



Differences and Common Ground: Minnesota's Regional Centers

Findings from the MPR News | APM Research Lab
2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans

APM Research Lab, February 2018

Introduction

Across Minnesota, residents have experiences, habits, and outlooks that are shared, as well as unique challenges and opportunities. The statewide 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans provides an opportunity to assess where perspectives align and where they diverge, including by geographic groupings.

This brief summarizes the Ground Level Survey findings between three regional centers in Minnesota: the Duluth Area, St. Cloud Area, and Rochester Area.¹ Outside of the Twin Cities region, these three communities are the most populous in Minnesota. This brief complements our other reports on Ground Level Survey findings, including briefs that summarize findings for Minnesota's urban and rural areas broadly, and another on three large rural areas (Northern, Central, and Southern Minnesota) that we designated for purposes of this project.

Demographic, Economic, and Social Overview of Minnesota’s Regional Centers

Collectively, the three regional centers—the Duluth, St. Cloud, and Rochester Areas—are home to 365,600 Minnesota residents, or 6.7 percent of the statewide population. (Readers should note that each Area is larger than its central city’s municipal boundaries. See the End Notes of this brief for details.) **Each regional center is home to more than 100,000 people and just over 2 percent of Minnesota’s residents.** Approximately 117,100 people live in the Duluth Area; about 126,800 live in the St. Cloud Area; and about 121,700 live in the Rochester Area.

Residents of the regional centers differ in their age distribution, levels of formal education, household income, race and ethnicity, and birthplace. Appreciating these differences gives helpful context to the survey findings.

Of the three regional centers, the Duluth Area is the oldest: It has the highest share of residents who are age 65 or older (at 15%) and lowest share of children under age 18 (at 19%). In the St. Cloud Area, children account for 22 percent of the population and even higher 24 percent in the Rochester Area. In the St. Cloud Area, only 12 percent of residents are older adults (age 65+), compared to 14 percent in the Rochester Area.

Two other age differences among the three communities are salient: **While 17 percent of both the Duluth Area and St. Cloud Area residents are young adults age 18-24, many of whom are engaged in post-secondary education or training, that percentage falls by half in the Rochester Area.** The Rochester Area also has a greater proportion of its population in their typical working years, age 25-64, than do the other two areas.

Statewide, 82 percent of Minnesotans self-identify as non-Hispanic White. **Among the regional centers, the Rochester Area has a lower proportion of non-Hispanic White residents (79%), while the St. Cloud Area (86%) and the Duluth Area (91%) have higher proportions.**

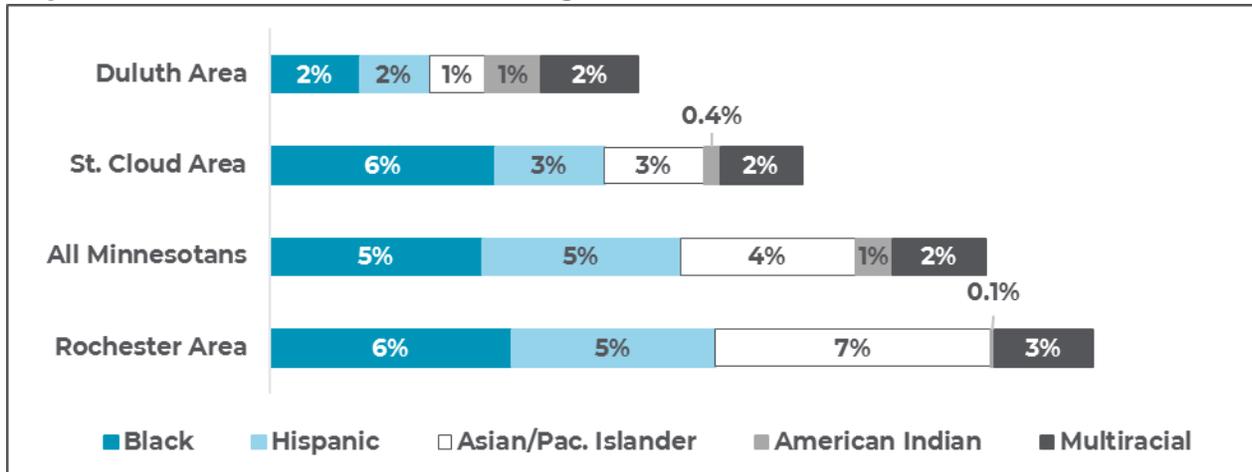
Population that is non-Hispanic White, Minnesota’s regional centers



Source: APM Research Lab analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey data.

Among populations of Color,² both the Rochester and St. Cloud Areas have a slightly higher percentage of Black residents than does Minnesota overall. The Rochester Area also mirrors the statewide proportion of Hispanic residents, at 1 in 20, and greatly exceeds Minnesota's share of Asian/Pacific Islander residents (7%, compared to 4%). The Duluth Area has less representation among Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander Minnesotans than seen statewide, but similar shares of American Indian (1%) and multiracial residents (2%), with no racial or ethnic minority group accounting for more than 2 percent of its total population.

