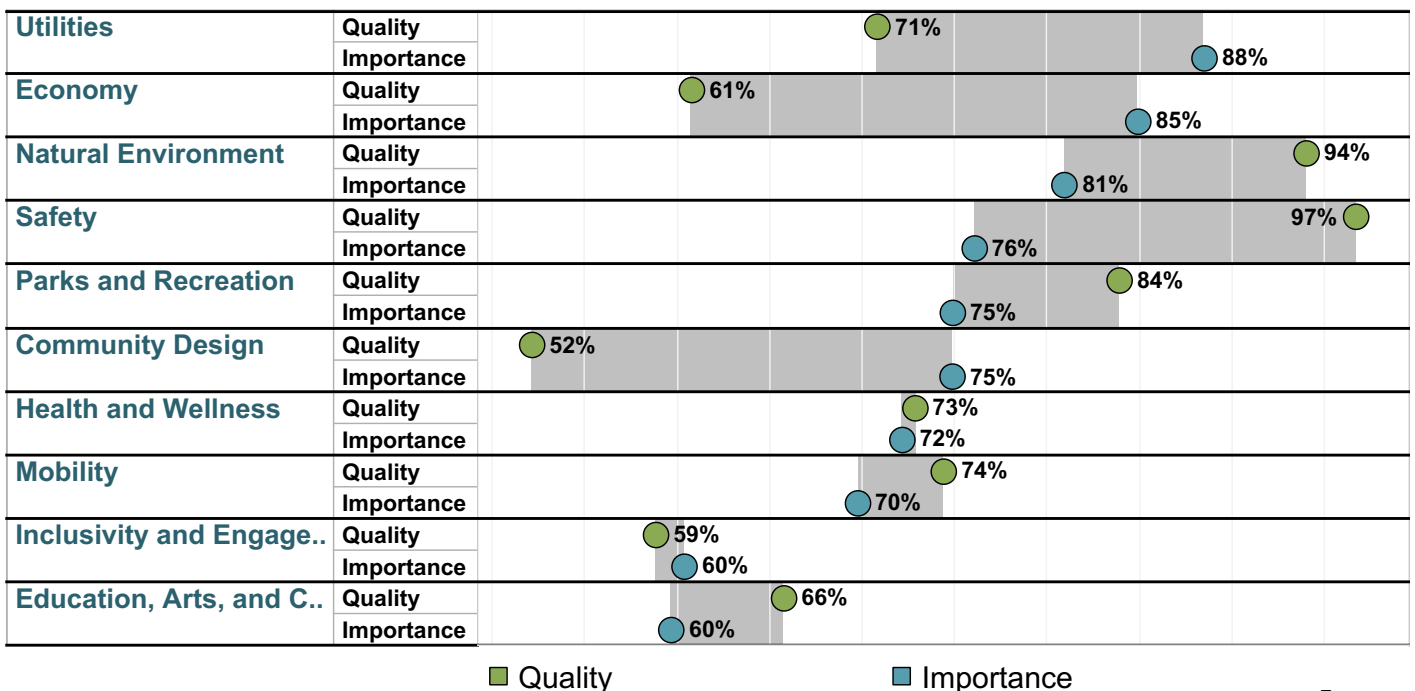
Quality and Importance by the Numbers

The table below shows the proportion of residents who rated the community facets positively for quality and the priority (importance) placed on each. Also displayed is whether local quality ratings were lower, similar, or higher t..



Quality/Importance Gap Analysis

The gap analysis chart below shows the same data as above; however, this chart more clearly illustrates the comparative differences in quality and importance ratings for each facet, as well as the absolute ratings for each.



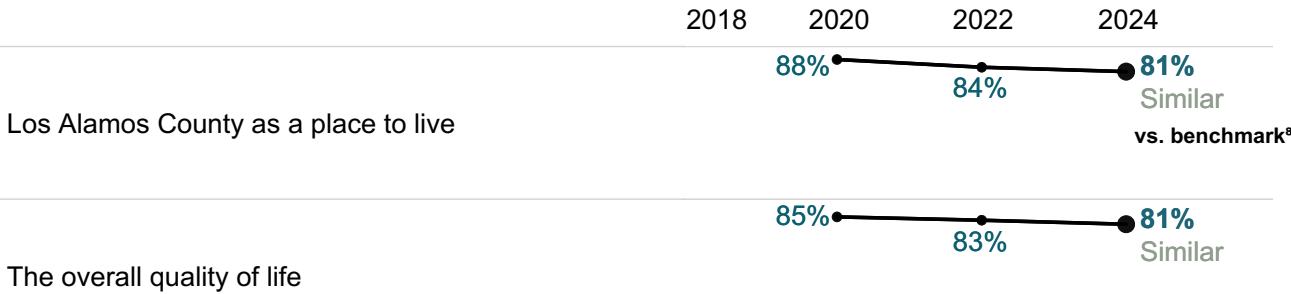
The overall quality of life in Los Alamos County, 2024

Quality of Life

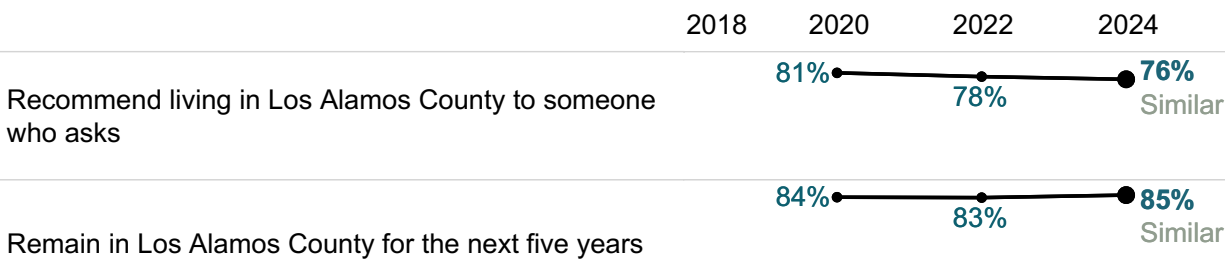
Measuring community livability starts with assessing the quality of life of those who live there, and ensuring that the community is attractive, accessible, and welcoming to all.



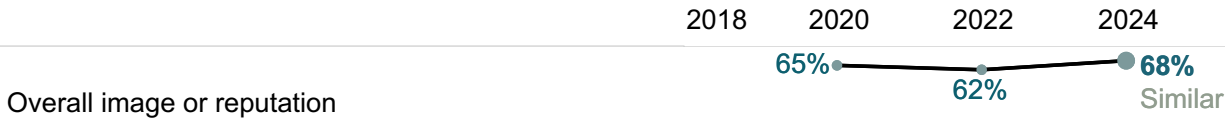
Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)



Please indicate how likely or unlikely you are to do each of the following.
(% very or somewhat likely)



Please rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)

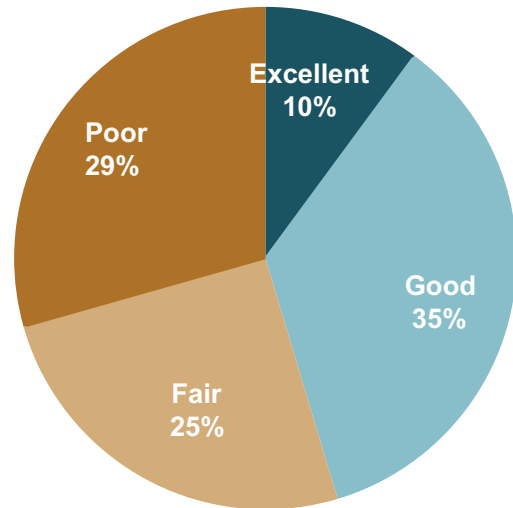


8. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

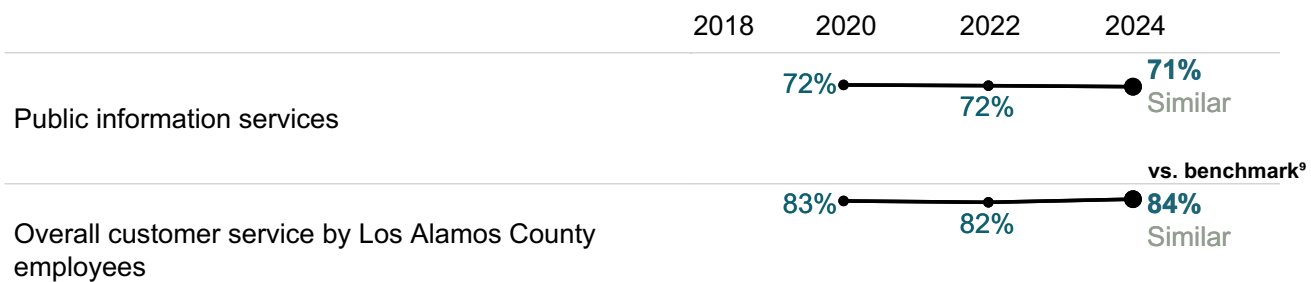
Overall confidence in Los Alamos County government, 2024

Governance

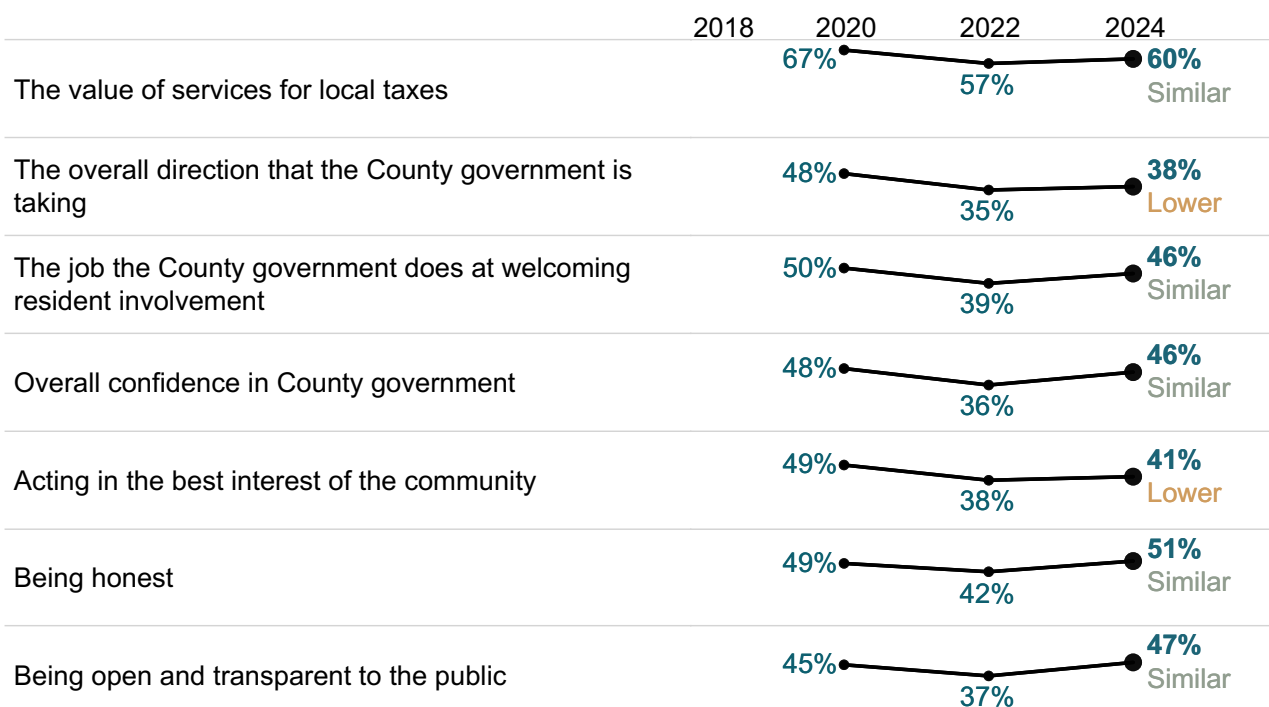
Strong local governments produce results that meet the needs of residents while making the best use of available resources, and are responsive to the present and future needs of the community as a whole.

