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CPAR Research Brief: Comparing Results of the 2014 Nebraska Metro and Rural Polls on Resident Views of Community Change and Outlook

By: Abby Heithoff and David Drozd, Center for Public Affairs Research

Effect of Community Size on Respondent's Outlooks

- Residents of Omaha and Lincoln were most positive about how their community had changed in the past year (44% said "changed for the better", Figure 1).
- Nebraskans from larger rural communities were more positive about community change in the past year than those from smaller rural communities (38-39% vs 24% and 28%, respectively, Figure 1).
- Residents of the smallest communities (under 500 people) were most negative about their community's changes in the past year. There was no real difference between residents of larger communities (27% versus 19% or less, Figure 1).
- The difference or gap between those saying their community became better versus worse increased for each larger community size (-3 to +28 point differences, Figure 1).

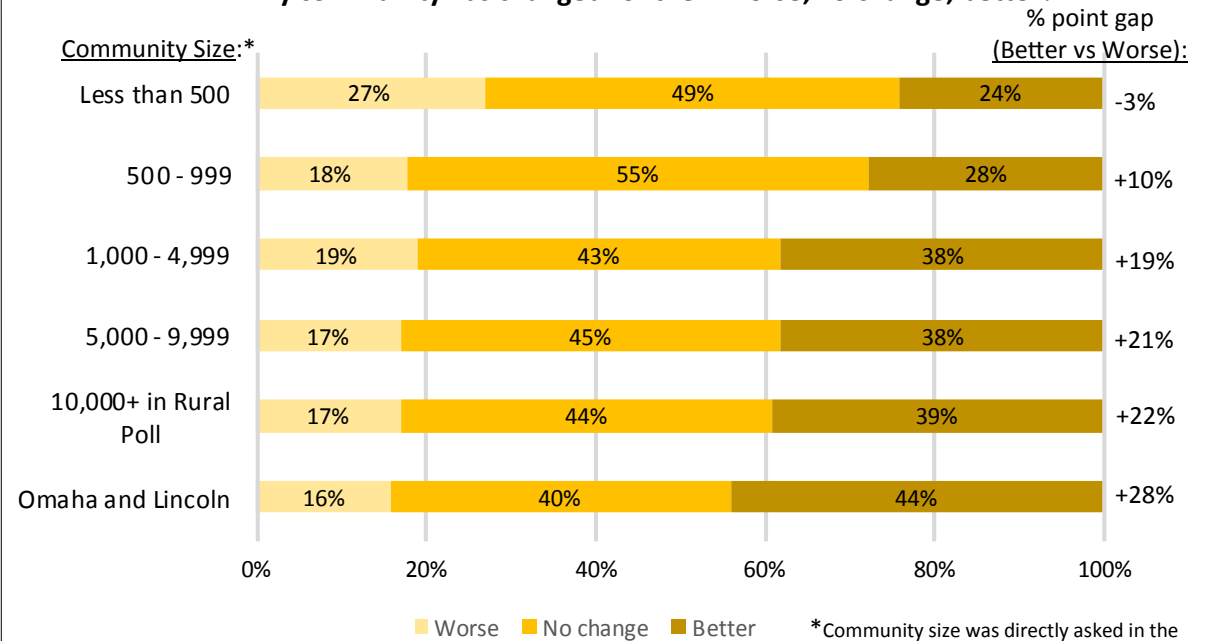
Effect of Higher Education in Rural and Metro Areas

- Having more education was related to having a more positive outlook. In Metro Nebraska, those with a Bachelor's degree or more were the most positive about community change, and those with some college or an Associate's degree were more positive than those with only a High School diploma (2014 Metro Poll Report).
- In rural Nebraska, those with a Bachelor's degree were most positive, and those with some college or an Associate's degree, or a High School diploma had similar outlooks (2014 Rural Poll Reports).

Other Demographic Considerations

- In Metro and Rural Nebraska, the following characteristics were related to having a more positive view about community change in the past year:
 - Earning a higher income
 - Being under the age of 40

Figure 1: When you think about this past year, would you say: My community has changed for the... worse, no change, better?



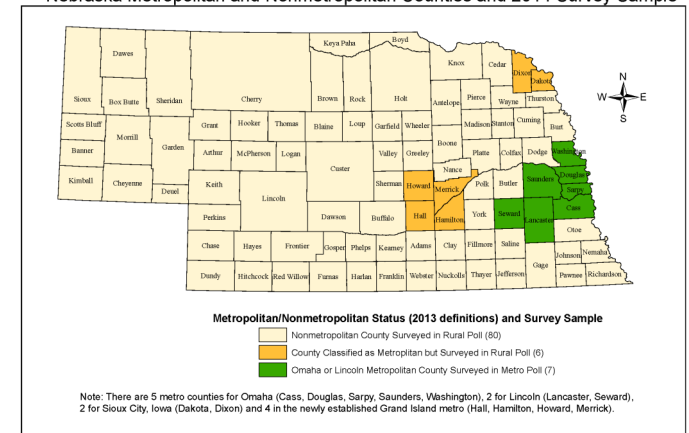
Source: 2014 Rural and Metro Polls

*Community size was directly asked in the Rural Poll. Lincoln and Omaha residents were identified by their mailing address.

