

Community leadership, engagement, and problem-solving

2010 household survey in North Dakota

The following snapshot is based on surveys completed with a representative sample of North Dakotans in December 2010. Differences by gender, age, education level, presence of children in the household, and metro (including the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area of Cass County and the Grand Forks metropolitan area of Grand Forks County) versus non-metro (all other counties) are reported when significant. Changes since 2009 are noted based on a similar survey conducted in December 2009.

Overview

These surveys, conducted on behalf of the Bush Foundation, were designed to better understand residents' opinions about their quality of life, the challenges posed by the state budget crisis, and the ability of their community to exercise the leadership necessary to address these challenges.

Respondents identified the top problems they see as affecting their quality of life. The three issues that appeared on that list most often were: education (42%), the economy/jobs (36%), and health care (29%).

When asked about spending in several areas of government, 55 percent of respondents wanted spending to stay at current levels across the board, while only 8 percent preferred a decrease in spending and 31 percent preferred an increase. Respondents' top priorities for funding were K-12 education, health care, long-term care, and economic development. When asked which funding areas were most in need of reform in order to ensure effective use of taxpayer dollars, respondents focused on K-12 education and health care.

About the Bush Foundation

Since its beginning in 1953, the Bush Foundation has invested in the vitality of communities across Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and the 23 Native nations that share the same geography. Today these communities face fundamental changes; not short-term conditions, but rather a new long-term reality that will affect the vitality of communities and the people in them for decades to come. Adapting to this new reality will pose tough problems that are complex, challenge the status quo, will not be solved with business-as-usual approaches, and requiring change by whole communities. The Bush Foundation works in two different ways to support communities that are confronting these challenges:

1. By committing to find solutions to specific problems toward which the Foundation can make a significant contribution. The Foundation is involved in two such decade-long commitments: improving educational achievement and supporting the self-determination of Native nations.
2. By helping communities develop their capacity to solve their own tough public problems. This is accomplished through a combination of leadership development and by providing research, data, tools, and opportunities to connect with others that are needed for developing innovative and sustainable solutions.

Through this work, the Bush Foundation is a catalyst for the courageous leadership necessary to create sustainable solutions to tough public problems and ensure community vitality.

Quality of life

In general, North Dakotans are more likely to believe that the quality of life is getting better in their state than they are to believe quality of life is getting better in their community. Compared with one year ago, residents' ratings indicate a much more favorable outlook for both their community and their state.

- Residents with less education are less likely to think the quality of life in their community is getting better.
- Older residents are more likely to believe that quality of life in their community and in the state as a whole is getting worse.

Most residents (88%) believe they can make a difference in improving the quality of life in their local community. This increased from 83 percent in 2009.

- Residents with more education are more likely to strongly agree that they can make a difference in improving the quality of life in their local community.

When asked to list their top concerns related to quality of life in North Dakota, the most commonly mentioned issues were: education (42%), the economy/jobs (36%), health care (29%), housing (26%), government budgets/spending/taxes (26%), and transportation (25%). This is significantly different than 2009, when two-thirds of residents (67%) felt the economy/jobs was the most important issue, followed by health and health care (29%) and education (17%).

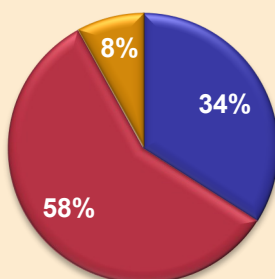
State budget challenges

Respondents were asked if spending should be increased, left at the current level, or decreased in several areas of government to address their state's budget challenges (which, in North Dakota's case, may be too large of a surplus). North Dakotans are most likely to favor increases in spending in the areas of K-12 education; health care for children, the elderly, poor, and disabled; long-term care for the elderly; and economic development. They are least likely to favor increases in spending for aid to cities, public safety, and property tax relief. Over half of residents (55%) want to leave "across the board" spending at the current level.

- Women are more likely than men to favor increased spending, except in the areas of transportation and housing.
- Residents with children are more likely to favor increased spending on K-12 education, public safety, and the environment, whereas residents without children are more likely to favor increased spending on income support for the poor.
- Residents with less education are more likely to favor increased spending on income support for the poor, public safety, and housing.
- Younger residents are more likely to favor increased spending on K-12 education and higher education.