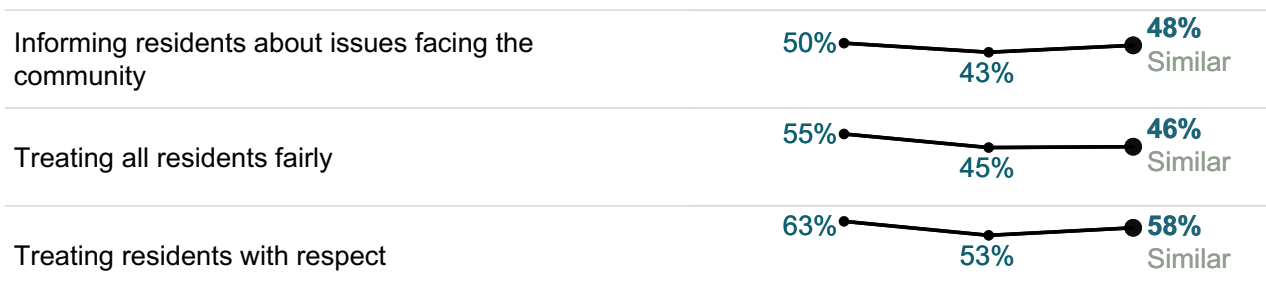


Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

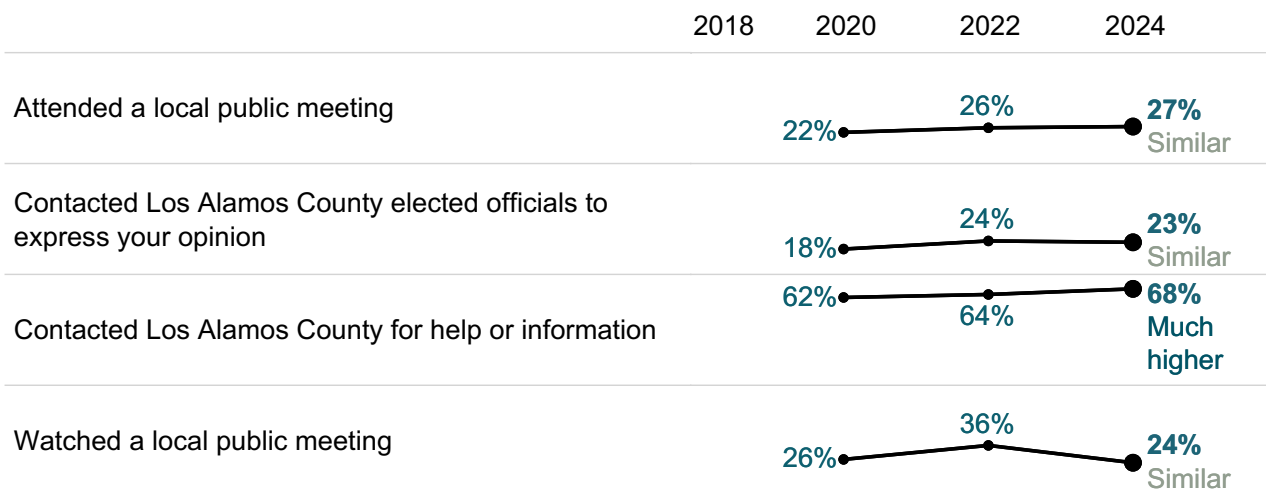


Please rate the following categories of Los Alamos County government performance.
(% excellent or good)

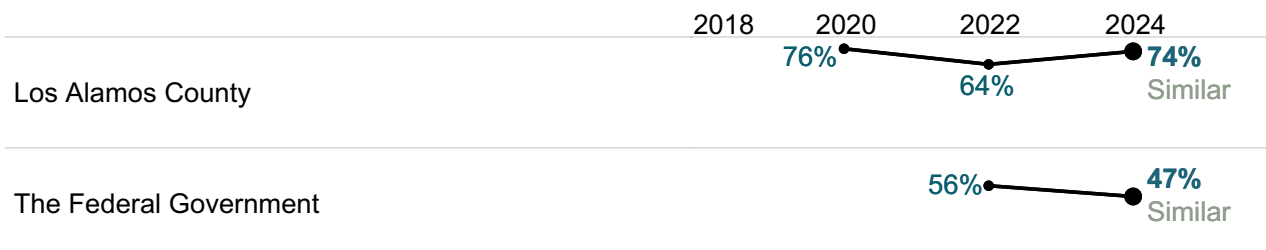




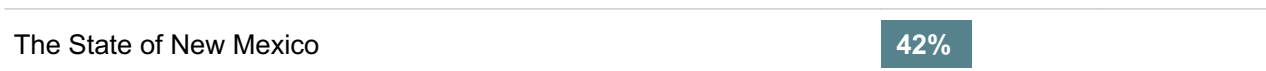
Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.
 (% excellent or good)



Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following?
 (% excellent or good)



Overall, how would you rate the quality of the services provided by each of the following?
 (% excellent or good)

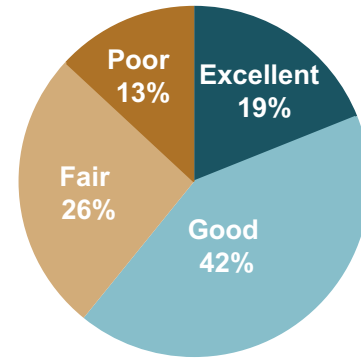


9. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

Overall economic health of Los Alamos County, 2024

Economy

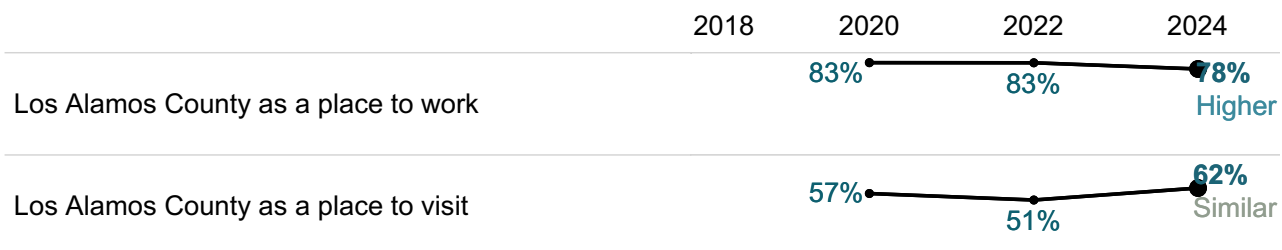
Local governments work together with private and nonprofit businesses, and with the community at large, to foster sustainable growth, create jobs, and promote a thriving local economy.



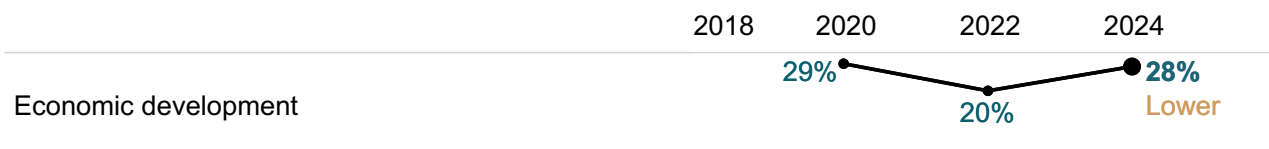
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

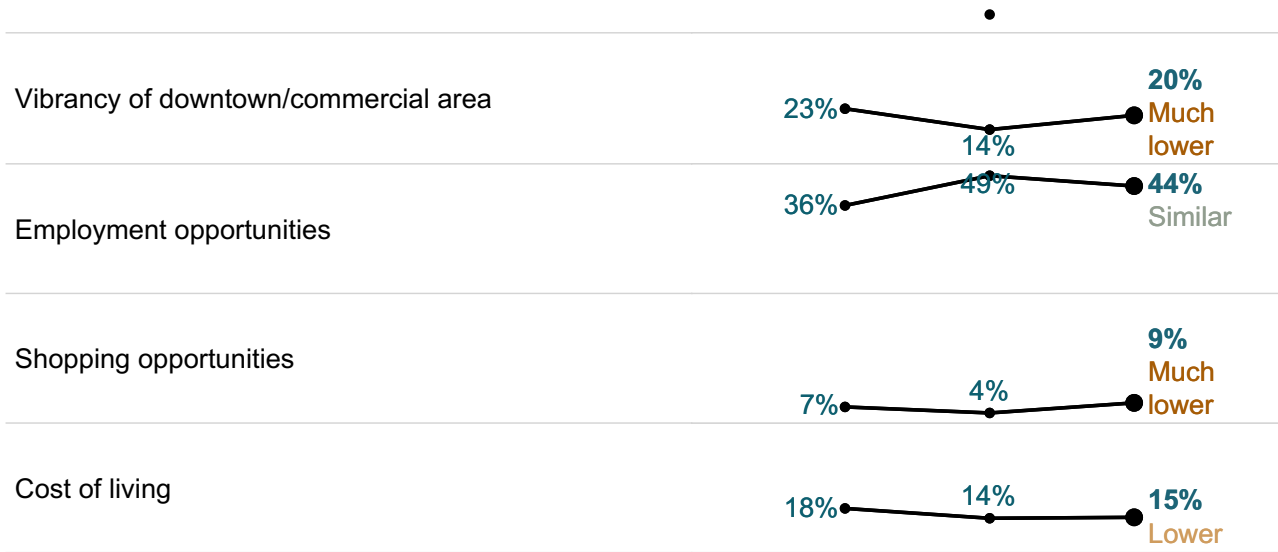


Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

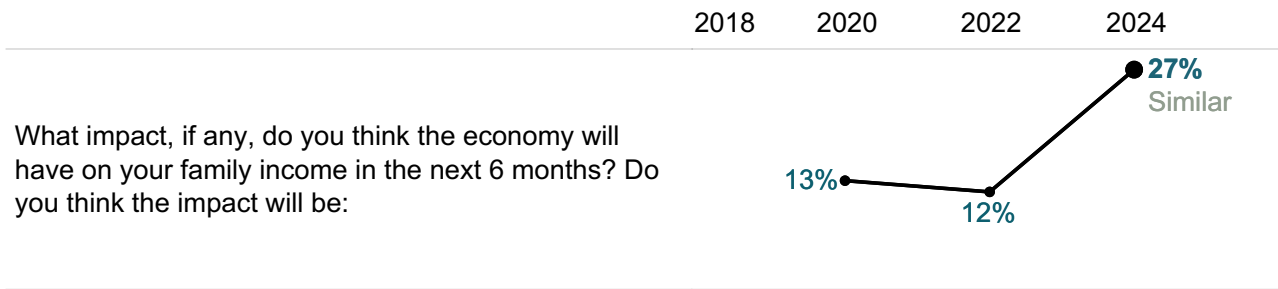


Please rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)