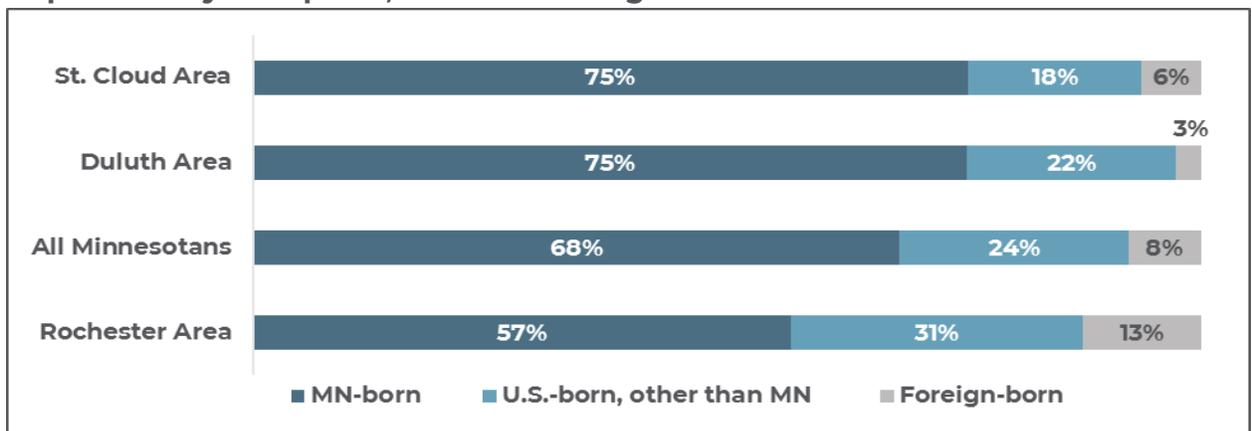
Populations of Color, Minnesota's regional centers



Source: APM Research Lab analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey data.

The greater racial diversity in the Rochester Area is driven in large part by the presence of immigrants. **Those born outside of the United States (immigrants) represent 13 percent of residents in the Rochester Area, more than twice the share in the St. Cloud Area and more than four times the share in the Duluth Area.** State-to-state migration has also left a greater imprint in the Rochester Area, where about 3 in 10 residents were born in a U.S. state other than Minnesota. Approximately 2 in 10 residents in the Duluth and St. Cloud Areas were also born in other states.

Population by birthplace, Minnesota's regional centers

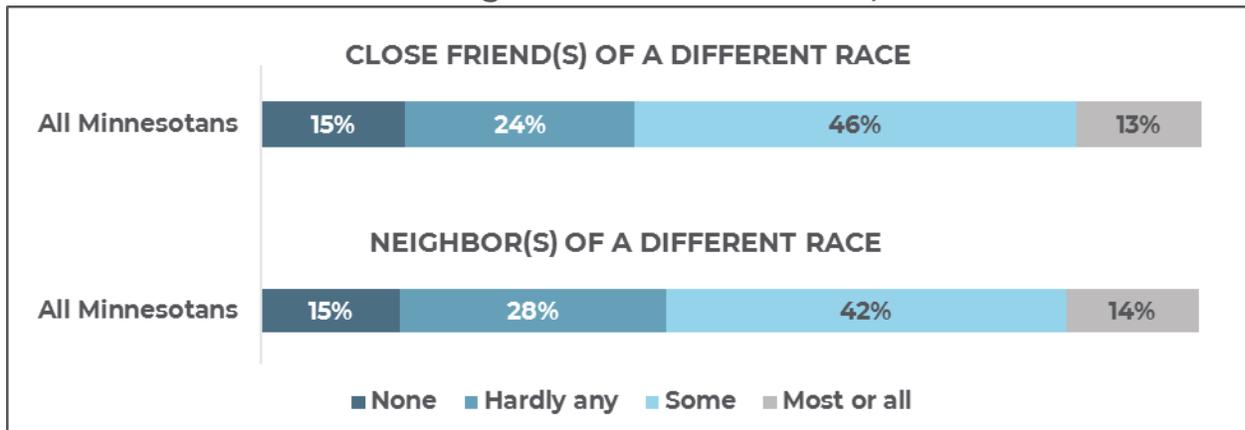


Source: APM Research Lab analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey data.

The Ground Level Survey examined the degree to which Minnesotans' relationships cross racial lines, by asking how many of the respondent's close friends and people in their neighborhood are of another race. On both questions, residents of regional centers closely mirror the state as whole (graphed below) in their likelihood of having close friends or neighbors of different race.

In line with the state, 59 percent of regional center residents say at least *some* of their close friends are of a different race than themselves, just above the share who say the same about their neighbors (56%). **A small minority of Minnesotans in the Duluth, St. Cloud, and Rochester Areas—as well as statewide—say *none* of their close friends nor their neighbors are of a different race (15% apiece).**

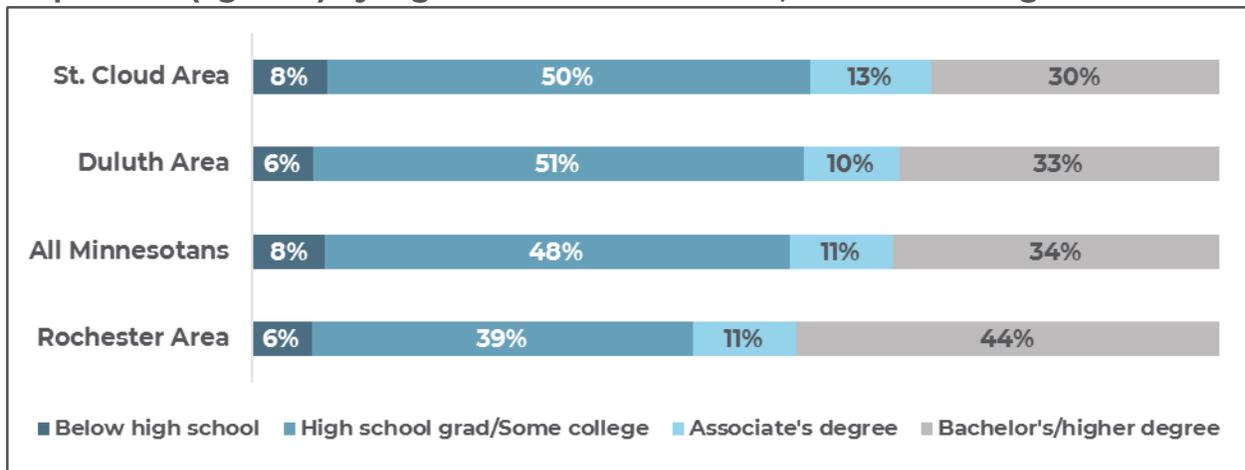
Adults with close friends or neighbors of a different race, all Minnesotans



