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The National Citizen Survey™
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About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Denver. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 1,289 residents of the City of Denver. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 3% for all respondents. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the Technical Appendices provided under separate cover.
Quality of Life in Denver

A majority of residents rated the quality of life in Denver as excellent or good. This rating was similar to the benchmark for communities with populations over 300,000 (see Appendix B of the Technical Appendices provided under separate cover).

Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.

In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Safety, Mobility and Economy as priorities for the Denver community in the coming two years. Ratings for all facets tended to be positive and similar to the benchmarks. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where residents see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

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

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

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Denver, 83% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents’ ratings of Denver as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities with populations over 300,000.

In addition to rating the City as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Denver as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Denver and its overall appearance. About half or more gave high marks to each aspect; ratings for Denver’s overall image were particularly strong when compared to other large communities.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Residents’ ratings for Mobility tended to be mixed of when compared to the benchmarks. While a majority gave positive ratings to the availability of paths and walking, ease of walking (which was higher than peer communities) and travel by bicycle, only about one in five or fewer favorably rated ease of travel by car, public parking and traffic flow in Denver, which were lower than comparison communities. Respondents’ ratings within Built Environment and Economy were on both sides of the spectrum. Evaluations for the availability of affordable quality housing, the variety of housing options and cost of living were lower than ratings observed elsewhere, while ratings for public places where people would like to spend time, the overall economic health of the city, employment opportunities and to Denver as a place to visit were higher than those awarded by residents of other large communities across the U.S.
Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics

**SAFETY**
- Overall feeling of safety: 64%
- Safe in neighborhood: 86%
- Safe downtown/commercial area: 71%

**MOBILITY**
- Overall ease of travel: 43%
- Paths and walking trails: 65%
- Ease of walking: 61%
- Travel by bicycle: 51%
- Travel by public transportation: 42%
- Travel by car: 25%
- Public parking: 17%
- Traffic flow: 15%

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**
- Overall natural environment: 68%
- Air quality: 47%

**BUILT ENVIRONMENT**
- Overall built environment: 56%
- New development in Denver: 53%
- Affordable quality housing: 9%
- Housing options: 25%

**ECONOMY**
- Overall economic health: 73%
- Vibrant downtown/commercial area: 62%
- Cost of living: 14%
- Shopping opportunities: 76%
- Employment opportunities: 66%
- Place to visit: 86%
- Place to work: 77%

**RECREATION AND WELLNESS**
- Health and wellness: 78%
- Mental health care: 39%
- Preventive health services: 59%
- Health care: 54%
- Food: 64%
- Recreational opportunities: 80%
- Fitness opportunities: 78%

**EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT**
- Education and enrichment opportunities: 71%
- Cultural/arts/music activities: 78%
- Adult education: 61%
- K-12 education: 43%
- Child care/preschool: 31%
- Openness and acceptance: 58%
- Opportunities to participate in community matters: 51%

**Comparison to custom benchmark**
- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

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

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

The overall quality of the services provided by Denver as well as the manner in which these services are provided is a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 6 in 10 respondents positively rated the overall quality of services provided by the City, while about 3 in 10 positively rated the Federal Government. Both ratings were similar to ratings observed in comparison jurisdictions.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Denver’s leadership and governance. At least two in five respondents gave positive marks to each aspect of Denver’s leadership and governance, and all ratings were similar to ratings in other large communities.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Denver. Residents’ ratings of services and amenities in Denver tended to be positive, and almost all were similar to ratings received in other communities with populations over 300,000. The highest rated services included fire, ambulance/EMS, garbage collection, public libraries and the overall quality of Denver’s City parks; this rating was higher than ratings observed elsewhere.

Overall Quality of City Services

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)  
Comparison to national benchmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Lower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of services for taxes paid</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall direction</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming citizen involvement</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in City government</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in the best interest of Denver</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being honest</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating all residents fairly</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services provided by the Federal Government</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

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

Comparison to national benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAFETY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance/EMS</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime prevention</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire prevention</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal control</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency preparedness</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOBILITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic enforcement</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street repair</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street cleaning</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street lighting</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow removal</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalk maintenance</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic signal timing</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus or transit services</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATURAL ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garbage collection</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard waste pick-up</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural areas preservation</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open space</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILT ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storm drainage</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land use, planning and zoning</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code enforcement</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECONOMY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECREATION AND WELLNESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City parks</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation programs</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation centers</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public libraries</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public information</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation

Are the residents of Denver connected to the community and each other?

