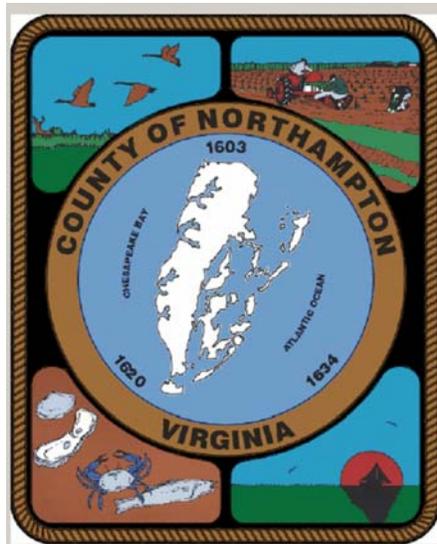


The National
CITIZEN SURVEY™

2005

**Report of Normative Comparisons with
Populations 40,000 and Under for
Northampton County, Virginia**



Submitted by:

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SURVEY BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CITIZEN SURVEY™

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS™) is a collaborative effort between National Research Center, Inc. (NRC) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA).

The National Citizen Survey™ was developed to provide local jurisdictions an accurate, affordable and easy way to assess and interpret resident opinion about important community issues. While standardization of question wording and survey methods provide the rigor to assure valid results, each jurisdiction has enough flexibility to construct a customized version of The National Citizen Survey™ that asks residents about key local services and important local issues.

Results offer insight into residents' perspectives about local government performance and as such provide important benchmarks for jurisdictions working on performance measurement. The National Citizen Survey™ is designed to help with budget, land use and strategic planning as well as to communicate with local residents. The National Citizen Survey™ permits questions to test support for local policies and answers to its questions also speak to community trust and involvement in community-building activities as well as to resident demographic characteristics.

The survey and its administration are standardized to assure high quality survey methods and comparable results across The National Citizen Survey™ jurisdictions. Participating households are selected at random and the household member who responds is selected without bias. Multiple mailings give each household more than one chance to participate with self-addressed and postage paid envelopes. Results are statistically reweighted to reflect the proper demographic composition of the entire community. The National Citizen Survey™ customized for this jurisdiction was developed in close cooperation with local jurisdiction staff. Northampton County staff selected items from a menu of questions about services and community problems; they defined the jurisdiction boundaries NRC used for sampling; and they provided the appropriate letterhead and signatures for mailings.

Report of Normative Comparisons

The National CITIZEN SURVEY™

UNDERSTANDING THE NORMATIVE COMPARISONS

Comparison Data

National Research Center, Inc. has collected citizen surveys conducted in over 350 jurisdictions in the United States. Responses to over 4,000 survey questions dealing with resident perceptions about the quality of community life and services provided by local government were recorded, analyzed and stored in an electronic database.

The jurisdictions in the database represent a wide geographic and population range as shown in the table below.

Jurisdiction Characteristic	Percent of Jurisdictions
<i>Region</i>	
West Coast ¹	21%
West ²	14%
North Central West ³	12%
North Central East ⁴	14%
South Central ⁵	9%
South ⁶	22%
Northeast West ⁷	4%
Northeast East ⁸	4%
<i>Population</i>	
less than 40,000	33%
40,000 to 74,999	25%
75,000 to 149,000	18%
150,000 or more	24%

¹Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii
²Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico
³North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota
⁴Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin
⁵Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas
⁶West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, Delaware, Washington DC
⁷New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey
⁸Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine

Use of the “Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor” Response Scale

The scale on which respondents are asked to record their opinions about service and community quality is “excellent,” “good,” “fair” or “poor” (EGFP). This scale has important advantages over other scale possibilities (very good to very bad; very satisfied to very dissatisfied; strongly agree to strongly disagree, as examples). EGFP is used by the plurality of jurisdictions conducting citizen surveys across the U.S. The advantage of familiarity is one we did not want to dismiss because elected officials, staff and residents already are acquainted with opinion surveys measured this way. EGFP also has the advantage of offering three positive options, rather than only two, over which a resident can offer an opinion. While symmetrical scales often are the right choice in other measurement tasks, we have found that ratings of almost every local government service in almost every jurisdiction tend, on average, to be positive (that is, above the scale midpoint). Therefore, to permit finer distinctions among positively rated services, EGFP offers three options across which to spread those ratings. EGFP is more neutral because it requires no positive statement of service quality to judge (as agree-disagree scales require) and, finally, EGFP intends to measure absolute quality of service delivery or community quality (unlike satisfaction scales which ignore residents’ perceptions of quality in favor of their report on the acceptability of the level of service offered).

Putting Evaluations Onto a 100-Point Scale

Although responses to many of the evaluative questions were made on a 4 point scale with 4 representing the best rating and 1 the worst, many of the results in this summary are reported on a common scale where 0 is the worst possible rating and 100 is the best possible rating. If everyone reported “excellent,” then the result would be 100 on the 100-point scale. Likewise, if all respondents gave a “poor” rating, the result would be 0 on the 100-point scale. If the average rating for quality of life was “good,” then the result would be 67 on a 100-point scale; “fair” would be 33 on the 100-point scale. The 95 percent confidence interval around an average score on the 100-point scale is no greater than plus or minus 5 points based on all respondents.

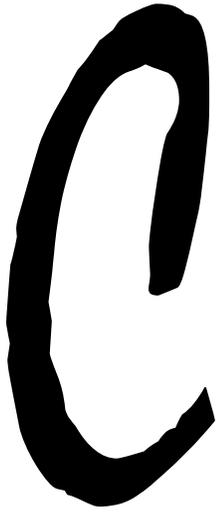
Interpreting the Results

Comparisons are provided when similar questions are included in our database, and there are at least five other jurisdictions in which the question was asked. Where comparisons are available, three numbers are provided in the table. The first is the rank assigned to your jurisdiction's rating among jurisdictions where a similar question was asked. The second is the number of jurisdictions that asked a similar question. Third, the rank is expressed as a percentile to indicate its distance from the top score. This rank (5th highest out of 25 jurisdictions' results, for example) translates to a percentile (the 80th percentile in this example). A percentile indicates the percent of jurisdictions with identical or lower ratings. Therefore, a rating at the 80th percentile would mean that your jurisdiction's rating is equal to or better than 80 percent of the ratings from other jurisdictions. Conversely, 20 percent of the jurisdictions where a similar question was asked had higher ratings.

Alongside the rank and percentile appears a comparison: "above the norm," "below the norm" or "similar to the norm." This evaluation of "above," "below" or "similar to" comes from a statistical comparison of your jurisdiction's rating to the norm (the average rating from all the comparison jurisdictions where a similar question was asked). Differences of 3 or more points on the 100-point scale between your jurisdiction's ratings and the average based on the appropriate comparisons from the database are considered "statistically significant," and thus are marked as "above" or "below" the norm. When differences between your jurisdiction's ratings and the national norms are less than 3 points, they are marked as "similar to" the norm.

The data are represented visually in a chart that accompanies each table. Your jurisdiction's percentile for each compared item is marked with a black line on the chart.

All of the data in this report are from jurisdictions in the database that have populations of 40,000 or less. No other comparisons are included. The list of the jurisdictions used in making these comparisons appears in Appendix 1.



