



2026 NEBRASKA RURAL POLL RESEARCH REPORT



Community



The Rural Poll now offers a way for you to find the exact data you're looking for, for your research, policy decisions, or business proposals. If you want to purchase questions for the 2027 Poll, contact Survey Manager Becky Vogt at rvogt2@unl.edu.

Nebraska Rural Poll Research Report 26-2, September 2026.

Cover photo used with permission from Russell Shaffer, IANR Communciations.

All of the research reports detailing Nebraska Rural Poll results are located on the webpage <http://ruralpoll.unl.edu>

Funding for this project was provided by Nebraska Extension's Rural Prosperity Nebraska of the Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Executive Summary	ii
Introduction	1
Trends in Community Ratings (1996 - 2026)	2
<i>Figure 1. Community Change, 1996 – 2026</i>	3
<i>Figure 2. Expected Community Change Ten Years from Now: 2011 – 2026</i>	3
<i>Figure 3. Feelings of Community Powerlessness: 2011-2026</i>	4
The Community and Its Attributes in 2026	4
<i>Table 1. Proportion of Respondents Very or Somewhat Satisfied with Each Service, 2005 – 2026</i>	5
<i>Figure 4. Perceptions of Community Change by Community Size</i>	6
<i>Figure 5. Feelings of Community Powerlessness by Education Level</i>	6
<i>Figure 6. Satisfaction with Cost of Housing by Community Size</i>	7
<i>Figure 7. Dissatisfaction with Quality of Housing in Community by Age</i>	9
<i>Table 2. Opinions about Community</i>	10
<i>Figure 8. I Have a Say about What Goes On in this Community by Age</i>	11
<i>Figure 9. Difficulty or Ease of Leaving Community by Length of Time Living in Community</i>	12
Conclusion	12
Appendix Figure 1. Regions of Nebraska	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The past year continued to be challenging for rural Nebraskans. In the spring of 2026, many counties in the state were experiencing drought conditions and certain areas were dealing with wildfires. Given these challenges, how do rural Nebraskans feel about their community? Are they satisfied with the services provided by their community? Have these views changed over the past 31 years? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

This report details 881 responses to the 2026 Nebraska Rural Poll, the 31st annual effort to understand rural Nebraskans' perceptions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their community. Trends for some of the questions are examined by comparing data from the 30 previous polls to this year's results. In addition, comparisons are made among different respondent subgroups, that is, comparisons by age, occupation, region, etc. Based on these analyses, some key findings emerged:

- **By many different measures, rural Nebraskans are positive about their community.**
 - More rural Nebraskans say their community has changed for the better during the past year than those who say it has changed for the worse. Just over three in ten (31%) of rural Nebraskans say their community has changed for the better, while just over one-quarter (26%) say it has changed for the worse.
 - Many rural Nebraskans say it would be difficult to leave their community. One-half of rural Nebraskans (50%) say it would be difficult to leave their community. Just under four in ten (36%) indicate it would be easy for their household to leave their community.
 - Most rural Nebraskans have a positive attachment to their community. Most rural Nebraskans agree that they have a good bond with others in their community (65%), they belong in their community (62%), they can get what they need in their community (61%), they feel like a member of their community (61%), people in the community are good at influencing each other (56%), they feel connected to their community (54%), and the community helps them fulfill their needs (53%).
 - Most rural Nebraskans disagree that their community is powerless to control its future. Just over six in ten rural Nebraskans (63%) strongly disagree or disagree that their community is powerless to control its own future.
- **Persons living in or near larger communities are more likely than persons living in or near smaller communities to say their community has changed for the better during the past year.** At least one-third of persons living in or near communities with populations of 5,000 or more say their community has changed for the better, compared to two in ten persons living in or near the smallest communities (populations less than 500).
- **When comparing responses by region, persons living in both the South Central and Southeast regions are the groups most likely to say their community will be a better place to live ten years from now.** At least one-quarter of the residents of these two regions believe their community will be a better place to live ten years from now, compared to approximately 14 percent of the residents of the other regions of the state.
- **Persons between the ages of 40 and 49 are more likely than other age groups to agree that they have a say about what goes on in their community.** Over one-half (55%) of persons age 40 to 49 agree with that statement, compared to just over one in ten persons age 19 to 29 (13%). In fact, just under six in ten (58%) of the youngest persons disagree

with that statement.

- **Except for some services that are largely unavailable in rural communities, rural Nebraskans are generally satisfied with basic community services and amenities.** The services or amenities respondents are most satisfied with (based on the combined percentage of “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” responses) include fire protection (87%), parks and recreation (77%), library services (75%), cellular phone service (73%), Internet service (73%), law enforcement (69%), religious organizations (65%), medical care services (64%), and sewage/waste disposal (63%). At least four in ten respondents are either very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with cost of housing (56%), retail shopping (51%), entertainment (48%), streets and roads (46%), restaurants (43%), community recycling (43%), and quality of housing (43%).
 - Persons living in or near larger communities are more likely than persons living in or near smaller communities to express dissatisfaction with the cost of housing in their community. Three-quarters of persons living in or near communities with populations of 10,000 or more (75%) are dissatisfied with the cost of housing in their community, compared to just under three in ten persons living in or near communities with populations less than 500 (28%).
 - Persons age 30 to 39 are more likely than persons in other age groups to be dissatisfied with the quality of housing in their community. Almost six in ten persons age 30 to 39 (59%) are dissatisfied with the quality of housing, compared to just under three in ten persons age 65 and older (29%).



INTRODUCTION

The past year continued to be challenging for rural Nebraskans. Inflation continues to impact household budgets. However, farm income was projected to increase due to government payments and a strong cattle market. Given these challenges and opportunities, how do rural Nebraskans believe they are doing and how do they view their future? How satisfied are they with various items that influence their well-being? Have these views changed over the past 31 years? How do they view their mental health and do they experience feelings of loneliness? This paper provides a detailed analysis of these questions.

