



When Walmart Leaves Small-Towns:
Residents' Perception and Attitude
Towards Discount Store Closures in
Rural Missouri

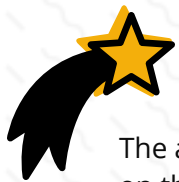
2020

Community Survey Report

Yanu Prasetyo

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Comments and suggestions for this report are highly appreciated. Please email any questions or feedback to:

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About the Survey

Background

This study addressed the public opinion toward Walmart stores closure in rural America with a close look at the state of Missouri. The debate about pros and cons of Walmart's entry and exit effect still needs to be thoroughly reviewed. This study has provided some valuable data from the micro perspectives of residents. This study was designed to learn and gather the public perceptions and attitudes toward the closure of Walmart stores. The survey results give us primary data and information regarding these issues. The survey was carried out in Southern Missouri, where Walmart closed its discount stores in 2017 permanently.

Research Purpose and Questions

Most of the studies on the impact of Walmart tend to use secondary data and overemphasize economic effects. There are limited studies that incorporate empirical case study and local community perspectives toward Walmart. In relation to this problem, the purpose of the study is to investigate the resident's perceptions of Walmart's closure in Rural Missouri. This study focused on a primary objective: How does Walmart store closure shape residents' perceptions and attitudes?

Population and Sample

Residents of two (2) Walmart towns in Southern Missouri, Caruthersville (Pemiscot County), and Piedmont (Wayne County), and three non-Walmart towns surrounding Piedmont (Greenville, Patterson, and Williamsville) took this survey. In this survey, we employed single-stage cluster sampling, which is a simple random sample of selected clusters (streets), and data collected from every unit in the sampled groups (houses/household).

Total Survey
Delivered = 755

Total Survey
Completed = 555

Response Rate = 73.5 %

*Response
Rate*



Methodology

Drop-off and Pick-Up Survey

A drop-off/pick-up survey was conducted for data collection in this study to address practical issues associated with improving coverage, and its relationships with sampling, response, and administrative considerations. This method has been presented as an alternative for reducing non-coverage errors at a lower cost (Steele et al. 2001).

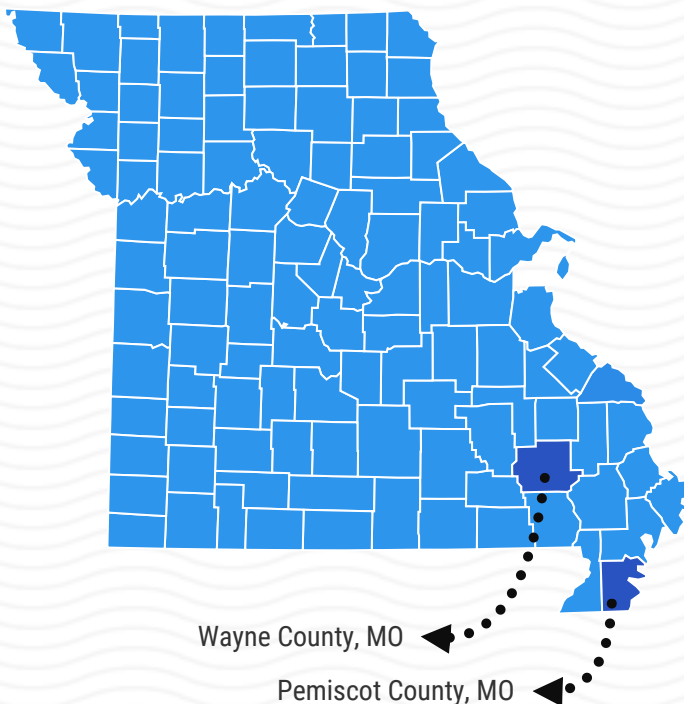
Drop-off and Pick-Up surveys are compatible with rural counties/communities and small population areas (Allred and Ross-Davis 2011). Although typically at higher costs due to labor and transportation (Trentelman et al. 2019), in general, it usually has low costs, good coverage, quick turnaround time, and higher response rate (Clark and Finley 2007).

Survey Locations:

Pemiscot County
(Caruthersville)

Wayne County
(Piedmont,
Greenville,
Patterson &
Williamsville)

State and County Maps of Missouri



The questionnaire for the hand delivered surveys was self-administered. The questionnaire included a cover letter, open-ended & close-ended questions. Respondents received souvenirs (reusable bags) as a thank you gift to increase the survey response rate (Asch, Christakis, and Ubel 1998).

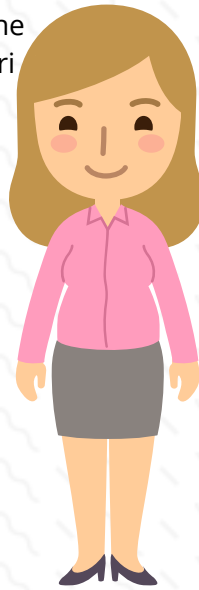
We hired local high-school students and residents to help with the drop-off and pick-up of surveys from each household. A survey in Caruthersville was conducted from September to November 2019, and data collection at Piedmont, Patterson, Williamsville, and Greenville was conducted from January to March 2020.



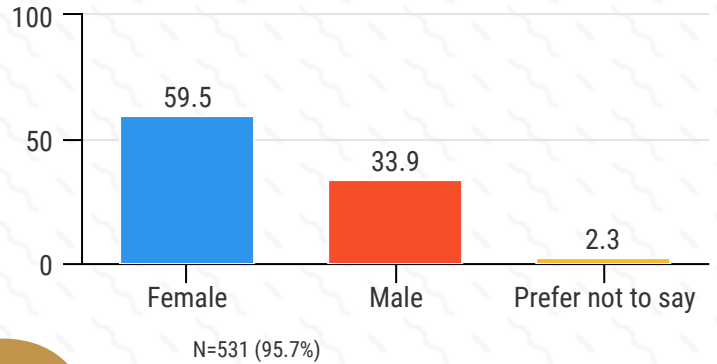
Findings

A. Socio-Demographic

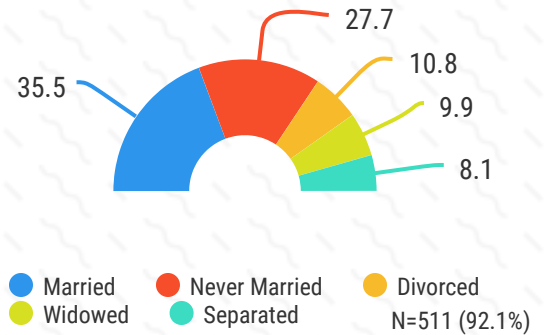
The typical characteristics of respondents in this survey are 43-year-old women (59.5%), white (63.6%), and married (35.5%) with high school degree or GED (34.8%). Their average annual income is less than \$39,000 (53.8%). These descriptions are almost similar to the characteristics of Walmart shoppers at the national level (46-year-old white women with an annual income less than \$76,000), and the general population demographic of Missouri (83% white, 50.9% female, and median household income \$53,560).



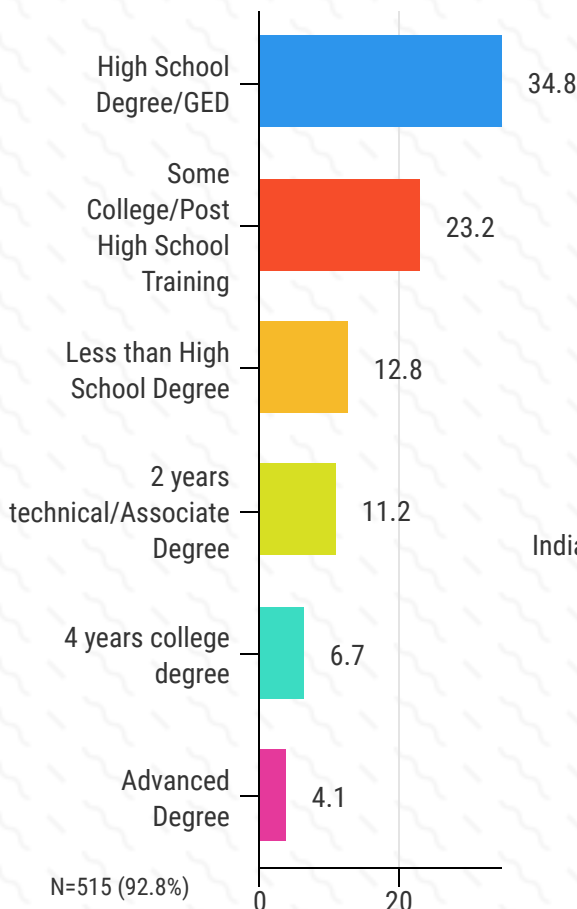
Gender (%)



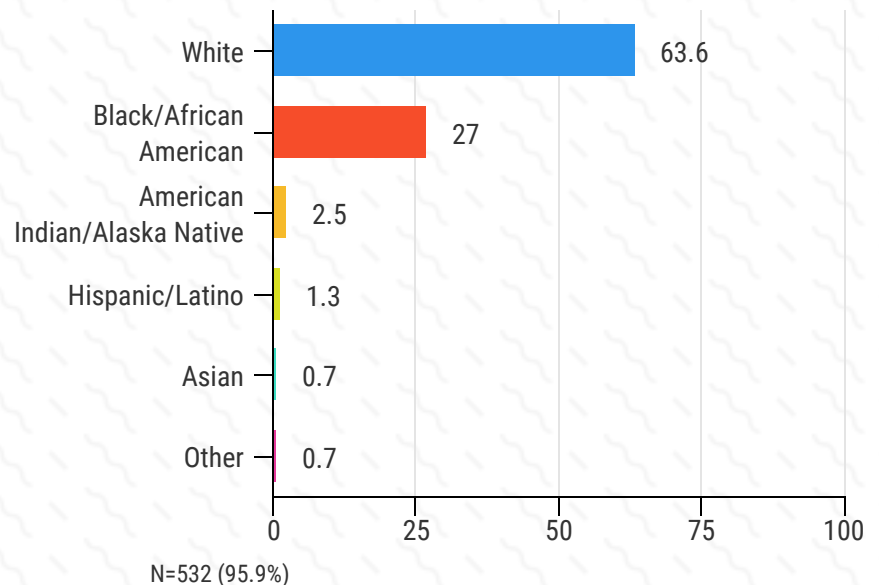
Marital Status (%)



Education (%)



Race (%)





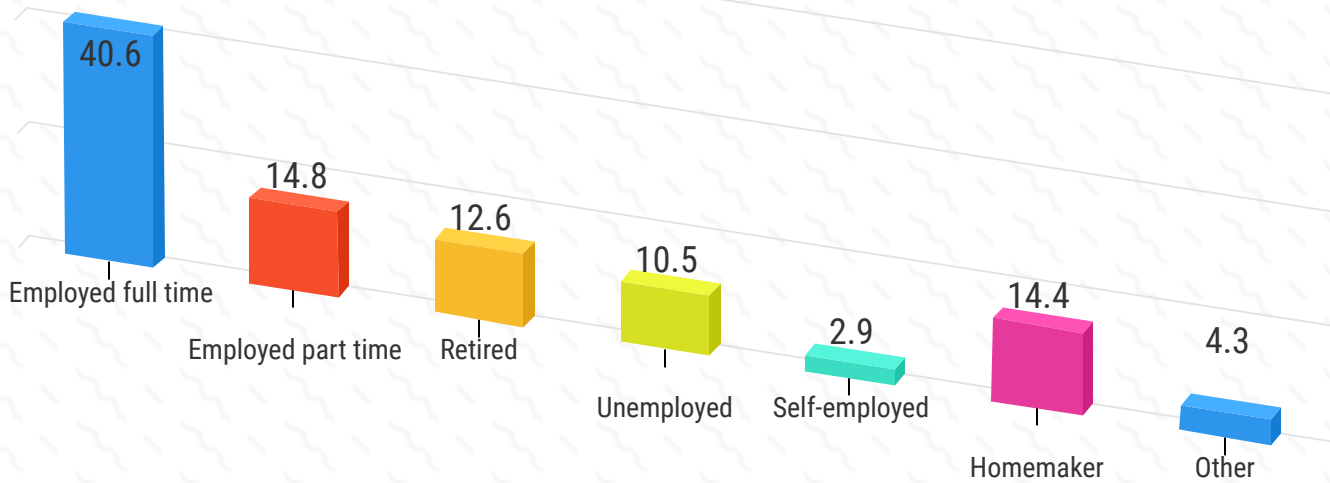
A. Socio-Demographic (Cont.)

