



Differences and Common Ground: Urban and Rural Minnesota

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

APM Research Lab, February 2018

Introduction

Urban and rural residents of Minnesota have experiences, habits, and outlooks that are shared, as well as unique challenges and opportunities. Similarly, rural and urban communities and economies in our state exhibit differences, but are also interdependent.

The statewide 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans provided an excellent opportunity to assess where urban and rural perspectives align and where they diverge. This brief summarizes the Ground Level findings—revealing common ground and existing fault lines.

While definitions of urban and rural vary, **in this brief, *urban* residents are defined as those residing in any of the seven counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington.** These counties include or are proximate to Minneapolis and St. Paul, the two largest cities in Minnesota. Collectively these seven counties are sometimes referred to as the *Twin Cities region*.

In this brief, *rural* residents are those who live outside of the urban Twin Cities region, but also excluding those in the greater Duluth, St. Cloud, and Rochester areas.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 rural regions uniquely and these three largest regional centers.)

Demographic and Social Overview of Urban and Rural Minnesotans

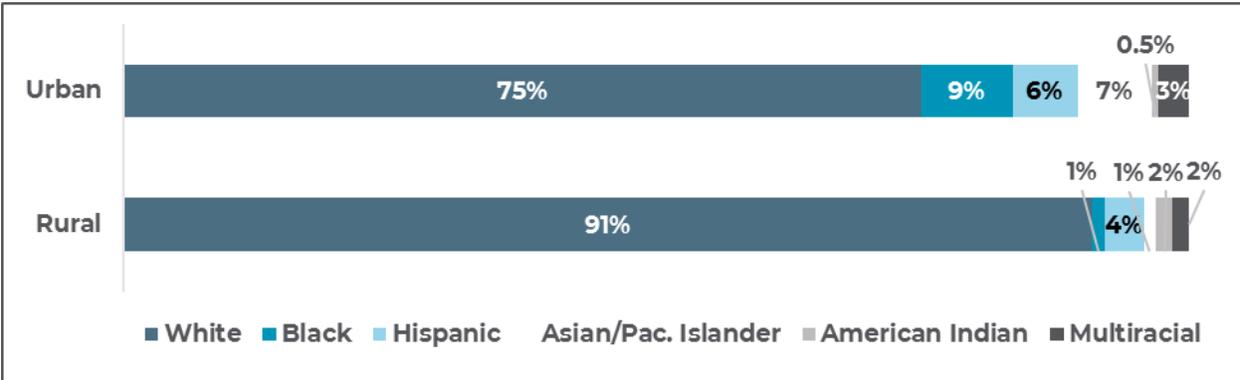
There are approximately 2,952,100 urban Minnesotans, representing 54 percent of the state population.² As defined in this brief, rural Minnesotans number about 2,101,500, and account for 39 percent of the state population. (The three largest regional centers—the Duluth, St. Cloud, and Rochester areas—are home to the remaining 365,600 Minnesota residents.)

Urban and rural areas of the state differ meaningfully in the age distribution, race and ethnicity, birthplace, levels of formal education, and income of their residents. Appreciating these differences gives additional context to the survey findings.

Urban and rural Minnesota have nearly equal percentages of children under age 18 in their communities (24% and 23%, respectively) and identical shares of young adults age 18-24 (9%), many of whom are pursuing additional education or training for the workforce. **However, 25- to 64-year-old residents comprise a larger portion of urban residents than rural (55% versus 51%). And a larger proportion of rural residents are older adults, age 65 or above (17%, compared to 12% in urban areas).**

Ninety-one percent of rural Minnesotans self-identify as non-Hispanic White, compared to 75 percent in urban Minnesota. The only population of Color³ that is more common in rural Minnesota is the American Indian group (representing 2% of rural areas versus 0.5% in urban areas). Black Minnesotans represent one percent of the rural population, but nine percent of the urban population. Hispanic Minnesotans account for four percent of rural residents, but six percent of urban dwellers. And while only one percent of rural Minnesotans identify as Asian or Pacific Islander, this rate multiplies seven-fold in urban communities.