COMPARISONS

Figure 1a: Quality of Life Ratings

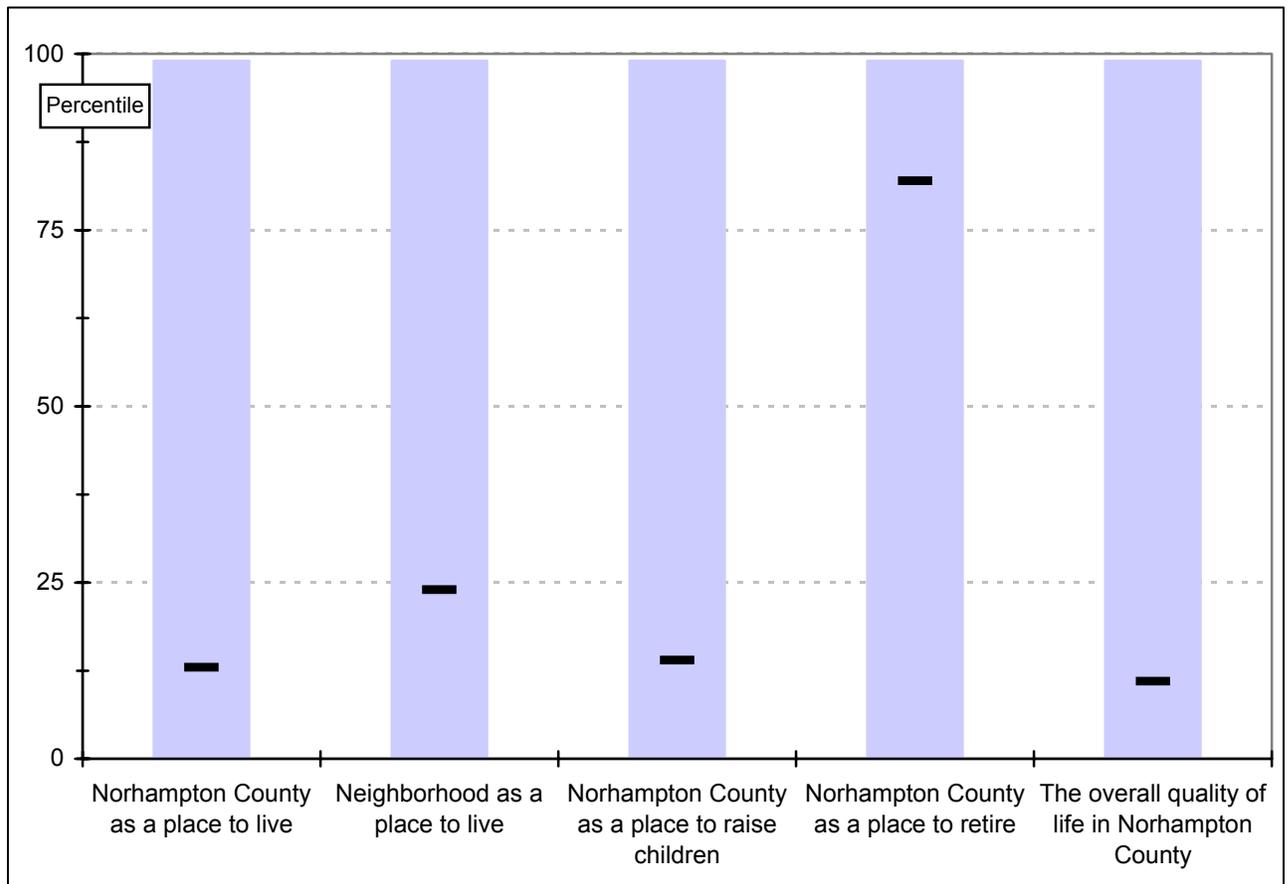


Figure 1b: Quality of Life Ratings					
	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Norhampton County as a place to live	57	63	71	13%ile	below the norm
Neighborhood as a place to live	64	32	41	24%ile	below the norm
Norhampton County as a place to raise children	53	44	50	14%ile	below the norm
Norhampton County as a place to retire	63	9	45	82%ile	above the norm
The overall quality of life in Norhampton County	50	59	65	11%ile	below the norm

Figure 2a: Characteristics of the Community: General and Opportunities

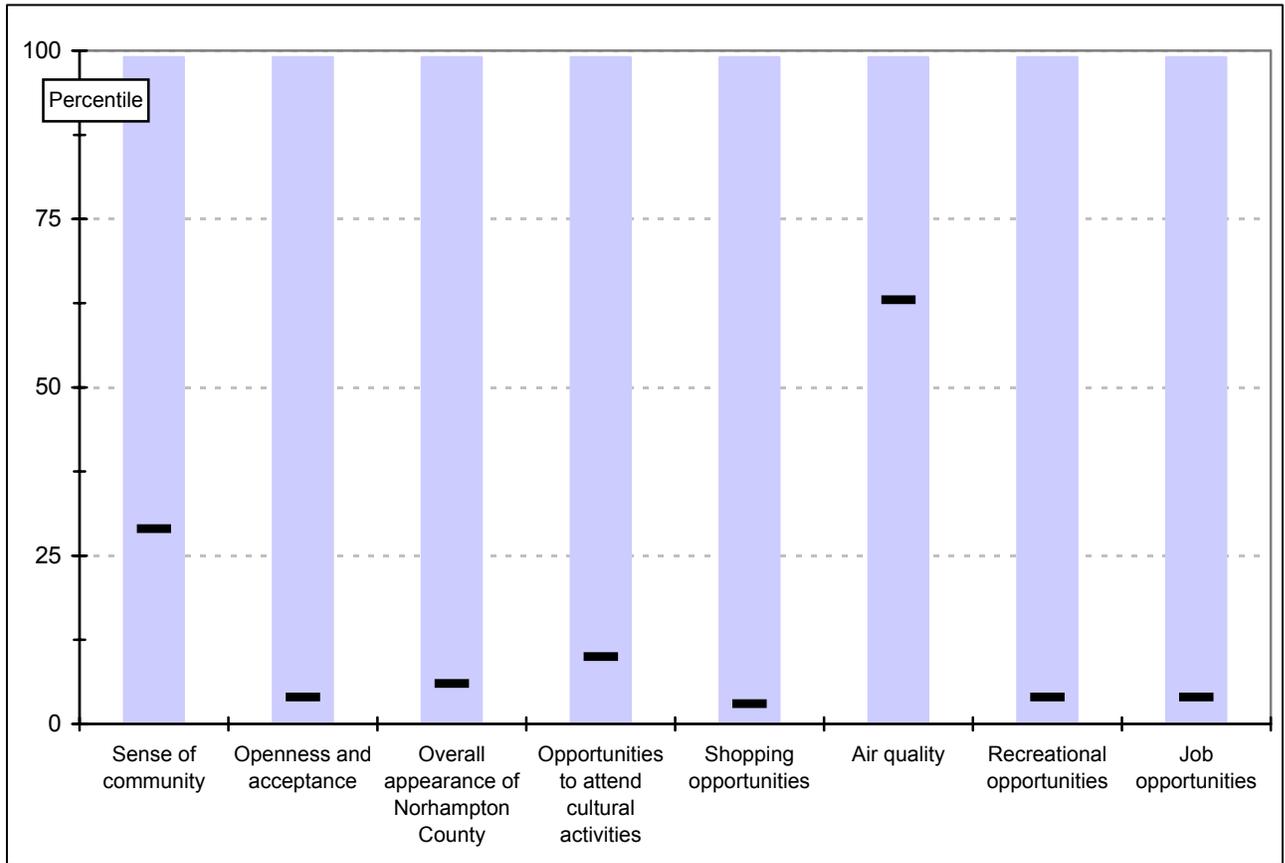


Figure 2b: Characteristics of the Community: General and Opportunities

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Sense of community	51	28	38	29%ile	similar to the norm
Openness and acceptance	39	27	27	4%ile	below the norm
Overall appearance of Norhampton County	36	46	48	6%ile	below the norm
Opportunities to attend cultural activities	34	28	30	10%ile	below the norm
Shopping opportunities	15	35	35	3%ile	below the norm
Air quality	63	4	8	63%ile	above the norm
Recreational opportunities	30	45	46	4%ile	below the norm
Job opportunities	11	47	48	4%ile	below the norm