What impact, if any, do you think the economy will have on your family income in the next 6 months? Do you think the impact will be:
 (% very or somewhat positive)

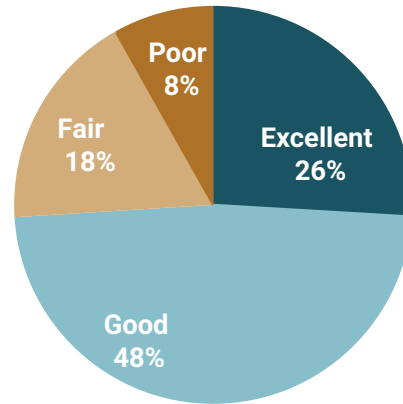


10. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

Overall quality of the transportation system in Los Alamos County, 2024

Mobility

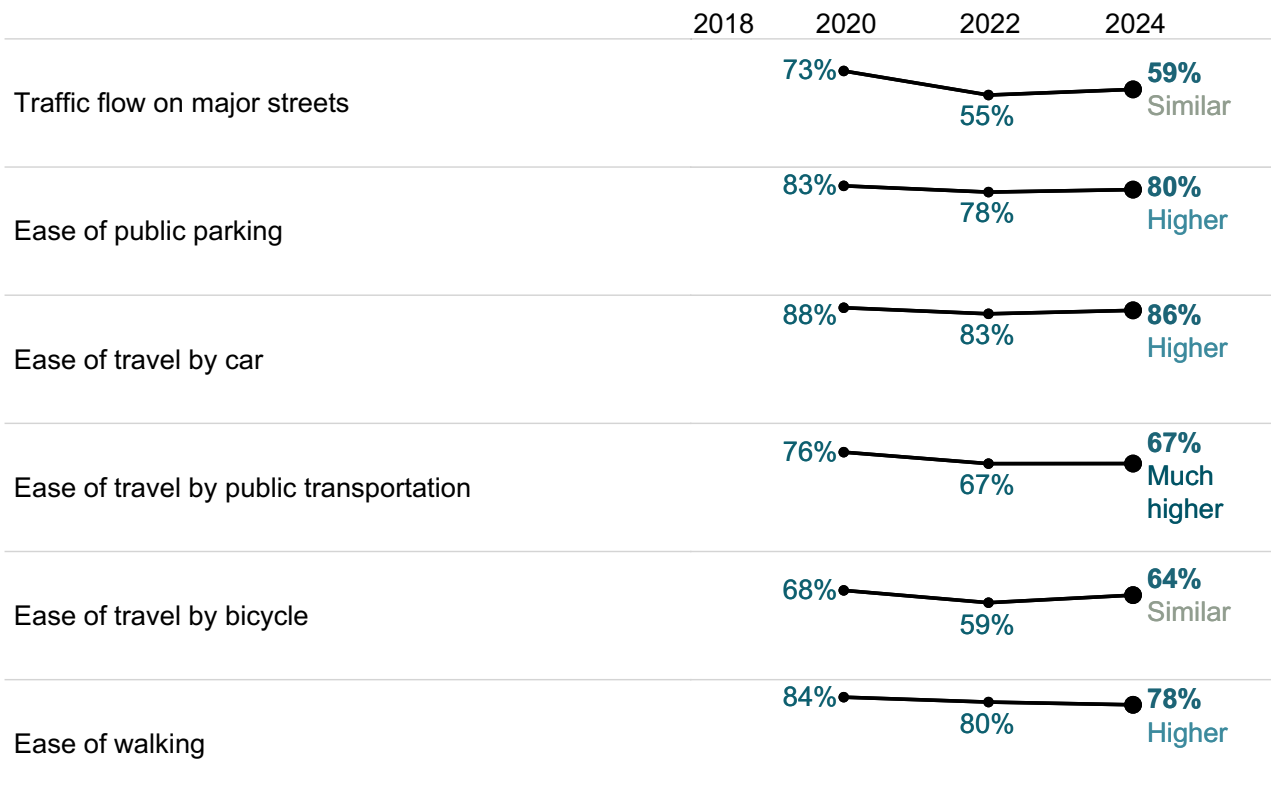
The ease with which residents can move about their communities, whether for commuting, leisure, or recreation, plays a major role in the quality of life for all who live, work, and play in the community.



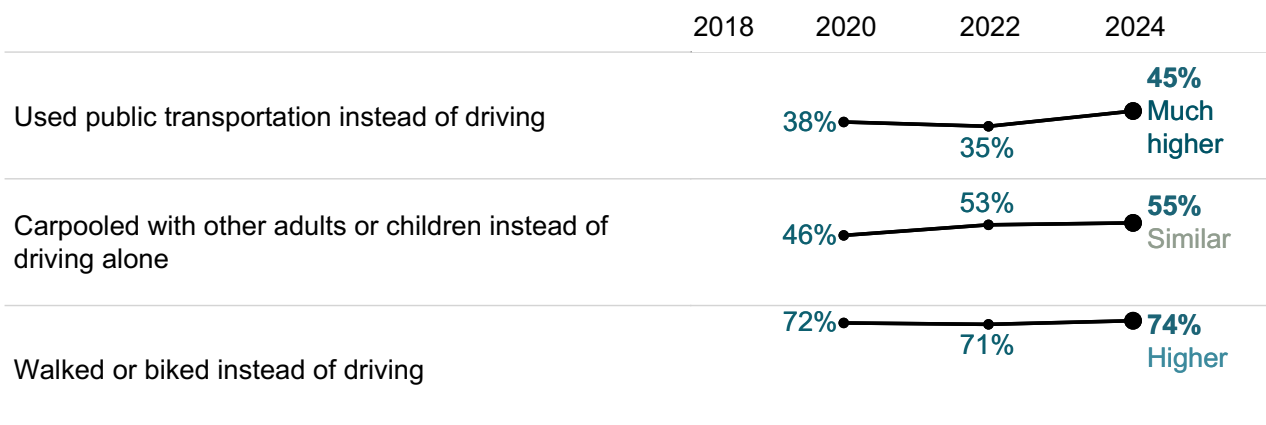
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



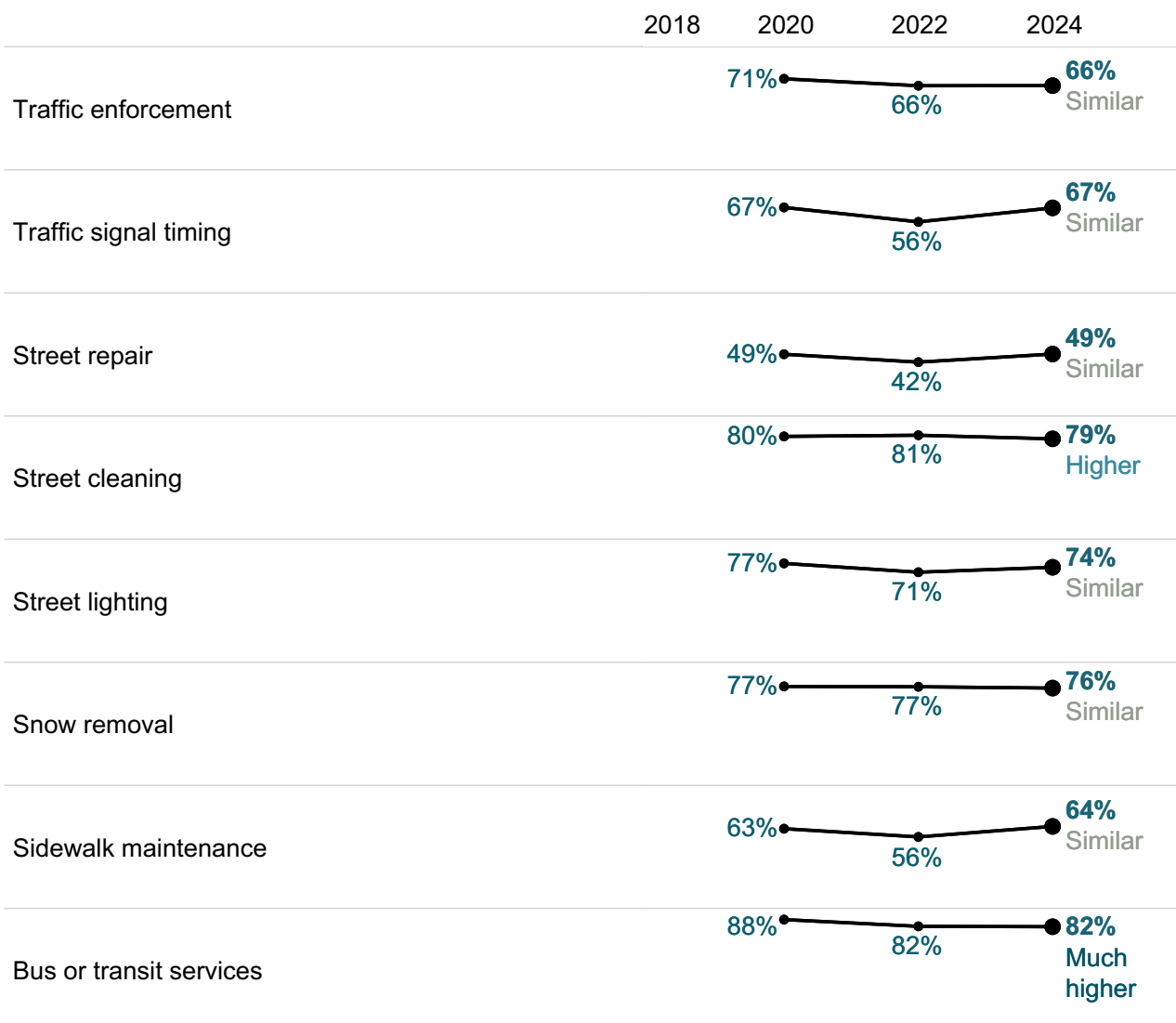
Please also rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)



Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.
 (% yes)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
 (% excellent or good)

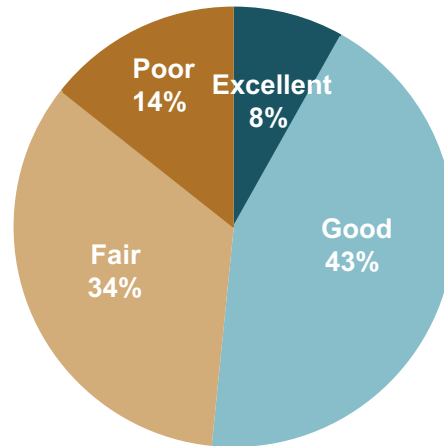


11. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

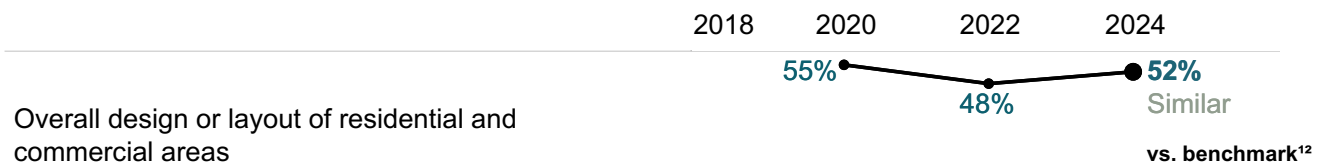
Overall design or layout of Los Alamos County's residential and commercial areas, 2024

Community Design

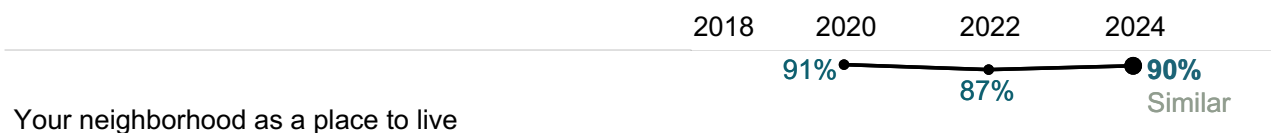
A well-designed community enhances the quality of life for its residents by encouraging smart land use and zoning, ensuring that affordable housing is accessible to all, and providing access to parks and other green spaces.