An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. About half of residents positively rated the sense of community in Denver, which was similar to ratings reported in other communities. About three-quarters or more were likely to recommend living in Denver and planned to remain in Denver; these rates were similar to the benchmarks. Close to half of respondents had contacted a City of Denver employee for help or information in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The survey included over 20 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Denver residents’ reported levels of Participation were generally similar to those reported in comparison communities; however, there were a few noteworthy exceptions. Survey participants reported higher levels of Participation within Mobility (used public transportation, carpooled, walked or biked instead of driving). Further, more Denver residents reported that they had visited a City park, attended a City-sponsored event or had contacted Denver elected officials than residents elsewhere.
Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

Percent rating positively (e.g., yes, more than once a month, always/sometimes)

Comparison to national benchmark

- **Higher**
- **Similar**
- **Lower**

### SAFETY
- Did NOT report a crime
  - 70%
- Was NOT the victim of a crime
  - 80%

### MOBILITY
- Used public transportation instead of driving
  - 73%
- Carpoled instead of driving alone
  - 56%
- Walked or biked instead of driving
  - 75%

### NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
- Conserved water
  - 84%
- Made home more energy efficient
  - 75%
- Recycled at home
  - 89%

### BUILT ENVIRONMENT
- Did NOT observe a code violation
  - 53%
- NOT under housing cost stress
  - 58%

### ECONOMY
- Purchased goods or services in Denver
  - 95%
- Economy will have positive impact on income
  - 33%
- Work in Denver
  - 62%

### RECREATION AND WELLNESS
- Used Denver recreation centers
  - 53%
- Visited a City park
  - 94%
- Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables
  - 85%
- Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity
  - 88%
- In very good to excellent health
  - 65%

### EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT
- Used Denver public libraries
  - 67%
- Attended a City-sponsored event
  - 58%

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
- Contacted Denver elected officials
  - 30%
- Attended a local public meeting
  - 20%
- Watched a local public meeting
  - 25%
- Read or watched local news
  - 84%
- Voted in local elections
  - 88%
The City of Denver included seven questions of special interest on The NCS as well as two open-ended questions, where respondents could write down responses in their own words. The first special interest question asked respondents if they had any contact with a City of Denver employee in the 12 months prior to the survey. About half of respondents reported having contact with a City of Denver employee. Next, residents who reported having contact with a City of Denver employee were asked to rate various aspects of their impression of the City of Denver employees they had interacted with in their most recent contact. About 7 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to each aspect of their impression of the City employee(s).

Figure 4: Contact with City of Denver employee
*Have you had any in-person, phone or email contact with an employee of the City of Denver within the last 12 months (including police, receptionists, planners or any others)?*

![Contact with City of Denver employee](image)

Figure 5: Impression of Contact with City of Denver Employee(s)
*What was your impression of the employee(s) of the City of Denver in your most recent contact? (Rate each characteristic below.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall impression</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third special-interest question asked residents to what extent they would support or oppose the City adopting a program that would waive fees for recycling and composting, and instead charge households based on the amount of waste they send to the landfill. About 8 in 10 residents reported that they would strongly or somewhat support this type of program.

Figure 6: Reducing Landfill Waste
To encourage composting and recycling, some cities provide free composting and recycling and charge for landfill waste, with fees based on how much or how little waste a household sends to the landfill. To what extent would you support or oppose the City adopting a similar program with the goal of reducing the amount of waste that is being delivered to landfills?

The next question sought to understand to what extent residents agreed that the City of Denver government does a good job managing police officer conduct. About two-thirds of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that the City does a good job, while about one-third strongly or somewhat disagreed.

Figure 7: Managing Police Officer Conduct
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The City of Denver government does a good job of managing police officer conduct"?
Residents were next asked if anyone in their household had contacted 311 in the 12 months prior to the survey. About one-third of residents reported that they had contacted 311. Next, residents who reported having contacted 311 were asked to rate various aspects of their impression of the 311 agent they had spoken with their most recent contact. At least 8 in 10 respondents gave high marks to each aspect of their contact with the 311 agent.