Figure 3a: Characteristics of the Community: Access and Mobility

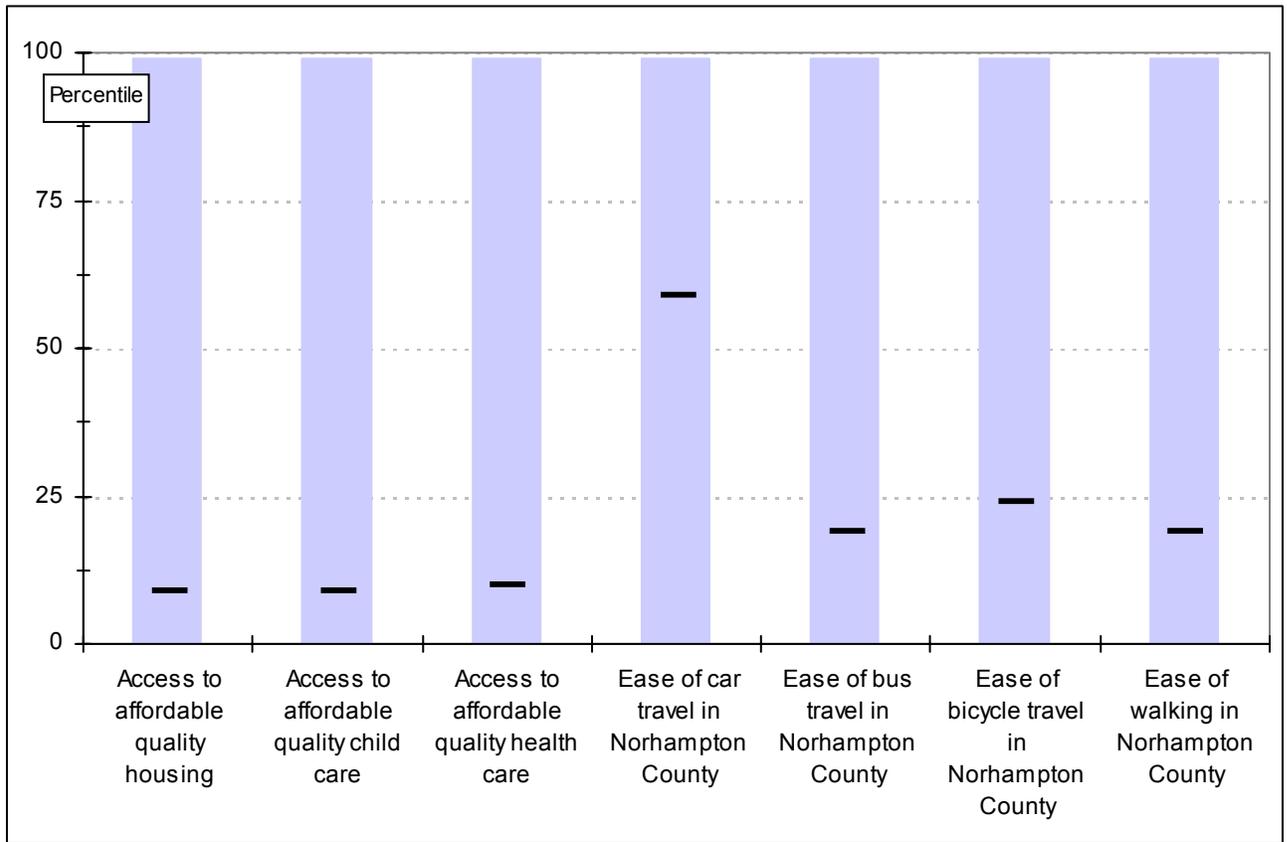


Figure 3b: Characteristics of the Community: Access

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Access to affordable quality housing	21	43	46	9%ile	below the norm
Access to affordable quality child care	30	22	23	9%ile	below the norm
Access to affordable quality health care	35	19	20	10%ile	below the norm
Ease of car travel in Northampton County	54	15	34	59%ile	similar to the norm
Ease of bus travel in Northampton County	34	14	16	19%ile	below the norm
Ease of bicycle travel in Northampton County	39	23	29	24%ile	below the norm
Ease of walking in Northampton County	43	23	27	19%ile	below the norm

Figure 4a: Ratings of Safety from Various Problems

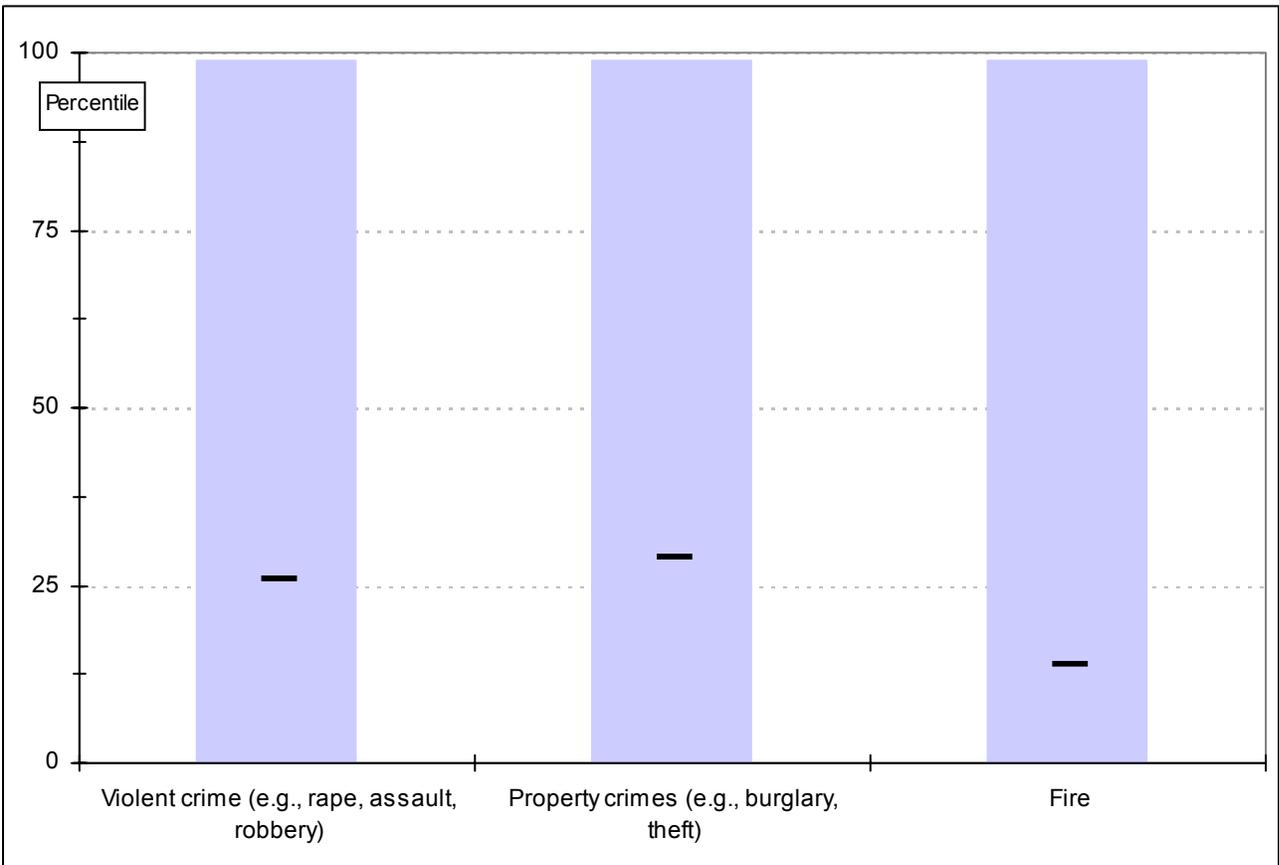


Figure 4b: Ratings of Safety From Various Problems

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Violent crime (e.g., rape, assault, robbery)	65	27	35	26%ile	below the norm
Property crimes (e.g., burglary, theft)	58	26	35	29%ile	below the norm
Fire	69	31	35	14%ile	below the norm