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Among adults age 25 and older, Rochester Area residents are more likely to have completed advanced education than Duluth Area and St. Cloud Area residents: 55 percent of those age 25 and older in the Rochester Area hold a two-year (associate's) or higher degree, while the comparable figure is 43 percent in both the St. Cloud and Duluth Areas.

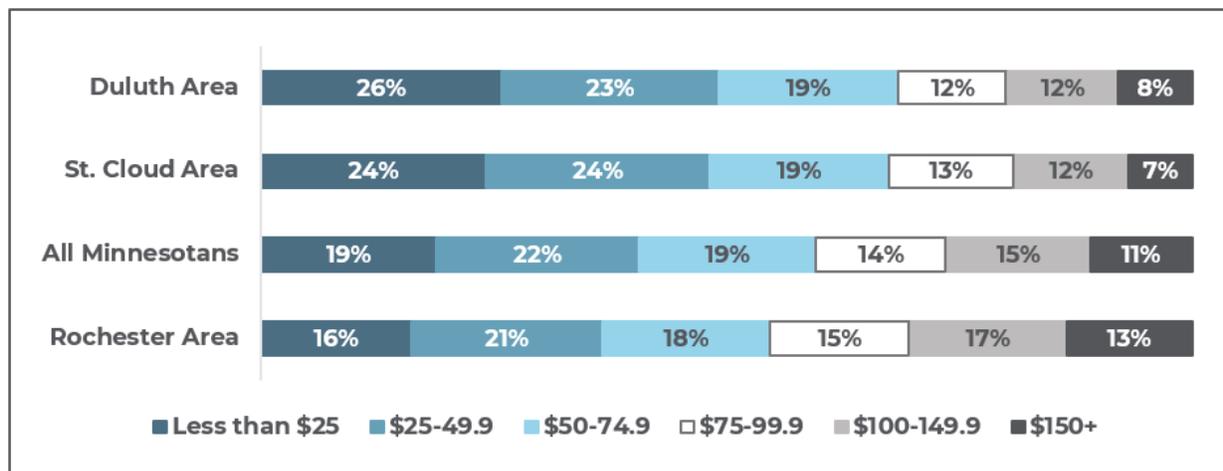
Population (age 25+) by highest level of education, Minnesota's regional centers



Source: APM Research Lab analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey data.

Education levels are highly correlated with household income. The Rochester Area’s higher educational attainment levels are reflected in its greater proportion of high-income households—those with incomes at \$150,000 or more annually (at 13%, compared to 8% in the Duluth Area and 7% in St. Cloud Area). Just under half of households in the Duluth and St. Cloud Areas have yearly incomes below \$50,000, compared to 41 percent of households statewide. In Rochester, the share falls to 37 percent.

Households by annual income (shown in thousands), Minnesota’s regional centers



Source: APM Research Lab analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey data.

The Ground Level survey also explored two lifestyle habits—religious attendance and gun ownership--for which we previously lacked data and understanding:

- **Regional center residents are equally likely to attend religious services once a month or more often** (about 46% do so), statistically tied with Minnesotans statewide.
- **Residents of Rochester Area are significantly less likely to own a permit for a concealed weapon**, with about 7 percent of adults in that community indicating they possess one. Registered gun ownership is 1.5 to 2 times higher among Duluth Area and St. Cloud Area residents (about 11-14%), similar to the statewide share.

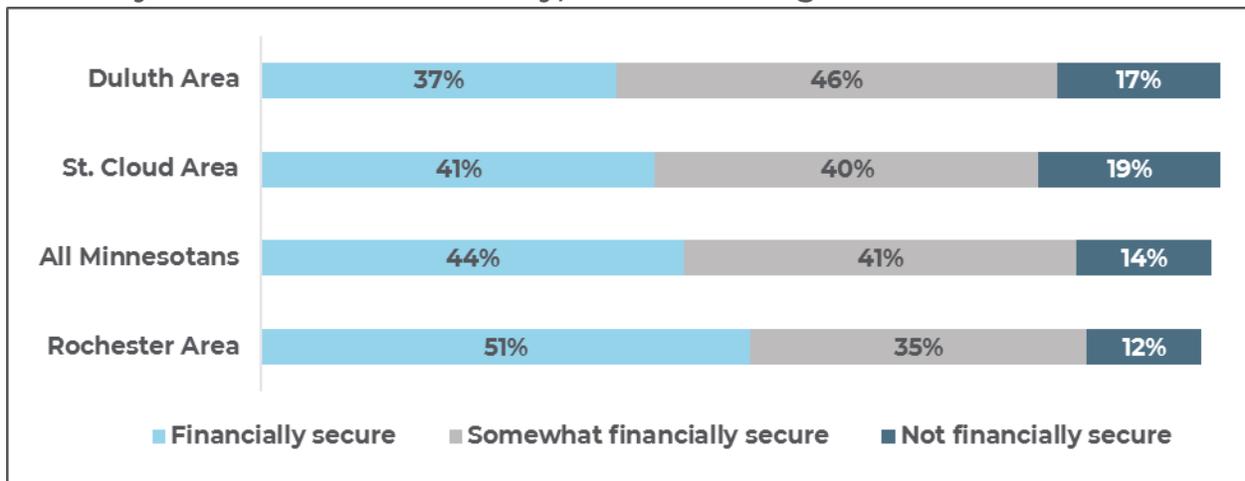
Personal Financial Security and Sense of Economic Improvement