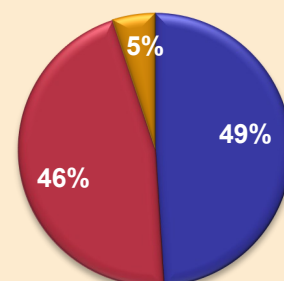
IN GENERAL, WHEN IT COMES TO QUALITY OF LIFE IN YOUR COMMUNITY / STATE, WOULD YOU SAY THINGS ARE...

In your community



- Getting better
- Staying about the same
- Getting worse

In your state



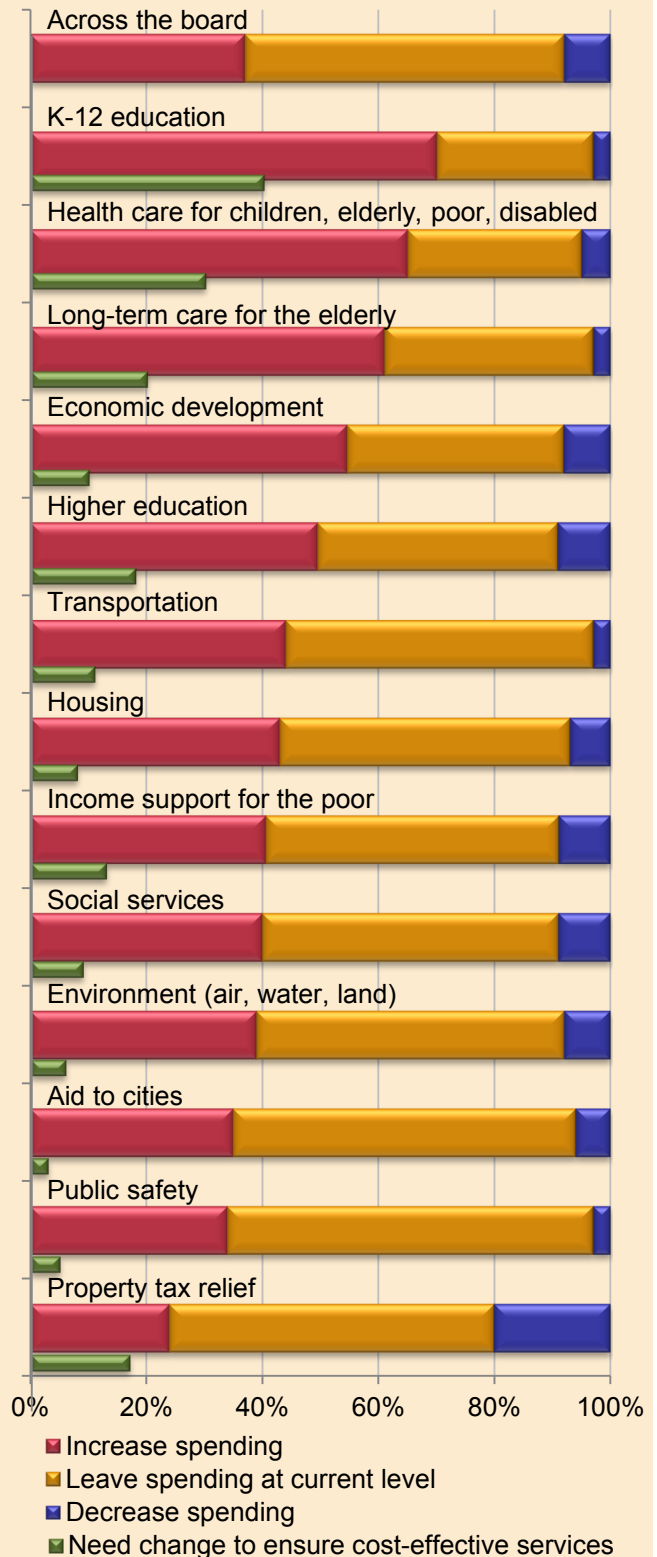
- Residents of metro areas are more likely to favor increased spending on K-12 education, higher education, social services, economic development, and transportation, whereas residents of non-metro areas are more likely to favor increased spending on long-term care for the elderly, income support for the poor, public safety, housing, aid to cities, and the environment.