Figure 5a: Ratings of Safety in Various Areas

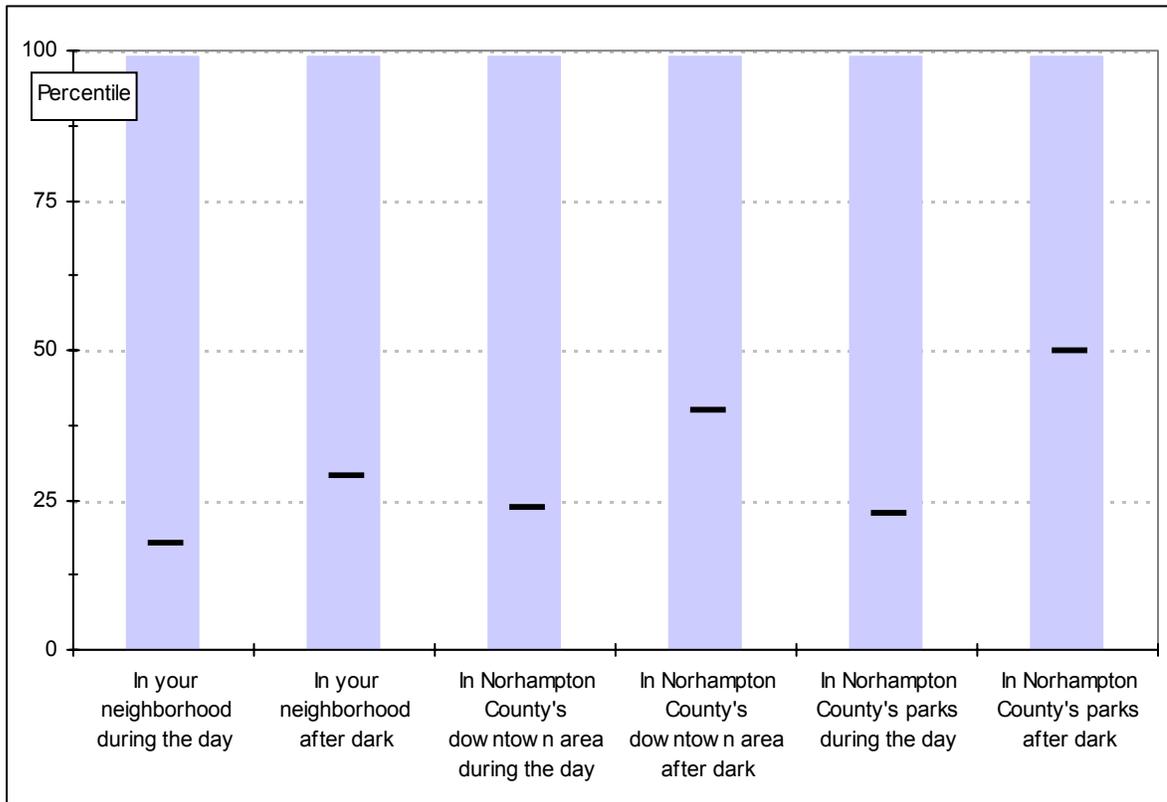


Figure 5b: Ratings of Safety in Various Areas

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
In your neighborhood during the day	85	29	34	18%ile	below the norm
In your neighborhood after dark	73	38	52	29%ile	similar to the norm
In Norhampton County's downtown area during the day	82	26	33	24%ile	below the norm
In Norhampton County's downtown area after dark	64	25	40	40%ile	similar to the norm
In Norhampton County's parks during the day	80	28	35	23%ile	below the norm
In Norhampton County's parks after dark	59	19	36	50%ile	similar to the norm

Figure 6a: Quality of Public Safety Services

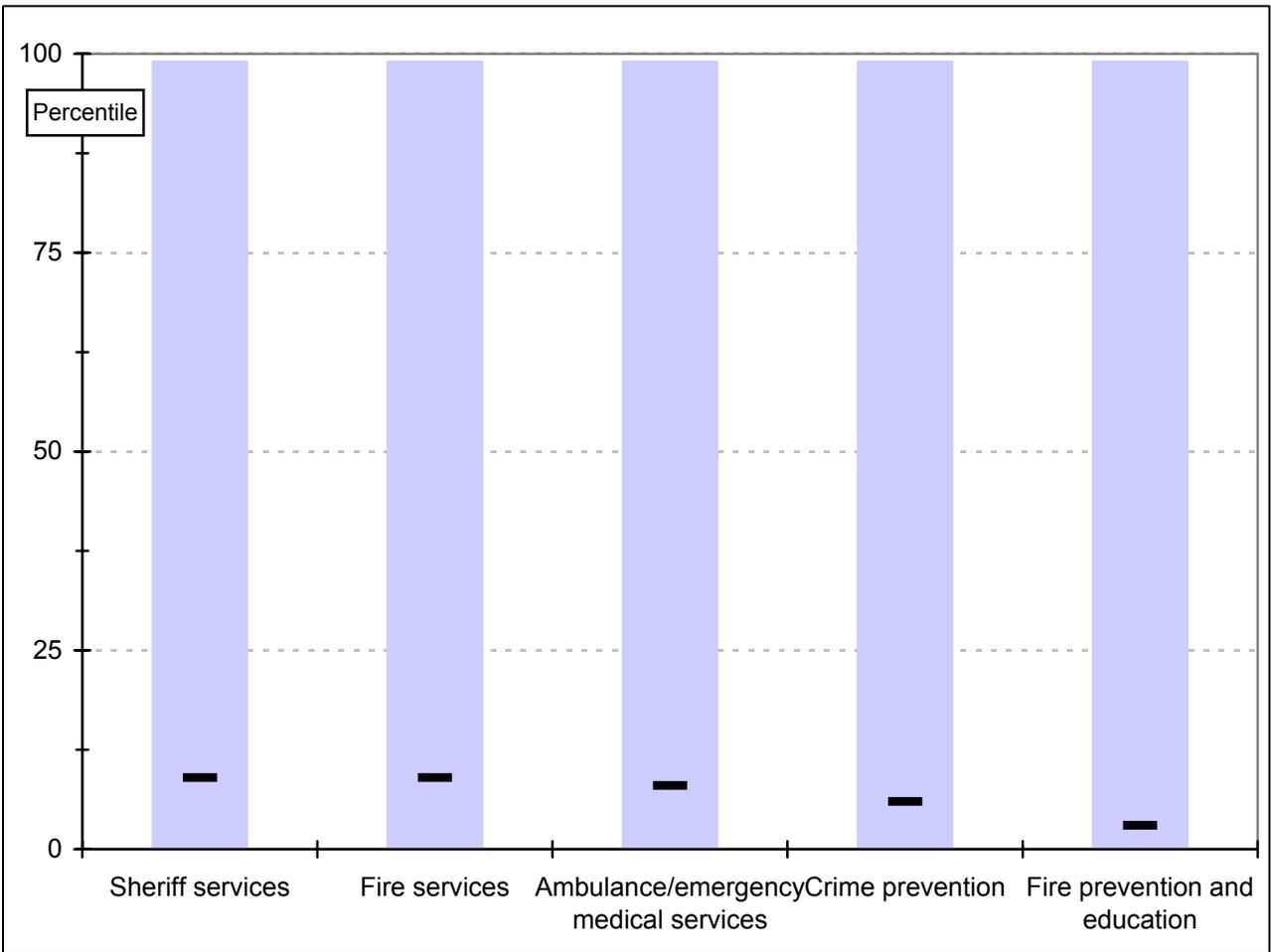


Figure 6b: Quality of Public Safety Services

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Sheriff services	57	90	98	9%ile	below the norm
Fire services	68	68	74	9%ile	below the norm
Ambulance/emergency medical services	65	55	59	8%ile	below the norm
Crime prevention	44	33	34	6%ile	below the norm
Fire prevention and education	52	33	33	3%ile	below the norm