The Ground Level Survey included questions designed to measure Minnesotans’ assessment of their current economic situation and whether it had improved or deteriorated since 2007, just preceding the financial crisis and subsequent recession. Regarding present circumstances, the survey asked, “Do you feel you are financially secure, somewhat financially secure, or not financially secure?” About 4 in 10 Minnesotans indicate they feel *financially secure* today. A similar share (41%) feel *somewhat financially secure*, while the remaining 14 percent report that they are *not financially secure*.

Examining responses to this question across the regional centers, **Rochester Area residents are more likely to say they feel *financially secure* (51% do so) than Duluth Area residents (37%).**

The share of St. Cloud residents who say this—4 in 10—falls in the middle but is statistically tied with both areas. The number of adults who feel “not financially secure” is estimated at about 16,000 people in the Duluth Area, as well as 18,000 in the St. Cloud Area and 11,000 in the Rochester Area.

Adults by sense of financial security, Minnesota’s regional centers

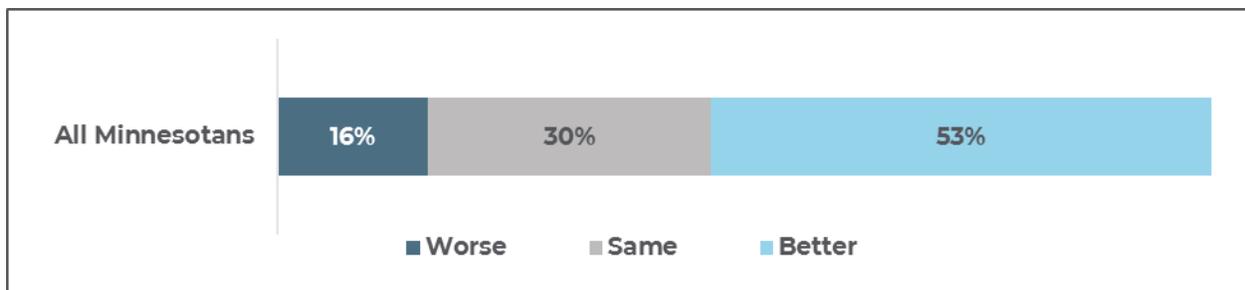


Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

The Ground Level Survey also asked respondents, “Thinking about where your personal financial situation is today, compared to ten years ago - that is since 2007 - is your personal financial situation today better, worse, or the same?” Responses statewide were statistically tied with those given by respondents of all three regional centers. **In other words, Ground Level Survey results indicate residents of the Duluth Area, the St. Cloud Area, and the Rochester Area weathered the recession in similar fashion.**

Specifically, **about 16 percent of residents across all regional centers residents feel they are “worse off” than a decade prior, while just over half experienced what they perceive as economic progress.** A similar proportion in all areas (30%) feel economically unchanged, not better nor worse. In people terms, there are about 14,000 residents who feel financially “worse off” in the Duluth Area; 20,000 in the St. Cloud Area; and 12,000 in the Rochester Area.

Adults by sense of economic improvement compared to 10 years ago, all Minnesotans



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Levels of Trust in Minnesota Institutions

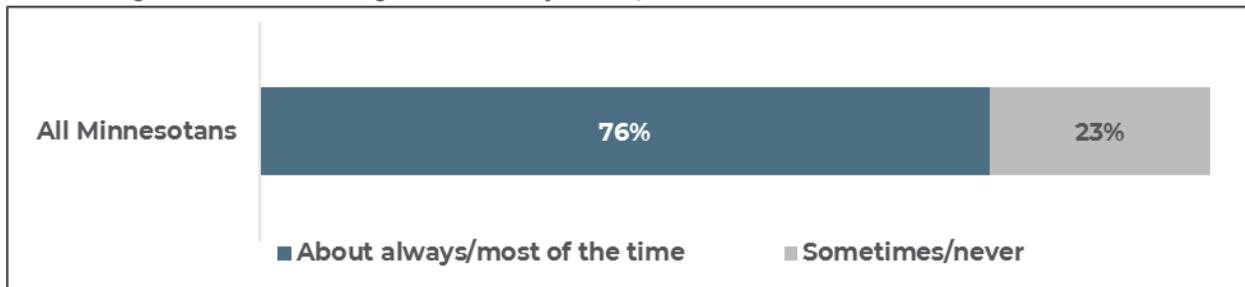
The Ground Level Survey asked respondents a series of questions that began: “Generally speaking, how much of the time do you think you can trust _____ to do what is right? Would you say, just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, or never?” The survey explored residents’ levels of trust in seven Minnesota institutions, including:

1. The police in Minnesota
2. The church or organized religion in Minnesota
3. The medical system in Minnesota
4. The public schools in Minnesota
5. News media, including TV, newspapers, and radio in Minnesota
6. Big business in Minnesota
7. The state government in St. Paul

Responses were collapsed into two groups those who generally trust the institution to do what is right, more often than not (*always + most of the time* responses) and those who generally *distrust* the institution (*only some of the time + never* responses).

For the police question, responses do not show any notable differences between regional centers, nor responses of all Minnesotans statewide (graphed below), with about three-fourths trusting police to *always or most of the time*. Inversely, in all regional centers, and across the state, only about one-fourth of residents say they trust the police *only some of the time or never*.

