

THE NCSTM
The National Citizen SurveyTM

Albert Lea, MN

Trends over Time

2018



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Summary

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS™) is a collaborative effort between National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The survey and its administration are standardized to assure high quality research methods and directly comparable results across The NCS communities. 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). This report discusses trends over time, comparing the 2018 ratings for the City of Albert Lea to its previous survey results in 2012 and 2015. Additional reports and technical appendices are available under separate cover.

Trend data for Albert Lea represent important comparison data and should be examined for improvements or declines. Deviations from stable trends over time, especially, represent opportunities for understanding how local policies, programs or public information may have affected residents' opinions.

Meaningful differences between survey years have been noted within the following tables as being "higher" or "lower" if the differences are greater than six percentage points between the 2015 and 2018 surveys, otherwise the comparisons between 2015 and 2018 are noted as being "similar." Additionally, benchmark comparisons for all survey years are presented for reference. Changes in the benchmark comparison over time can be impacted by various trends, including varying survey cycles for the individual communities that comprise the benchmarks, regional and national economic or other events, as well as emerging survey methodologies.

Overall, ratings in Albert Lea for 2018 generally remained stable. Of the 132 items for which comparisons were available, 87 items were rated similarly in 2015 and 2018, 12 items showed a decrease in ratings and 33 showed an increase in ratings. Notable trends over time included the following:

- Among 52 total Community Characteristics ratings, residents assessed 16 aspects more positively than in 2015 and only six less positively. Survey respondents felt more favorably toward several aspects of community quality, including the overall image and overall appearance of Albert Lea. The greatest increases since 2015 were for the vibrancy of the downtown area, employment opportunities, fitness opportunities and ease of travel by public transit (with increases of 15%, 13% and 12%, respectively). Decreases within this pillar tended to be concentrated within Recreation and Wellness (availability of health care, mental health care and preventive health services) and Education and Enrichment (availability of affordable quality child care/preschool and opportunities to attend religious or spiritual events).
- Around one-third of the Governance ratings increased since 2015. Residents awarded the highest ratings bump to sidewalk maintenance (increasing by 13%), followed by special events (11%) and the City's power and utility billing services (both increasing by 10%). A number of government performance measures also improved in 2018, including the overall direction, value of services for taxes paid and the City welcoming citizen involvement, being honest and treating all residents fairly, among others. Respondents were more critical of ambulance/EMS services and health services (which dropped 23%) in 2018.
- Residents reported greater rates of attending City-sponsored special events and reading or watching local news in 2018 than in 2015. Conversely, respondents reported lower levels of contacting the City and participation in religious or spiritual activities, clubs and attendance of local public meetings.

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Table 1: Community Characteristics General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark		
	2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018
Overall quality of life	57%	56%	61%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Lower
Overall image	37%	38%	46%	Higher	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
Place to live	64%	63%	65%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Lower
Neighborhood	74%	69%	67%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
Place to raise children	68%	66%	63%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Lower
Place to retire	59%	61%	64%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
Overall appearance	58%	58%	67%	Higher	Much lower	Similar	Similar