Most of the respondents are working full-time (40.6%), and 10.5% of them are unemployed, which is much higher than the unemployment rate in the state of Missouri as of October 2019 (3.4%).



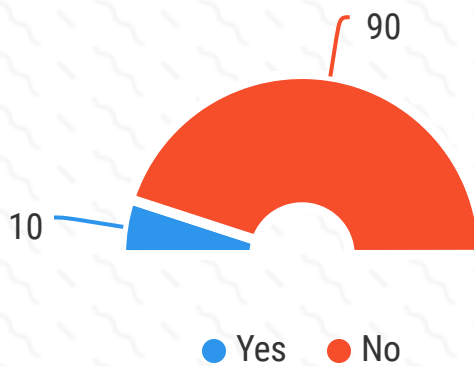
53.8% of respondents with an annual income less than \$39,000

Employment (%)

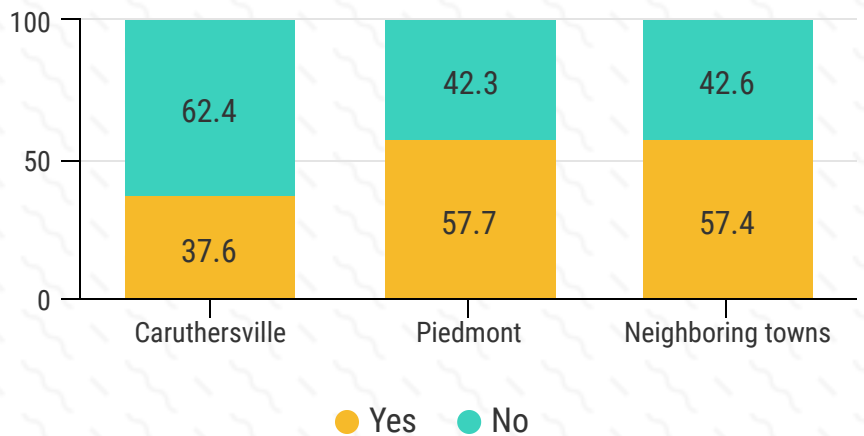


Own a small business (%)

n = 529



Home owner (%)



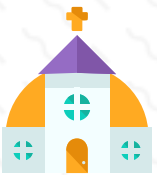
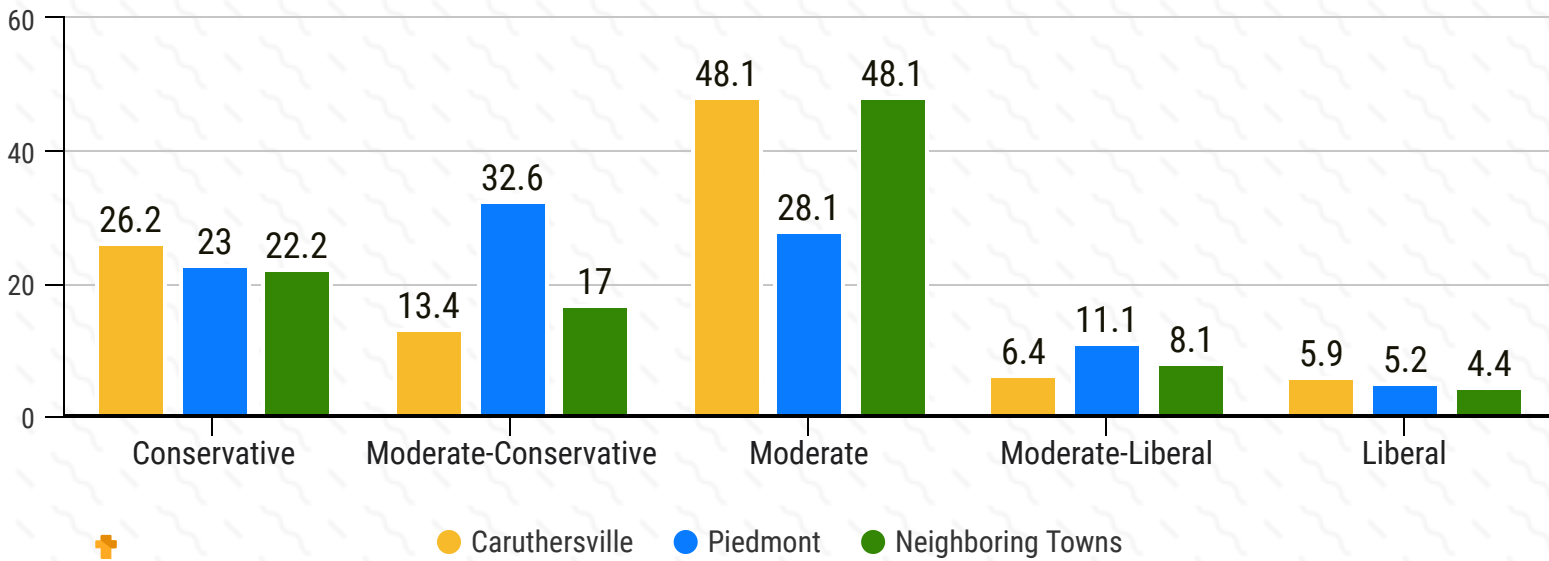


A. Socio-Demographic (Cont.)

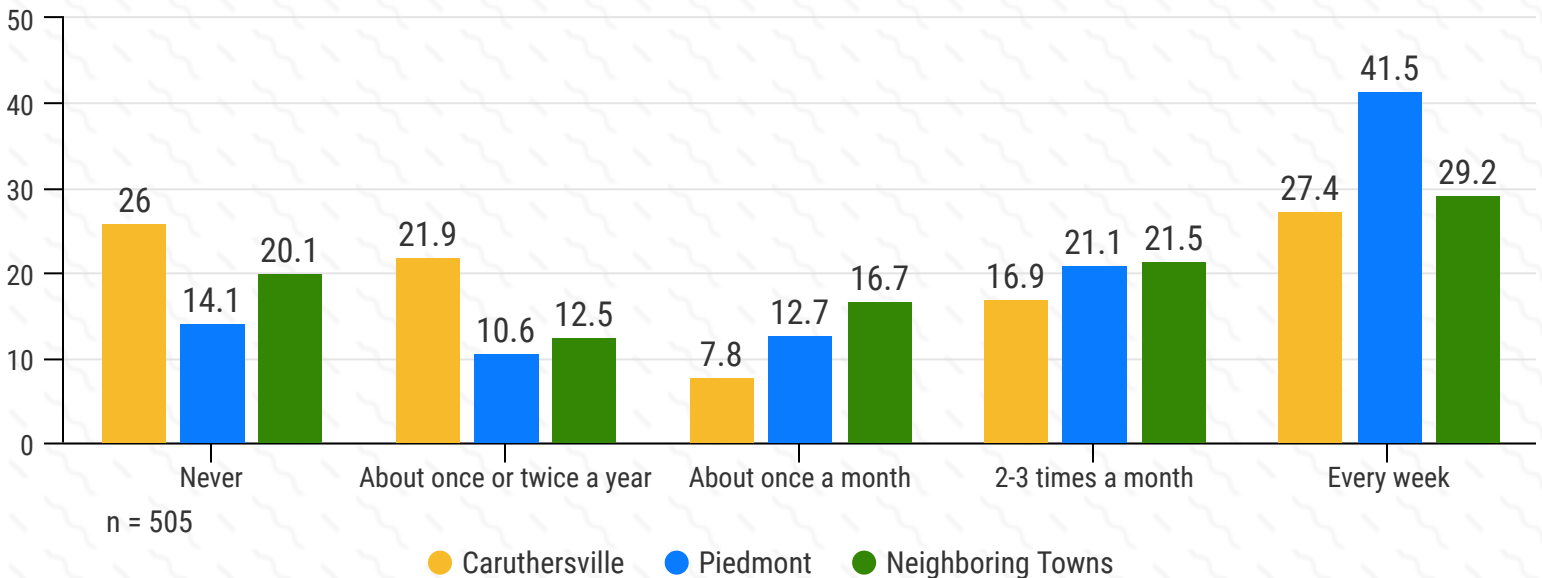
One of the key trends in public opinion over the past few decades has been a growing divide among liberal and conservatives that affect public opinion towards many issues in the US. In this survey, respondents all towns identified themselves with conservatives and moderate values rather than liberal values.



Political View (%)



Religious Services (%)





A. Socio-Demographic (Cont.)

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristic	Caruthersville (n=222)	Piedmont (n=165)	Neighboring Towns (n=168)
Age (mean, years)	39.93	45.43	46.06
Living in the area (mean, years)	26.32	32.93	26.29
Gender (%)			
Male	30.7	38.7	38.6
Female	67.9	60.6	55.7
Prefer not to say	1.4	0.6	5.7
Ethnicity (%)			
White	30.6	92.7	78.6
Black/African American	66.7	0.0	4.2
Hispanic/Latino	0.5	0.0	3.6
Asian	0.9	0.6	0.6
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9	1.2	6.0
Other	0.5	0.6	1.2
Education (%)			
Less than high school degree	14.4	6.1	17.3
High school degree or GED	41.9	24.2	35.7
some college/post high school training	19.8	33.3	17.9
2 years technical or associate degree	3.6	19.4	13.1
4 years college degree (BA/BS)	11.3	3.6	3.6
Advanced degree	5.4	4.8	1.8
Employment (%)			
Employed full time	33.8	55.8	25.0
Employed part time	10.8	15.2	16.1
Unemployed	24.8	1.2	4.8
self-employed	8.6	6.1	14.9
Home maker	3.2	1.8	3.0
Retired	9.0	14.5	17.9
Other	6.3	0.6	4.2

Caruthersville has a younger population (39-year-old) than Piedmont (45-year-old) and neighboring towns (46-year-old). Caruthersville is more diverse in terms of racial make-up, with 64.4 percent of African American respondents.

This high response from the African American community was due to the cluster's density, more African American households are living in these neighborhoods compared to the other groups.

On the educational level, Caruthersville has more respondents with four years of a college degree (11.3%) compared to Piedmont (3.6%) and neighboring towns (3.6%).

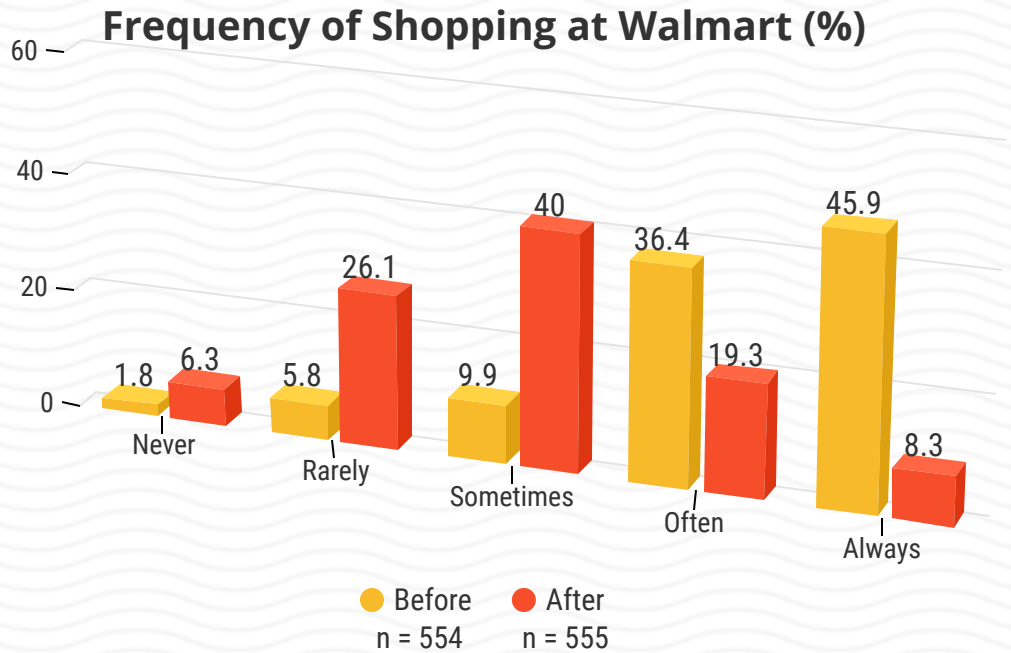
While Piedmont and neighboring towns are isolated in the Ozark areas, Caruthersville is located in the Bootheel Missouri, bordering the states of Arkansas, Tennessee, and accessible to many small towns and cities.