Population by race/ethnicity, rural and urban Minnesota residents

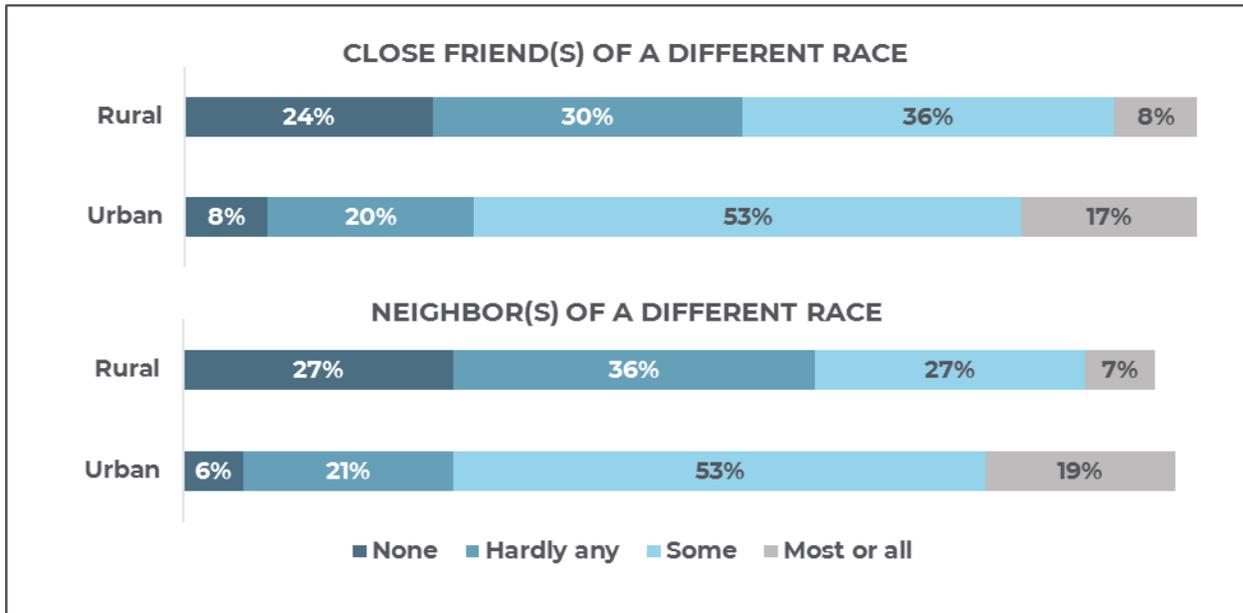


Source: APM Research Lab analysis of U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey data.

These uneven residential patterns by race are reflected in findings from the Ground Level Survey as well, in response to questions that asked how many of the respondent’s close friends and people in their neighborhood are of another race. **Only 27 percent of adults living in urban areas report “none” or “hardly any” of their neighbors are of a different race than themselves. In rural Minnesota, the corresponding percentage more than doubles, to 63 percent.**

The likelihood of having close friends across racial (or ethnic) lines mostly mirrors patterns in one’s neighborhood, although inter-racial friendships are somewhat more common than inter-racial neighbors in rural communities. **Less than half (44%) of rural residents report that they have at least some friends of a different racial background, compared with 70 percent of urban residents.**

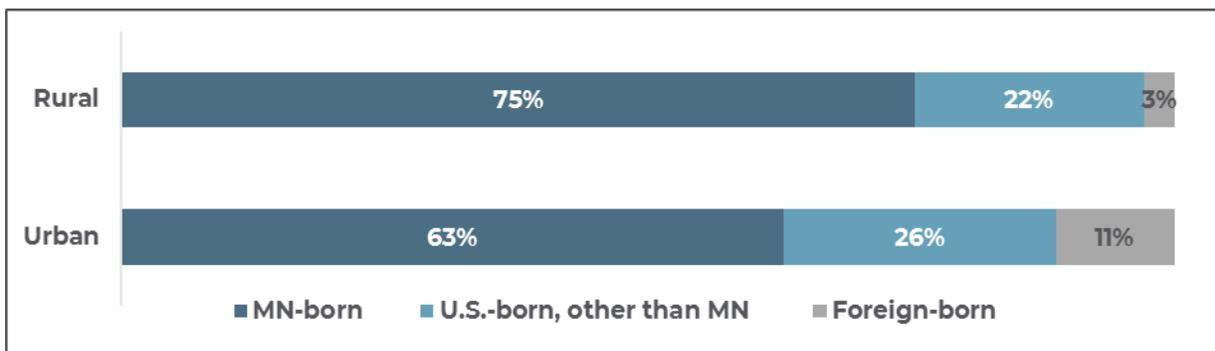
Adults with close friends or neighbors of a different race, rural and urban Minnesota residents