This report details 881 responses to the 2026 Nebraska Rural Poll, the 31st annual effort to understand rural Nebraskans' perceptions. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their well-being.

Methodology & Respondent Profile

This study is based on 881 responses from Nebraskans living in 86 counties in the state. (See footnote.) A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in April and June to 6,894 randomly selected households. Metropolitan counties not included in the sample were Cass, Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward and Washington. The 14-page questionnaire included questions pertaining to well-being, community, community leadership, artificial intelligence, access to health care and social drivers of health, trails, sustainable products and practices, and the Nebraska Forest Service. This paper reports only

results from the well-being section.

A 13% response rate was achieved using the total design method (Dillman, 1978). The sequence of steps used follow:

1. A pre-notification letter was sent requesting participation in the study.
2. The questionnaire was mailed with an informal letter signed by the project manager approximately two weeks later.
3. A reminder postcard was sent to those who had not yet responded approximately two weeks after the questionnaire had been sent.
4. Those who had not yet responded within approximately 30 days of the original mailing were sent a replacement questionnaire.

There are some marked differences between some of the demographic variables in our sample compared to U.S. Census data. Thus, we suggest the reader use caution in generalizing our data to all rural Nebraska. However, given the random sampling frame used for this survey, the acceptable percentage of responses, and the large number of respondents, we feel the data provide useful insights into opinions of rural Nebraskans on the various issues presented in this report. The margin of error for this study is plus or minus three percent.

Since younger residents have typically been under-represented by survey respondents and older residents have been over-represented, weights were used to adjust the sample to match the age distribution in

In the spring of 2013, the Grand Island area (Hall, Hamilton, Howard and Merrick Counties) was designated a metropolitan area, though Howard County was no longer considered a metropolitan county in 2023. To facilitate comparisons from previous years, these four counties are still included in our sample. In addition, the Sioux City area

metropolitan counties of Dixon and Dakota were added in 2014 because of a joint Metro Poll being conducted by the University of Nebraska at Omaha to ensure all counties in the state were sampled. Although classified as metro, Dixon County is rural in nature. Dakota County is similar in many respects to other "micropolitan" counties the Rural Poll surveys.

the nonmetropolitan counties in Nebraska (using U.S. Census figures from 2020).

The average age of respondents is approximately 51 years. Sixty-three percent are married and 66 percent live within the city limits of a town or village. On average, respondents have lived in Nebraska 42 years and have lived in their current community 27 years. Forty-eight percent are living in or near towns or villages with populations less than 5,000. Ninety-eight percent have attained at least a high school diploma.

Seventeen percent of the respondents report their 2025 approximate household income from all sources, before taxes, as below \$40,000. Sixty-nine percent report incomes over \$60,000. Seventy percent were employed in 2025 on a full-time, part-time, or seasonal basis. Twenty percent are retired. Thirty-two percent of those employed reported working in a management, professional, or education occupation. Nineteen percent indicated they were employed in agriculture.

TRENDS IN COMMUNITY RATINGS (1996 - 2026)

Comparisons between the community data collected this year and the 30 previous studies are made. These were independent samples (the same people were not surveyed each year).

Community Change – 31-Year Trend

To examine respondents' perceptions of how their community has changed, they were asked the question, "Communities across the nation are undergoing change. When you think about this past year, would you say...My community has changed for the..." Answer categories were better, no change, or worse.

One difference in the wording of this question has occurred over the past 31 years. Starting in 1998, the phrase "this past year" was added to the question; no time frame was given to the respondents in the first two studies. Also, in 2007 the

middle response "same" was replaced with "no change."

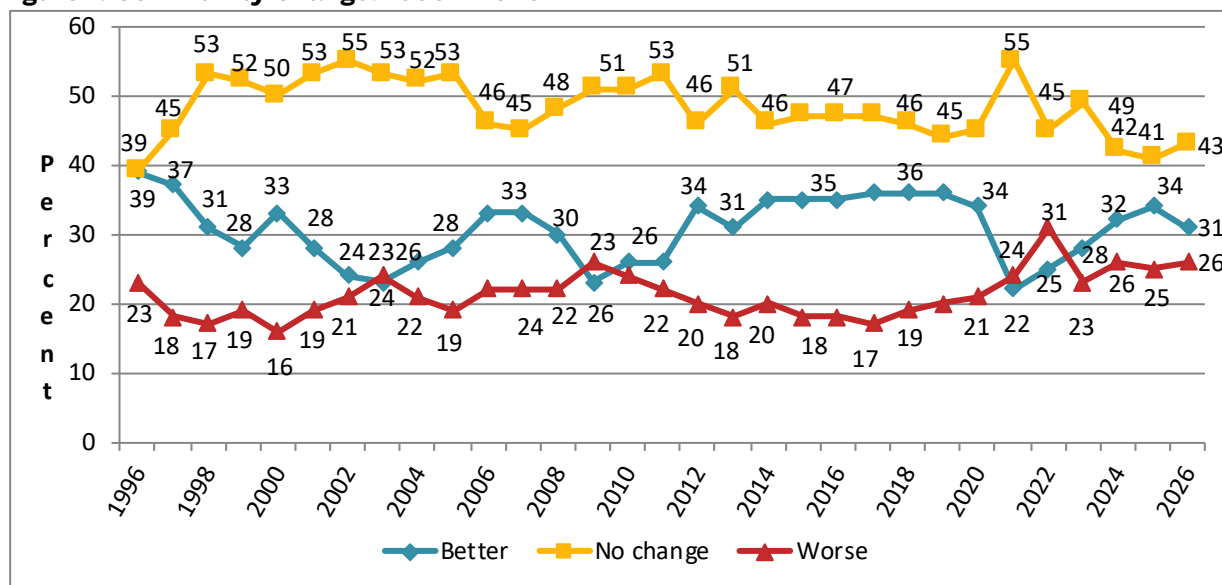
Rural Nebraskans' views about the change in their community have generally been positive. The proportion believing their community has changed for the better has typically been greater than the proportion believing it has changed for the worse, especially between 2012 and 2020 when the gap between the two widened (Figure 1). However, in both 2021 and 2022, the proportion believing their community had changed for the worse was more than the proportion believing it had changed for the better (similar to what occurred in 2003 and 2009). This trend reverted to its typical pattern during the last four years. Currently, more believe their community has changed for the better than has changed for the worse.