Figure 7a: Quality of Leisure Services

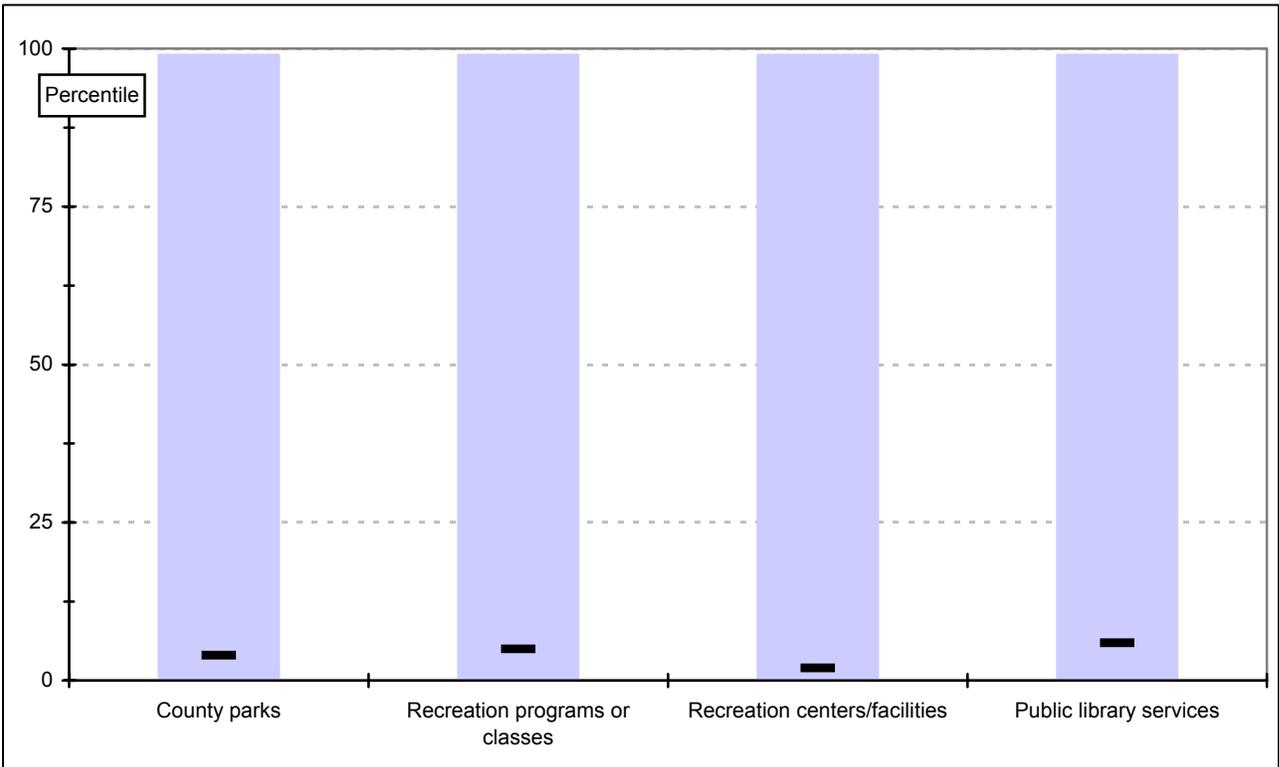


Figure 7b: Quality of Leisure Services

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
County parks	43	49	50	4%ile	below the norm
Recreation programs or classes	39	61	63	5%ile	below the norm
Recreation centers/facilities	35	42	42	2%ile	below the norm
Public library services	46	61	64	6%ile	below the norm

Figure 8a: Quality of Utility Services

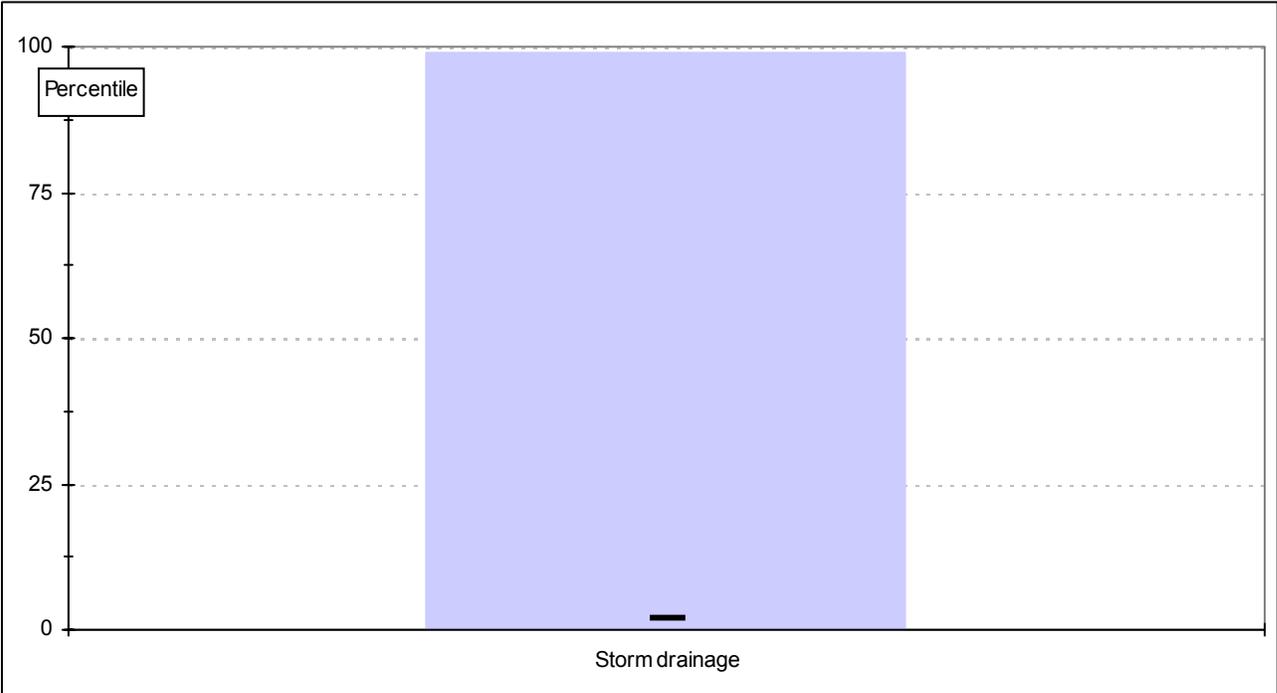


Figure 8b: Quality of Utility Services					
	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Storm drainage	22	45	45	2%ile	below the norm