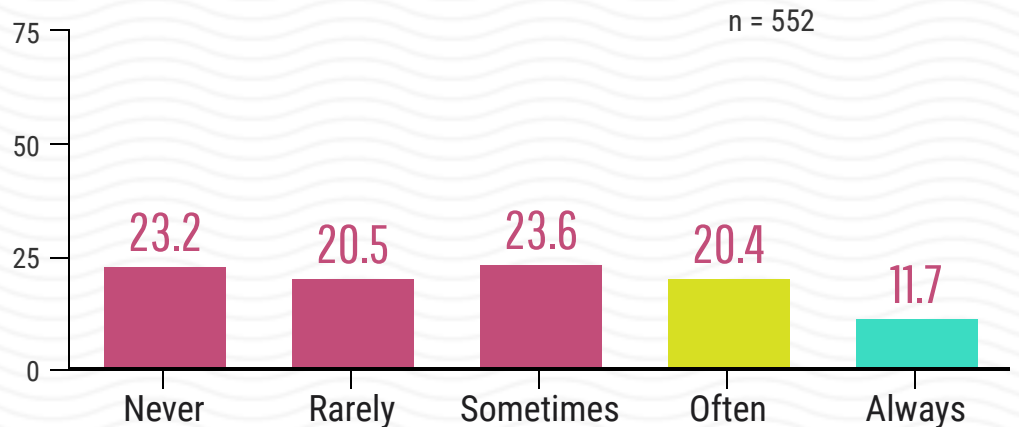


B. Shopping Frequencies

The data shows that respondent's shopping frequency at Walmart was declining. Before the store closed, the majority of respondents - all towns - said they always shopped at Walmart (45.0%). Now, only 8.3% of respondents are still "always" shopping at Walmart. Most of them sometimes and rarely visit the nearest Walmart (40% and 26.1%), and we also found 6.3% of respondents who said never shop at Walmart anymore.



Online Shopping Frequency (%)



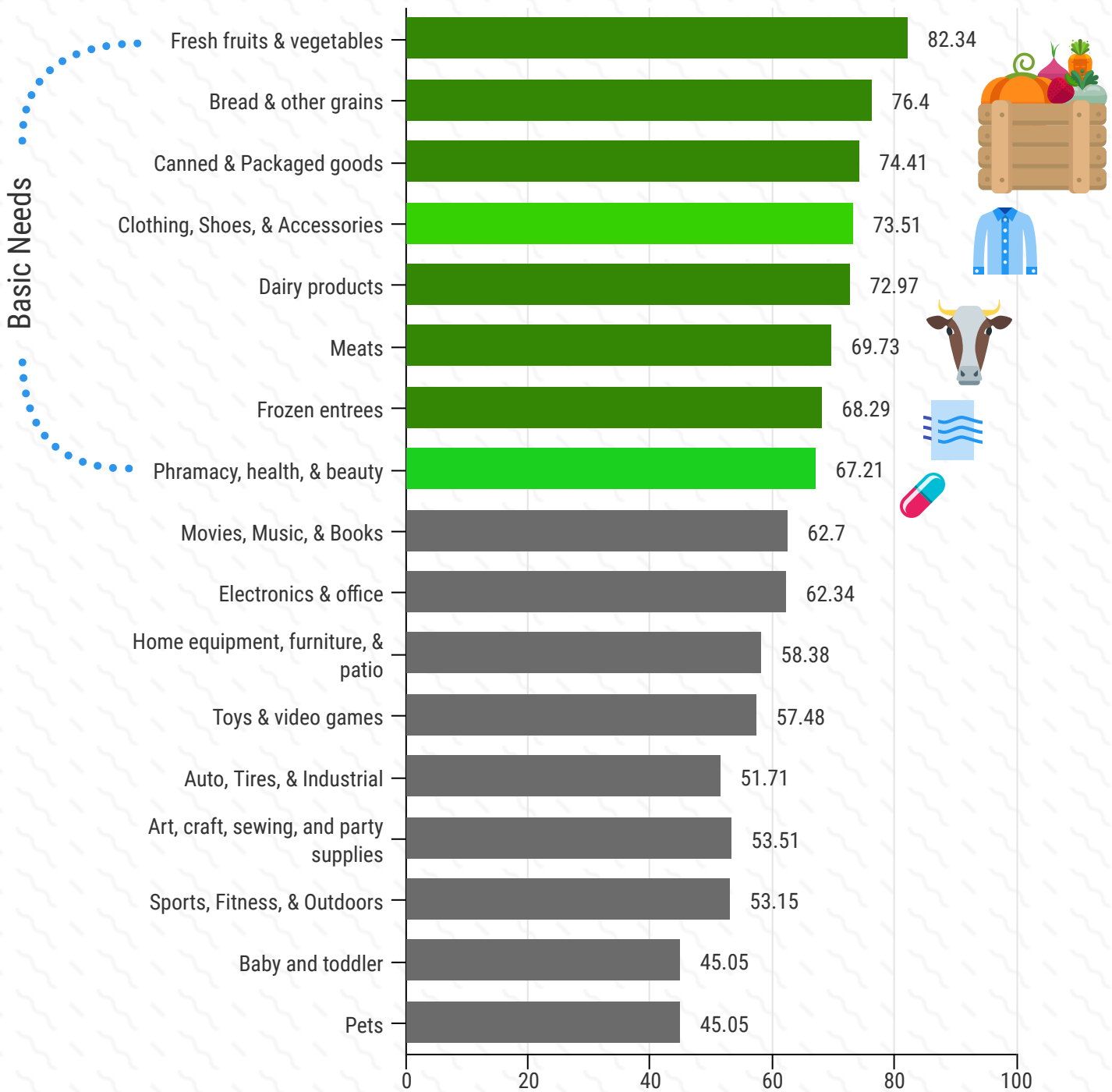
We asked about how often respondent shops online, and 23.2% said they never shop online. However, we had 32.1% of respondents who always and often shop online. These are quite higher percentages, which means online shopping is growing in rural areas as well. In the future, the number of people who shop online may increase since there are fewer products or store options available in surrounding towns. The challenge is on the availability and affordability of internet and cell services in these areas. Once residents have good internet access, online shopping behavior may explode.





C. Products & Services

Products & Services (%)



Walmart is the primary source for basic needs, which included food, clothing, and pharmacy. When Walmart stores left the town, the community lost a critical part of their lifestyle as well as necessary resources.



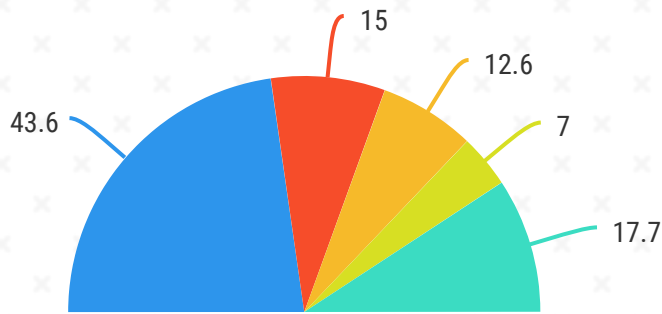
D. Satisfaction Towards Walmart

Although most respondents felt disappointed and angry when Walmart left their town, their general satisfaction with Walmart is still high, especially for its products, services, and employees. The lowest satisfaction is with the location of its store (58.6%), convenience (40.4%), and access (40%). It is because of the longer distance and more hours to drive to get to the closest Walmart store.

n = 532



Location (%)

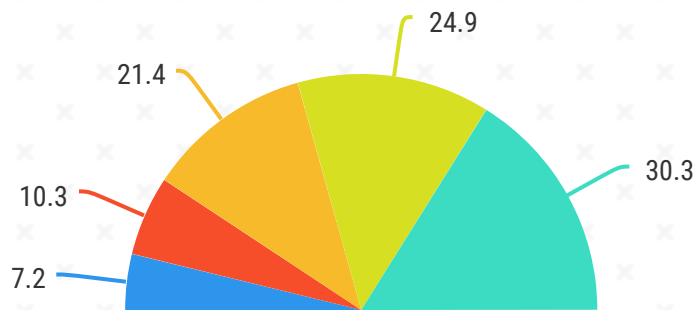


Extremely dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Satisfied Extremely Satisfied

n = 522



Products (%)

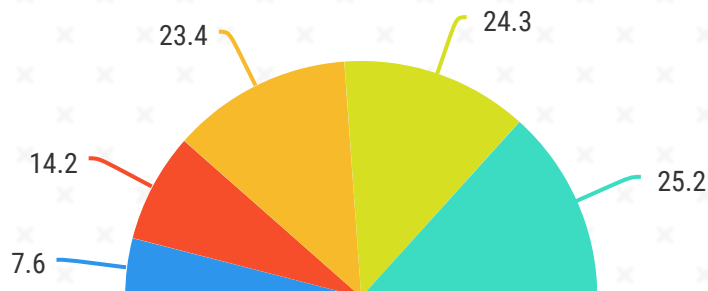


Extremely dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Satisfied Extremely Satisfied

n = 526



Services (%)



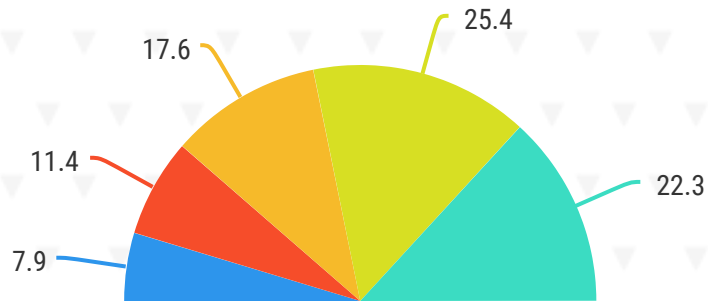
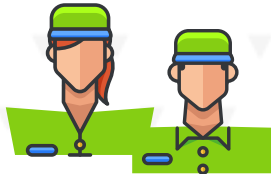
Extremely dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Satisfied Extremely Satisfied



D. Satisfaction towards Walmart (Cont.)

n = 525

Employee (%)

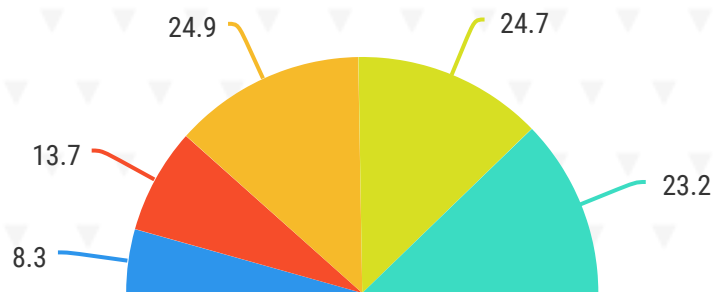


Extremely dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Satisfied Extremely Satisfied



n = 526

Prices (%)

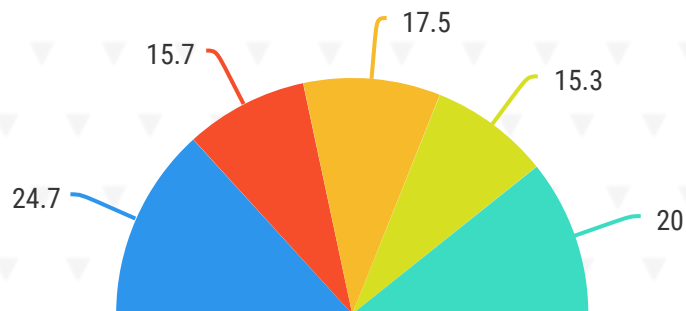


Extremely dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Satisfied Extremely Satisfied



n = 523

Access (%)



Extremely dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Satisfied Extremely Satisfied





D. Satisfaction towards Walmart

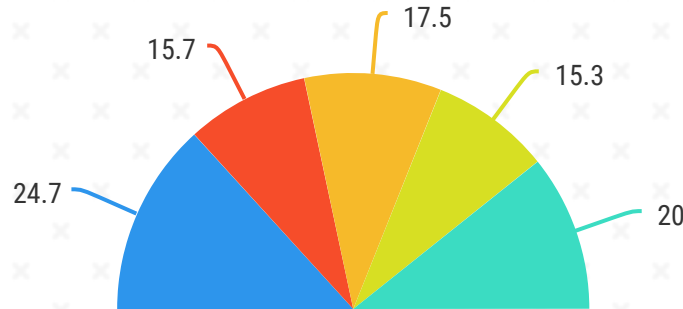
(Cont.)