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

The greater racial diversity in urban Minnesota is driven in large part by the presence of immigrants. **Those born outside of the United States (immigrants) represent 11 percent of residents in urban Minnesota, but only 3 percent in rural areas.** State-to-state migration has also left a greater imprint in urban Minnesota. Three-fourths of rural Minnesotans were born in this state, compared to less than two-thirds of urban residents.

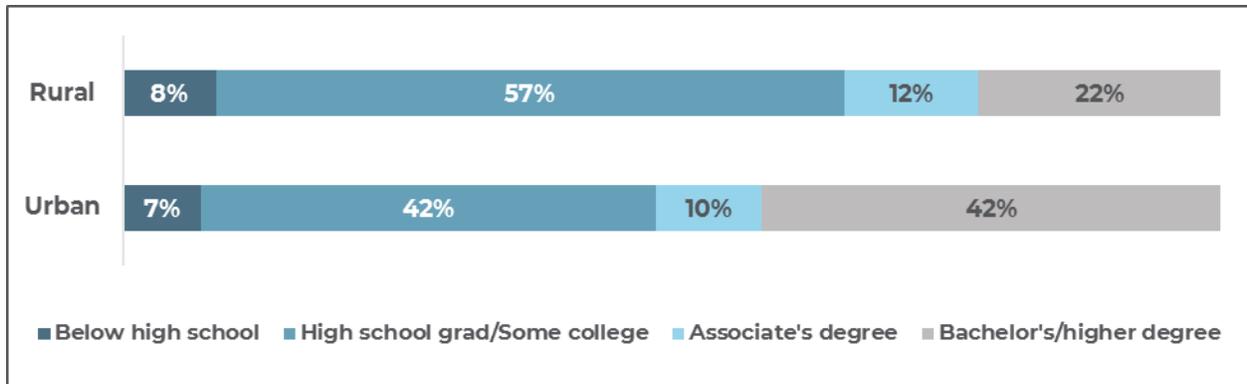
Population by birthplace, rural and urban Minnesota residents



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

Urban residents are more likely to have completed advanced education than those who live in rural Minnesota: 51 percent of those age 25 and older in urban areas hold a two-year (associate’s) or higher degree, while the comparable figure is 34 percent in rural Minnesota. Some of this educational difference is reflecting the older age structure in rural areas, as older generations were less likely to have pursued higher education.

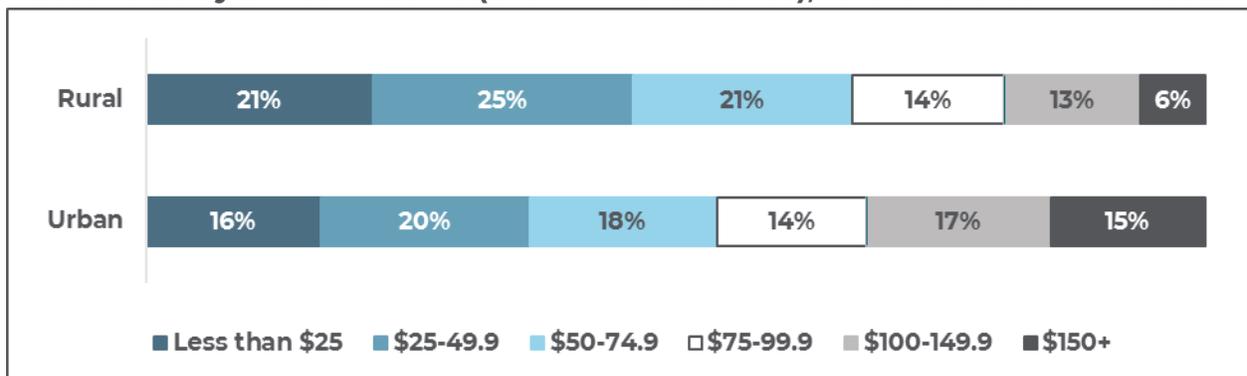
Population (age 25 and older) by highest level of education, rural and urban Minnesota residents