Respondents were also asked to select two of the items (from the same list of government services used in the previous question) that they feel are most in need of change to ensure taxpayers get the most cost-effective services. It is an interesting finding that the areas in which residents feel spending should be increased are many of the same areas in which residents are most likely to feel change is needed to ensure efficient services.

When asked to what degree they can accept certain consequences of increasing the cost-effectiveness of government services, residents of North Dakota were most likely to be able to accept doing more for themselves and getting used to a new way of doing things. They are least willing to accept less regulation and inspection and less convenience, such as longer waiting or traveling times.

- Men are more likely than women to be able to accept loss of government jobs and doing more for themselves as consequences of increased cost-effectiveness of government services.
- Residents with less education are more likely to be able to accept loss of government jobs and less regulation and inspection as consequences of increased cost-effectiveness of services, whereas residents with more education are more likely to be able to accept change in service location, getting used to a new way of doing things, and doing more for themselves.
- Middle-aged adults are more likely to be able to accept change in service location. Older adults are least likely to be able to accept doing more for themselves.

IN SOLVING YOUR STATE'S BUDGET CHALLENGES, SHOULD SPENDING BE INCREASED, DECREASED, OR LEFT AT THE CURRENT LEVEL? WHICH TWO AREAS DO YOU THINK ARE MOST IN NEED OF CHANGE TO ENSURE TAXPAYERS GET THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE SERVICES?



- Residents of metro areas are more likely to be able to accept getting used to a new way of doing things and change in location of services, whereas residents of non-metro areas are more likely to be able to accept doing more for themselves.

Community problem-solving

Most North Dakotans feel that people in their community work together and take action to solve problems, and about half of residents feel this is a lot like their community. Most residents also believe their community is good at taking action to solve problems and including input from all segments of the community in decision-making, with about 4 out of 10 residents saying these statements are a lot like their community. The proportion of North Dakota residents who feel this is a lot like their community increased about 10 percent on each of these items since 2009.

- Women are more likely than men to believe that people work together to solve problems in their community and that their community is good at moving from talking about problems to taking action to solve them.

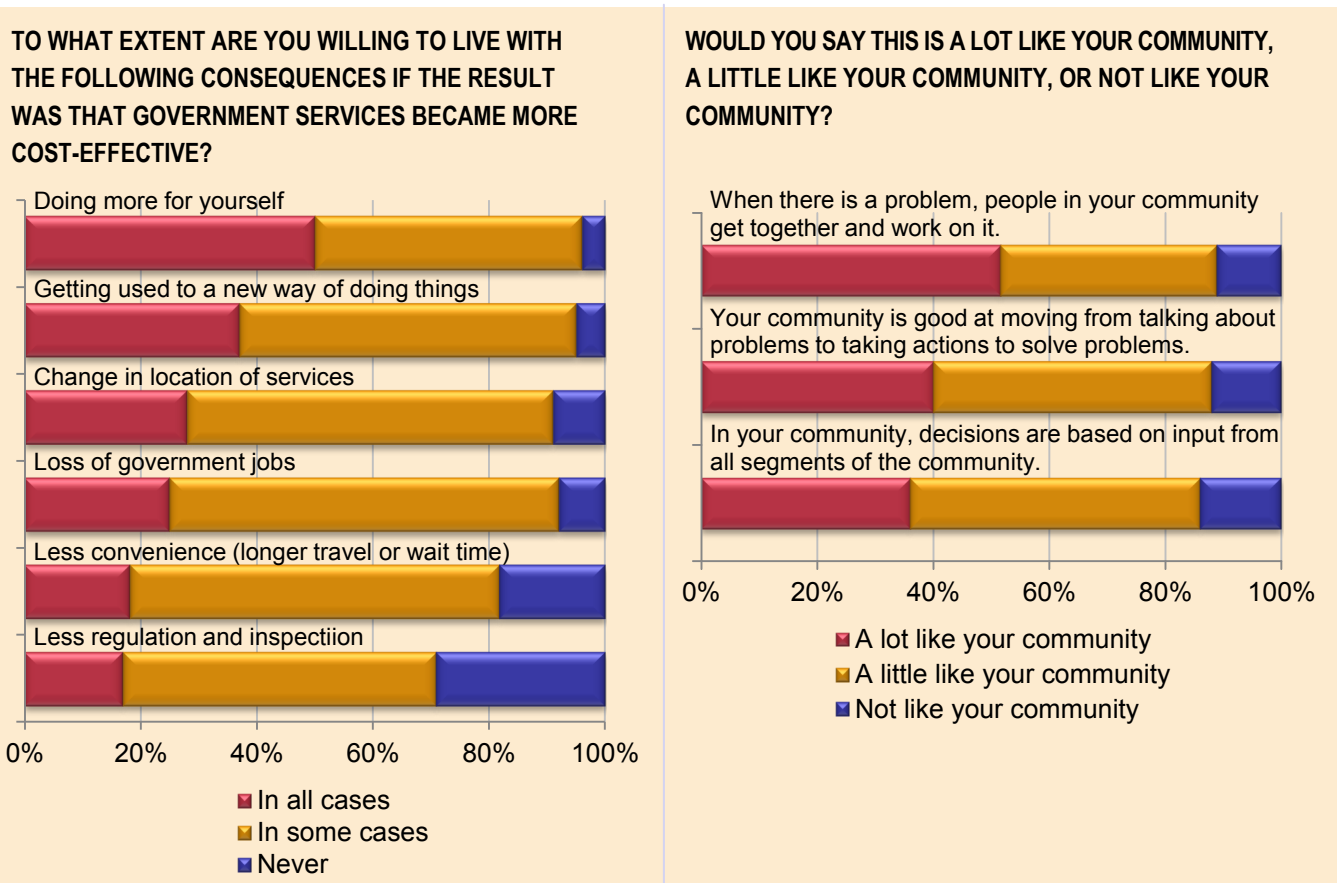
- Residents with less education are less likely to endorse these positive statements about decision-making in their community.