Adults by how often they trust the police, all Minnesotans

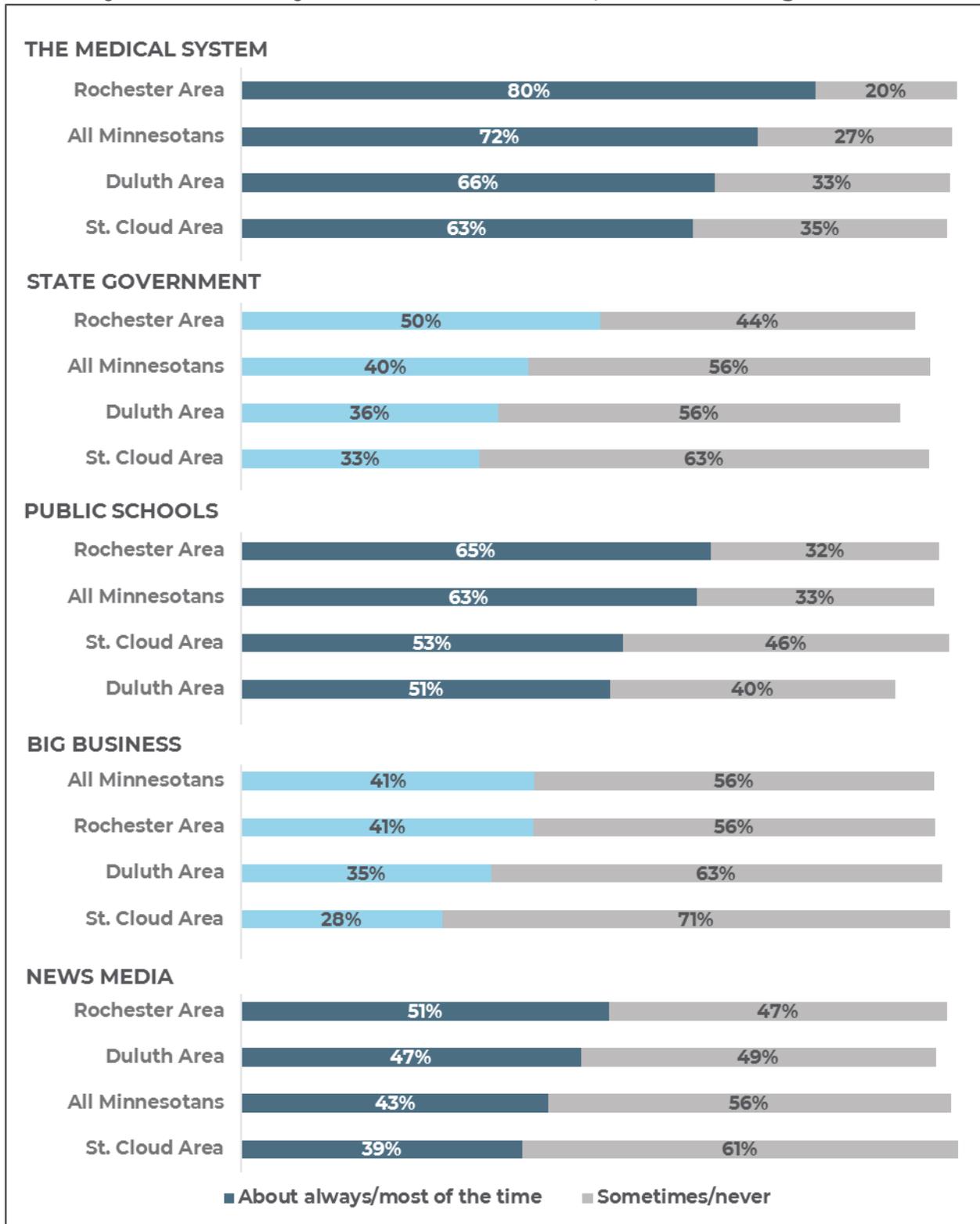


Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

The six other institutions asked about in the Ground Level Survey show varying perceptions of trust across the regional centers. **For five of the institutions—the medical system, state government, public schools, big business, and news media—the Rochester Area emerged as having the greatest percentage of “high trust” residents.** In each case, the Rochester Area was statistically tied or higher than the statewide share saying they trust the institution *just about always or most of the time*.

Across these same five institutions, St. Cloud Area residents were either the lowest—or statistically tied for the lowest—community expressing trust. In other words, the Rochester Area is home to more “high trust” residents, whereas the St. Cloud Area is home to more residents who are skeptical about these institutions’ ability to act in a trustworthy manner.

Adults by how often they trust select institutions, Minnesota's regional centers



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Most Minnesotans believe the medical system in Minnesota consistently acts in a trustworthy manner. **Rochester Area residents (who live near the world-renowned Mayo Clinic) offer the highest levels of trust for the medical system, with 80 percent saying they trust it to do what is right *just about always* or *most of the time*.** Statistically tied with one another, about two-thirds of Duluth and St. Cloud Area residents offer a high trust assessment of the medical system.