The proportion saying their community has changed for the better has averaged approximately 31 percent. Following a seven-year period of general decline, the proportion saying their community has changed for the better increased from 23 percent in 2003 to 33 percent in 2007. It then declined to 23 percent in 2009. However, the proportion viewing positive change in their community then generally increased to 34 percent in 2012 and stayed fairly stable before sharply declining to 25 percent in 2022. It has since generally increased to 31 percent this year.

The proportion of individuals saying their community has stayed the same first increased from 1996 to 1998. It then remained steady during the following eight years but declined in both 2006 and 2007. Then it steadily increased to 53 percent in 2011. However, the proportion believing their community has stayed the same then generally declined to 45 percent in 2020. In 2021, it increased sharply to 55 percent before generally declining to 43 percent this year.

The proportion saying their community has changed for the worse had remained steady across all 31 years, averaging 21 percent. It increased from 22 percent in 2008 to 26 percent in 2009. Since then, it generally decreased to 17 percent in 2017 before steadily increasing to 31 percent in 2022

Figure 1. Community Change: 1996 - 2026



(the highest proportion across all 31 years of study). It then declined to 23 percent in 2023 and has remained steady in the past three years, being 26 percent this year.

Starting in 2011, respondents were also asked to predict the expected change in their community ten years from now. The exact question wording was, “Based on what you see of the situation today, do you think that, ten years from now, your community will be a worse place to live, a better place or about the same?”

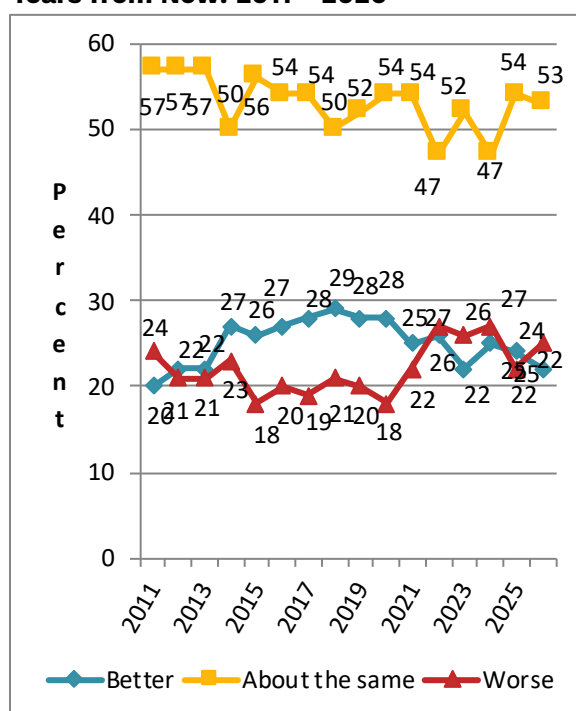
The proportion believing their community will be a better place to live ten years from now had generally increased, from 20 percent in 2011 to 28 percent in 2020 (Figure 2). However, it generally declined to 22 percent this year. The proportion believing their community will be a worse place to live generally declined from 24 percent in 2011 to 18 percent in 2020, before increasing to 27 percent last year (the highest proportion across all 16 years, also occurring in 2022). However, it has generally declined to 25 percent this year.

The proportion that believe their community will be about the same ten years from now has been generally steady, with the exception of two low points occurring in 2022 and 2024.

Community Powerlessness – 31-Year Trend

Also starting in 2001, respondents were asked a question to determine if they view their community as powerless. They were asked, “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My community is powerless to control its own future.” They were given a five-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Figure 2. Expected Community Change Ten Years from Now: 2011 - 2026



In general, rural Nebraskans' perceptions of the powerlessness of their community has remained fairly stable (Figure 3). The proportion disagreeing with the statement generally increased from 56 percent in 2011 to 63 percent this year.

Respondents were also asked how satisfied they are with various community services and amenities each year. They were asked about this in all 31 studies; however, in 1996 they were also asked about the availability of these services. Comparisons will only be made between the last 20 studies. The respondents were asked how satisfied they were with a list of 27 services and amenities, taking into consideration availability, cost, and quality.

Table 1 shows the proportions very or somewhat satisfied with the service each year. The rank ordering of these items has remained relatively stable over the 20 years. However, the proportion of rural Nebraskans satisfied with some social services has generally declined across all 20 years. As an example, the proportion of rural Nebraskans satisfied with nursing home care has dropped from 46 percent in 2007 to 35 percent this year. A similar decline occurs with child day care services. In addition, satisfaction with retail shopping has also generally declined over the past 20 years. Satisfaction with retail shopping declined from 41 percent in 2007

to 35 percent this year.

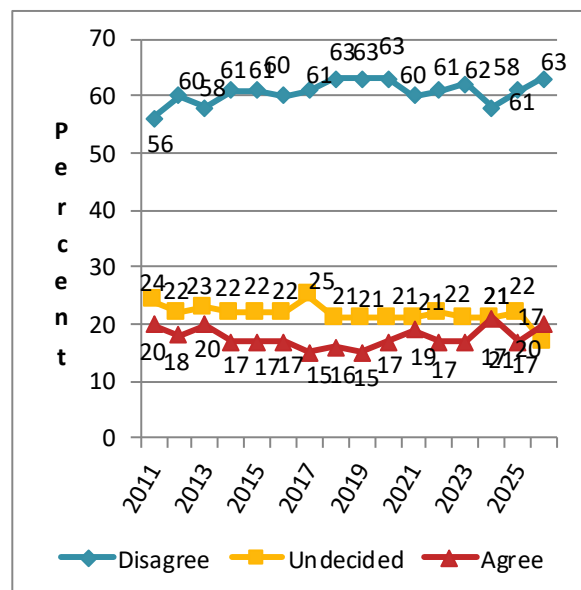
On the other hand, satisfaction with both Internet service and cellular phone service has generally increased over time. The proportion satisfied with cellular phone services has generally increased from 54 percent in 2007 to 73 percent this year. And, satisfaction with Internet service has increased from 51 percent in 2007 to 73 percent this year.