Courageous leadership

Bush Foundation’s description of courageous leadership is as follows:

Courageous leaders don’t shy away from conflict when they are trying to solve tough problems. Courageous leaders harness energy from differing points of view and rally community members to work together to find solutions. Courageous leadership can come from anybody in your community, not just those in charge.

Respondents were read this description and asked about the courageous leadership in their community. When asked if their community has the courageous leadership needed to solve tough problems, half of residents (50%) said this is a lot like their



community and 40 percent said it is a little like their community.

- Women, residents without children, and residents with more education are most likely to strongly endorse this statement about their community.

Two-thirds of residents (67%) feel their community is either strong or very strong in terms of courageous leadership, compared with just 55 percent in 2009.

- Women, residents with children, and residents of metro areas are more likely to feel their community is strong or very strong in terms of courageous leadership.

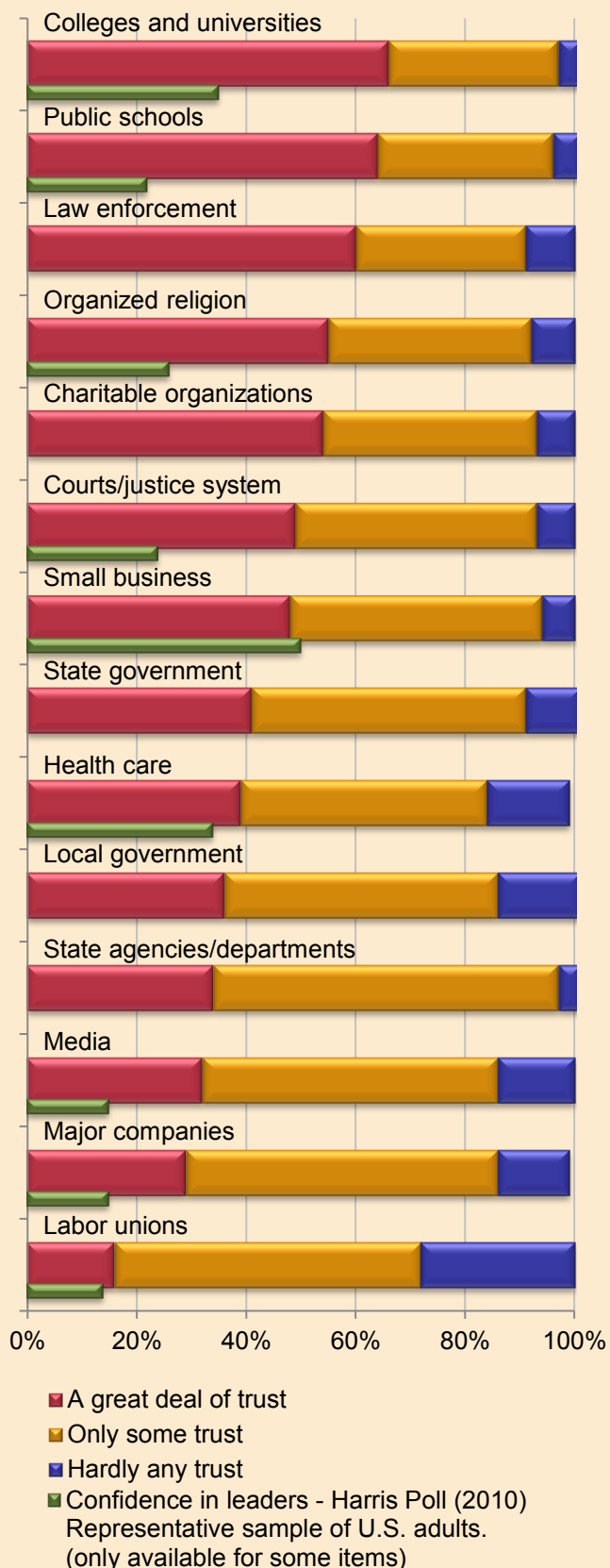
Finally, nearly two-thirds of residents (63%) have seen between one and four courageous leaders in action in their community in the past year. Twelve percent of residents said they had not seen any courageous leaders in their community and 25 percent said they had seen five or more in the past year. These results are similar to 2009.

- Women and residents with more education are more likely to have seen at least one courageous leader in action in their community in the past year.

Trust in leadership

North Dakota residents have the most trust in the leadership of colleges and universities, public schools, and law enforcement. They are least trusting of the leadership of labor unions. When compared with the average U.S. adult (using a Harris Poll conducted in 2010), North Dakotans are far more trusting of leaders from all types of institutions, with the exception of small business, health care, and labor unions (comparisons to the average U.S. adult could not be offered in all categories because of differences in polling categories). However, it is important to note that the Harris Poll used different question wording (“confidence” in leaders, instead of “trust” in leaders), as well as slightly different wording on some of the items, so caution should be used when interpreting these comparisons with the national poll.