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 higher educational levels in urban Minnesota are reflected in its greater proportion of high-income households—those with incomes of \$150,000 or more (at 15%, compared to 6% in rural Minnesota). Just under half (46%) of households in rural areas have incomes below \$50,000, compared to 36 percent of households in urban Minnesota.

Households by annual income (shown in thousands), rural and urban Minnesota



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

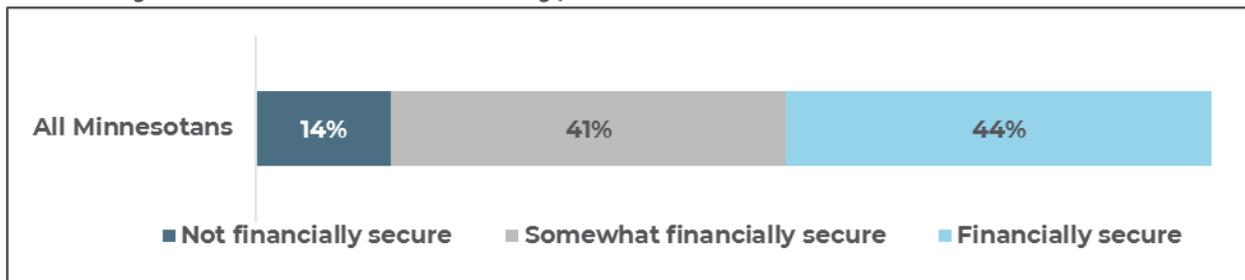
The Ground Level survey also illustrates two lifestyle *similarities* between urban and rural residents for which we previously lacked data and understanding:

- **Minnesota’s rural and urban residents are equally likely to attend religious services once a month or more often** (about 46% do so).
- **Residents of both areas are also similar in owning a permit for a concealed weapon**, with roughly 1 in every 8 adults in urban and rural Minnesota indicating that they possess one.

Personal Financial Security and Sense of Economic Improvement

When we designed the Ground Level Survey, we were curious about 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, we 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* (41%), while the remaining 14 percent report vulnerability: they are *not financially secure*.

Adults by sense of financial security, all Minnesota residents



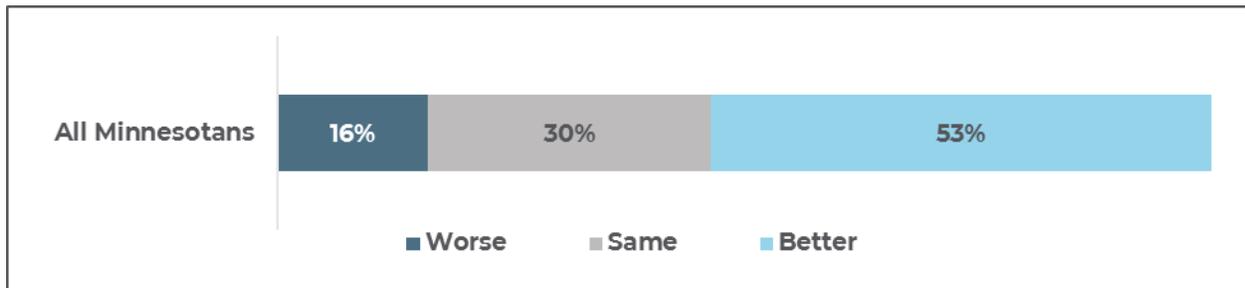
Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

When we examined responses to this question by rural versus urban residence, the percentages did not meaningfully diverge for any of the three response categories. In other words, **by their own assessment, rural and urban residents are equally likely to be feeling financially secure and insecure.**

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 urban and rural respondents.