The satisfaction level usually describes the loyalty of Walmart customers in rural areas.

n = 517



Convenience (%)



● Extremely dissatisfied
 ● Dissatisfied
 ● Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 ● Satisfied
 ● Extremely Satisfied

n = 522



Discount (%)

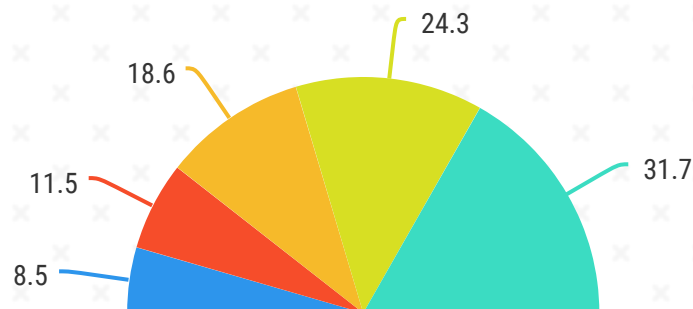


● Extremely dissatisfied
 ● Dissatisfied
 ● Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 ● Satisfied
 ● Extremely Satisfied

n = 525



Groceries (%)

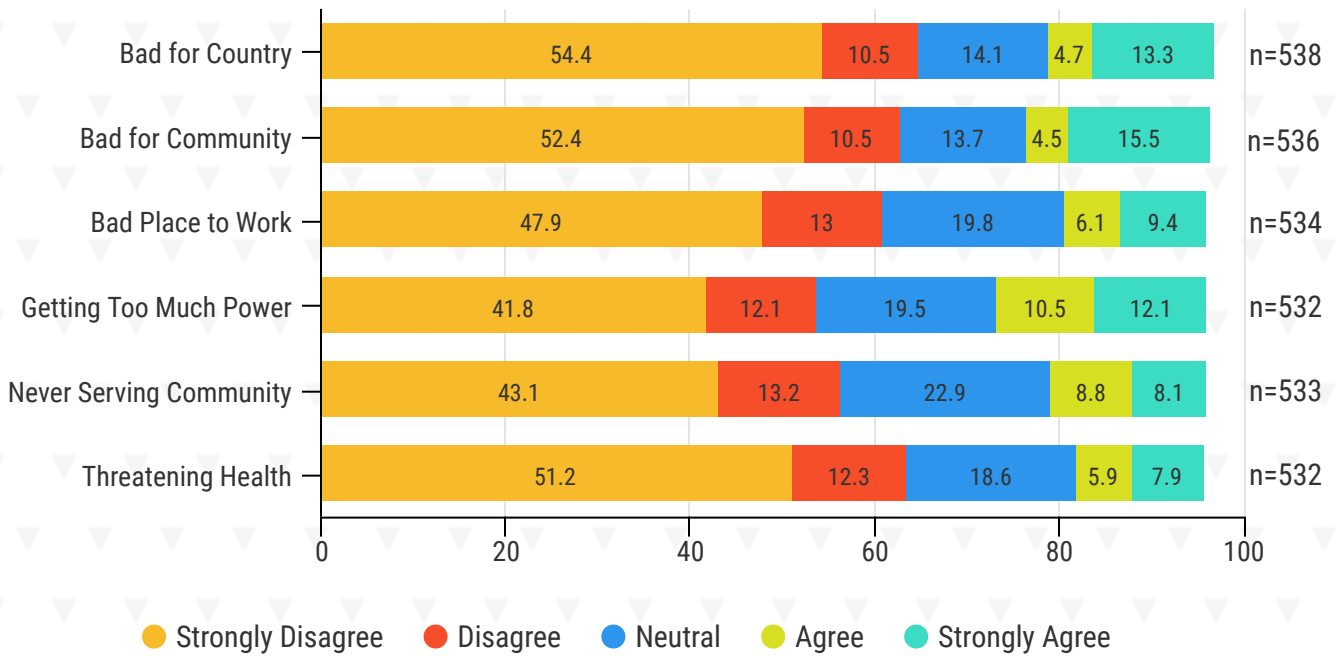


● Extremely dissatisfied
 ● Dissatisfied
 ● Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 ● Satisfied
 ● Extremely Satisfied

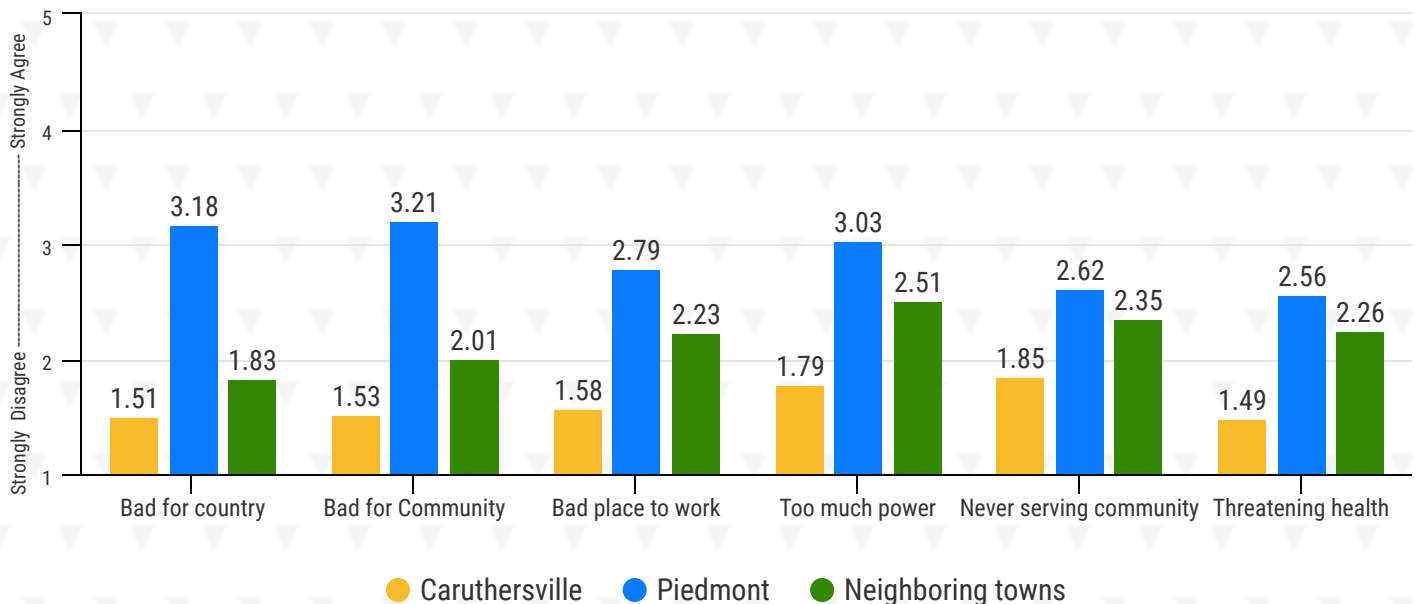


E. Perception Towards Walmart

Thoughts about Walmart (%)



Respondent's Perception Towards Walmart (mean)

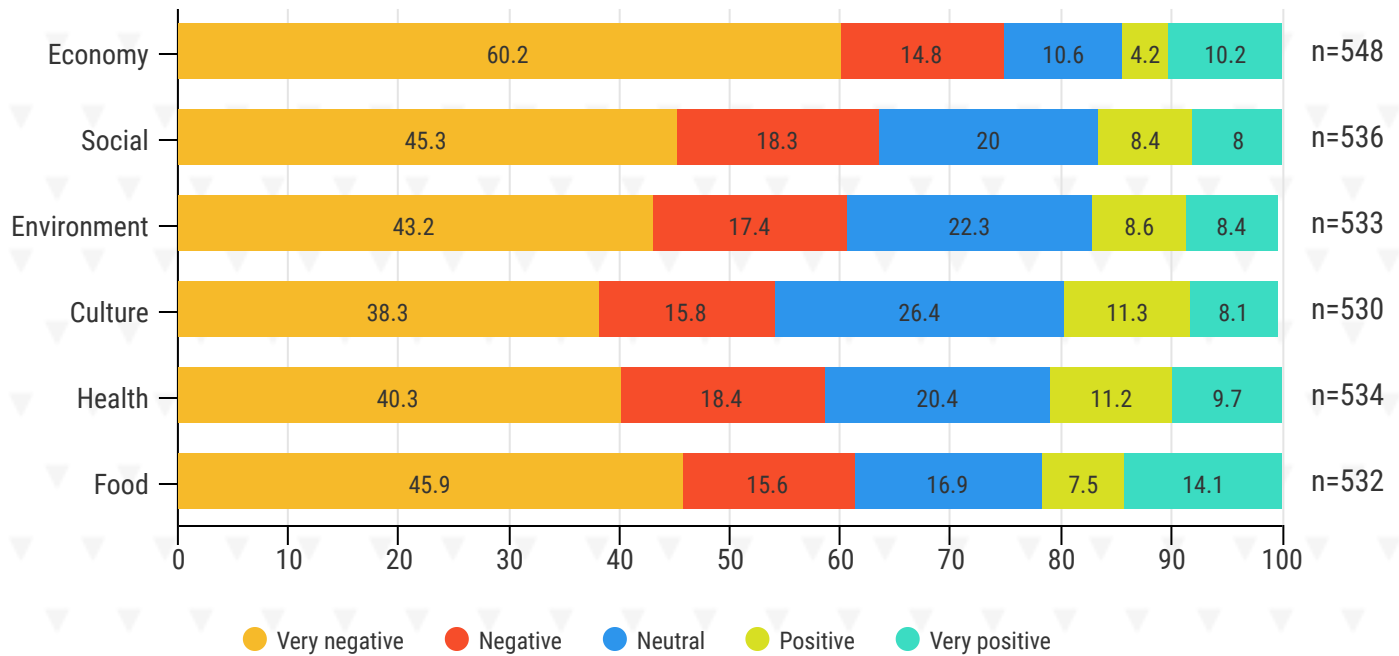


Consistent with the respondents' satisfaction towards Walmart, their perception of this giant retail presence is also positive. Respondents from Caruthersville and neighboring towns tend to see Walmart is good for the country and their community. Walmart is also a good place for work, according to these two communities. Only respondents from Piedmont said they somewhat disagree or are neutral with those statement. Across the survey questions, respondents in Caruthersville are reported more likely to support Walmart's existence in their towns since they disagree or strongly disagree with the negative statements about Walmart, including if *it has too much power* and *threatening the health of the community*.

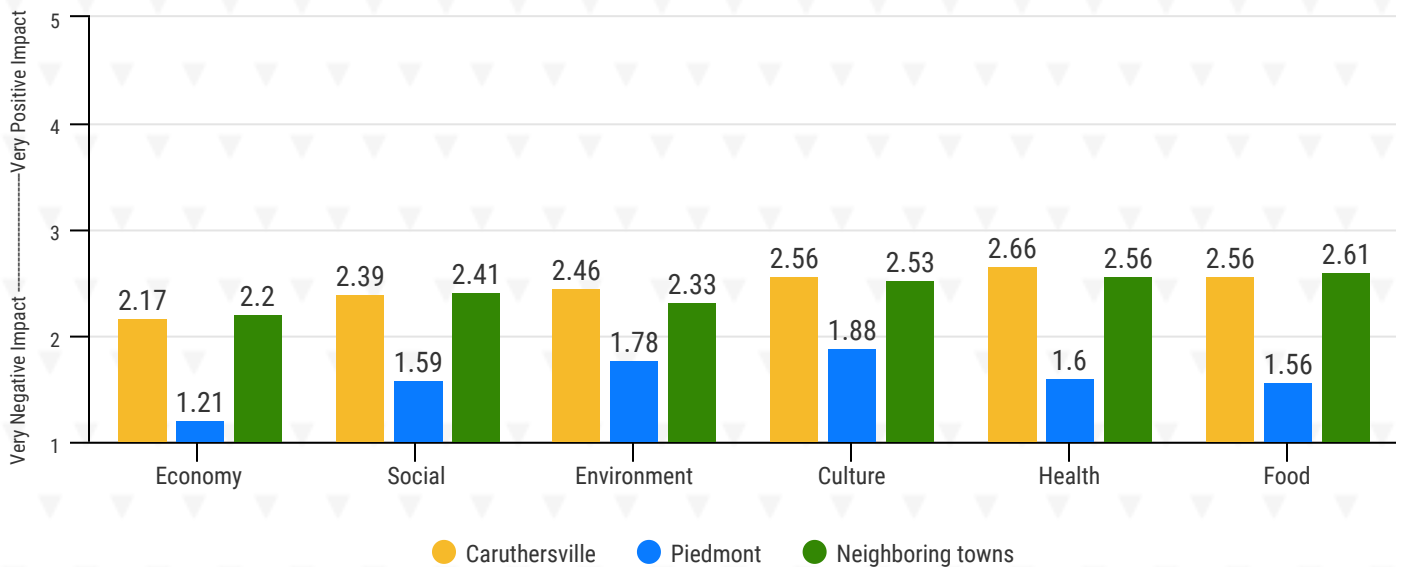


F. The Impact of Walmart Closure

Walmart's stores closure impact on community (%)