Table 2: Community Characteristics by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark			
		2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018	
Safety	Overall feeling of safety	NA	66%	69%	Similar	NA	Lower	Similar	
	Safe in neighborhood	96%	88%	89%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar	
	Safe downtown/commercial area	89%	86%	92%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar	
Mobility	Overall ease of travel	NA	79%	80%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Paths and walking trails	80%	81%	81%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Higher	
	Ease of walking	76%	81%	77%	Similar	Much higher	Higher	Higher	
	Travel by bicycle	67%	62%	71%	Higher	Much higher	Similar	Higher	
	Travel by public transportation	NA	35%	47%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Travel by car	69%	76%	79%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Higher	
	Public parking	NA	64%	66%	Similar	NA	Similar	Higher	
	Traffic flow	53%	63%	72%	Higher	Higher	Similar	Higher	
	Natural Environment	Overall natural environment	66%	69%	77%	Higher	Lower	Similar	Similar
		Cleanliness	59%	59%	68%	Higher	Much lower	Similar	Similar
Air quality		75%	81%	81%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar	
Overall built environment		NA	53%	60%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar	
New development in Albert Lea		26%	28%	29%	Similar	Much lower	Much lower	Lower	
Built Environment	Affordable quality housing	40%	36%	30%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar	
	Housing options	38%	40%	34%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Similar	
	Public places	NA	58%	64%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar	
Economy	Overall economic health	NA	28%	30%	Similar	NA	Much lower	Much lower	
	Vibrant downtown/commercial area	NA	26%	40%	Higher	NA	Lower	Similar	
	Business and services	37%	38%	39%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Lower	
	Cost of living	NA	37%	41%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Shopping opportunities	20%	20%	18%	Similar	Much lower	Much lower	Much lower	
	Employment opportunities	12%	19%	31%	Higher	Much lower	Lower	Similar	
	Place to visit	NA	44%	48%	Similar	NA	Lower	Lower	
	Place to work	36%	34%	42%	Higher	Much lower	Much lower	Lower	
	Recreation and Wellness	Health and wellness	NA	61%	57%	Similar	NA	Similar	Lower
		Mental health care	NA	38%	30%	Lower	NA	Similar	Lower
Preventive health services		60%	52%	37%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Lower	

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good, very/somewhat safe)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark		
		2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018
	Health care	52%	55%	32%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Much lower
	Food	60%	54%	56%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Recreational opportunities	46%	56%	65%	Higher	Much lower	Similar	Similar
	Fitness opportunities	NA	67%	79%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Education and enrichment opportunities	NA	47%	52%	Similar	NA	Lower	Similar
	Religious or spiritual events and activities	76%	80%	73%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Cultural/arts/music activities	31%	48%	52%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar
	Adult education	NA	53%	52%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	K-12 education	NA	65%	64%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Child care/preschool	52%	61%	42%	Lower	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Social events and activities	48%	40%	47%	Higher	Much lower	Lower	Similar
	Neighborhoodness	NA	50%	50%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Community Engagement	Openness and acceptance	44%	37%	41%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Lower
	Opportunities to participate in community matters	51%	48%	56%	Higher	Much lower	Similar	Similar
	Opportunities to volunteer	74%	62%	62%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar

Table 3: Governance General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark		
	2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018
Services provided by Albert Lea	55%	61%	67%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar
Customer service	76%	65%	74%	Higher	Similar	Similar	Similar
Value of services for taxes paid	34%	36%	44%	Higher	Much lower	Lower	Similar
Overall direction	19%	26%	35%	Higher	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
Welcoming citizen involvement	31%	31%	40%	Higher	Much lower	Lower	Similar
Confidence in City government	NA	29%	34%	Similar	NA	Lower	Lower
Acting in the best interest of Albert Lea	NA	32%	38%	Higher	NA	Lower	Lower
Being honest	NA	33%	42%	Higher	NA	Lower	Similar
Treating all residents fairly	NA	34%	40%	Higher	NA	Lower	Lower
Services provided by the Federal Government	35%	NA	61%	Higher	Similar	NA	Higher

Table 4: Governance by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark		
		2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018
Safety	Police	74%	74%	80%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Fire	87%	87%	93%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Ambulance/EMS	89%	85%	79%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Crime prevention	63%	59%	61%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Fire prevention	83%	76%	79%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
	Animal control	46%	44%	47%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Similar
	Emergency preparedness	66%	59%	58%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Traffic enforcement	65%	58%	59%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Street repair	25%	21%	29%	Higher	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
	Street cleaning	59%	48%	52%	Similar	Similar	Lower	Similar
Mobility	Street lighting	55%	57%	61%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Snow removal	52%	56%	58%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar
	Sidewalk maintenance	43%	42%	55%	Higher	Lower	Similar	Similar
	Traffic signal timing	39%	44%	53%	Higher	Much lower	Similar	Similar