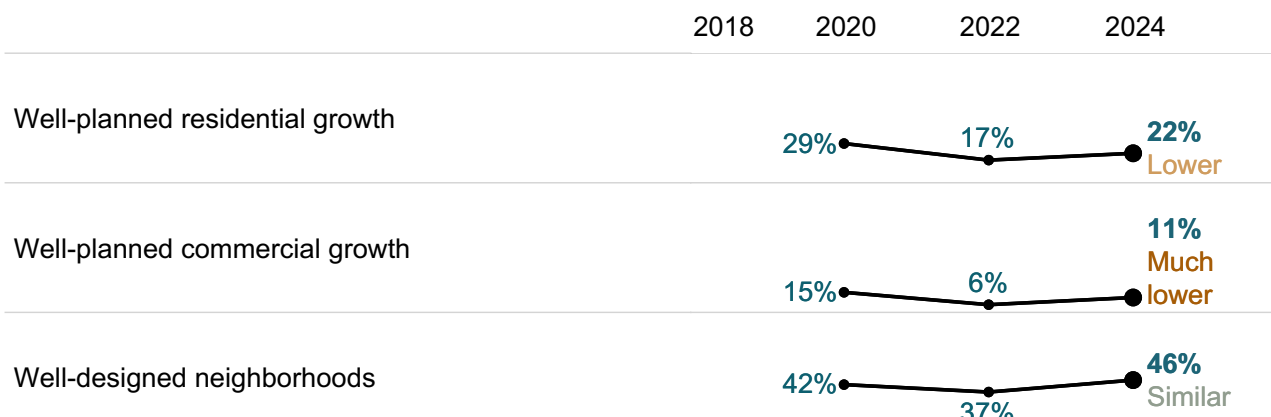
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)

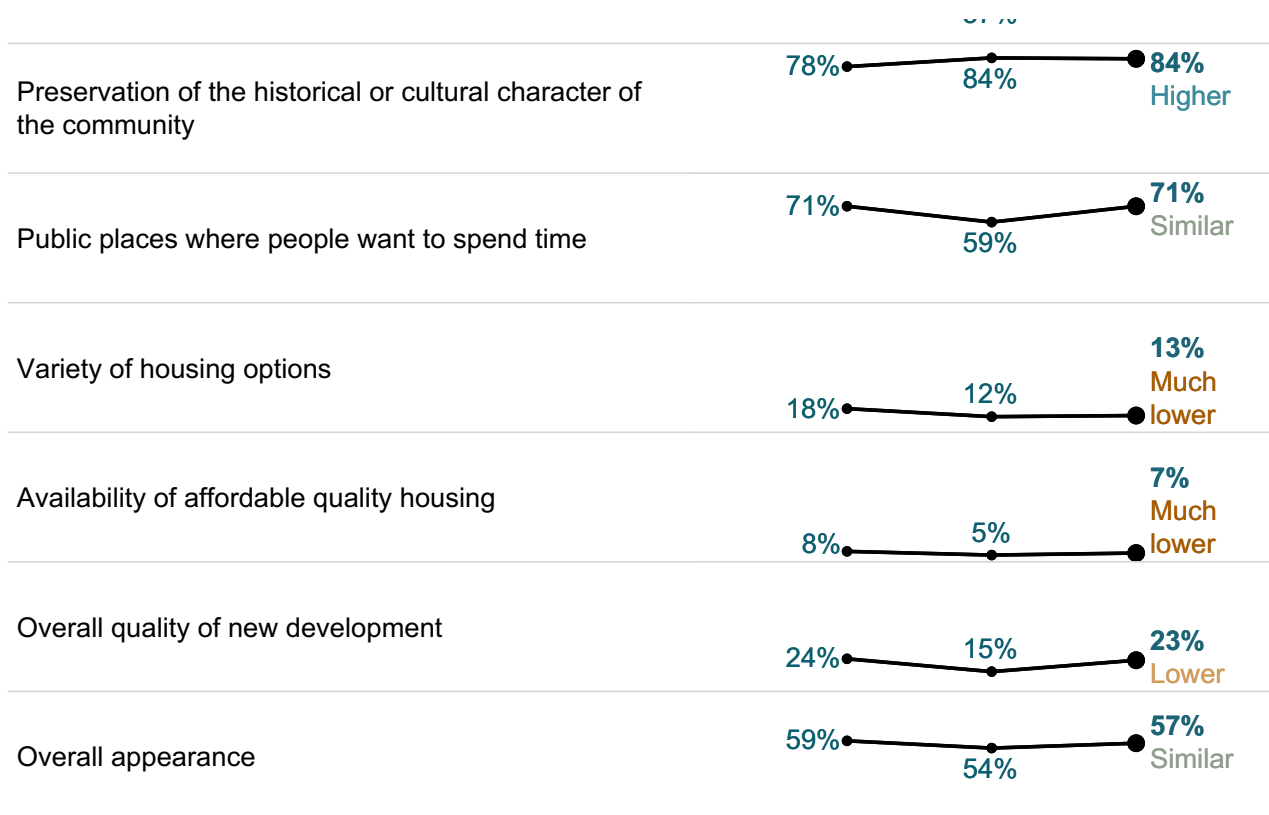


Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

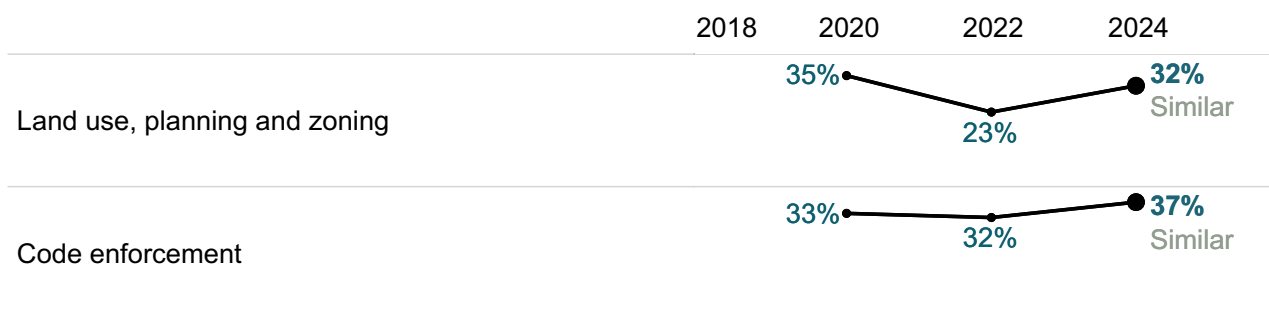


Please also rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)





Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
 (% excellent or good)

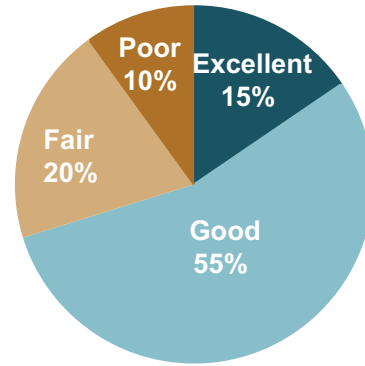


12. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

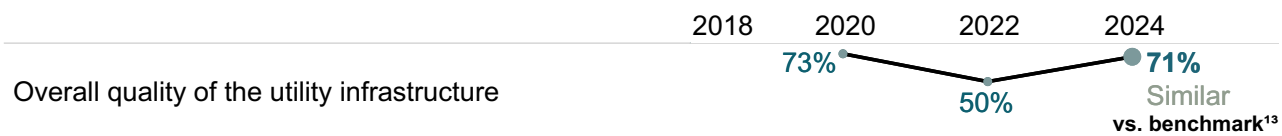
Overall quality of the utility infrastructure in Los Alamos County, 2024

Utilities

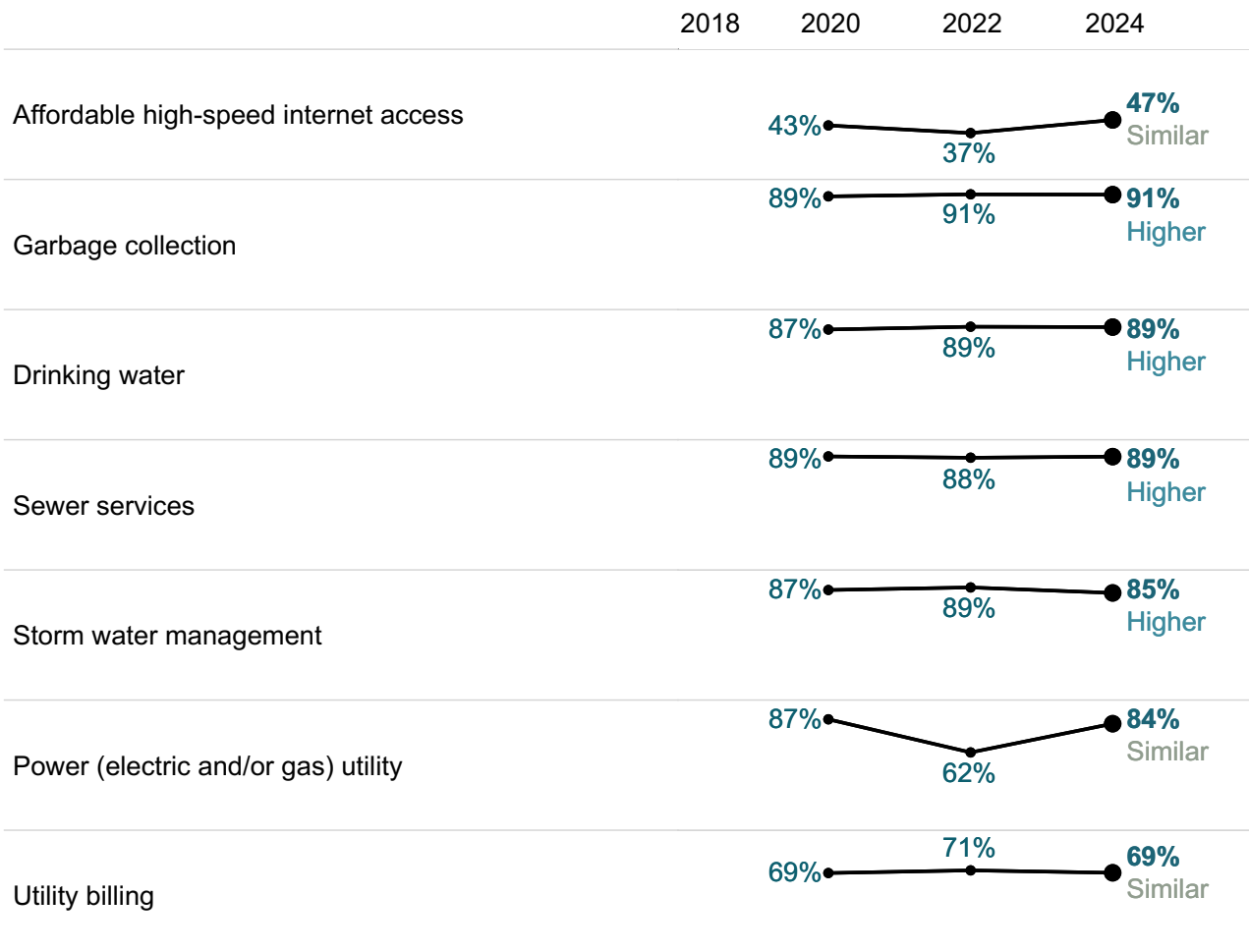
Services such as water, gas, electricity, and internet access play a vital role in ensuring the physical and economic health and well-being of the communities they serve.



Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

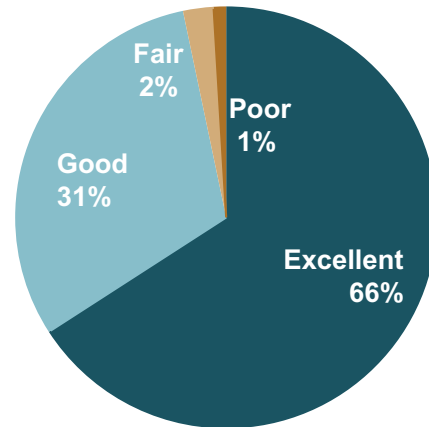


¹³. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

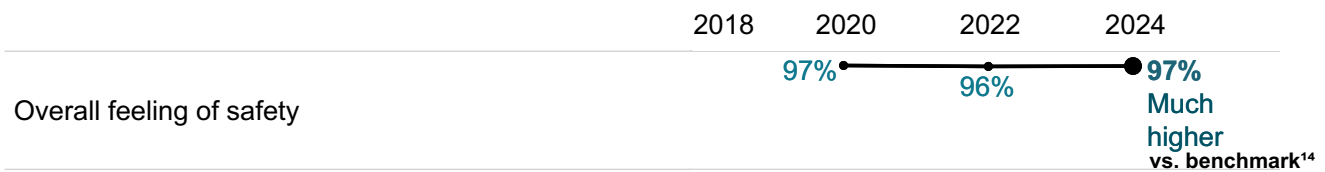
Overall feeling of safety in Los Alamos County, 2024

Safety

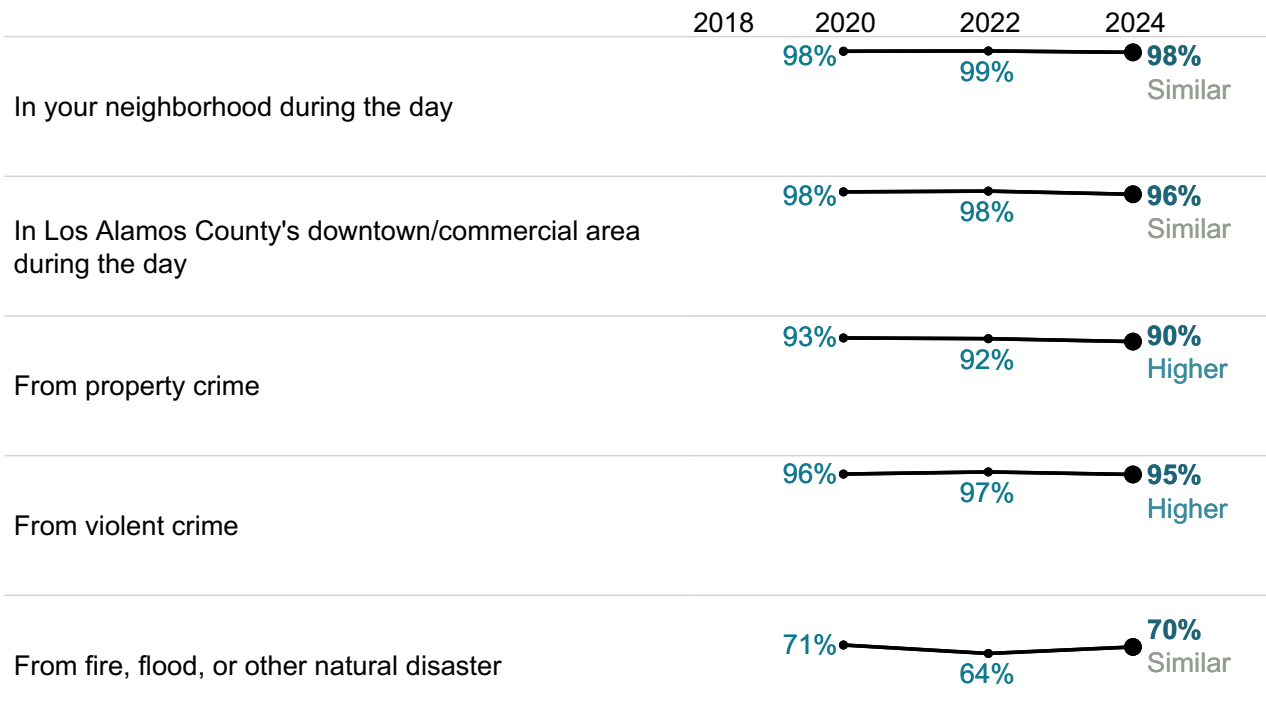
Public safety is often the most important task facing local governments. All residents should feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods and in the greater community, and providing robust safety-related services is essential to residents' quality of life.



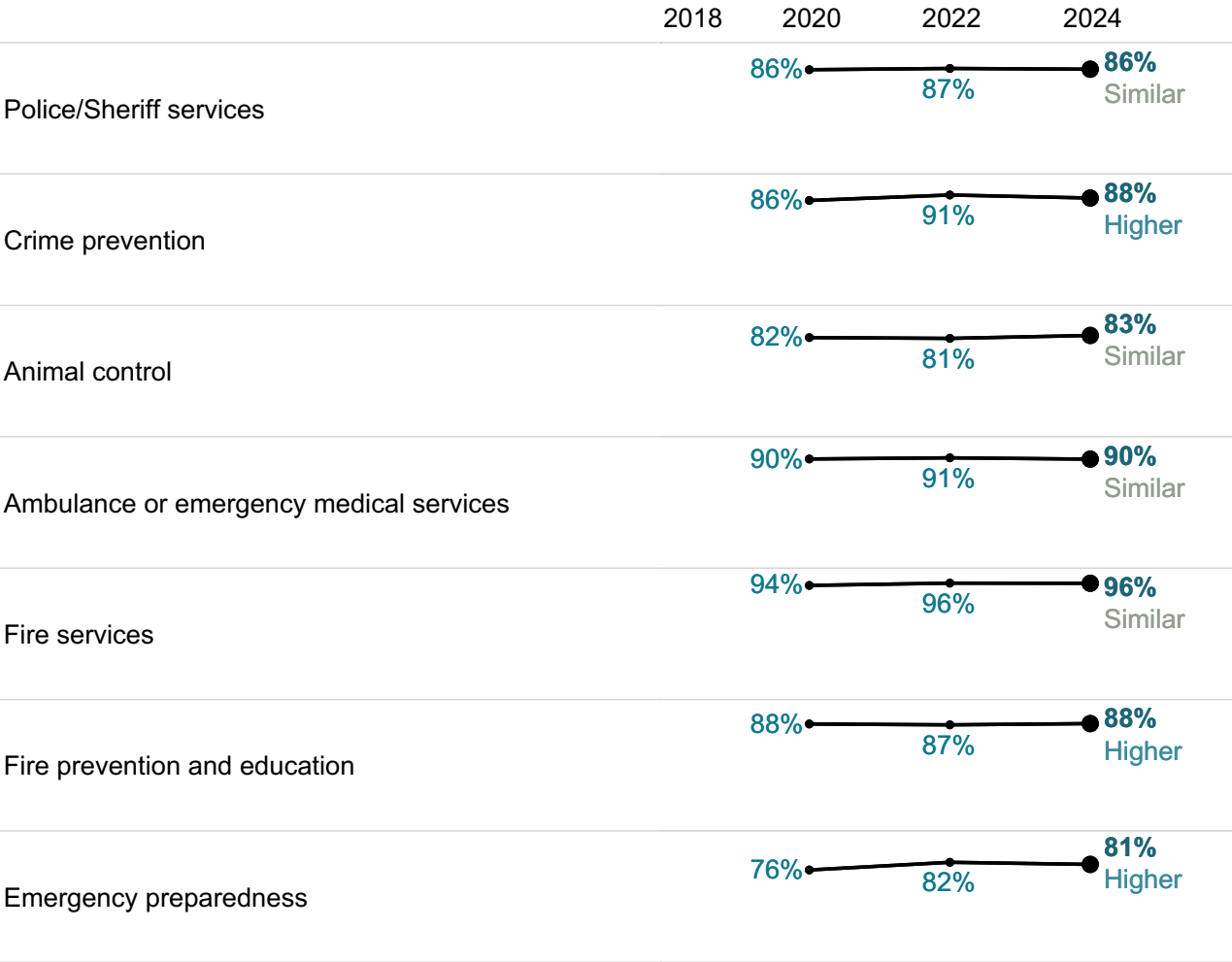
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate how safe or unsafe you feel:
(% very or somewhat safe)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

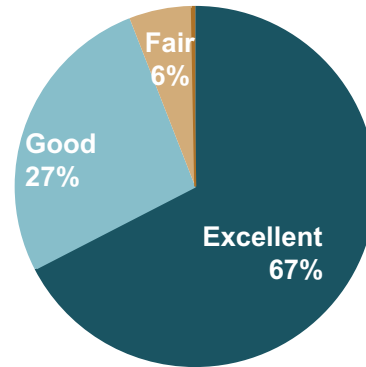


14. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

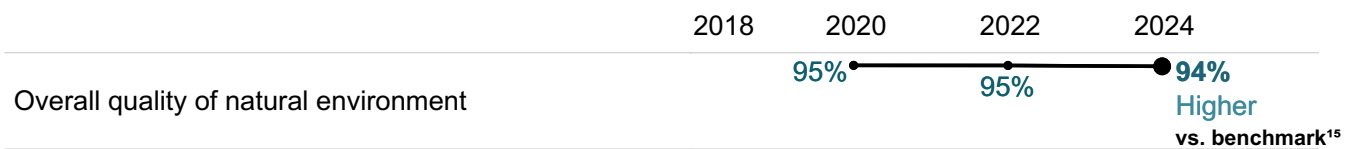
Overall quality of natural environment in Los Alamos County, 2024

Natural Environment

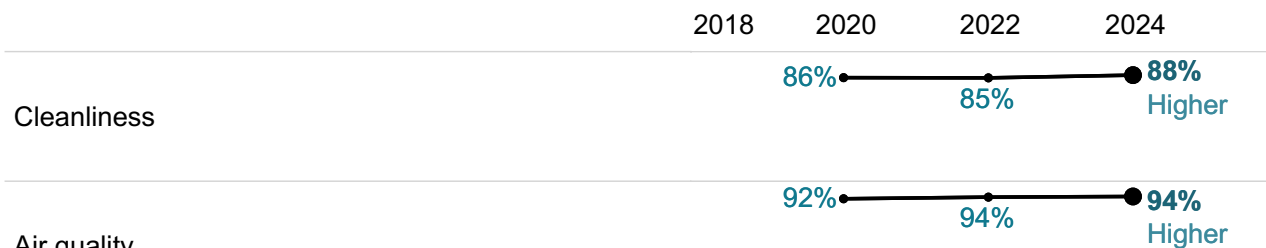
The natural environment plays a vital role in the health and well-being of residents. The natural spaces in which residents live and experience their communities has a direct and profound effect on quality of life.