Figure 9a: Quality of Planning and Code Enforcement Services

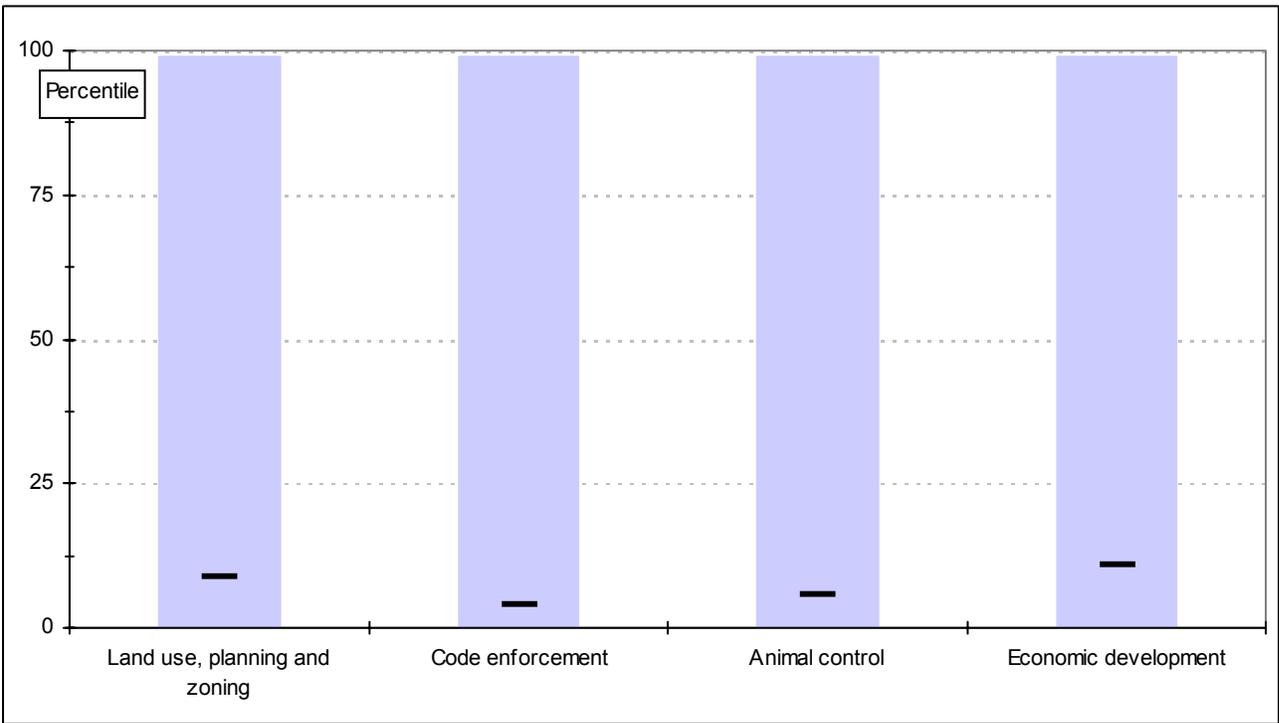


Figure 9b: Quality of Planning and Code Enforcement Services

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Land use, planning and zoning	31	40	43	9%ile	below the norm
Code enforcement	21	55	56	4%ile	below the norm
Animal control	39	45	47	6%ile	below the norm
Economic development	26	32	35	11%ile	below the norm

Figure 10a: Quality of Services to Special Populations and Other Services

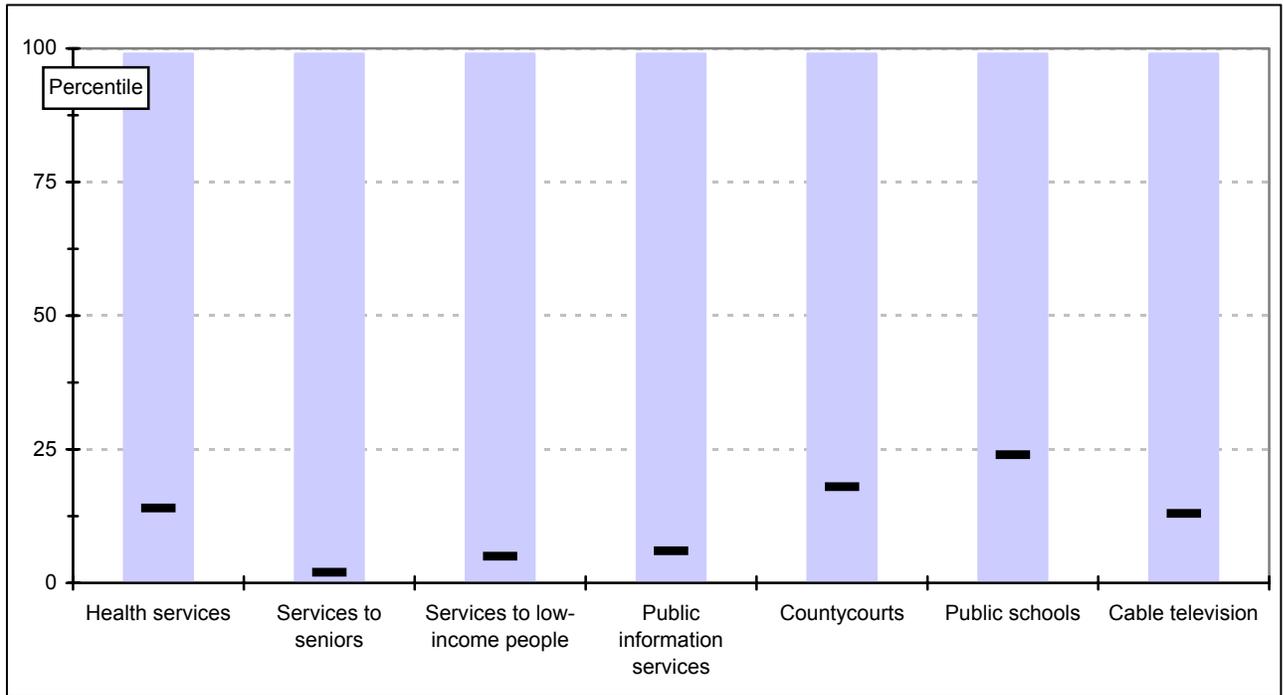


Figure 10b: Quality of Services to Special Populations and Other Services

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Health services	45	19	21	14%ile	below the norm
Services to seniors	38	48	48	2%ile	below the norm
Services to low-income people	31	21	21	5%ile	below the norm
Public information services	42	33	34	6%ile	below the norm
County courts	49	19	22	18%ile	below the norm
Public schools	49	36	46	24%ile	below the norm
Cable television	32	22	24	13%ile	below the norm

Figure 11a: Overall Quality of Services

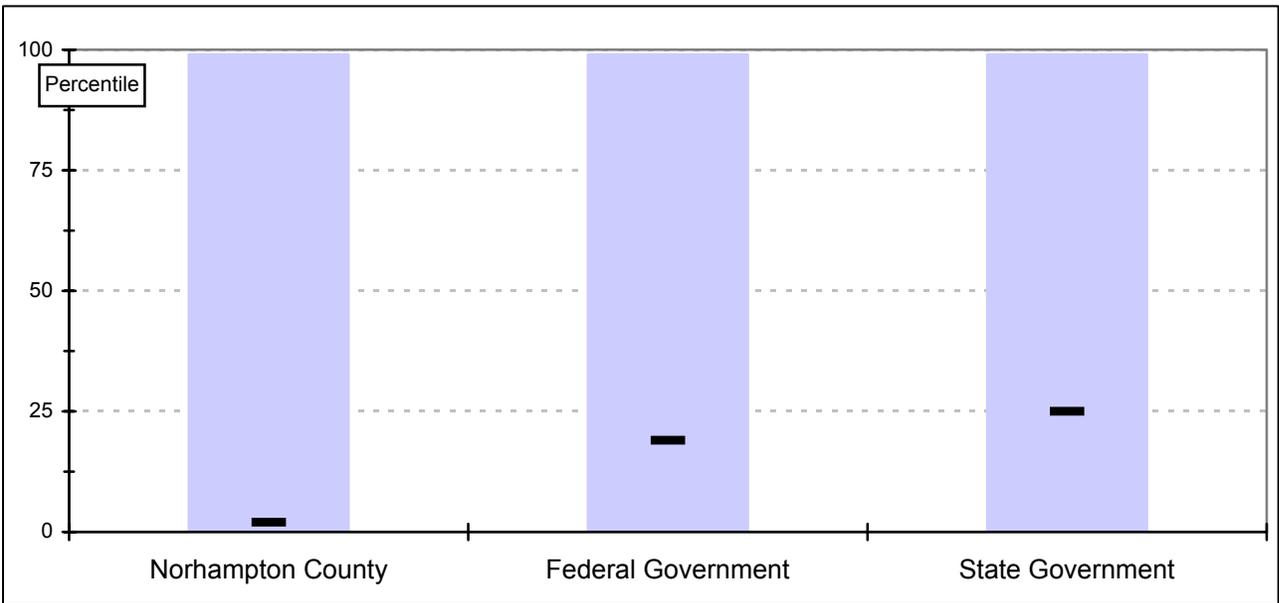


Figure 11b: Overall Quality of Services

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Services provided by Norhampton County	42	57	57	2%ile	below the norm
Services provided by the Federal Government	40	27	32	19%ile	similar to the norm
Services provided by the State Government	41	25	32	25%ile	similar to the norm