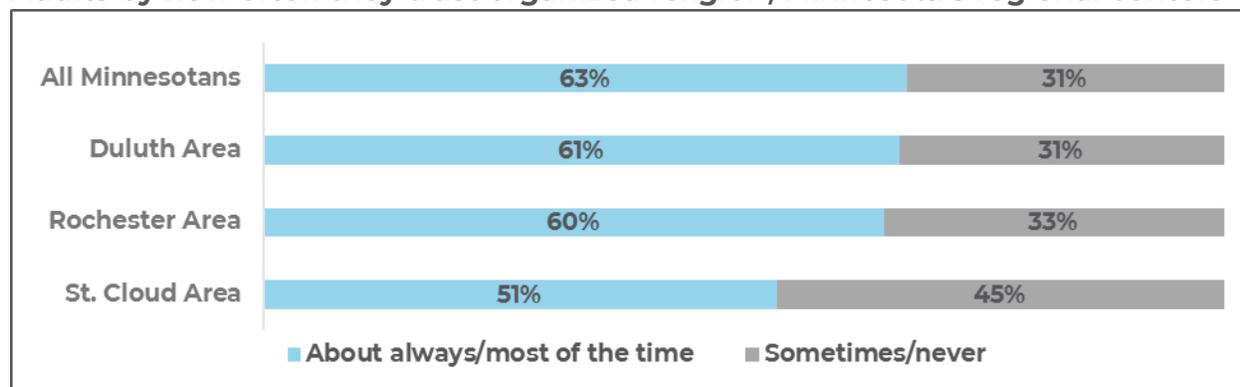
Half of Rochester residents view state government in a trustworthy light, while the corresponding share falls to about one-third among those who live in the Duluth and St. Cloud Areas (which are not significantly different). Like Minnesotans statewide, those living in Duluth and St. Cloud Areas are more likely to distrust state government (as measured by the two low trust responses) than to trust it.

Regarding the public schools, just over half of St. Cloud and Duluth Area residents (which are statistically tied) express high levels of trust, a proportion that climbs to two-thirds among Rochester Area adults.

Big business, generally speaking, does not inspire a high level of trust from residents in any of the regional centers, in line with the feelings of Minnesotans statewide. Only *half* as many of Rochester Area residents offer the same level of trust for big business as did for the medical system. About 4 in 10 residents in both Rochester and Duluth Area trust big business *just about always* or *most of the time* (these regions are statistically tied). **Only roughly one-quarter (28%) of those in St. Cloud Area offered this level of trust to big business, among the lowest expressions of trust across the entire survey.**

More residents of the Rochester and Duluth Areas express high levels of trust in the news media (statistically tied at about half saying *just about always* or *most of the time*) than do residents in the St. Cloud Area. Similar to the state overall, only about 4 in 10 residents of St. Cloud offer expressions of high trust for the news media.

Adults by how often they trust organized religion, Minnesota’s regional centers



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

The final institution in the Ground Level Survey with a meaningful difference in regional center responses is organized religion. At about 6 in 10, the proportion of high trust responses by Duluth Area and Rochester Area residents are not different from statewide figure. However, **St. Cloud residents are warier of organized religion, with about half saying they trust it to do what is right *just about always* or *most of the time*, and just under half saying they trust organized religion *only sometimes* or *never*.**

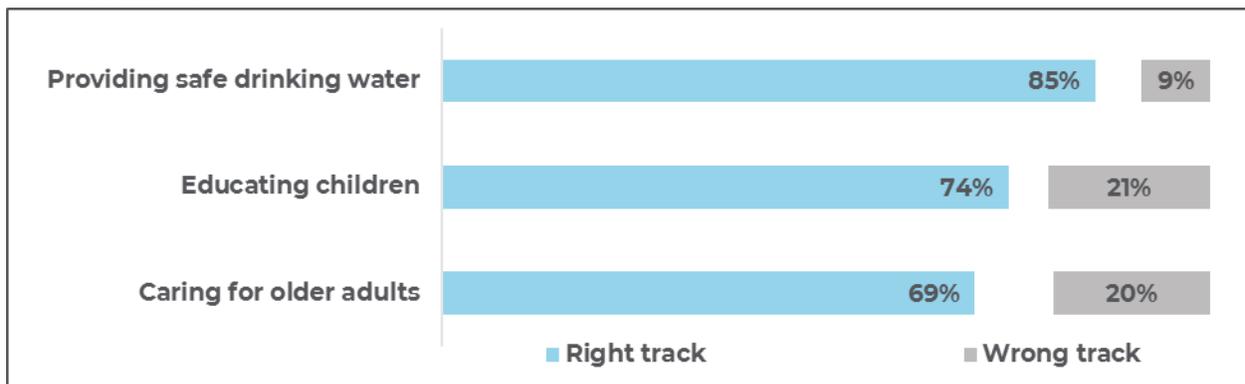
Right Track / Wrong Track on Key Public Issues

The Ground Level Survey asked respondents a series of questions that began: “Do you think Minnesota is generally on the right track or the wrong track when it comes to _____?” The survey probed respondents’ feelings across nine issue areas that touch on Minnesotans’ shared public life, including:

1. Educating children
2. Having good health care
3. Providing care for those facing mental health issues
4. Providing safe drinking water
5. Protecting lakes and rivers for things like swimming, boating, and fishing
6. Welcoming immigrants and refugees
7. Strengthening the economy
8. Caring for older adults
9. Providing opportunities for everyone to get ahead, regardless of their background

Across three of the issues areas, the percentage of residents from the regional centers indicating Minnesota was on the right track was statistically tied with the statewide share expressing these opinions (and with each other). **In other words, a majority of regional center residents feel the state is on the right track for providing safe drinking water (85%), educating children (74%), and caring for older adults (69%).** However, 1 in 5 residents in regional centers and across Minnesota are concerned that Minnesota is on the wrong track *educating children* and *caring for older adults*.