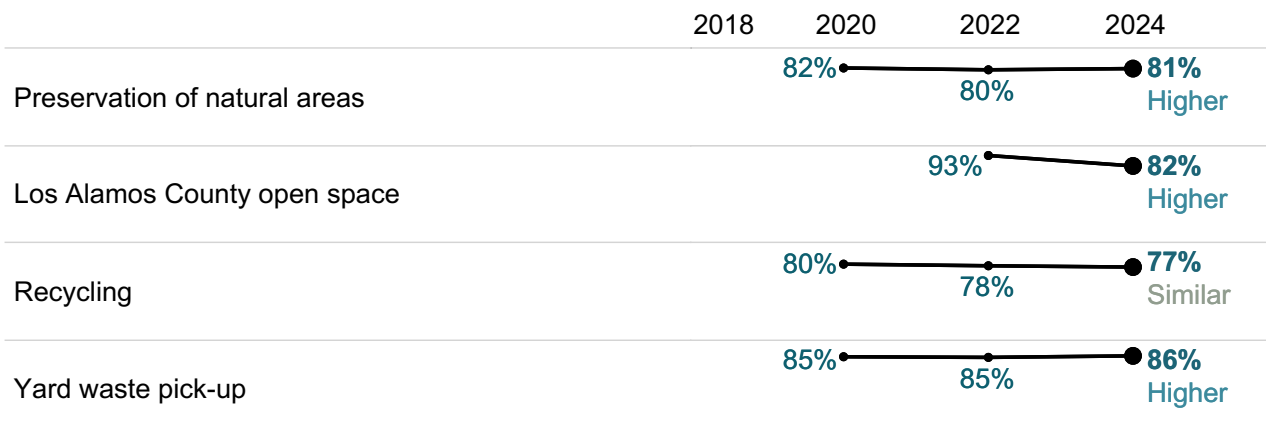
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please also rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)



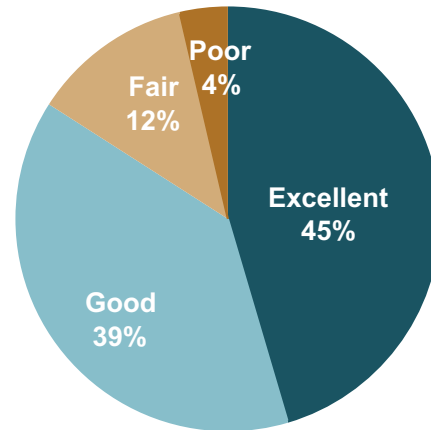
¹⁵. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities, 2024

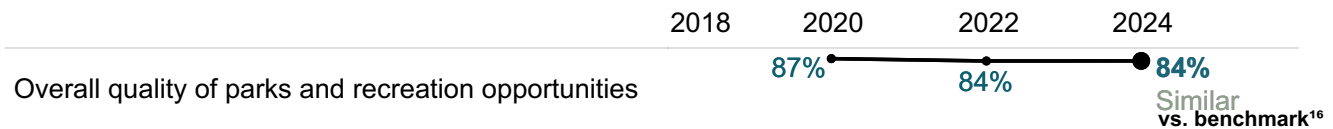
Parks and Recreation

"There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment."

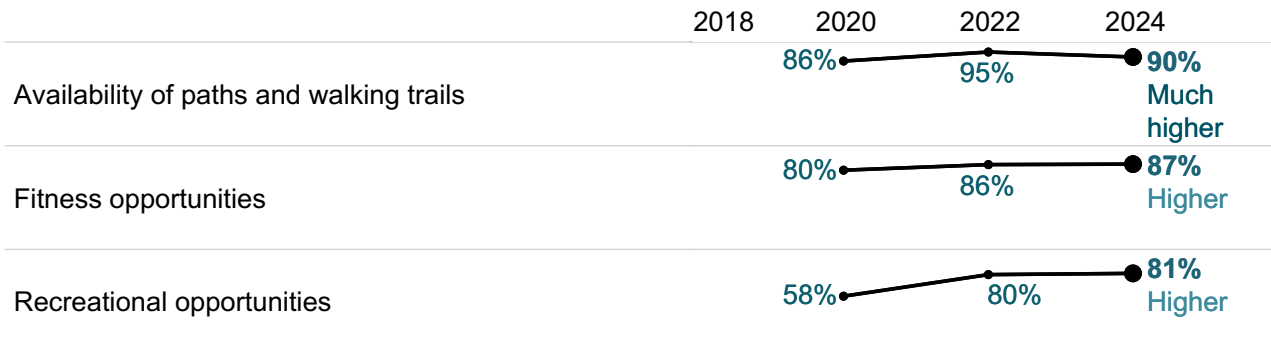
- National Recreation and Park Association



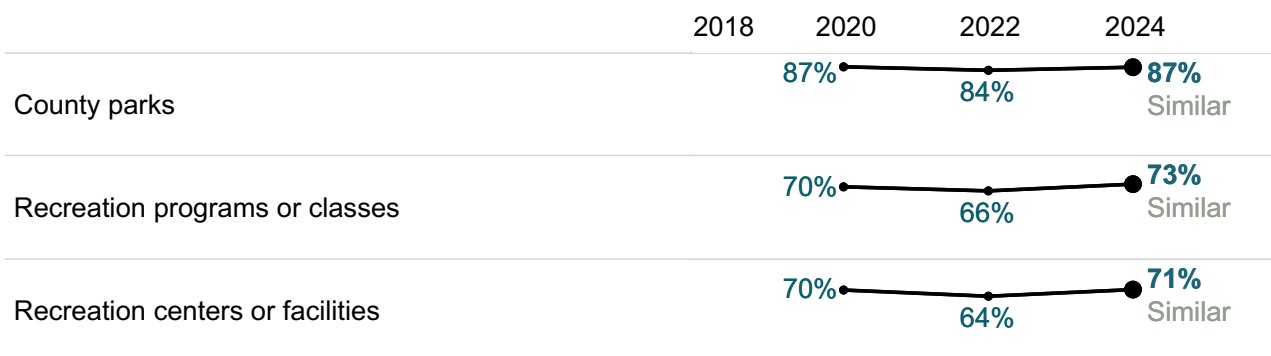
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please also rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

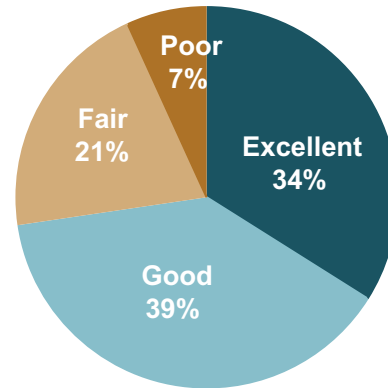


¹⁶. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

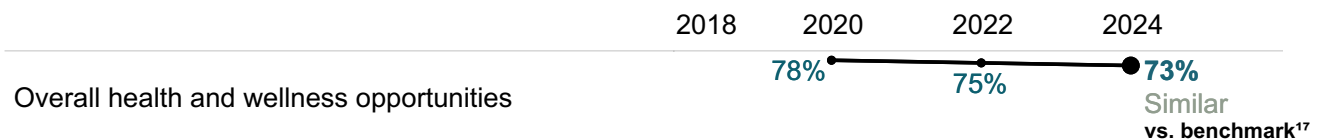
Overall health and wellness opportunities in Los Alamos County, 2024

Health and Wellness

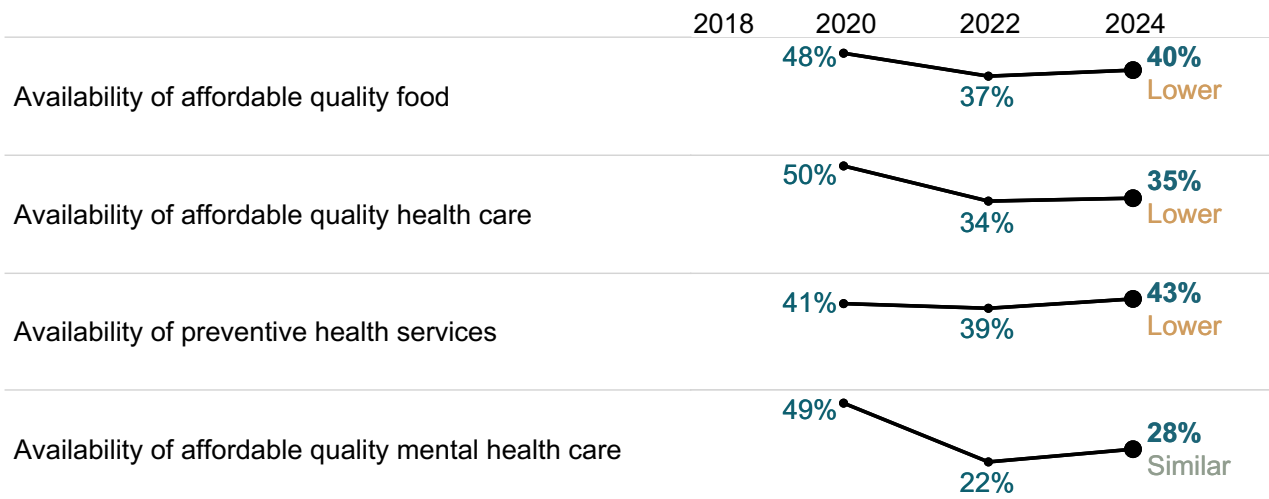
The characteristics of and amenities available in the communities in which people live has a direct impact on the health and wellness of residents, and thus, on their quality of life overall.



Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



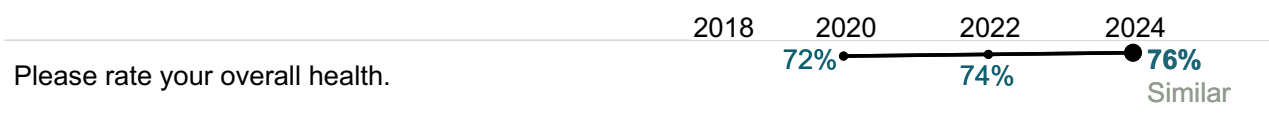
Please also rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate your overall health.
(% excellent or very good)

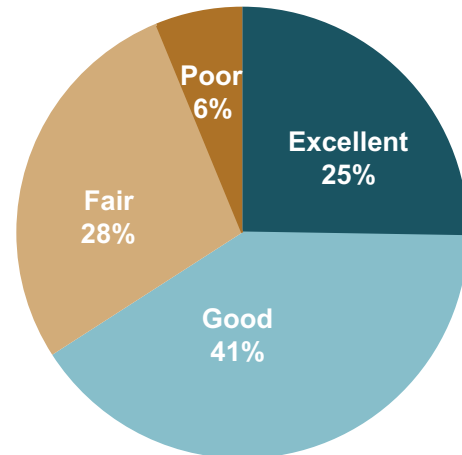


17. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

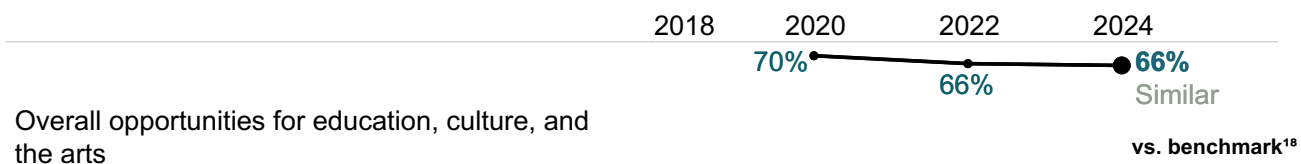
Education, Arts, and Culture

Participation in the arts, in educational opportunities, and in cultural activities is linked to increased civic engagement, greater social tolerance, and enhanced enjoyment of the local community.

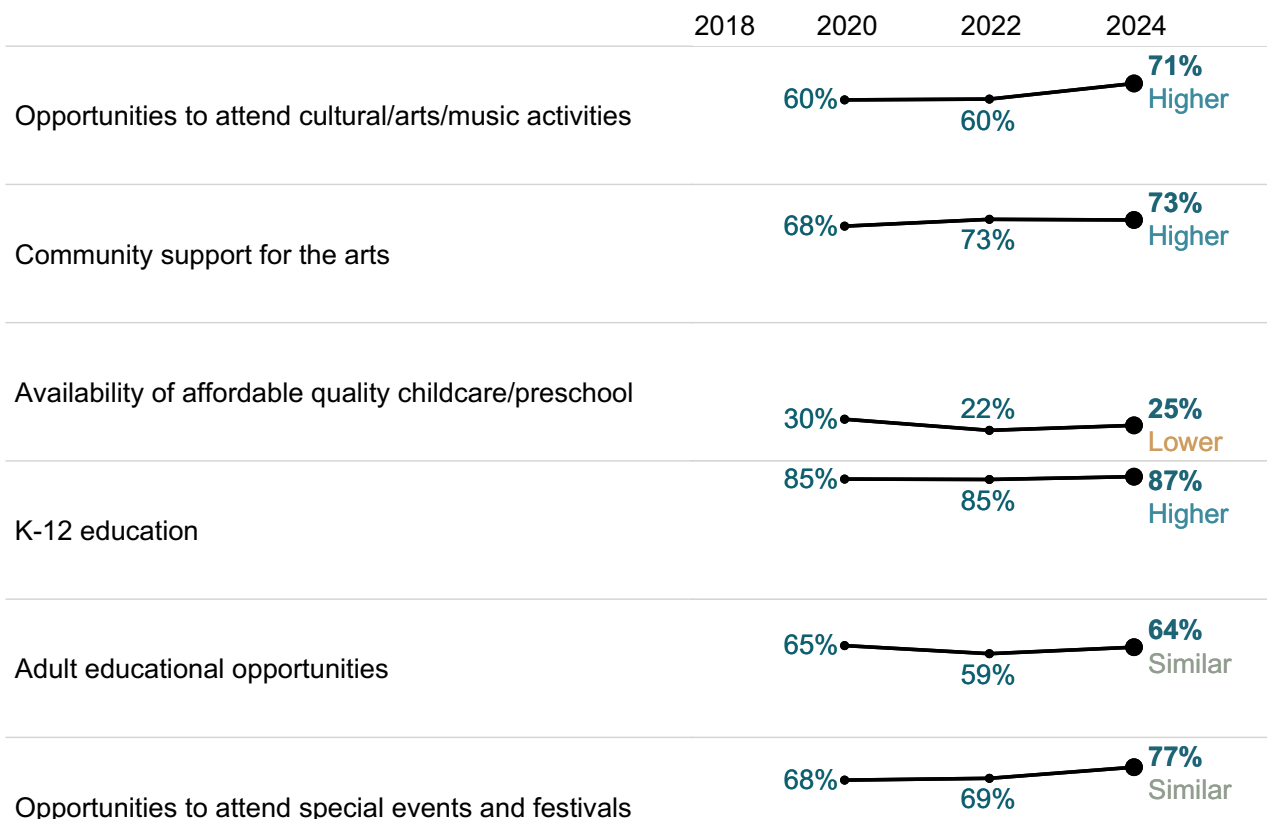
Overall opportunities for education, culture and the arts, 2024



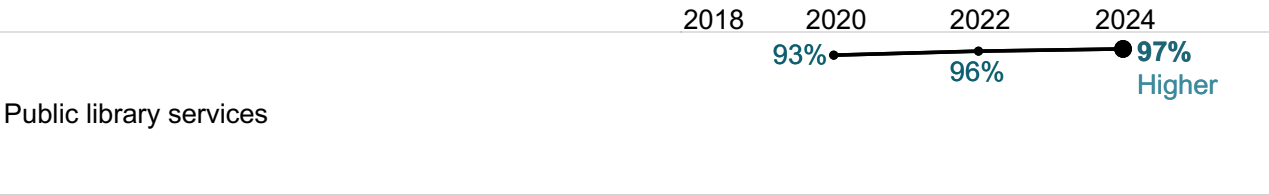
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please also rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)

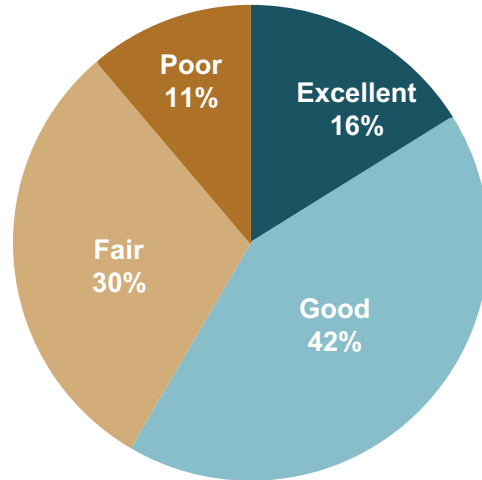


18. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

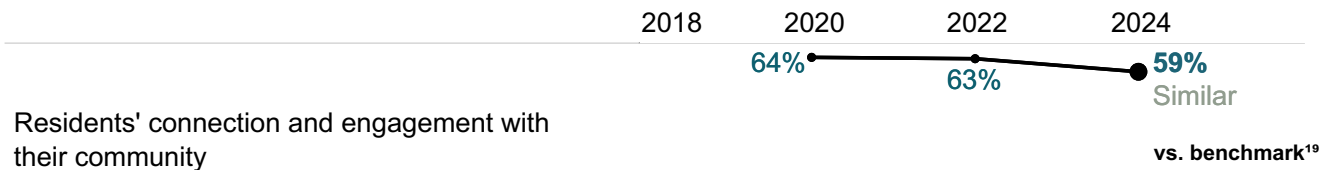
Residents' connection and engagement with their community, 2024

Inclusivity and Engagement

Inclusivity refers to a cultural and environmental feeling of belonging; residents who feel invited to participate within their communities feel more included, involved, and engaged than those who do not.



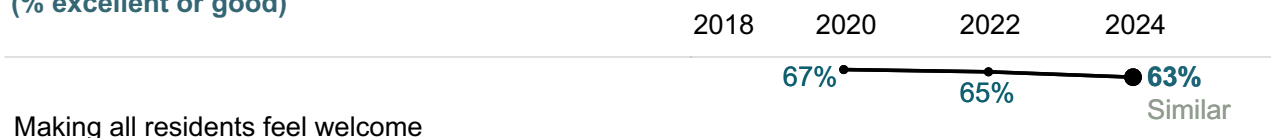
Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Los Alamos County as a whole.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate each of the following aspects of quality of life in Los Alamos County.
(% excellent or good)



Please rate the job you feel the community does at each of the following.
(% excellent or good)



Attracting people from diverse backgrounds

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	52%	
2020	51%	
2024	57%	Similar

Valuing/respecting residents from diverse backgrounds

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	65%	
2020	60%	
2024	65%	Similar

Taking care of vulnerable residents

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	67%	
2020	59%	
2024	60%	Similar

Please also rate each of the following in the community.
(% excellent or good)

Sense of civic/community pride

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	70%	
2020	60%	
2024	64%	Similar

Neighborliness of residents

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	66%	
2020	64%	
2024	64%	Similar

Opportunities to participate in social events and activities

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	66%	
2020	61%	
2024	72%	Similar

Opportunities to volunteer

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	76%	
2020	75%	
2024	80%	Higher

Opportunities to participate in community matters

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	67%	
2020	62%	
2024	65%	Similar

Openness and acceptance of the community toward people of diverse backgrounds

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	66%	
2020	62%	
2024	66%	Similar

Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.
(% excellent or good)

Campaigned or advocated for a local issue, cause, or candidate

Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	18%	
2020	21%	
2024	20%	Similar