The impact of Walmart stores closure (mean)



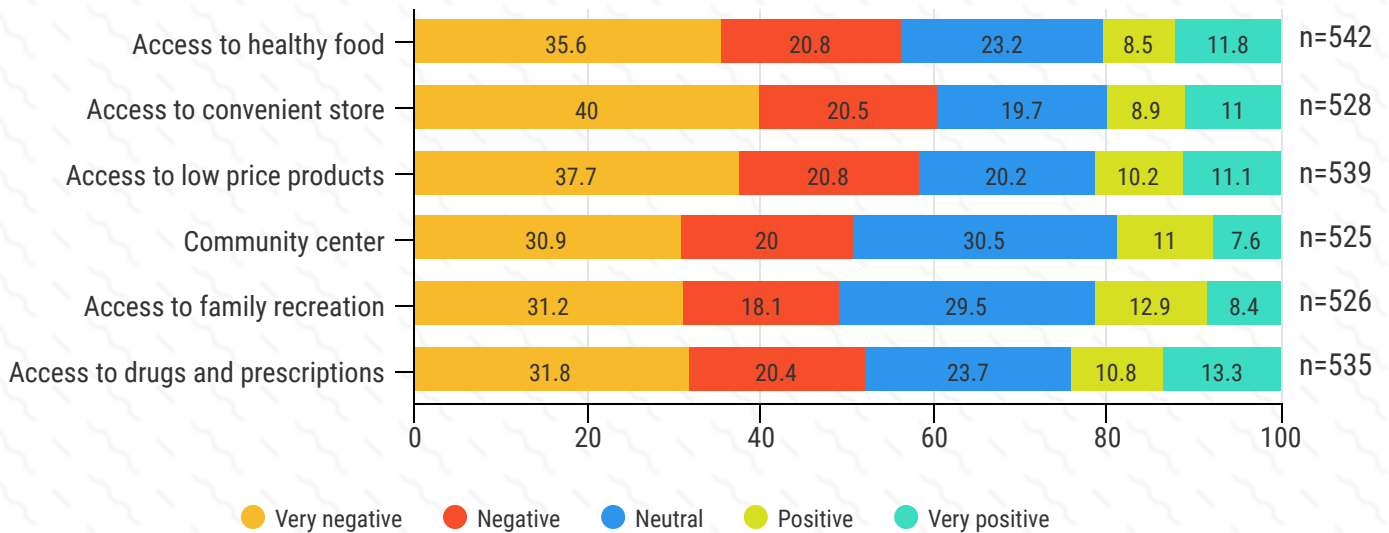
Respondents in all three groups agreed that the impact of Walmart stores closure in their own town was negative and very negative, especially for the local economy, social, environment, culture, health, and access to food. Respondents in Piedmont tend to see more negative impact compared to respondents in Caruthersville and the neighboring towns. In Piedmont, the effect of Walmart's exit on the local economy is very negative, according to respondents.



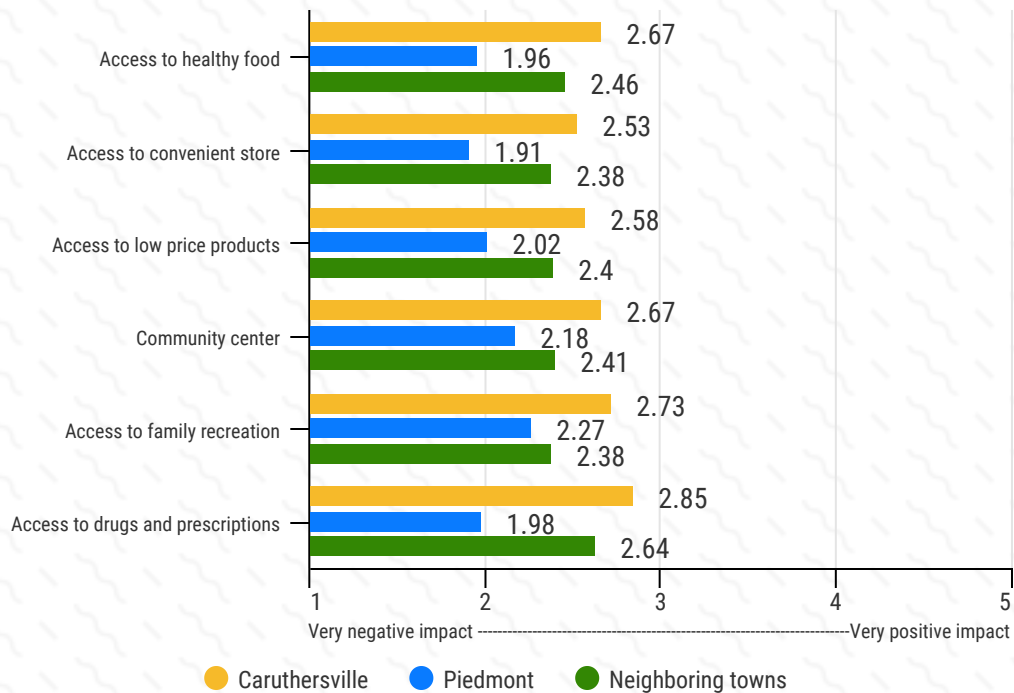
F. The Impact of Walmart Closure

(Cont.)

The impact of Walmart stores closure on households (%)



The impact of Walmart stores closure (mean)

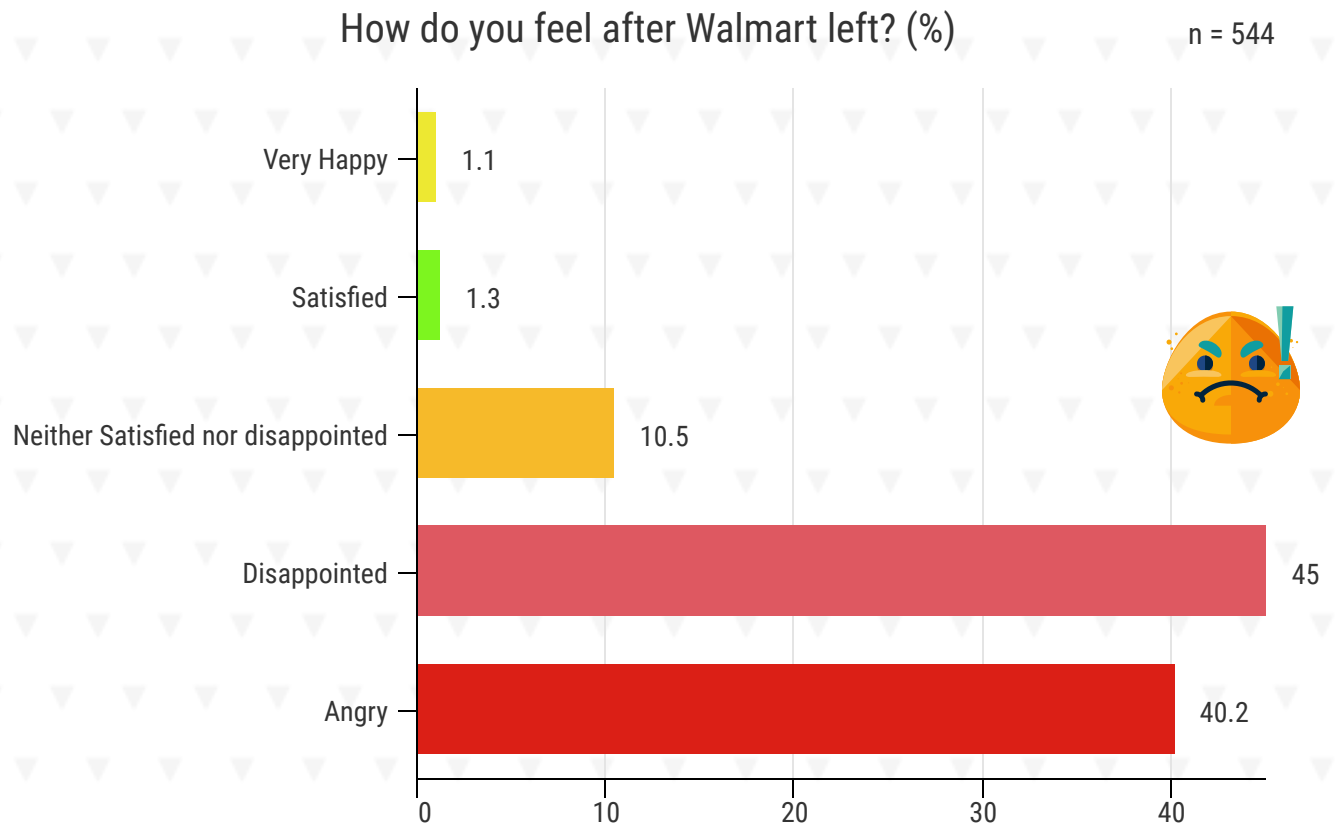


Regarding households, the impact of Walmart's closure was negative, especially for access to healthy food and low-price products. Again, respondents in Piedmont have a more negative view on the effect of Walmart's closure compared to the respondents in Caruthersville and the neighboring towns. However, some respondents said that the closure of Walmart has a positive or very positive effect on the access to healthy food and low-prices products (19%-20%) across towns.



F. The Impact of Walmart Closure

(Cont.)



The Walmart stores closed permanently in Caruthersville and Piedmont in January 20, 2017. However, people in these communities still remember this moment clearly. Though some of the residents said they don't want to talk about Walmart anymore. There are rumors about Walmart's potential come back, or other retail stores coming to replace Walmart in these areas. In general, people had their own memories about Walmart that had served in these communities since 1977 (Caruthersville) and 1987 (Piedmont). Before the store closed, some of their family or relatives worked there, and now they are working somewhere else or still unemployed. Some residents shared memories about their access to prescription drugs, school supplies, and how they always go to Walmart store to meet their friends while shopping. Now, all those experiences are gone, and Walmart just left an empty building in these towns which became terrible reminder for the community members. That's why the majority of respondents said they were disappointed and angry (95.2%).



G. Household Food Insecurity

Questions/statements used to assess the food security of households:

- 14A. We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.
- 14B. The food that we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.
- 14C. We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
- 14D. We relied on only few kinds of low-food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food
- 14E. We couldn't feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn't afford that
- 14F. The children were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food

In the last 12 months...

- 15. Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food?
- 16. Were you ever hungry, but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
- 17. Did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?
- 19. Did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?
- 20. (if yes to question 19) how often did this happen?

In the last 12 months...

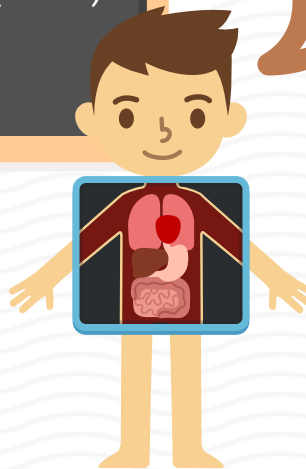
- 22. Did you ever cut the size of any of the children's meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
- 23. Were the children ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?
- 24. Did any of the children ever skip a meal because there wasn't enough money for food?
- 25. (if yes to question 24) how often did this happen?

In the last 12 months...

- 26. Did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?



"Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life."
(USDA)

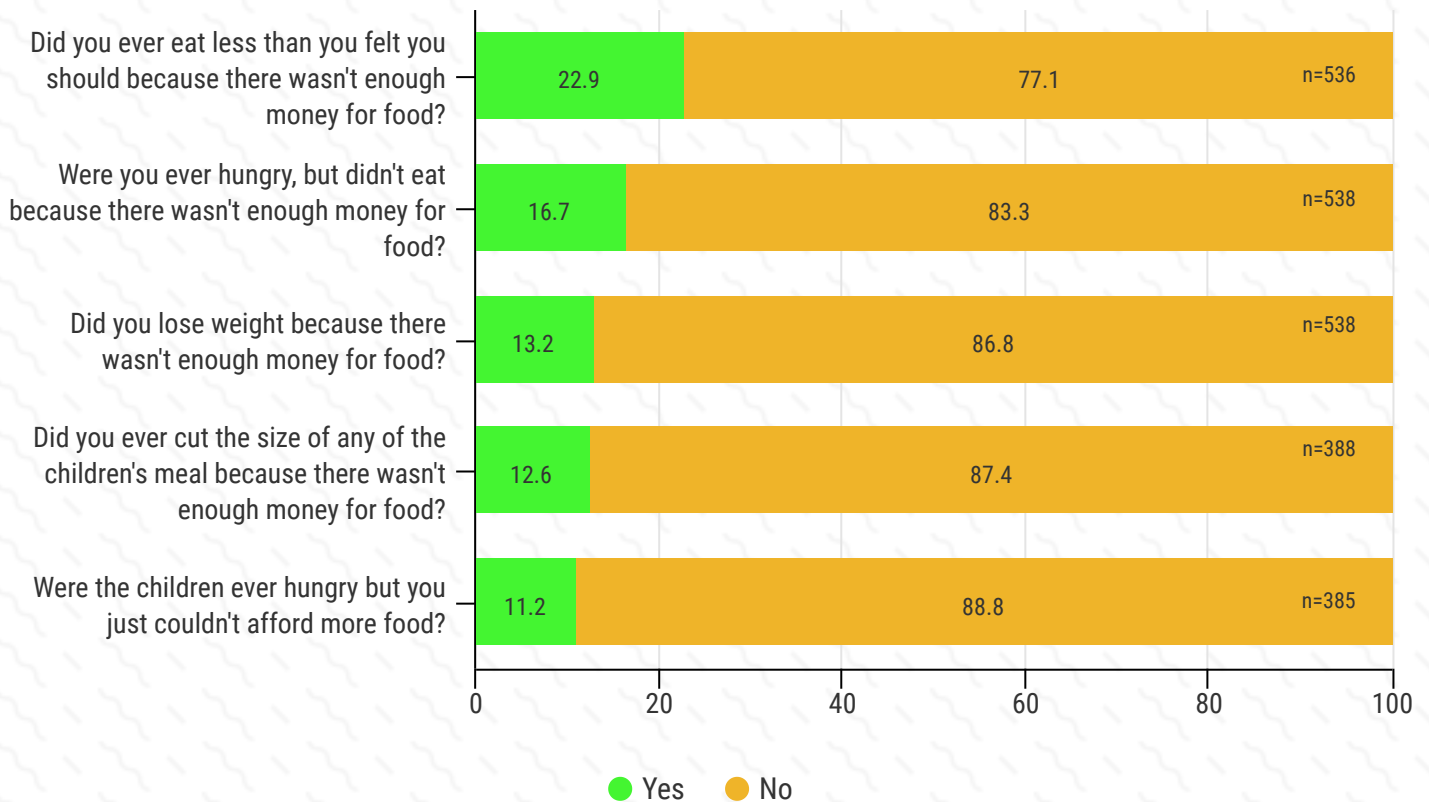
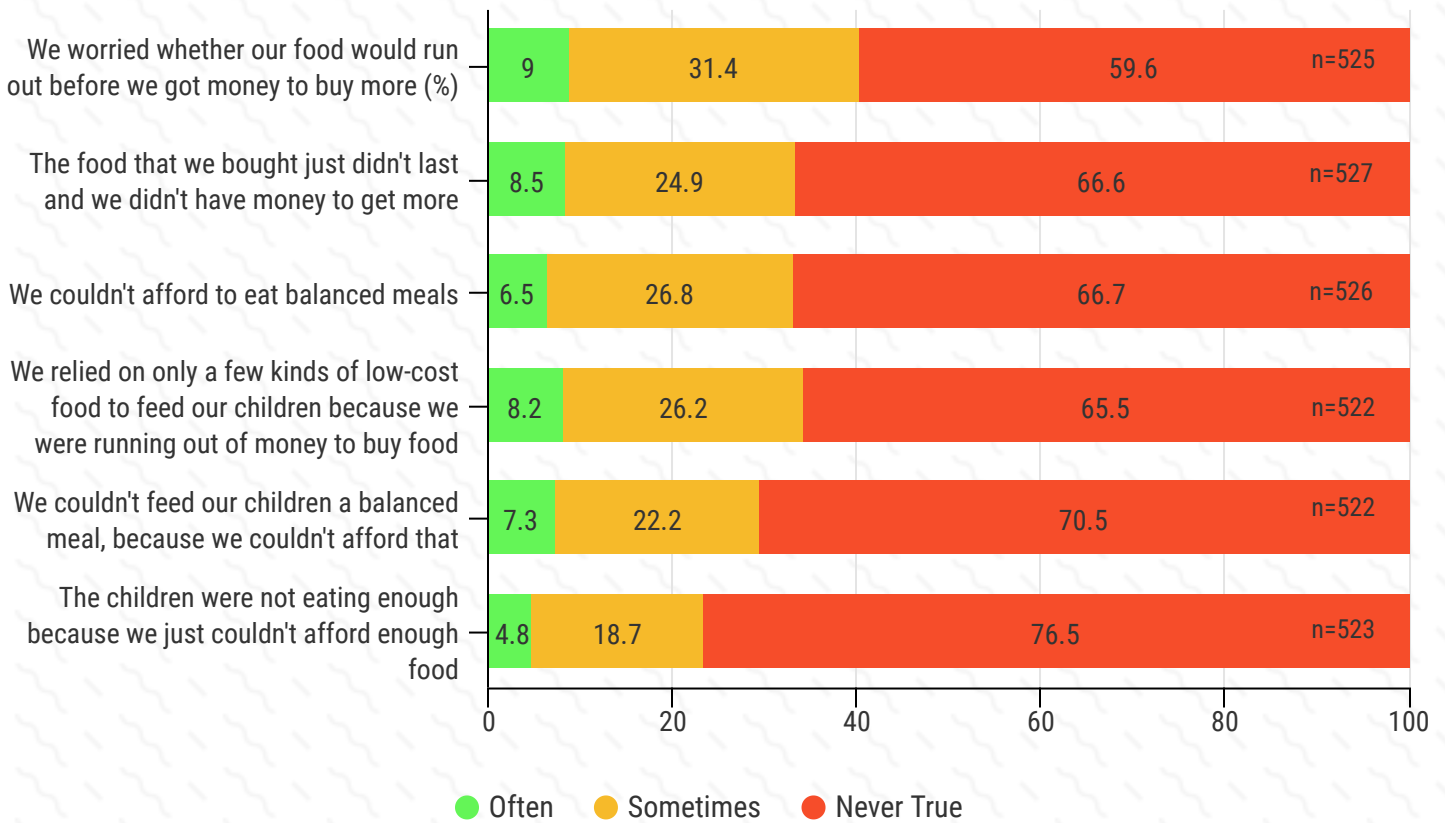


An estimated 11.1 percent of U.S. households were food insecure at least some time during the year in 2018.



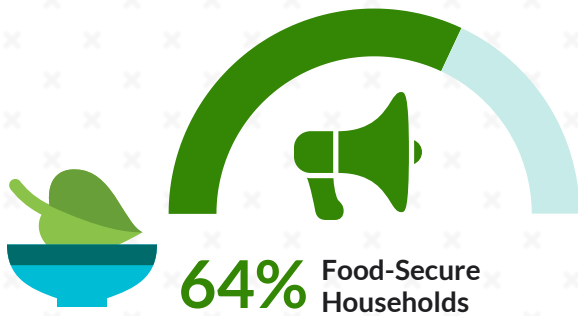
G. Household Food Insecurity (Cont.)

Household Food Insecurity Status (%)

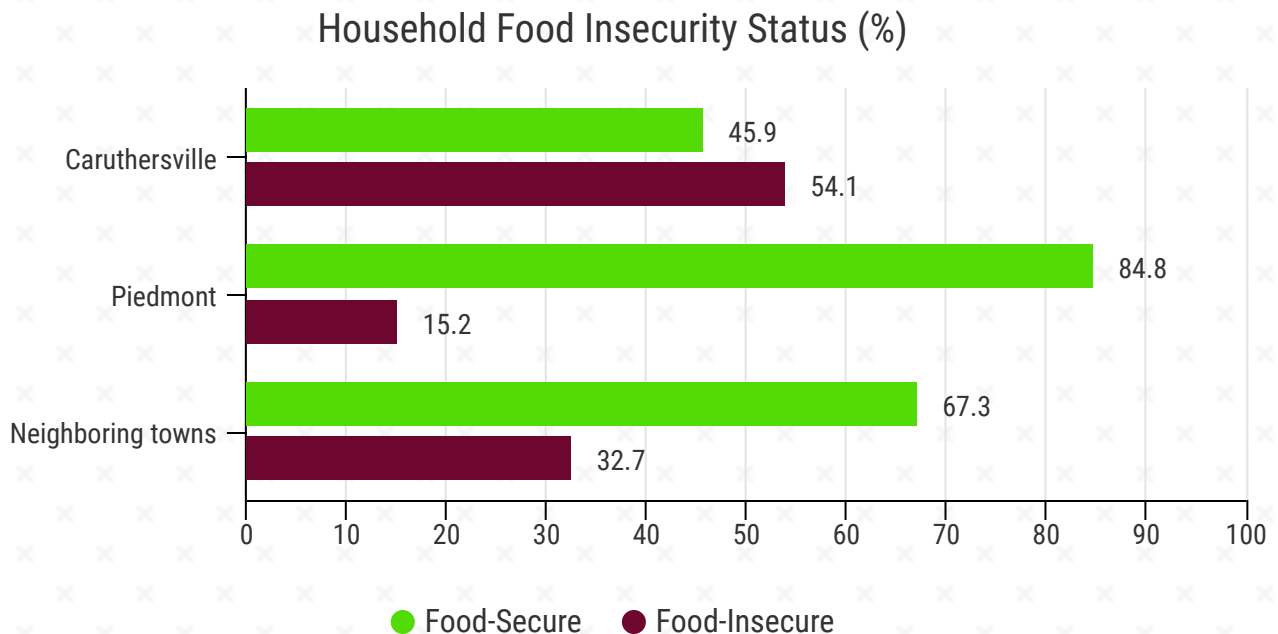




G. Household Food Insecurity (Cont.)



Household are classified as having food-insecure conditions if they are report three or more food-insecure conditions (indicated by response of "often" or "sometimes" to questions 14(A-F), "almost every month" or "some month but not every month" to questions 20 and 25, and "yes" to the other questions) - see page 19.



The data presented in this report are based on a measure of questions about conditions that characterize households when they are having problem meeting basic food needs at any time during the previous 12 months. The statistics above should be interpreted carefully since these questions is designed to measure food security status at household level, so each households member may be affected differently by the food insecurity conditions. An estimated 64% of respondents were food secure throughout the entire year which means that all household members had access to enough food for an active and healthy life at all times. The food insecurity status was significantly higher in Caruthersville (54.1%) than the other towns are more likely related to the demographic composition of which is recorded in the survey and the high number of low-income households who opted as a respondent in the survey.