Overall, satisfaction with the services was mostly unchanged as compared to last year. Two services did see a decline. Satisfaction with access to higher education declined from 64 percent last year to 58 percent this year. Satisfaction with public transportation services declined from 25 percent last year to 20 percent this year.

THE COMMUNITY AND ITS ATTRIBUTES IN 2026

In this section, the 2026 data on respondents' evaluations of their communities and its attributes are examined in terms of any significant differences that may exist depending upon the size of the respondent's community, the region in which they live, or various individual attributes such as household income or age.

Figure 3. Feelings of Community Powerlessness: 2011 - 2026



Community Change – 2026 Data

The perceptions of the change occurring in their community by various demographic subgroups are examined. Persons living in or near larger communities are more likely than persons living in or near smaller communities to say their community has changed for the better during the past year. At least one-third of persons living in or near communities with populations of 5,000 or more say their community has changed for the better, compared to two in ten persons living in or near the smallest communities (populations less than 500) (Figure 4).

The demographic groups most likely to say their community has changed for the better during the past year include: persons age

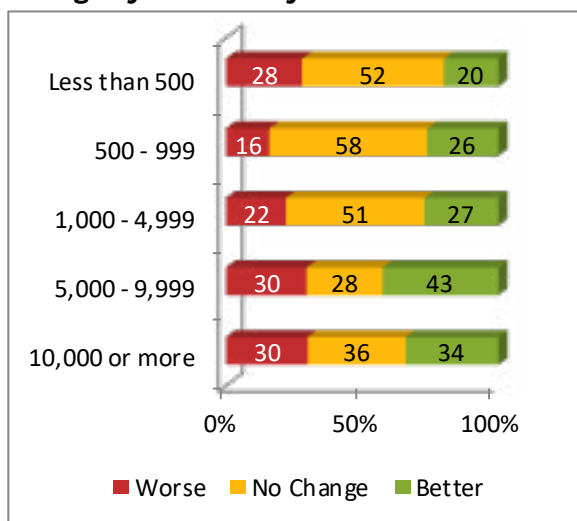
Table 1. Proportion of Respondents Very or Somewhat Satisfied with Each Service, 2007 - 2026

Service/Amenity	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Fire protection	85	86	87	85	86	85	86	86	87	87	85	89	89	87	86	84	85	84	89	87
Parks/recreation	74	75	74	74	75	76	76	71	76	78	75	74	79	77	73	70	74	71	76	77
Library services	74	75	74	73	73	72	73	72	73	71	73	74	73	72	68	68	70	73	76	75
Cell phone services	54	58	61	60	64	63	65	60	64	63	61	59	66	64	64	59	61	65	75	73
Internet service	51	57	58	56	60	59	59	56	58	56	54	53	57	54	53	54	59	61	70	73
Law enforcement	63	62	64	65	63	65	64	62	64	69	67	66	69	68	67	65	61	62	69	69
Religious org.	72	73	71	71	70	72	71	70	72	69	68	67	69	70	65	61	58	62	66	65
Sewage/waste disposal*	66	67	66	65	65	64	67	64	65	64	66	67	65	63	61	60	63	61	65	63
Medical care svcs	63	66	67	67	67	68	66	62	62	64	63	59	64	66	62	61	57	58	64	64
Access to higher ed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	63	62	59	58	63	63	61	57	57	56	64	58
Education (K-12)	68	70	68	68	68	68	68	68	69	68	70	69	70	70	63	62	64	60	62	58
Streets and roads*	55	49	51	47	48	49	53	44	47	43	44	45	42	41	37	40	39	45	47	50
Civic/nonprofit organizations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45	47	48	49	47	46	41	44	44	46	46
Restaurants	50	45	47	47	48	48	46	40	46	43	43	45	43	52	43	40	40	38	46	45
Senior centers	48	47	47	47	48	47	48	47	49	47	47	45	43	45	40	35	37	38	44	42
Quality of housing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	44	45	45	44	47	46	48	43	36	37	32	40	41
Comm recycling	50	48	52	54	54	54	58	53	55	52	50	51	46	44	39	38	40	42	39	37
Head start progrms	29	26	28	29	27	27	27	39	39	39	40	37	44	42	34	37	35	35	38	34
Retail shopping	41	39	40	41	37	39	38	33	38	34	32	35	28	33	29	31	29	31	38	35
Nursing home care	46	47	45	46	46	45	43	47	47	43	44	38	40	42	36	30	34	34	37	35
Local government*	40	38	41	40	41	42	40	37	40	37	42	39	43	42	40	35	36	32	35	35
Entertainment	30	26	29	32	30	30	31	26	29	26	28	29	29	31	23	25	24	26	34	30
Mental health svcs	23	23	24	23	24	25	23	21	23	22	21	19	23	25	24	24	24	25	28	26
Arts/cultural activities	26	25	24	27	27	27	26	24	26	22	24	26	27	24	20	23	25	25	28	27
Cost of housing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	45	45	45	46	43	43	38	33	36	21	27	31
Housing	59	59	61	59	59	57	52	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Child day care svcs	0	0	32	34	35	35	32	34	34	33	31	30	34	34	27	23	20	20	25	25
Day care services	31	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pub transp svcs*	17	17	19	18	19	19	20	17	19	18	17	21	20	21	17	20	20	18	25	20

0 = Not asked that particular year

* New items added in 2007 that combine previous items (indented below each).