Voted in your most recent local election

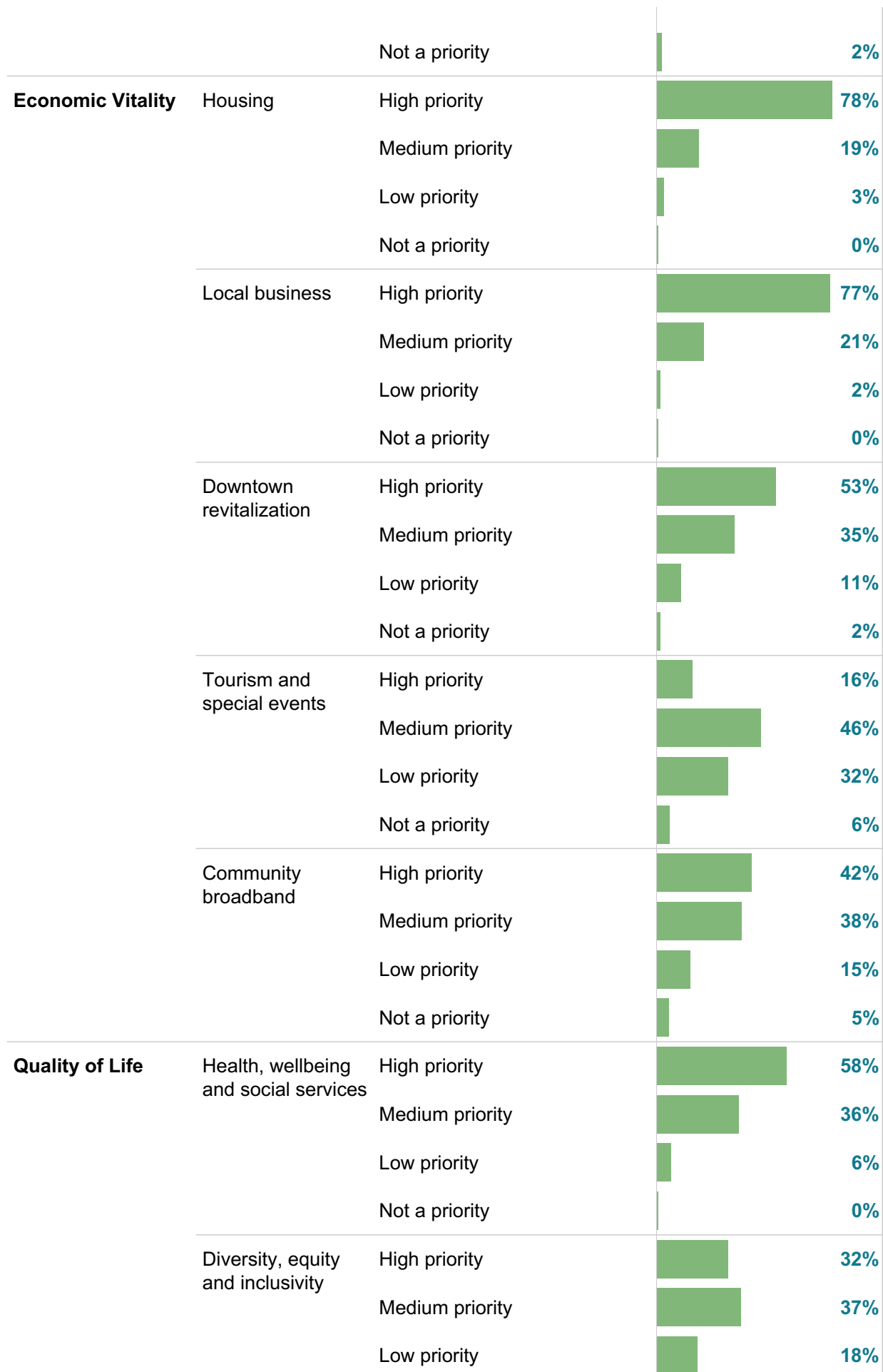
Year	Percentage	Comparison
2018	77%	
2020	83%	
2024	73%	Similar

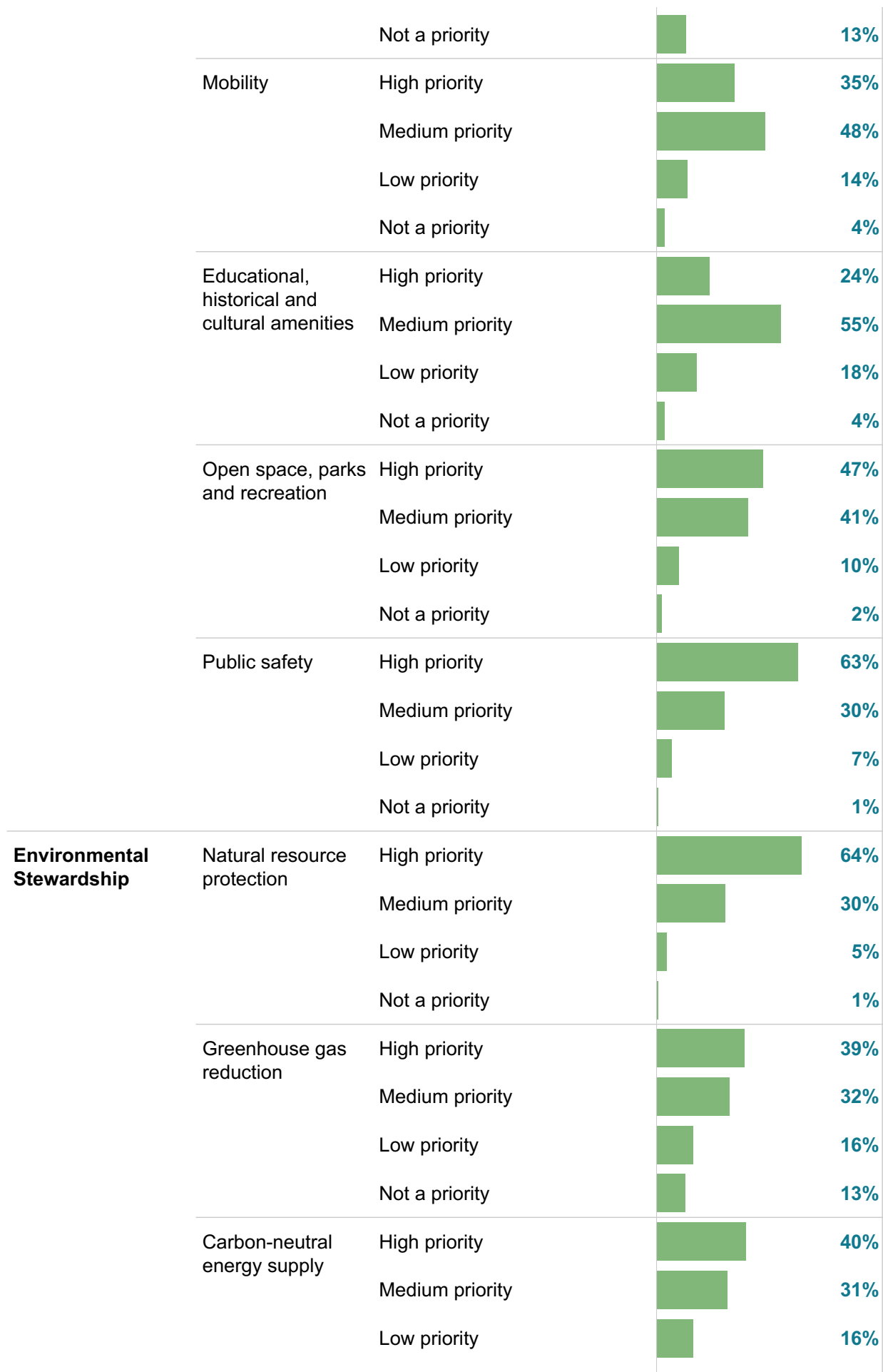
19. Comparison to the national benchmark is shown. If no comparison is available, this is left blank.

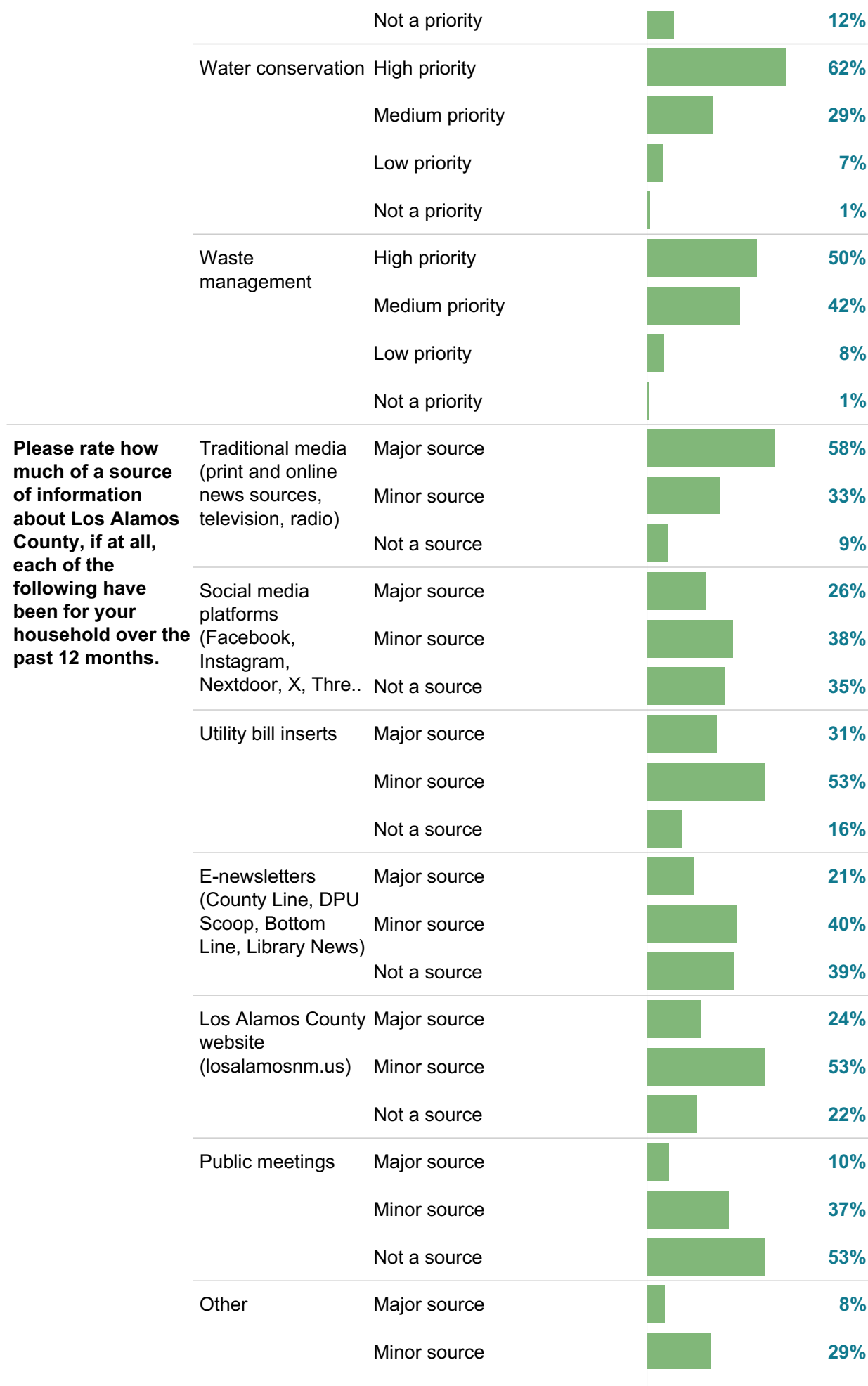
Custom questions

Below are the complete set of responses to each custom question on the survey. By default, “don’t know” responses are excluded, but may be added to the table using the response filter below.

			Include "don't know"
			No
Quality of Governance	Communication and engagement	High priority	 58%
		Medium priority	 39%
		Low priority	 2%
		Not a priority	 0%
	Intergovernmental, Tribal and regional relations	High priority	 34%
		Medium priority	 47%
		Low priority	 15%
		Not a priority	 5%
	Fiscal stewardship	High priority	 71%
		Medium priority	 26%
		Low priority	 3%
		Not a priority	 0%
Operational Excellence	Effective, efficient and reliable services	High priority	 80%
		Medium priority	 19%
		Low priority	 1%
		Not a priority	 0%
	Infrastructure asset management	High priority	 60%
		Medium priority	 36%
		Low priority	 4%
		Not a priority	 0%
	Employee recruitment and retention	High priority	 42%
		Medium priority	 48%
		Low priority	 8%







	Not a source		63%
Have you downloaded and/or used the Los Alamos Now app?	No		39%
	Yes		10%
	Not familiar with the app		50%
How satisfied are you, if it all, with the app's ease of navigation and use?	Very satisfied		21%
	Somewhat satisfied		73%
	Somewhat dissatisfied		2%
	Very dissatisfied		5%