About 16 percent of both rural and urban residents feel they are “worse off” than a decade prior, while just over half in both areas experienced what they perceive as economic progress. A similar proportion of both areas (30%) feel economically unchanged, not better nor worse. **In other words, Ground Level survey results suggest urban and rural Minnesotans weathered the recession in similar fashion.**

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



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

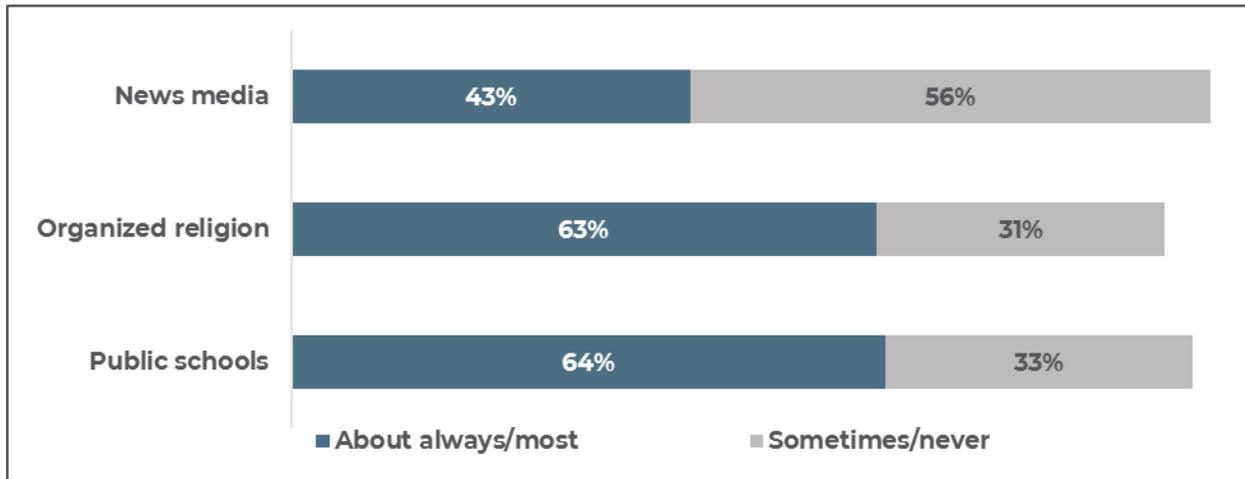
Responses were collapsed into two groups those who generally trust the institution to do what is right, more often than not (*always + most of the time* responses) and those who generally distrust the institution (*only some of the time + never* responses).

Responses for three of the seven institutions do not show any notable differences between rural and urban residents, and are statistically tied with responses of all Minnesotans statewide (graphed below).

Rural and urban Minnesotans share a similarly low opinion of the trustworthiness of news media, broadly speaking. A minority (43%) of adults statewide say they trust news media to do the right thing *just about always or most of the time*, while a majority (56%) express prevailing distrust.

Regardless of locale, a similar share of Minnesotans (just above 6 in 10) trust organized religion and the public schools to do the right thing more often than not. Inversely, in both rural and urban parts of the state, about one-third of residents report that they trust organized religion and the public schools *only some of the time or never*.

Adults by how often they trust select institutions, all Minnesota residents



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

The four other institutions asked about in the Ground Level Survey show varying perceptions of trust depending on whether the survey-taker lives in a rural or urban community.

A majority of both urban and rural residents express low levels of trust for Minnesota's state government. But **a higher proportion of rural Minnesotans are pessimistic about state government's ability to act reliably in a manner deserving of their trust**, with 61 percent responding *only some of the time* or *never*, compared to 52 percent of urban Minnesotans.