Figure 4. Perceptions of Community Change by Community Size



30 and older, persons having at least a four-year college degree, persons who are divorced or separated, long-term residents (persons who have lived in or near the community for more than five years), persons with healthcare support or public safety occupations, and persons with management, professional or education occupations.

In addition, respondents were asked to predict the expected change in their community ten years from now. Respondents' perceptions are analyzed by the size of their community, the region where they live, and some individual attributes.

When comparing responses by region, persons living in both the South Central and Southeast regions are the groups most likely to say their community will be a better place to live ten years from now. At least one-quarter of the residents of these two regions believe their community will be a better place to live ten years from now, compared to approximately 14 percent of the residents of the other regions of the state.

The other groups most likely to believe their community will be a better place to live ten years from now include: persons living in or near communities with populations ranging from 5,000 to 9,999, persons age 30 and older, persons with at least a four-year degree, and persons who

are divorced or separated.

When comparing responses by occupation, persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations are the group least likely to say their community will be a better place to live ten years from now.

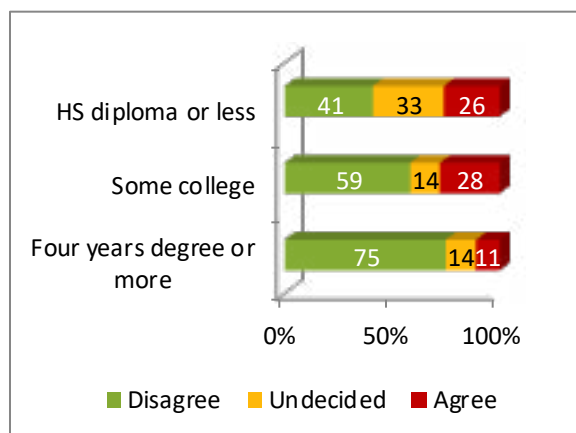
Community Powerlessness – 2026 Data

In addition to asking respondents about their perceptions of the change occurring in their community, they were also asked if they view their community as powerless. They were asked, “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My community is powerless to control its own future.” They were given a five-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The feelings of community powerlessness are examined by community size, region and individual attributes. Many differences emerge.

Persons with higher education levels are more likely than persons with less education to disagree that their community is powerless to control its own future. Three-quarters of persons having at least a four-year degree (75%) disagree with that statement, compared to just over four in ten persons with a high school diploma or less education (Figure 5). Just over one-quarter of persons without a four-year degree agree that their community is powerless to control its future.

Figure 5. Feelings of Community Powerlessness by Education Level



Other groups most likely to disagree that their community is powerless to control its future include: persons living in or near communities with populations ranging from 500 to 4,999; persons with the highest household incomes; persons age 40 to 64; married persons; persons who are divorced or separated; and persons with management, professional, or education occupations.

Satisfaction with Community Services and Amenities – 2026 Data

Next, rural Nebraskans were asked to rate how satisfied they are with 27 different services and amenities, taking into consideration cost, availability, and quality. Residents report high levels of satisfaction with some services, but other services and amenities have higher levels of dissatisfaction. Nine services listed have a higher proportion of dissatisfied responses than satisfied responses and those services are largely unavailable in rural communities.

The services or amenities respondents are most satisfied with (based on the combined percentage of “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” responses) include fire protection (87%), parks and recreation (77%), library services (75%), cellular phone service (73%), Internet service (73%), law enforcement (69%), religious organizations (65%), medical care services (64%), and sewage/waste disposal (63%). At least four in ten respondents are either very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with cost of housing (56%), retail shopping (51%), entertainment (48%), streets and roads (46%), restaurants (43%), community recycling (43%), and quality of housing (43%).

The ten services and amenities with the greatest dissatisfaction ratings were analyzed by community size, region, and various individual attributes. Many differences emerge.

Persons living in or near larger communities are more likely than persons living in or near smaller communities to express dissatisfaction with the cost of housing in their community. Three-quarters of

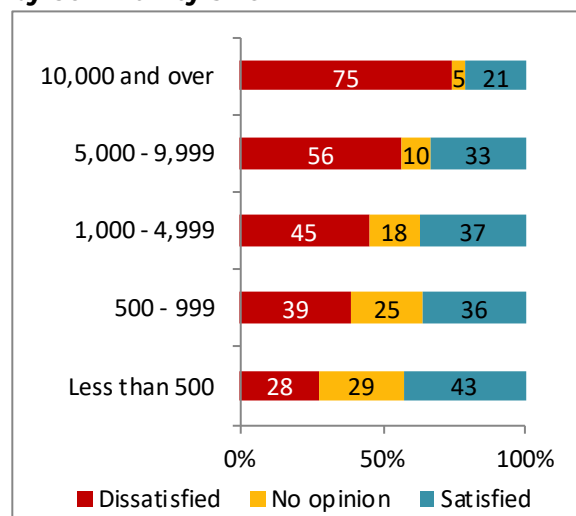
persons living in or near communities with populations of 10,000 or more (75%) are dissatisfied with the cost of housing in their community, compared to just under three in ten persons living in or near communities with populations less than 500 (28%) (Figure 6).

Persons living in the Northeast region are more likely than persons living in other regions of the state to say they are dissatisfied with the cost of housing in their community. Almost two-thirds of Northeast region residents (65%) are dissatisfied with the cost of housing, compared to just over four in ten residents of the Southeast region (41%).

Persons age 30 to 39 are the age group most likely to be dissatisfied with the cost of housing in their community. Almost seven in ten persons age 30 to 39 (69%) are dissatisfied with the cost of housing in their community, compared to four in ten persons age 65 and older (40%).

Other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with the cost of housing in their community include: persons with higher household incomes; persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations; persons with food service or personal care occupations; and long-term residents. When comparing responses by marital status, widowed persons are the group least likely to express dissatisfaction with the cost of housing in their community.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with Cost of Housing by Community Size



Panhandle residents are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to express dissatisfaction with the retail shopping in their community. Just over seven in ten Panhandle residents are dissatisfied with the retail shopping (72%), compared to just over four in ten residents of the South Central region (41%).