Methodology Snapshot

- The Nebraska Metro Poll sampled residents of the seven counties that comprise the Lincoln and Omaha metropolitan areas.
- The Rural Poll sampled non-metro counties and regional trade centers in the state.
- Both polls sent 4 mailings regarding or containing the surveys in the spring of 2014 and had an online response option.

Nebraska Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Counties and 2014 Survey Sample



Source: 2013 Metropolitan and Micropolitan Definitions, Office of Management and Budget, released 2-28-13
Prepared by: David Drozd, Center for Public Affairs Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha - December 1, 2014

Nebraskans' views of their community's future in the next 10 years:

How viewpoints differ by personal and community factors

Effect of Community Size on Future Outlook

- Residents of Lincoln and Omaha were most likely to believe their community will be a better place in the future (36%, Figure 2).
- In Rural Nebraska, there was a strong relationship between community size and having a positive outlook for the future. Those from larger communities reported more positive outlooks (Figure 2).
- Nebraskans from Lincoln and Omaha were less likely to report that their community will be a worse place to live in 10 years, compared with Rural Nebraskans (18% in metro and 22% or more in rural, Figure 2).

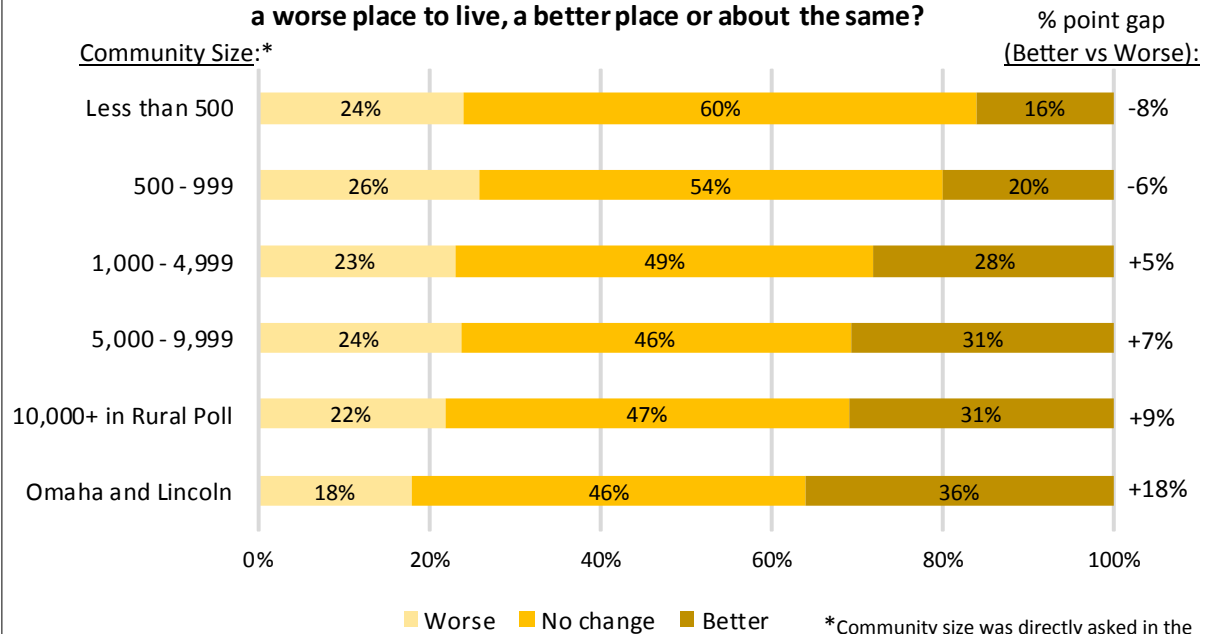
Other Demographic Considerations

- Rural respondents were significantly less optimistic about their community's future if they had lived there 5 years or longer. For Metro Nebraskans, this relationship was not observed (2014 Metro/Rural Poll Reports).
- For rural Nebraskans, being under age 40 was associated with a more positive outlook for the future, with older respondents being less positive. This factor was not significant for metro Nebraskans (2014 Metro/Rural Poll Reports).
- In Metro and Rural Nebraska, the following characteristics were related to having a more positive outlook for the future (2014 Metro/Rural Poll Reports):
 - Earning a higher income
 - Marital status—those who had never been married had the most positive outlook



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Figure 2: Do you think that in ten years from now your community will be a worse place to live, a better place or about the same?



Source: 2014 Rural and Metro Polls

*Community size was directly asked in the Rural Poll. Lincoln and Omaha residents were identified by their mailing address.

Summary of Nebraskan's Views on Community: Today and in the Future

- Residents of communities with less than 500 residents were most likely to believe that their community had changed for the worse in the last year (27%, Figure 1) and least likely to believe their community would be a better place in 10 years (16%, Figure 2), indicating residents of the smallest rural communities do not predict the current situation will improve.
- Residents of Omaha and Lincoln were the most positive about recent changes in their community in 2014 (44%, Figure 1), and their outlook for the future was the most positive in the state (36%, Figure 2),
- The gaps in positive versus negative ratings increased for each larger community size category in a consistent stair-step pattern (-3% to +28% on Figure 1; -8% to +18% on Figure 2).
- Positive ratings on change in the past year as well as the outlook of residents for the next 10 years were closely tied to the size of the resident's community, with larger places being more positive, possibly due to the resources and services available in larger towns. Respondents with more education and higher incomes also held more positive views of their community.