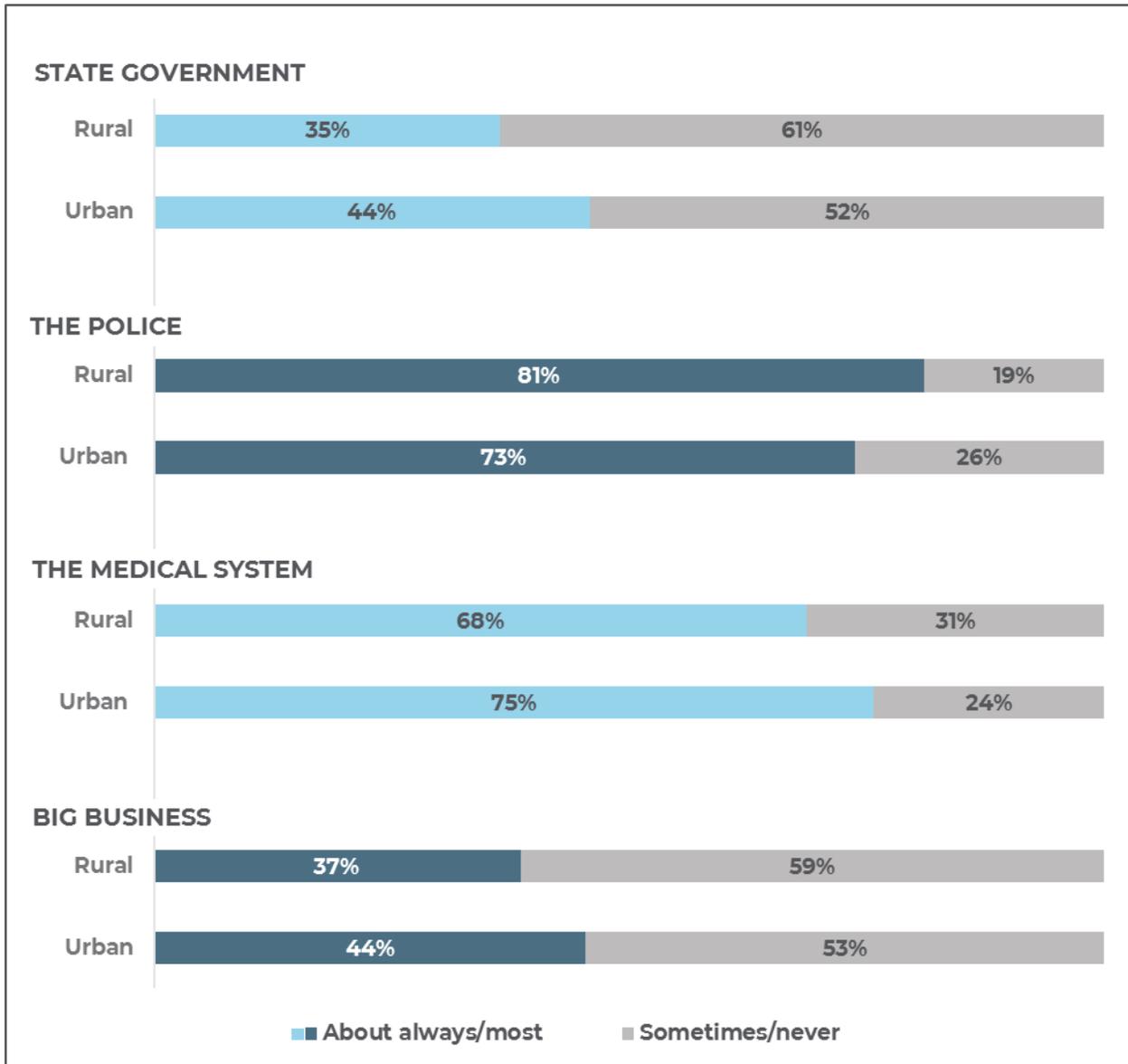
Levels of trust for the police also diverge somewhat along urban-rural lines, but in the opposite direction. **Rural residents are more likely than urban residents to express high levels of trust in the police** (with 81% versus 73% responding *just about always* or *most of the time*, respectively). However, both rural and urban Minnesotans place the police in high regard relative to all institutions asked about in the survey.