Persons living in or near communities with populations between 5,000 and 9,999 are the community size group most likely to express dissatisfaction with the retail shopping in their community.

The other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with the retail shopping in their community include persons with some college education (but less than a four-year degree) and persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations.

Persons living in or near communities with populations between 5,000 and 9,999, persons under the age of 30, males, persons with less than a four-year degree, persons who have never married, and persons with production, transportation, or warehousing occupations are the groups most likely to be dissatisfied with the entertainment in their community.

Residents of both the Panhandle and Northeast regions are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to be dissatisfied with their streets and roads. Just over one-half of the residents of these two regions express dissatisfaction with their streets and roads, compared to just under four in ten residents of the South Central region (37%).

Other groups most likely to express dissatisfaction with their streets and roads include persons age 19 to 29, persons with some college education (but less than a four-year degree), and persons with production, transportation or warehousing occupations.

Persons living in or near communities with populations ranging from 5,000 to 9,999 are the community size group most likely to be dissatisfied with the restaurants in their community.

When comparing responses by region, the residents of the South Central region are the group least likely to be dissatisfied with the restaurants in their community.

Persons with production, transportation or warehousing occupations are more likely than persons with other occupations to be dissatisfied with the restaurants in their community.

Residents of the Northeast region are more likely than the residents of other regions of the state to express dissatisfaction with their community recycling. Almost six in ten residents of the Northeast region (59%) are dissatisfied with their community recycling, compared to less than two in ten Panhandle residents (16%).

The youngest persons are more likely than older persons to be dissatisfied with their community recycling. Over six in ten persons age 19 to 29 (62%) are dissatisfied, compared to just over three in ten persons age 65 and older.

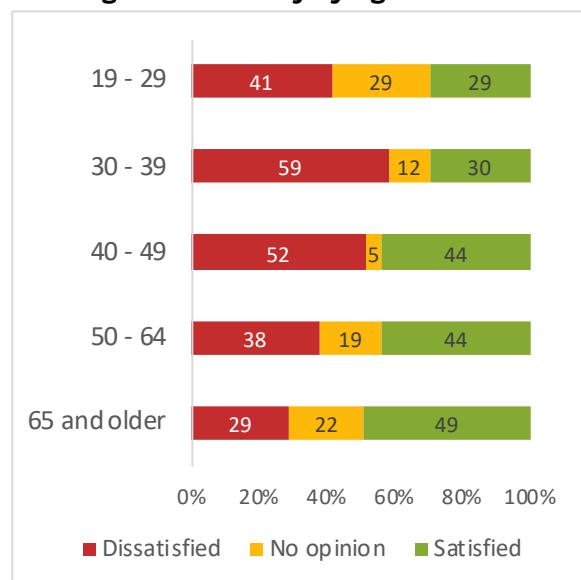
The other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with their community recycling include: persons with household incomes of \$40,000 or more, persons with at least some college education, persons who have never married, and newcomers to the community.

Persons age 30 to 39 are more likely than persons in other age groups to be dissatisfied with the quality of housing in their community. Almost six in ten persons age 30 to 39 (59%) are dissatisfied with the quality of housing, compared to just under three in ten persons age 65 and older (29%) (Figure 7).

The other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with the quality of housing in their community include person with some college education (but less than a four-year degree), married persons, persons who have never married, persons with production, transportation or warehousing occupations, and newcomers to the community.

Younger persons are more likely than older persons to be dissatisfied with their local government. At least four in ten persons under the age of 50 are dissatisfied with

Figure 7. Dissatisfaction with Quality of Housing in Community by Age



their local government, compared to just over three in ten persons age 65 and older (31%).

The other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with their local government include persons living in or near both the smallest and largest communities, persons with lower household incomes, persons not having a four-year college degree, persons who have never married, and persons with food service or personal care occupations.

Persons living in or near the smallest communities are more likely than persons living in or near larger communities to express dissatisfaction with the public transportation in their community. One-half of the persons living in or near communities with populations less than 500 (50%) are dissatisfied with the public transportation services, compared to just over two in ten persons living in or near communities with populations between 5,000 and 9,999.

The other groups most likely to be dissatisfied with the public transportation services include: persons age 19 to 29, persons who have never married, and newcomers to the community.

When comparing responses by region, Panhandle residents are the group least likely to be dissatisfied with their public transportation services. Just over one

in ten Panhandle residents (14%) are dissatisfied, compared to at least three in ten residents of the other regions of the state.

Persons age 30 to 39 and persons with production, transportation or warehousing occupations are the groups most likely to express dissatisfaction with the arts/cultural activities in their community.

Residents of the South Central region are the regional group least likely to be dissatisfied with the arts/cultural activities in their community.

Opinions about the Community

Next, respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with various statements about their community. Most rural Nebraskans have a positive attachment to their community. Most rural Nebraskans agree that they have a good bond with others in their community (65%), they belong in their community (62%), they can get what they need in their community (61%), they feel like a member of their community (61%), people in the community are good at influencing each other (56%), they feel connected to their community (54%), and the community helps them fulfill their needs (53%) (Table 2). Feelings are mixed on whether they believe they have a say about what goes on in their community. Just under four in ten disagree with that statement, while a similar proportion agree.

Respondents' level of attachment to their community is examined by community size, region and various individual attributes. Many differences emerge.

Persons living in or near communities with populations between 500 and 999 are more likely than persons living in or near communities of other sizes to agree that they have a say about what goes on in their community. Just over four in ten persons living in or near communities of this size agree with that statement, compared to approximately one-third of persons living in or near communities with populations ranging from 1,000 to 9,999.