Figure 8: Contact with 311
*In the past 12 months have your or anyone in your household contacted 311?*

![Pie chart showing 33% Yes and 67% No]

Figure 9: Impression of Contact with 311
*What was your impression of the 311 agent in your most recent contact? (Rate each characteristic below.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall impression</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey also included two open-ended questions. The first open-ended question asked residents to write down the single most pressing issue currently facing the City and County of Denver. Of the respondents who wrote in a response, the most frequently cited issues were related to affordable housing and cost of living. When asked to identify the largest issue in their neighborhoods in the second open-ended question, many of the same themes were cited; however, crime and safety issues came out on top (for the full verbatim responses, see the Open End Report under separate cover).

Figure 10: City/County of Denver’s Most Pressing Issue
*What do you think is the single most pressing issue facing the City and County of Denver today and why?*

![Bar chart showing the most pressing issues in the City/County of Denver.](chart10)

- Affordable housing/cost of living: 32%
- Growth/development/planning/environment: 21%
- Traffic/transportation/roads/parking: 20%
- Homelessness: 8%
- Safety/police: 7%
- Governance/budget/public services: 6%
- Other: 4%
- Don't know/nothing: 2%

Figure 11: Neighborhood Issues
*What is the largest issue in your neighborhood?*

![Bar chart showing the largest issues in neighborhoods.](chart11)

- Crime/safety/drugs/code violations: 31%
- Traffic/parking/street repair/sidewalks: 21%
- Affordable housing/cost of living: 14%
- Growth/development/gentrification/planning/environment: 11%
- Homelessness: 8%
- Don't know/nothing: 7%
- Other: 5%
- Sense of community/schools/youth/elderly: 3%
Conclusions

Denver’s quality of life remains high.
A vast majority of survey respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of life in Denver and the City as a place to live these ratings were similar to the benchmark comparisons and stable over time (see the Trends over Time report under separate cover). More than four in five respondents indicated that they planned to remain in the City for the coming five years, and about three-quarters would recommend living in Denver to someone who asked. Ratings for features that enhance quality of life, such as the overall appearance of the City, and residents’ neighborhoods as places to live were given positive ratings by about 7 in 10 respondents, and were similar to ratings seen in comparison communities. About three-quarters of respondents gave high marks to Denver’s overall image and this rating was higher than those in comparison communities.

Mobility is a top resident concern.
When asked to rate the importance of several different community focus areas over the coming two years, Denver residents identified Mobility as one of the most important. Several aspects of Mobility have been trending down since 2015, including the overall ease of travel and availability of paths and walking trails. Ratings for the overall ease of travel, travel by car, public parking and traffic flow in Denver were lower than the benchmarks. When asked, in their own words, what the top issues were facing the City and in their own neighborhoods, about one in five respondents mentioned Mobility issues. On a positive note, Denver residents seem to be trying to help reduce congestion issues as much as they can, reporting higher rates of carpooling, using public transportation and walking or biking instead of driving than residents in comparison communities.

Safety continues to be a top community priority.
As in prior years, Safety was identified as a key focus area for the Denver community. A majority of residents reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods and downtown, and gave strong marks to the overall feeling of safety in Denver. These ratings were all similar to the benchmark, as were ratings of safety services. However, when asked to name the largest issue in their neighborhoods, the most commonly cited issues had to do with crime, safety, drugs and code violations in neighborhoods. Safety concerns regarding homelessness were also identified by about 1 in 10 of residents who cited neighborhood issues.

Ratings for Denver’s Built Environment were generally strong, but residents continue to see room for improvement in affordable housing.
Ratings within the facet of Built Environment were generally strong and similar to ratings reported in other communities. About half or more of residents gave high marks to the overall quality of the built environment in Denver, the quality of new development, public places where people who like to spend time and to the City’s storm drainage services. However, ratings for affordable housing were comparatively low: only about 1 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the availability of affordable quality housing in Denver and about one-quarter favorably rated housing options; these evaluations were lower than ratings seen in comparison communities. Further, only about 6 in 10 respondents indicated they were not under housing cost stress. As in 2015 and 2016, residents identified affordable housing and the cost of living in Denver as the single most pressing issue currently facing the City and County.