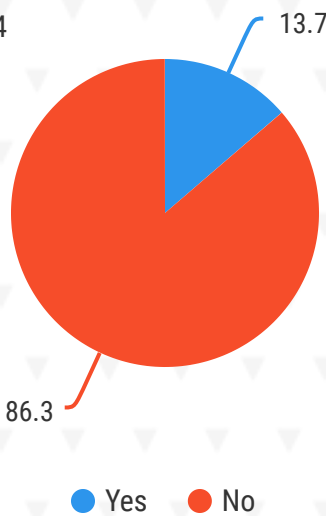


G. Household Food Insecurity (Cont.)

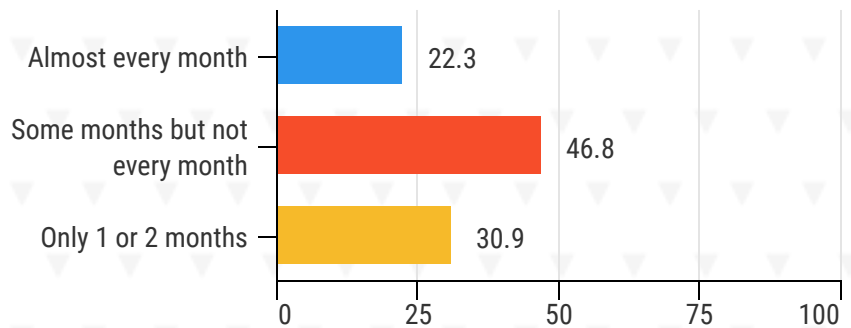


In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food? (%)

n = 94

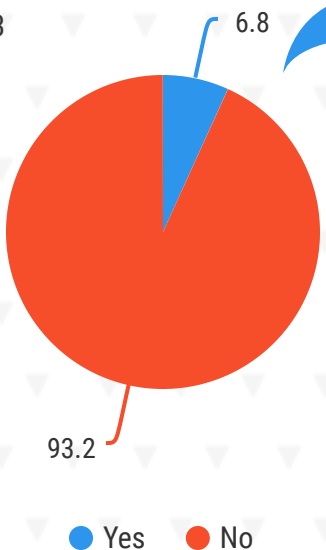


If yes, how often did this happen? (%)

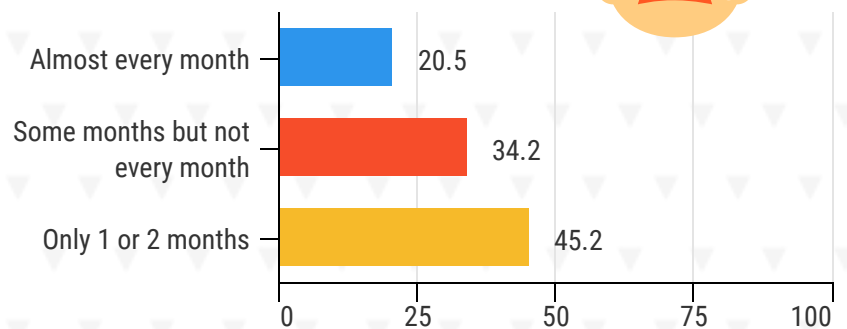


In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever skip a meal because there wasn't enough money for food? (%)

n = 73



If yes, how often did this happen? (%)





H. Government Assistance Program

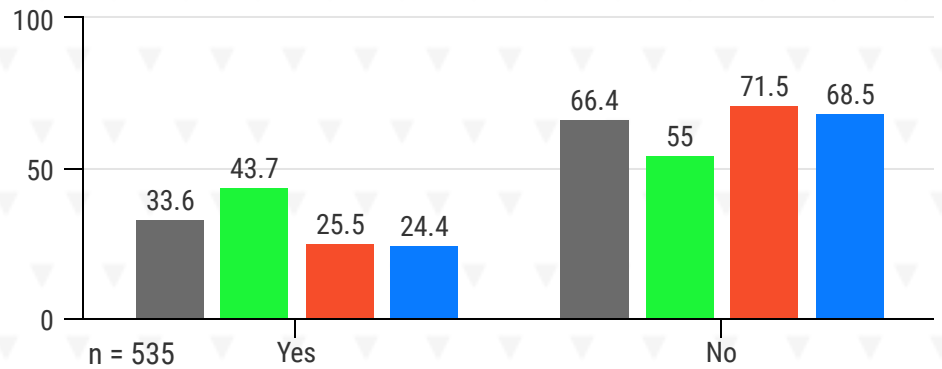
In this survey, we are asking about their participation in the government assistance programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP, National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

All these programs are helping low-income families get better access to healthy food and nutrition. In general, SNAP is the most common program in these communities.

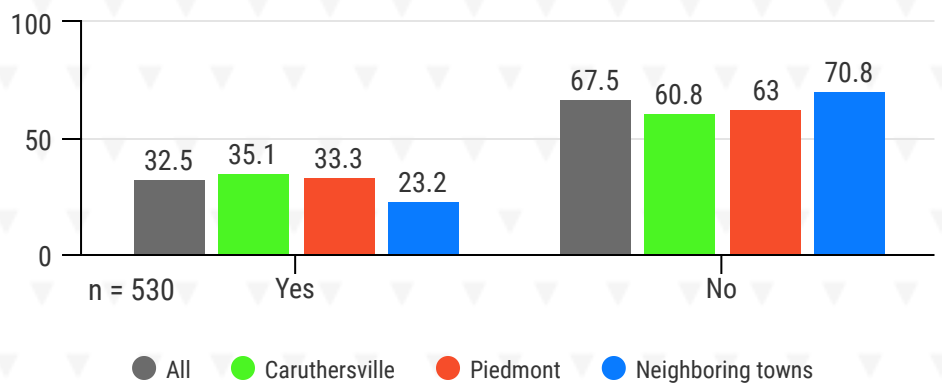
Caruthersville has the highest participation in SNAP (43.7%) compared to Piedmont (25.5%) and Neighboring towns (24.4%). The number of NSLP's participation depends on the number of children they have in the school. The WIC program's involvement depends on the number of children or infants in the household.



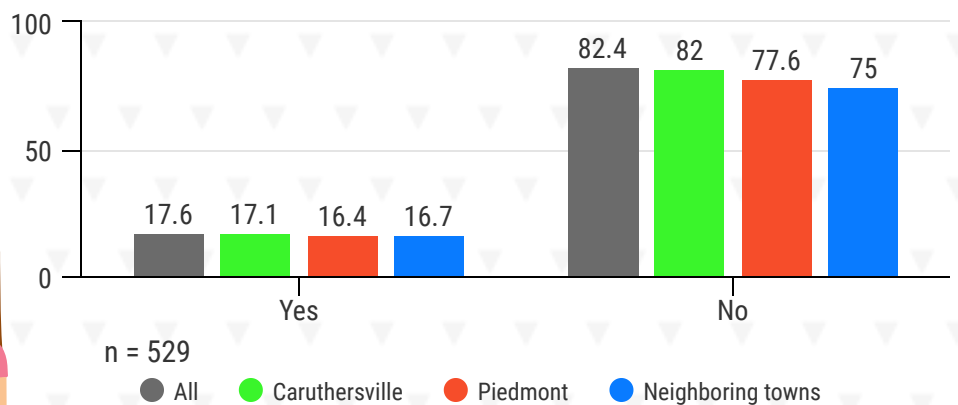
Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/SNAP (%)



Participation in the National School Lunch Program/NSLP (%)



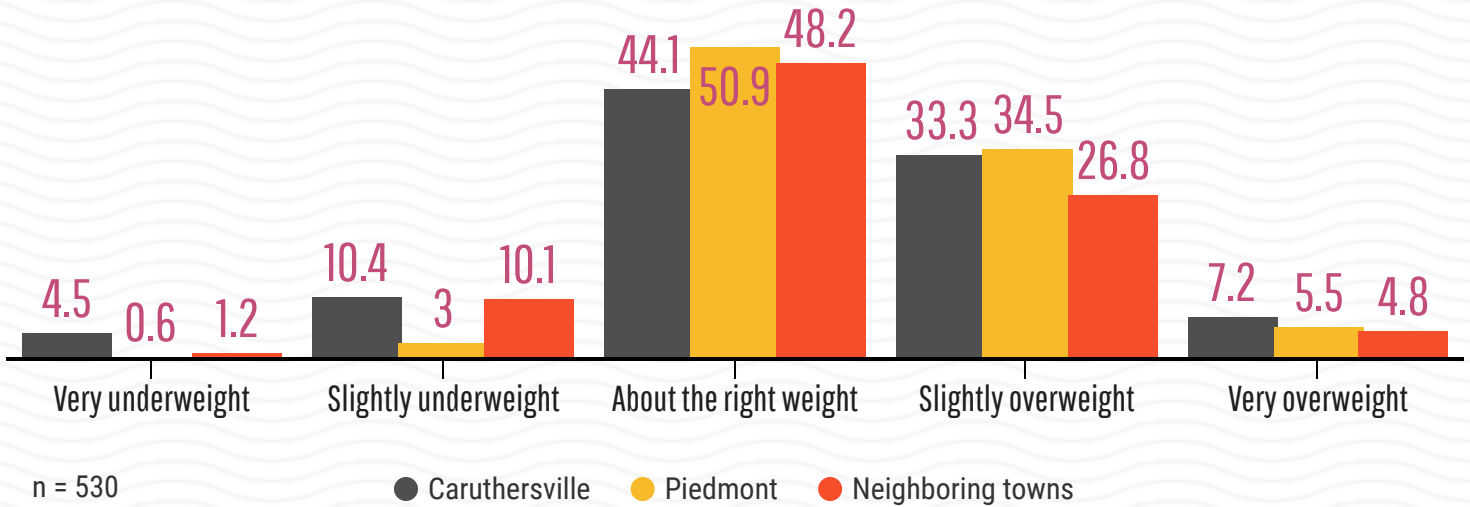
Participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children/WIC (%)



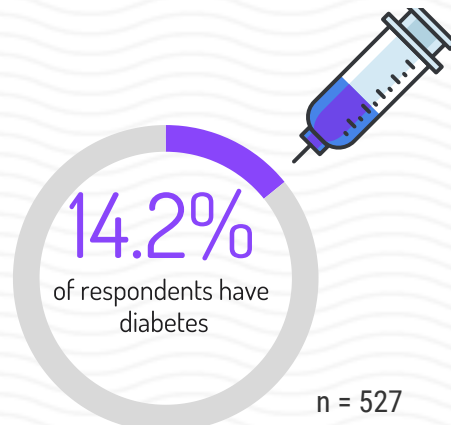
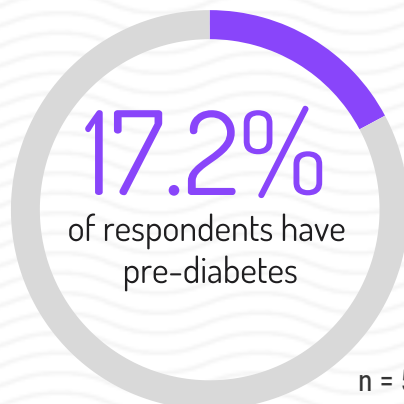
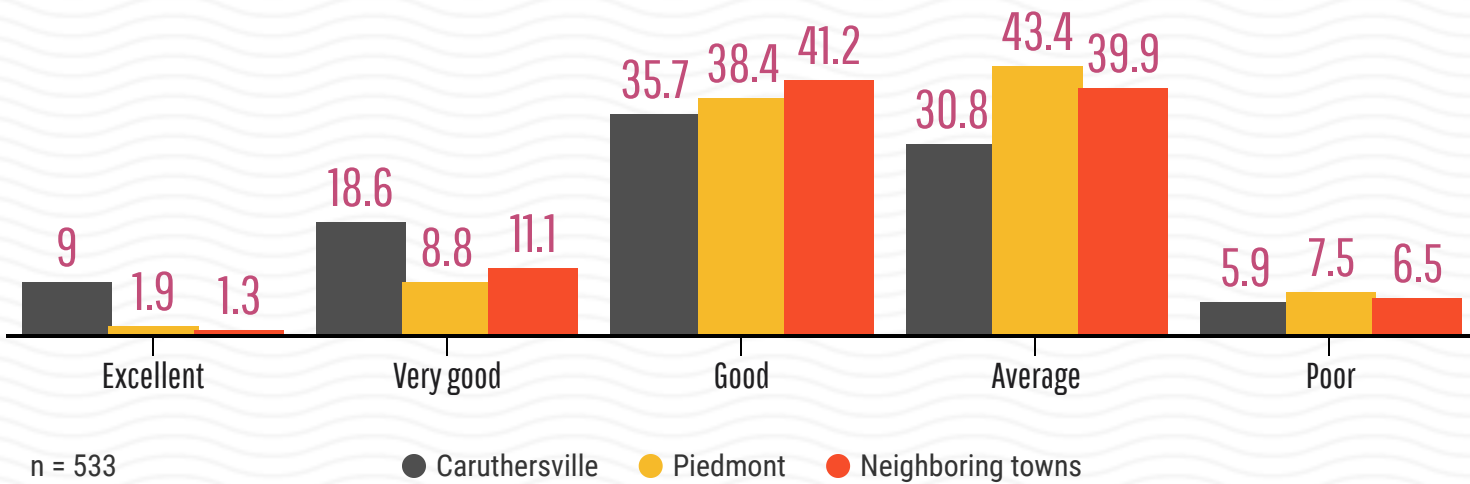


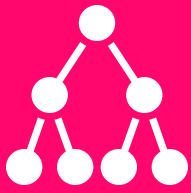
I. Self-Rated Health Status

Weight (%)