Persons living in or near smaller

Table 2. Opinions about Community

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can get what I need in this community.	7%	21%	12%	53%	8%
This community helps me fulfill my needs.	7	17	24	46	7
I feel like a member of this community.	6	15	19	49	12
I belong in this community.	5	11	21	49	13
I have a say about what goes on in my community.	9	26	29	29	6
People in this community are good at influencing each other.	3	13	29	48	8
I feel connected to this community.	8	16	23	43	11
I have a good bond with others in this community.	4	11	19	53	12

communities are more likely than persons living in or near larger communities to agree that they feel connected to their community. Approximately six in ten persons living in or near communities with populations under 1,000 agree with this statement, compared to just over one-half of persons living in or near larger communities.

Residents of both the South Central and Northeast regions are more likely than residents of other regions of the state to agree that they can get what they need in their community. Approximately two-thirds of the residents of these two regions agree with this statement, compared to approximately one-half of the residents of the other regions of the state.

Residents of both the Southeast and South Central regions are the regional groups most likely to agree that people in their community are good at influencing each other. Over six in ten residents of these two regions agree, compared to over four in ten residents of both the Panhandle and North Central regions.

Persons with higher household incomes are more likely than persons with lower incomes to agree with many of the statements listed: that they can get what they need in their community, the community helps them fulfill their needs, they have a say about what goes on in their community, and they have a good bond with others in their community. As an example, approximately four in ten persons with household incomes of \$75,000 or

more agree that they have a say about what goes on in the community, compared to just under one-quarter of persons with incomes under \$40,000.

Persons under the age of 50 are more likely than older persons to agree that they can get what they need in their community. Approximately two-thirds of persons under the age of 50 agree with this statement, compared to just under one-half of persons age 65 and older.

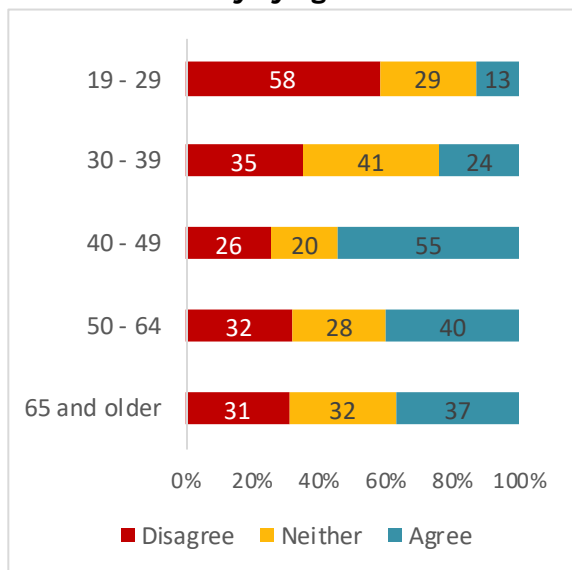
Older persons are more likely than younger persons to feel they belong in their community, feel connected to the community, and have a good bond with others in the community. Just over seven in ten persons age 65 and older agree that they belong in their community, compared to less than six in ten persons under the age of 40.

Persons between the ages of 40 and 49 are more likely than other age groups to agree that they have a say about what goes on in their community. Over one-half (55%) of persons age 40 to 49 agree with that statement, compared to just over one in ten persons age 19 to 29 (13%). In fact, just under six in ten (58%) of the youngest persons disagree with that statement (Figure 8).

This same age group (40 to 49) are the group most likely to agree that people in the community are good at influencing each other.

Males are more likely than females to

Figure 8. I Have a Say about What Goes On in this Community by Age



agree that they can get what they need in their community. Females are more likely to agree that people in the community are good at influencing each other.

Persons with higher education levels are more likely than persons with less education to agree with most of the statements listed. For example, just under two-thirds of persons with at least a four-year degree (64%) agree that the community helps them fulfill their needs, compared to just over four in ten persons with less education.

Both married persons and persons who are divorced or separated are the marital groups most likely to agree that they can get what they need in their community. Widowed persons are the group most likely to agree that they feel like a member of the community, that they belong in the community, feel connected to the community, and have a good bond with others in the community.

Persons with construction, installation, or maintenance occupations are the occupation group most likely to agree that they can get what they need in their community and that they feel like a member of this community. Persons with occupations in agriculture join this group as those most likely to agree that community helps them fulfill their needs.

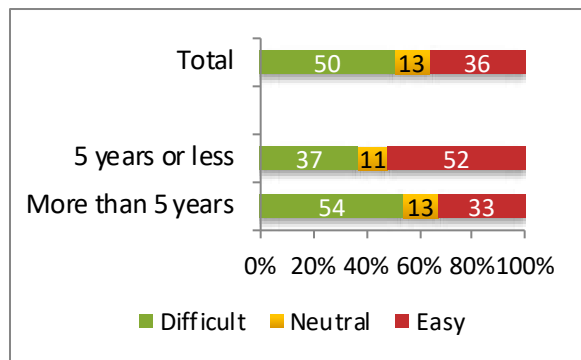
Persons with food service or personal care occupations are the occupation group most likely to agree that they belong in the community, people in the community are good at influencing each other, and they have a good bond with others in the community. Persons with healthcare support or public safety occupations are the group most likely to agree that they have a say about what goes on in the community.

Newcomers to the community are more likely than long-term residents to agree that they can get what they need in their community. Almost seven in ten persons living in their community for five years or less agree to the statement, compared to just under six in ten persons living in the community for six or more years.

Long-term residents have more attachment to their community than newcomers. Long-term residents are more likely than newcomers to agree that they feel like a member of the community, that they belong in the community, that they have a say about what goes on in the community, that people in the community are good at influencing each other, that they feel connected to the community, and they have a good bond with others in the community. As an example, just over seven in ten long-term residents (71%) agree that they have a good bond with others in the community, compared to just over four in ten newcomers (44%).