AS FAR AS ... IS CONCERNED IN NORTH DAKOTA, WOULD YOU SAY YOU HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF TRUST, ONLY SOME TRUST, OR HARDLY ANY TRUST IN ITS LEADERS?



- Women, residents without children, residents with more education, and metro residents have more trust in the leadership compared with other residents.

Advice for elected officials

When asked what one piece of advice they would give to elected officials in their state as they work on these and other issues of importance to their state, by far the most common suggestions provided by the residents of North Dakota fall under the following themes:

- Listen to your constituents, represent the people that elected you, remember who you work for (25% of respondents).
- Use common sense, do what is best for the people, make tough decisions, don't pander to lobbyists (12% of respondents).
- Fiscal responsibility, balanced budget, don't waste money (11% of respondents).

Methods and respondent demographics

Households were randomly selected to participate in this survey using address-based sampling. Adults were chosen at random from these households using the "most recent birthday" method. Post-stratification weighting based on age and gender (from the 2010 U.S. Census) was used to ensure representativeness of the data. The sampling error is less than +/- 5 percent.

For more information

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RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Female	50%
Male	50%
Average household size	2.7 people
Percent with children	43%
Working full-time	55%
Working part-time	13%
Unemployed	7%
Retired	19%
Disabled - unable to work	3%
Stay at home parent	4%
High school diploma or less	27%
Some college/AA degree	31%
Bachelor's degree or more	42%
18-34	34%
35-49	23%
50-64	24%
65 and older	19%

Harris Interactive. (March 9, 2010).

Virtually no change in annual Harris Poll Confidence Index from last year. Retrieved from <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vault/Harris-Interactive-Poll-Research-Education-Confidence-2010-03.pdf>

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