Figure 12a: Ratings of Contact with City Employees

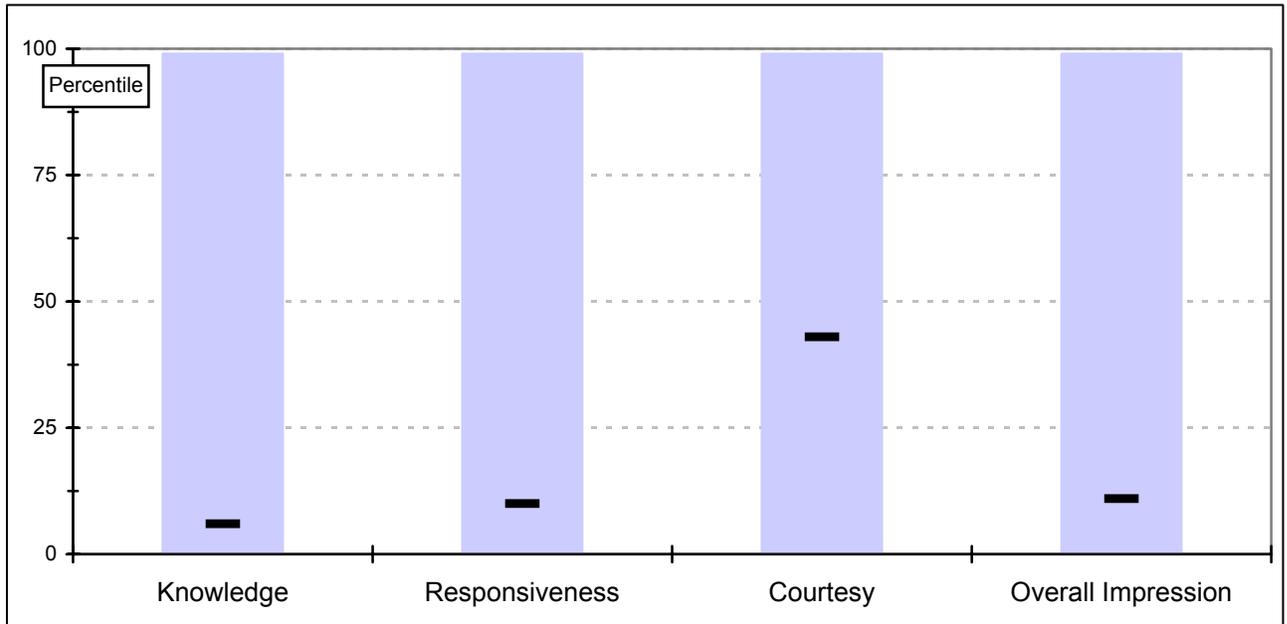


Figure 12b: Ratings of Contact with the City Employees

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
Knowledge	61	45	47	6%ile	below the norm
Responsiveness	60	46	50	10%ile	below the norm
Courtesy	70	22	37	43%ile	similar to the norm
Overall Impression	60	51	56	11%ile	below the norm

Figure 13a: Ratings of Public Trust

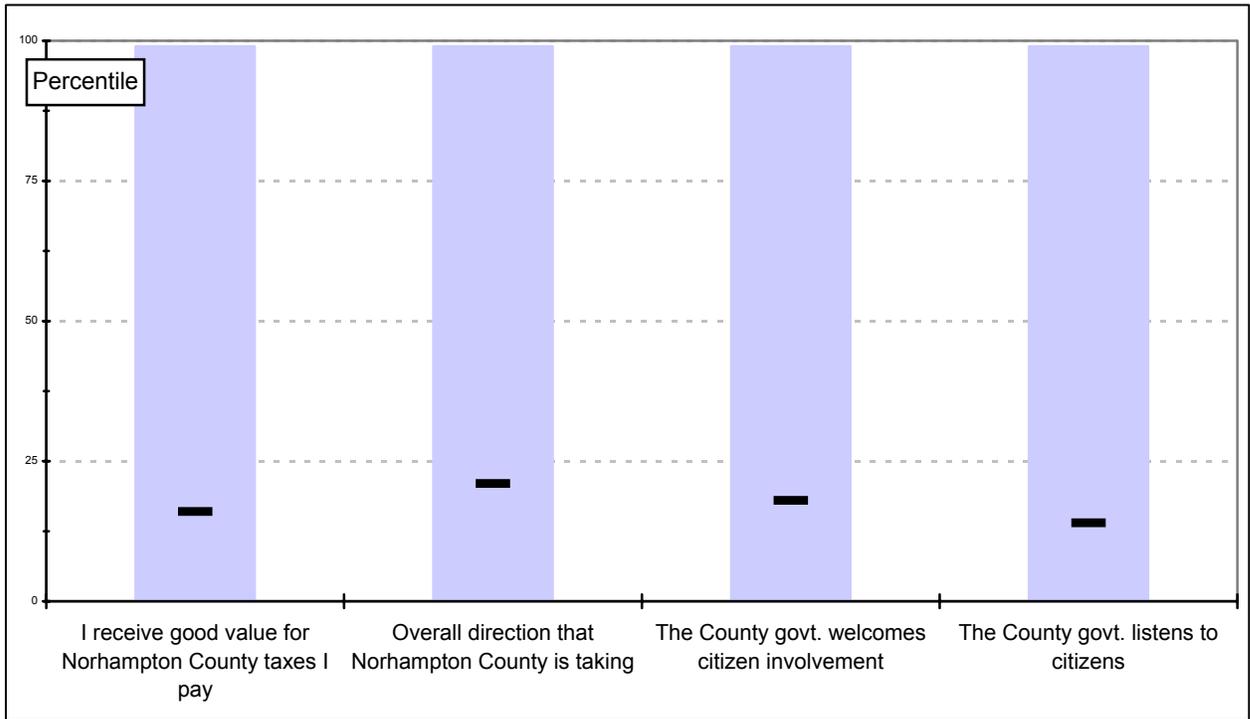


Figure 13b: Ratings of Public Trust

	Northampton County Rating	Rank	Number of Jurisdictions for Comparison	Northampton County Percentile	Comparison of Northampton County Rating to Norm
I receive good value for Norhampton County taxes I pay	48	17	19	16%ile	below the norm
Overall direction that Norhampton County is taking	49	34	42	21%ile	below the norm
The County govt. welcomes citizen involvement	55	33	39	18%ile	below the norm
The County govt. listens to citizens	49	32	36	14%ile	below the norm