Finally, respondents were asked a question about how easy or difficult it would be to leave their community. The exact question wording was “Assume you were to have a discussion in your household about leaving your community for a reasonably good opportunity elsewhere. Some people might be happy to live in a new place and meet new people. Others might be very sorry to leave. How easy or difficult would it be for your household to leave your community?” They were given a seven-point scale where 1 indicated very easy and 7 denoted very difficult. One-half of rural Nebraskans (50%) say it would be difficult to leave their community (Figure 9). Just under four in ten (36%) indicate it would be easy for their household to leave their community. Responses to this question are examined

Figure 9. Difficulty or Ease of Leaving Community by Length of Time Living in Community



by region, community size and various individual attributes. Many differences appear.

Persons living in or near smaller communities are more likely than persons living in or near larger communities to say it would be difficult to leave their community. Approximately six in ten persons living in or near communities with populations under 10,000 say it would be difficult to leave the community, compared to just under four in ten persons living in or near communities with populations of 10,000 or more.

Long-term residents of the community are more likely than newcomers to say it would be difficult to leave their community. Over one-half of long-term residents (54%) say it would be difficult to leave the community, compared to just under four in ten newcomers (37%) (Figure 9). Over one-half of newcomers (52%) say it would be easy to leave the community.

When comparing responses by region, residents of both the Panhandle and Northeast regions are the groups least likely to say it would be difficult to leave the community. Approximately four in ten residents of these two regions say it would be difficult to leave the community, compared to at least one-half of the residents of the other regions of the state.

Other groups most likely to say it would be difficult to leave their community include: persons age 65 and older; widowed persons; persons with occupations in agriculture; and persons with construction, installation, or maintenance occupations.

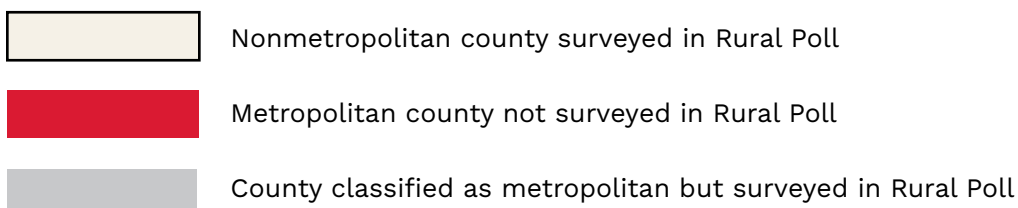
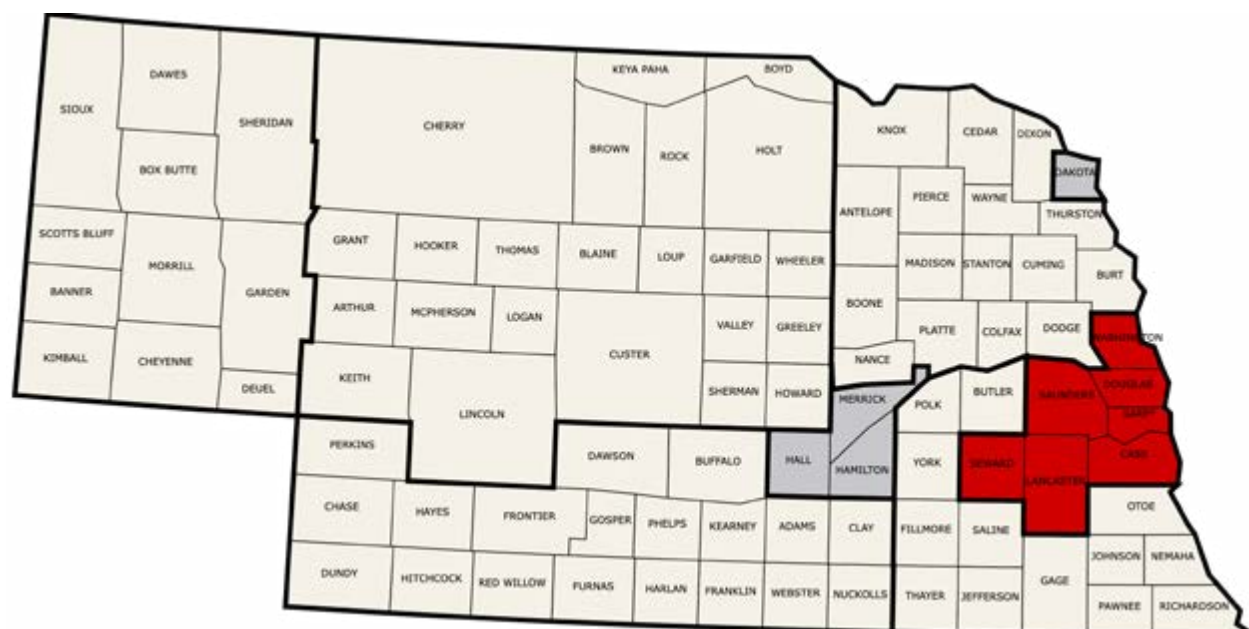
CONCLUSION

Rural Nebraskans are positive about their community by many different measures. More rural Nebraskans say their community has changed for the better during the past year than those who say it has changed for the worse. Many rural Nebraskans also say it would be difficult to leave their community and most have a positive attachment to their community. Finally, most rural Nebraskans disagree that their community is powerless to control its future.

There were differences in perceptions of the community by community size. Persons living in or near larger communities are more likely than persons living in or near smaller communities to say their community has changed for the better during the past year.

Except for some services that are largely unavailable in rural communities, rural Nebraskans are generally satisfied with basic community services and amenities.

Appendix Figure 1. Nebraska Rural Poll Regions
Top left to Bottom Right: Panhandle, North Central, Northeast, South Central, Southeast





RURAL POLL

**Nebraska Rural Poll
Research Report 26-2
results compiled by:**

Heather Akin
Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel
Mary Emery
Katelyn Larson
Bradley Lubben
L.J. McElravy
Rebecca Vogt



UNL does not discriminate
based upon any protected
status.

Please see [go.unl.edu/
nondiscrimination](http://go.unl.edu/nondiscrimination)
Copyright © 2026