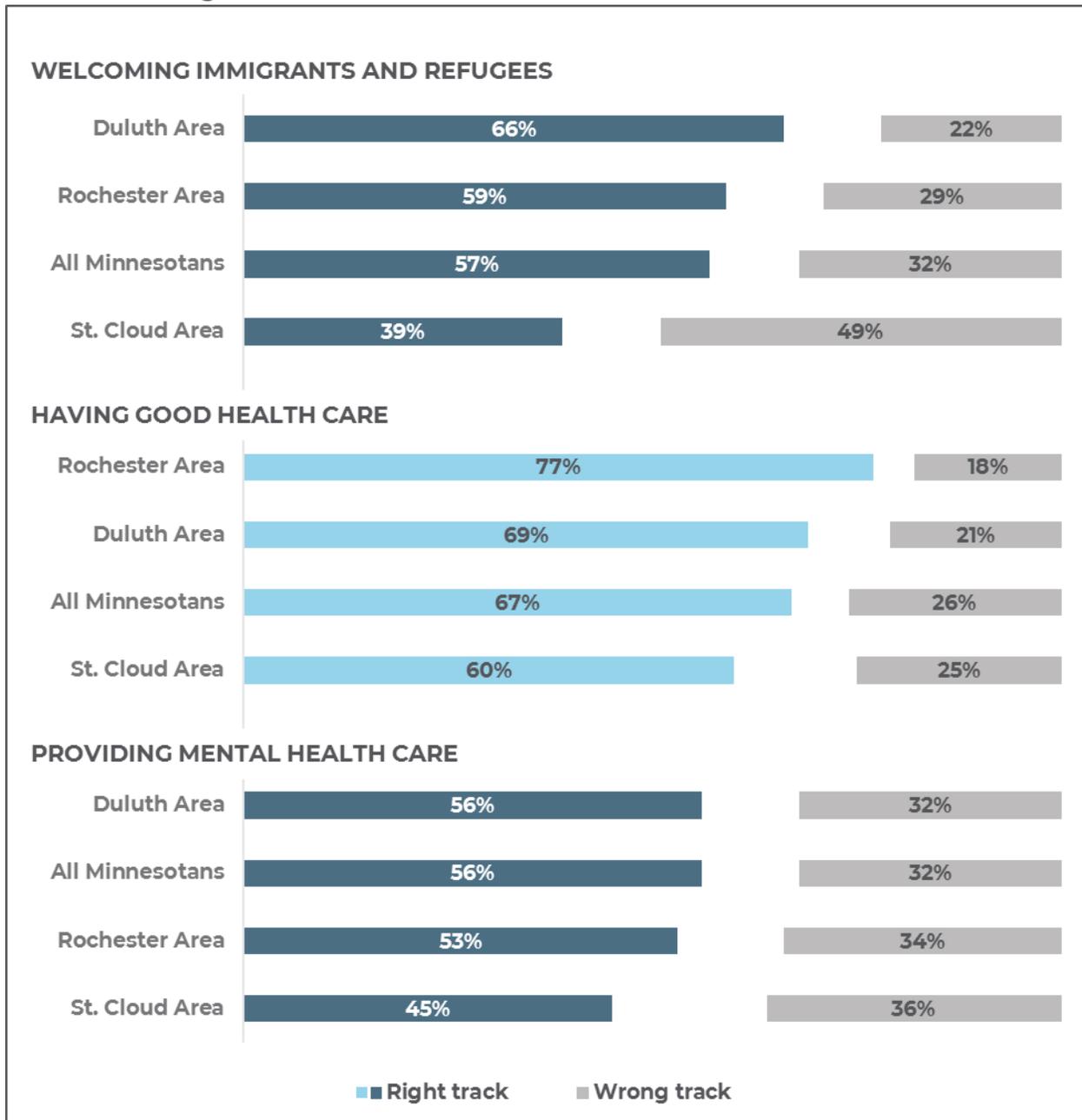
Adults who feel Minnesota is on the right or wrong track by issue area, all Minnesotans



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

The remaining six issue areas elicit some differences of opinion between regional centers or the state overall. In five of the six questions, St. Cloud Area residents were least likely to express right track opinions. The largest differences exist regarding *welcoming immigrants and refugees*. **A minority of St. Cloud Area residents (39%) believe Minnesota is on the right track regarding “welcoming immigrants and refugees,” compared to a majority of those in the Rochester and the Duluth Area (59%-66%),** which are statistically tied with each other and Minnesota overall. This gap is the largest observed when comparing the three regional centers across the entire survey.

Adults who feel Minnesota is on the right or wrong track by select issue areas, Minnesota’s regional centers