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark			
		2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018	
Natural Environment	Garbage collection	NA	86%	86%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Recycling	NA	86%	87%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Drinking water	72%	70%	71%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar	
	Natural areas preservation	61%	55%	57%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar	
	Open space	NA	52%	55%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	
Built Environment	Storm drainage	53%	57%	55%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar	
	Sewer services	73%	70%	74%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar	
	Power utility	NA	73%	83%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Utility billing	NA	59%	70%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Land use, planning and zoning	32%	36%	38%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Similar	
	Code enforcement	30%	28%	30%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Lower	
	Cable television	NA	41%	41%	Similar	NA	Lower	Similar	
	Economy	Economic development	20%	21%	27%	Higher	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
	Recreation and Wellness	City parks	87%	85%	86%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
Recreation programs		73%	68%	68%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar	
Recreation centers		63%	61%	61%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar	
Health services		NA	60%	36%	Lower	NA	Similar	Lower	
Education and Enrichment	Special events	NA	51%	63%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar	
	Public libraries	79%	78%	81%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar	
Community Engagement	Public information	NA	58%	61%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar	

Table 5: Participation General

	Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark		
	2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018
Sense of community	52%	45%	50%	Similar	Much lower	Lower	Similar
Recommend Albert Lea	64%	64%	67%	Similar	Much lower	Much lower	Lower
Remain in Albert Lea	82%	79%	83%	Similar	Lower	Similar	Similar
Contacted Albert Lea employees	41%	38%	39%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar

Table 6: Participation by Facet

		Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark		
		2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018
Safety	Stocked supplies for an emergency	NA	28%	29%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Did NOT report a crime	NA	78%	74%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Was NOT the victim of a crime	91%	87%	85%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar
Mobility	Used public transportation instead of driving	NA	11%	11%	Similar	NA	Lower	Lower
	Carpooled instead of driving alone	NA	38%	43%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Walked or biked instead of driving	NA	56%	58%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Natural Environment	Conserved water	NA	72%	74%	Similar	NA	Lower	Similar
	Made home more energy efficient	NA	77%	78%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Recycled at home	82%	92%	97%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Higher
Built Environment	Did NOT observe a code violation	NA	38%	41%	Similar	NA	Lower	Lower
	NOT under housing cost stress	73%	77%	75%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Purchased goods or services in Albert Lea	NA	96%	98%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Economy	Economy will have positive impact on income	20%	19%	22%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Lower
	Work in Albert Lea	NA	56%	53%	Similar	NA	Higher	Higher
Recreation and Wellness	Used Albert Lea recreation centers	51%	54%	58%	Similar	Much lower	Similar	Similar
	Visited a City park	87%	80%	83%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Ate 5 portions of fruits and vegetables	NA	72%	75%	Similar	NA	Lower	Similar

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		Percent rating positively (e.g., always/sometimes, more than once a month, yes)			2018 rating compared to 2015	Comparison to benchmark		
		2012	2015	2018		2012	2015	2018
	Participated in moderate or vigorous physical activity	NA	78%	73%	Similar	NA	Similar	Lower
	In very good to excellent health	NA	49%	48%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Education and Enrichment	Used Albert Lea public libraries	70%	61%	58%	Similar	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Participated in religious or spiritual activities	71%	68%	60%	Lower	Much higher	Higher	Higher
	Attended a City-sponsored event	NA	55%	62%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
	Campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate	NA	21%	26%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
Community Engagement	Contacted Albert Lea elected officials	NA	26%	19%	Lower	NA	Similar	Similar
	Volunteered	57%	48%	44%	Similar	Much higher	Similar	Similar
	Participated in a club	44%	41%	34%	Lower	Much higher	Higher	Similar
	Talked to or visited with neighbors	NA	94%	93%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Done a favor for a neighbor	NA	86%	83%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Attended a local public meeting	29%	26%	19%	Lower	Similar	Similar	Similar
	Watched a local public meeting	NA	38%	33%	Similar	NA	Similar	Similar
	Read or watched local news	NA	83%	89%	Higher	NA	Similar	Similar
	Voted in local elections	78%	84%	81%	Similar	Higher	Similar	Similar