APPENDIX I: LIST OF JURISDICTIONS INCLUDED IN NORMATIVE COMPARISONS

Jurisdiction Name	State	2000 Population
Homer	AK	3,946
Phenix City	AL	28,265
Hot Springs	AR	35,613
Siloam Springs	AR	10,000
Safford	AZ	9,232
Sedona	AZ	10,192
Claremont	CA	33,998
Coronado	CA	24,100
El Cerrito	CA	23,171
Hercules	CA	19,488
Los Alamitos	CA	11,536
Los Gatos	CA	28,592
Menlo Park	CA	30,785
Monterey	CA	29,674
Ridgecrest	CA	24,927
Solana Beach	CA	12,979
Yuba City	CA	36,758
Castle Rock	CO	20,224
Englewood	CO	31,727
Golden	CO	17,159
Greenwood Village	CO	11,035
Lafayette	CO	23,197
Louisville	CO	18,937
Northglenn	CO	31,575
Parker	CO	23,558
Vail	CO	4,531
Wheat Ridge	CO	32,913
New London	CT	25,671
Vernon	CT	28,063
Wethersfield	CT	26,271
Dover	DE	32,135
Newark	DE	28,547
Bonita Springs	FL	32,797
Cooper City	FL	27,939
Ocoee	FL	24,391
Palm Coast	FL	32,732
Cartersville	GA	15,925
Milledgeville	GA	18,757
Adams County	IA	4,482
Ankeny	IA	27,117
Clarke County	IA	9,133
Fort Dodge	IA	25,136

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Jurisdiction Name	State	2000 Population
Fort Madison	IA	10,715
Indianola	IA	12,998
Iowa County	IA	15,671
Marion	IA	7,144
Newton	IA	15,579
Lewiston	ID	30,904
Moscow	ID	21,291
Twin Falls	ID	34,469
Addison Village	IL	35,914
Highland Park	IL	31,365
Homewood	IL	19,543
Park Ridge	IL	37,775
St. Charles	IL	27,896
Streamwood	IL	36,407
Urbana	IL	36,395
Wilmette	IL	27,651
Ashland	KY	21,981
Andover	MA	31,247
Greenbelt	MD	21,456
Delhi Township	MI	22,569
Meridian Charter Township	MI	38,987
Port Huron	MI	32,338
Golden Valley	MN	20,281
Grand Forks	MN	231
Mankato	MN	32,427
Maplewood	MN	34,947
Polk County	MN	31,369
Richfield	MN	34,439
Roseville	MN	33,690
St. Clair Shores	MN	827
Ballwin	MO	31,283
Ellisville	MO	9,104
Kirkwood	MO	27,324
Pascagoula	MS	26,200
Hickory	NC	37,222
Kearney	NE	27,431
Dover	NH	26,884
Merrimack	NH	25,119
Salem	NH	28,112
Medford	NJ	22,253
Willingboro Township	NJ	33,008
Los Alamos County	NM	18,343
Taos	NM	4,700
Rye	NY	14,955
Watertown	NY	26,705
Dublin	OH	31,392
Fairborn	OH	32,052
Huber Heights	OH	38,212
Sandusky	OH	27,844

Report of Normative Comparisons

Jurisdiction Name	State	2000 Population
Shaker Heights	OH	29,405
Westerville	OH	35,318
Ashland	OR	19,522
Lake Oswego	OR	35,278
Manheim	PA	4,784
State College	PA	38,420
Upper Merion Township	PA	28,863
Newport	RI	26,475
Mauldin	SC	15,224
Myrtle Beach	SC	22,759
Aberdeen	SD	24,658
Cookville	TN	23,923
Oak Ridge	TN	27,387
DeSoto	TX	37,646
Lufkin	TX	32,709
Mount Pleasant	TX	13,935
Nacogdoches	TX	29,914
Blacksburg	VA	39,357
Hopewell	VA	22,354
Williamsburg	VA	11,998
Bothell	WA	30,150
Lynnwood	WA	33,847
Lynnwood	WA	33,847
Marysville	WA	12,268
Richland	WA	38,708
University Place	WA	29,933
Walla Walla	WA	29,686
Marquette County	WI	15,832
Milton	WI	5,132
Superior	WI	27,368
Wausau	WI	38,426
Morgantown	WV	26,809
Laramie	WY	27,204

APPENDIX II: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CITIZEN SURVEY DATABASE

Q: What is in the citizen survey database?

A: National Research Center's database includes the results from citizen surveys conducted in over 300 jurisdictions in the United States. These are public opinion polls answered by more than 250,000 residents around the country. We have recorded, analyzed and stored responses to over 6,000 survey questions dealing with resident perceptions about the quality of community life and public trust and residents' report of their use of public facilities. Respondents to these surveys are intended to represent over 40 million Americans.

Q: What kinds of questions are included?

A: Residents' ratings of the quality of virtually every kind of local government service are included – from police, fire and trash haul to animal control, planning and cemeteries. Many dimensions of quality of life are included such as feeling of safety and opportunities for dining, recreation and shopping as well as ratings of the overall quality of community life and community as a place to raise children and retire.

Q: What is so unique about National Research Center's Citizen Survey database?

A: It is the only database of its size that contains the people's perceptions about government service delivery and quality of life. For example, others use government statistics about crime to deduce the quality of police services or speed of pot hole repair to draw conclusions about the quality of street maintenance. Only National Research Center's database adds the opinion of service recipients themselves to the service quality equation. We believe that conclusions about service or community quality are made prematurely if opinions of the community's residents themselves are missing.

Q: What is the database used for?

A: Benchmarking. Our clients use the comparative information in the database to help interpret their own citizen survey results, to create or revise community plans, to evaluate the success of policy or budget decisions, to measure local government performance. We don't know what is small or tall without comparing. Taking the pulse of the community has little meaning without knowing what pulse rate is too high and what is too low. So many surveys of service satisfaction turn up at least "good" citizen evaluations that we need to know how others rate their services to understand if "good" is good enough. Furthermore, in the absence of national or peer community comparisons, a jurisdiction is left with comparing its fire protection rating to its street maintenance rating. That comparison is unfair. Streets always lose to fire. We need to ask more important and harder questions. We need to know how our residents' ratings of fire service compare to opinions about fire service in other communities.

Report of Normative Comparisons

The National CITIZEN SURVEY™

Q: So what if we find that our public opinions are better or – for that matter – worse than opinions in other communities? What does it mean?

A: A police department that provides the fastest and most efficient service—one that closes most of its cases, solves most of its crimes and keeps the crime rate low—still has a problem to fix if its clients believe services are not very good compared to ratings received by objectively “worse” departments.

National Research Center’s database can help that police department – or any city department – to understand how well citizens think it is doing. Without the comparative data from National Research Center’s database, it would be like bowling in a tournament without knowing what the other teams are scoring. We recommend that citizen opinion be used in conjunction with other sources of data to help managers know how to respond to comparative results.

Q: Aren’t comparisons of questions from different surveys like comparing apples and oranges?

A: It is true that you can’t simply take a given result from one survey and compare it to the result from a different survey. National Research Center, Inc. principals have pioneered and reported their methods for converting all survey responses to the same scale. Because scales responses will differ among types of survey questions, National Research Center, Inc. statisticians have developed statistical algorithms, which adjust question results based on many characteristics of the question, its scale and the survey methods. All results are then converted to the PTM (percent to maximum) scale with a minimum score of 0 (equaling the lowest possible rating) to a maximum score of 100 (equaling the highest possible rating). We then can provide a norm that not only controls for question differences, but also controls for differences in types of survey methods. This way we put all questions on the same scale and a norm can be offered for communities of given sizes or in various regions.

Q: How can managers trust the comparability of results?

A: Principals of National Research Center, Inc. have submitted their work to peer reviewed scholarly journals where its publication fully describes the rigor of our methods and the quality of our findings. We have published articles in *Public Administration Review*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* and *Governing*, and we wrote a book, *Citizen Surveys: How to do them, how to use them, what they mean*, that describes in detail how survey responses can be adjusted to provide fair comparisons for ratings among many jurisdictions. Our work on calculating national norms for resident opinions about service delivery and quality of life won the Samuel C. May award for research excellence from the Western Governmental Research Association.