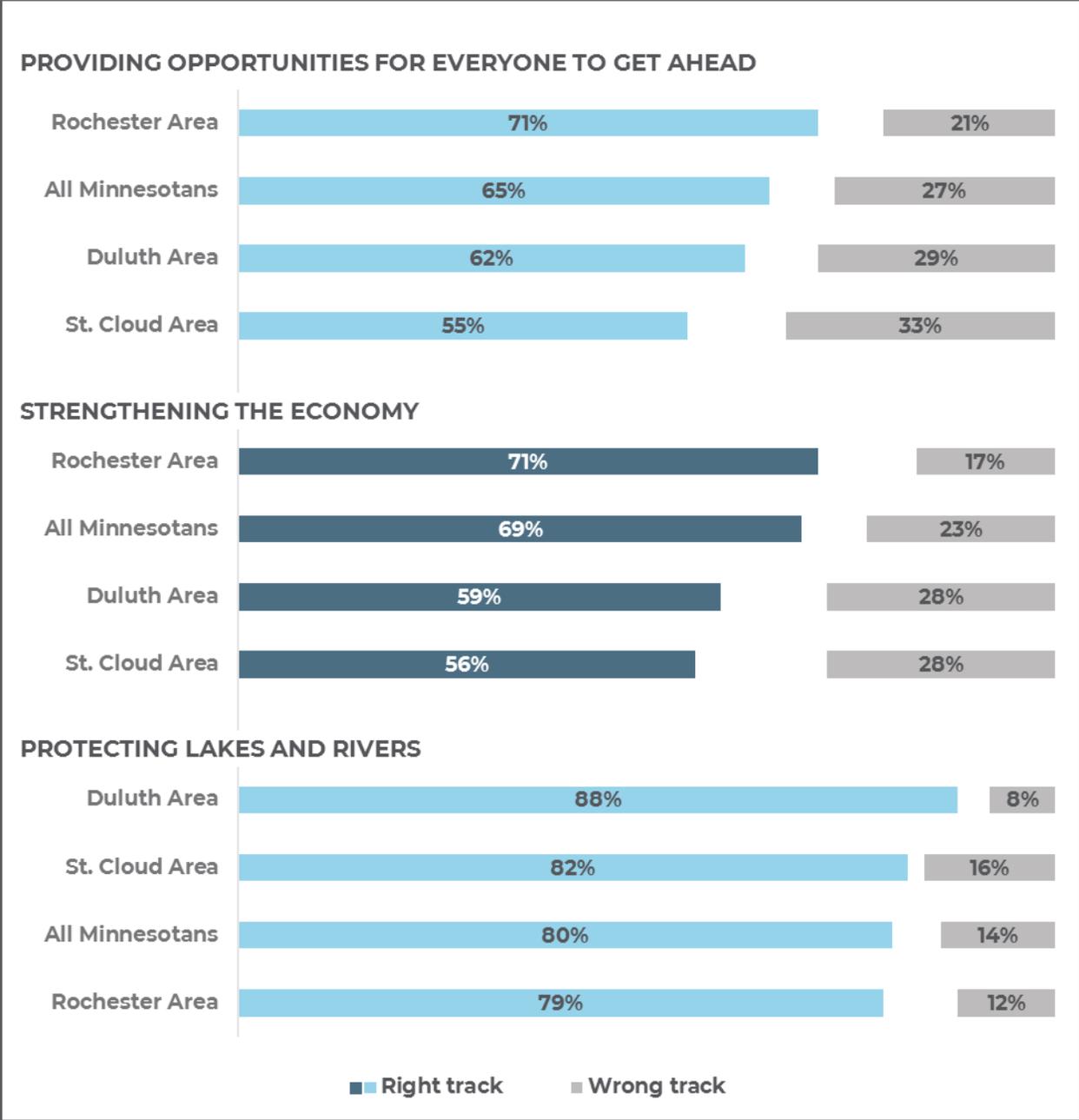
Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

At 77 percent, Rochester Area residents are 17 percentage points more likely to give Minnesota favorable right track responses to the state’s approach to *having good health care* than are St. Cloud Area residents. Rochester’s responses outpace the state overall in affirming the direction of health care, whereas responses from the Duluth Area and St. Cloud Area adults are tied with the statewide figure.

On the related topic of providing mental health care, St. Cloud Area is home to the lowest share of residents expressing that Minnesota is on the right track (45%) among the regional centers. Duluth and

Rochester Area residents are not overly enthusiastic on the direction of mental health care either, however, with only 53%-56% saying right track, statistically even with the statewide perspective.

Adults who feel Minnesota is on the right or wrong track by select issue areas, Minnesota’s regional centers



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

In addition to more optimism about the direction of health care, **Rochester Area residents also outpace the state and the two other regional centers in shares of right track responses regarding *providing opportunities for everyone to get ahead* (71%) and *strengthening the economy* (also 71%).** Duluth and

St. Cloud Area residents are less sanguine on both of these topics. Regarding the direction of the economy, the population in the Duluth Area and St. Cloud Area are significantly less likely to say the state is on the right track than Minnesotans overall, while Rochester Area residents are tied with the statewide figure.

The topic of *protecting lakes and rivers* elicited more right track responses from Duluth Area residents than any other question in this right track/wrong track series. **With 88 percent of its residents affirming Minnesota's efforts to protect lakes and rivers, the Duluth Area also outpaces its peer regional centers on this topic.** However, about 8 in 10 St. Cloud and Rochester Area residents also feel similarly, in line with the statewide high opinion of Minnesota's direction on protecting its water resources.

About the Survey

The MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans was a representative sample of 1,654 Minnesotans age 18 and older. The survey has an overall margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points at the 90 percent confidence level. Data collection was conducted via telephone (42% landline, 58% cell phone) August 22 – September 14, 2017, by SSRS of Glenn Mills, Penn. For more details and analysis see: bit.ly/GroundLevel

Acknowledgments

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End Notes

¹ **Duluth Area:** This region consists of the following 11 residential U.S. Postal Service zip codes in or immediately surrounding the city of Duluth, in portions of St. Louis County: 55802, 55803, 55804, 55805, 55806, 55807, 55808, 55810, 55811, 55812, and 55814.

St. Cloud Area: This region consists of the following 8 residential USPS zip codes in or immediately surrounding the city of St. Cloud, located in portions of Stearns, Sherburne, and Benton counties in Central Minnesota: 56301, 56303, 56304, 56369, 56374, 56377, 56379, and 56387.

Rochester Area: This region consists of the following four residential USPS zip codes in or immediately surrounding the city of Rochester, located in Olmsted county in southern Minnesota: 55901, 55902, 55904, and 55906.

² Race groups are presented as non-Hispanic, excepting the Hispanic group, and single race alone.

Note: Responses for “don’t know” or refusals are not graphed in this brief, and appear as gaps in bar graphs.