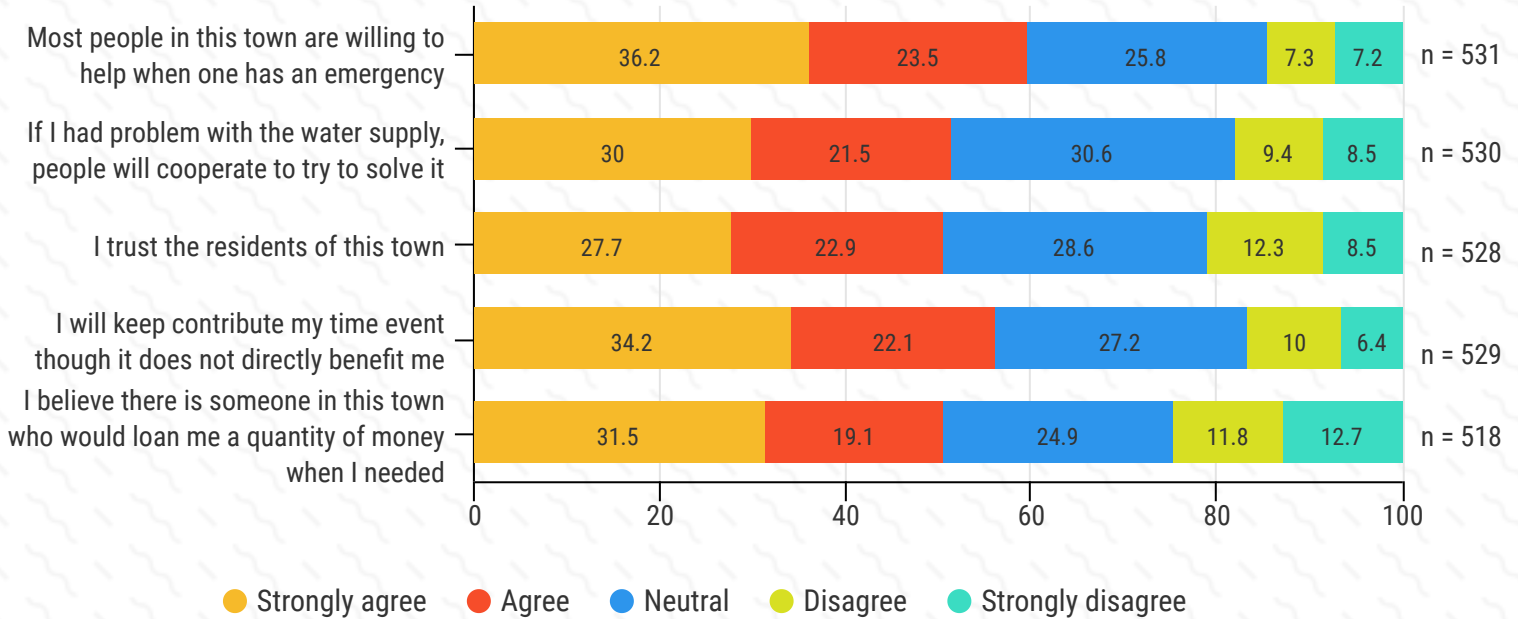
General Health (%)



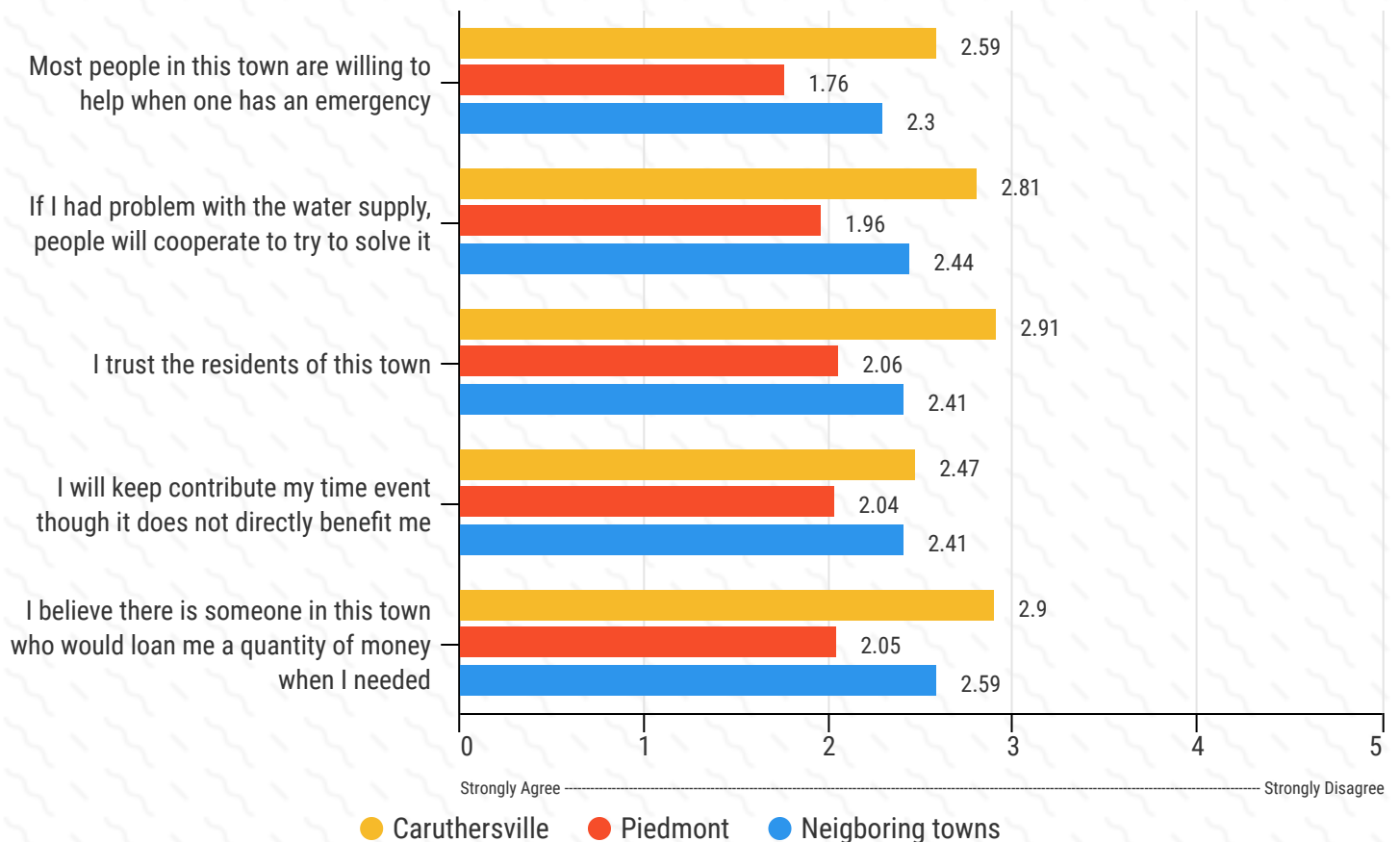


J. Social Support & Network

Strength of the social support and network in the community (%)



Strength of the social support and network in the community (mean)





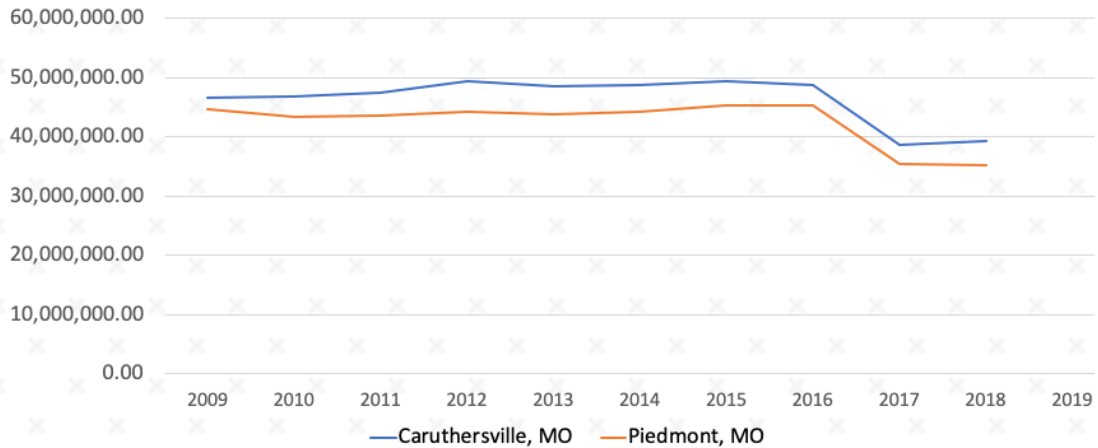
K. Additional Comments

- Number of qualitative responses: 94 (16.9%)
- Positive comments about Walmart = 30 (31.91 %)
- Negative comments about Walmart store closure = 34 (36.17 %)
- Neutral comments about Walmart store closure = 19 (20.21%)
- Positive comments about the Survey = 1 (1.06%)
- Negative comments about the survey = 8 (8.51%)



Many respondents wanted Walmart to return back to their town. They realized that Walmart's closure made the local economy declined, prices increased, and it cost more to travel to other Walmart stores. They mentioned the importance of job opportunities if Walmart comes back to the community. Respondents frequently said how convenient Walmart was compared to the other local grocery stores and Dollar General. Not only the convenience but also the low price and variety of products increased value of Walmart. Walmart was a significant economic opportunity and great experience for these communities, and if Walmart returns back, they said, it would make the community great again.

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TAXABLE SALES (SALES TAX ONLY)
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In contrast, some respondents have more negative comments towards Walmart store closure in their community. It's because the store took away jobs and opportunities for so many people. A respondent said they changed their opinion drastically and did not believe that Walmart is the same company that Sam Walton built, which they think should support small-towns values and communities. Some comments mentioned the relationship between Walmart and its products from China, and they didn't like Walmart because of this dependency on made-in-China availability and not made-in-America. Walmart leaving also affected other businesses in town, making life harder – especially for the elderly and low-income families – and again, they believe if Sam Walton was still alive, this (the closure) would never happen. Some people are even angry to this day, and they said there is nothing here anymore, and it is hard to live and survive in these towns.

Some respondents came up with more neutral and optimistic views. For example, they think their city needs something more accessible like Walmart, where they provide groceries and household items near them. They hope that the city could find something else to replace the ex-Walmart store building and create some jobs. Respondents said Dollar General should expand and increase offerings since there is no more extended competition with Walmart. A respondent noted that although her family was not affected by the closure of Walmart, this giant retailer should pay more attention to the customers in small towns. In short, we only have one positive comment regarding the survey and receive about eight negative comments on the survey, such as *too long, too much personal info, too many questions, not all the questions were about Walmart, and the study is not needed for this town.*



K. Additional Comments (cont.)

"I do still shop at Walmart, but less frequently. I used to have a real positive opinion of them but have changed that opinion drastically. I do not believe they are the same company that Sam Walton built. I've watched how they moved into small towns causing mom & pop stores closed and now are pulling out and hurting those towns again. All in the name of profits. I believe in our nations free market system and the rights of any person or company to compete and make their own business decisions. But, I don't like big companies moving in and out at small communities so drastically impacting their economy so negatively. For this reason, I am no longer loyal Walmart shopper."

_____ A resident of Piedmont, 54-years-old

"As a family of 7, my husband and I ranch cattle. We are not on government assistance. To get to a Walmart its about a 100 miles round trip. The local grocery store's prices are too high. For a box of cereal, we have to pay nearly \$8.00. I have done the math, its 50% higher to shop here. Once a week I drive to Poplar Bluff or Fredericktown specifically to go to Walmart to get groceries! Before Walmart left it was nearly in walking distance. Walmart leaving takes away jobs and opportunities for so many. It was part of the reason we picked to live in Piedmont instead of another surrounding town. I have plenty of receipts to compare product cost. Walmart leaving hurts hard working families that actually pay for the food we put on the table!"

_____ A resident of Piedmont, 36 years-old

"When Walmart closed it caused our community a lot stress and unwanted hardship! The elderly were forced to pay higher. Price for food and medicine. Things just seemed more difficult. There were no more quick trips to Walmart to grab forgotten items. Trips to Walmart become more planned events. The closure of our Walmart wasn't good for our community."

_____ A resident of Caruthersville, 54-years-old

"Just being two of us, fairly healthy. We can travel to another Walmart 60 miles round trip. But a lot of families and seniors on limited income cannot and the local stores do not carry the fresh produce, vegetables, or meats and they have raised their prices on most everything and very limited selection and choices. Walmart should pay closer attention to the customers in small towns."

_____ A resident of Patterson, 58 years-old

"The effect of lost job due to Walmart closing has been devastating! A positive of Walmart closing is people are forced to shop more local small business. However, their prices can be higher. The local grocery store's price have increased since Walmart closing, making affording healthy food hard!"

_____ A resident of Caruthersville, 38-years-old



Rural Community Survey 2020