Similarly, most Minnesotans believe that the medical system in Minnesota acts in a trustworthy manner. **But this trust slips slightly for rural residents, with 68 percent saying they trust the medical system *just about always* or *most of the time*, compared to three-fourths of urban Minnesotans.**

Big business, generally speaking, does not inspire a high level of trust from either rural or urban dwellers, with only 37 percent of the former and 44 percent of the latter expressing trust in its actions *just about always* or *most of the time*. However, **urban residents are slightly more likely to view Big Business in a trustworthy light.**

Adults by how often they trust select institutions, by rural and urban residents

Institutions are presented in order of greatest to smallest differences by geography



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

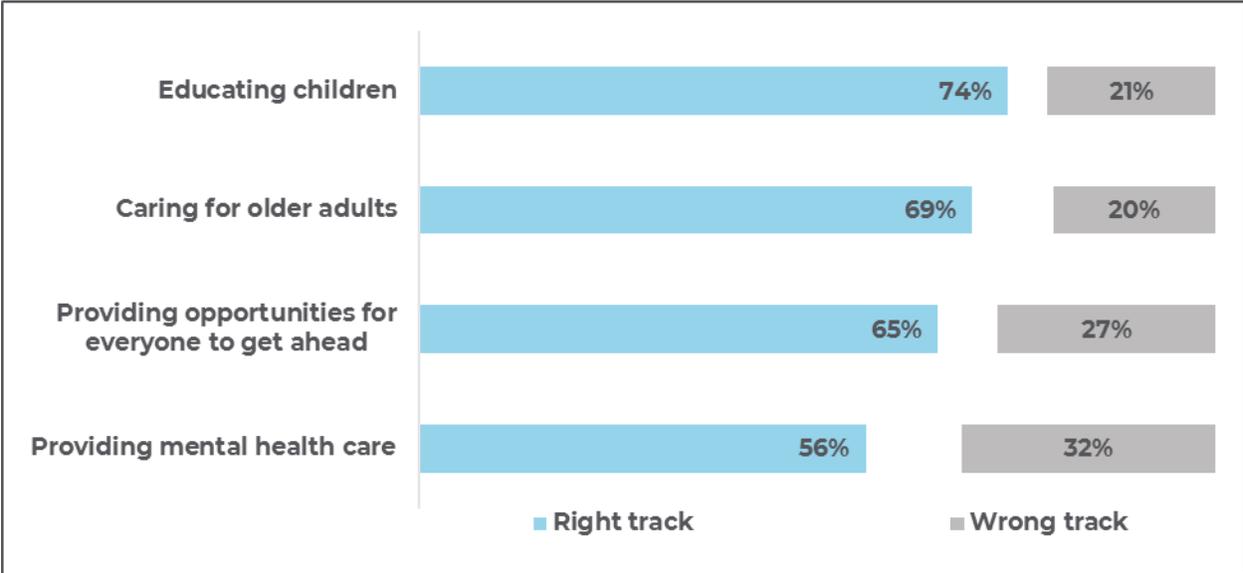
Right Track / Wrong Track on Key Public Issues

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 survey-takers’ 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 four of the issues areas, the percentage of urban and rural residents indicating Minnesota was on the right track was statistically tied with the statewide share expressing these opinions: **Rural and urban Minnesotans alike feel the state is on the “right track” for educating children (74%), caring for older adults (69%), providing opportunities for everyone to get ahead (65%), and providing mental health care (56%).** However, a sizable group of Minnesotans in urban and rural areas expressed concern about the provision of mental health care, with roughly one-third giving “wrong track” responses.

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



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

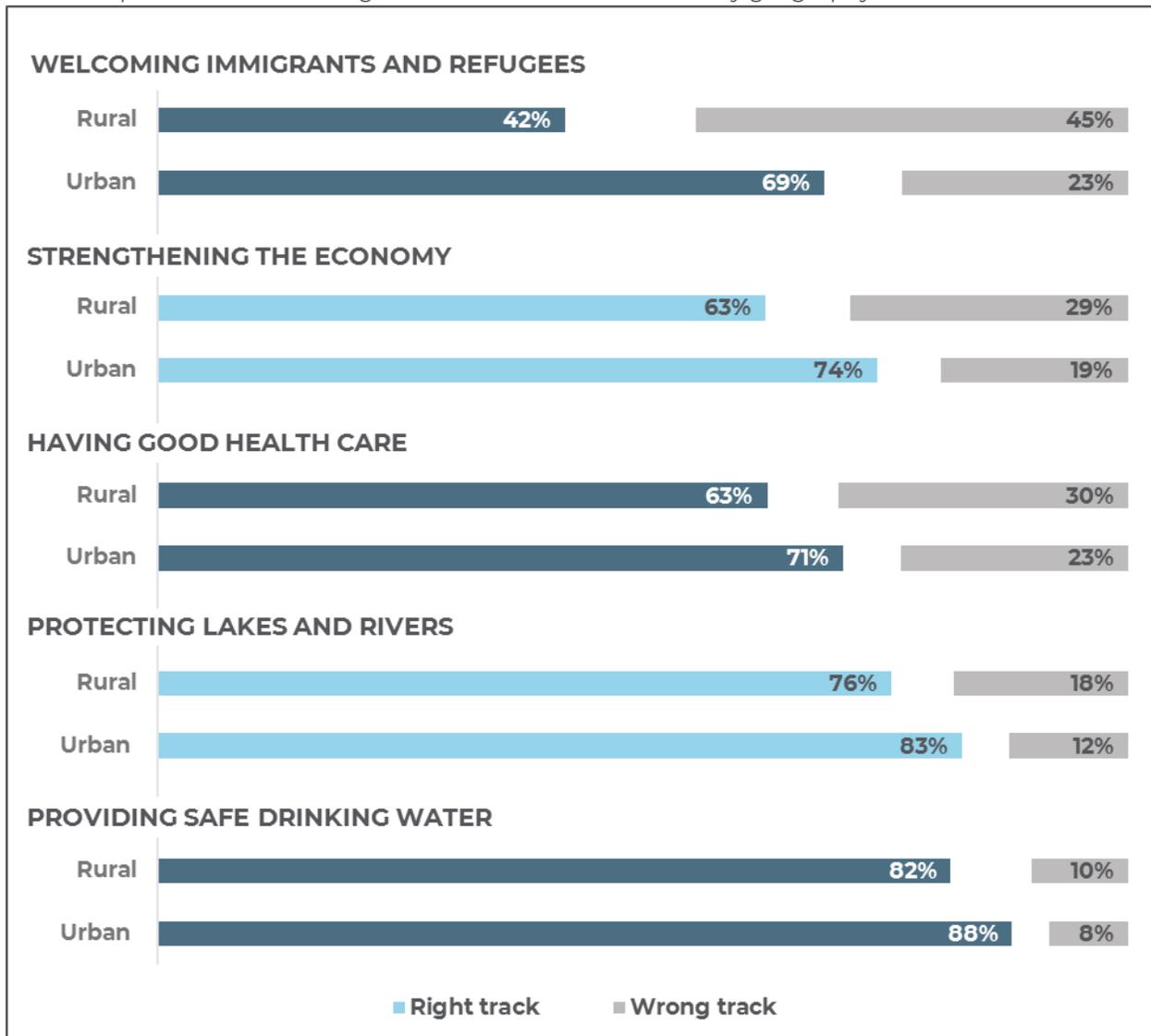
The remaining five issue areas elicit significant differences of opinion between rural and urban residents,

with rural Minnesotans less likely to feel the state was on the right track for each issue than urban dwellers. In terms of *welcoming immigrants and refugees*, a minority of rural residents (42%) believe Minnesota is on the right track, compared to a strong majority (69%) of urbanites. This 27 percentage-point difference was the largest urban-rural gap across the survey.

Urban Minnesotans are also 11 percentage points more likely to give Minnesota favorable right track responses to the state’s approach to *strengthening the economy* than rural residents. Smaller, but significant differences open up between rural and urban Minnesotans in the share affirming the state is on the right track for *having good health care* (63% versus 71%, respectively), *protecting lakes and rivers* (76% versus 83%, respectively), and *providing safe drinking water* (82% versus 88%, respectively).

Adults who feel Minnesota is on the right or wrong track by issue area, by rural and urban residents

Issues are presented in order of greatest to smallest differences by geography



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

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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The APM Research Lab conducts research projects of all types — surveys, demographic analyses, literature reviews, and more — and informs the work of partner organizations and the broader public through traditional reports, as well as infographics, blog posts, interactives, presentations, and other platforms. In addition to philanthropic support and partnership, we are happy to entertain requests for proposals and other contractual inquiries related to research and analysis.

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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 APM Research Lab analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2011-2015 American Community Survey.

³ 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.

