The 2025

Our State, Our Lives

Alabama Wellbeing Survey

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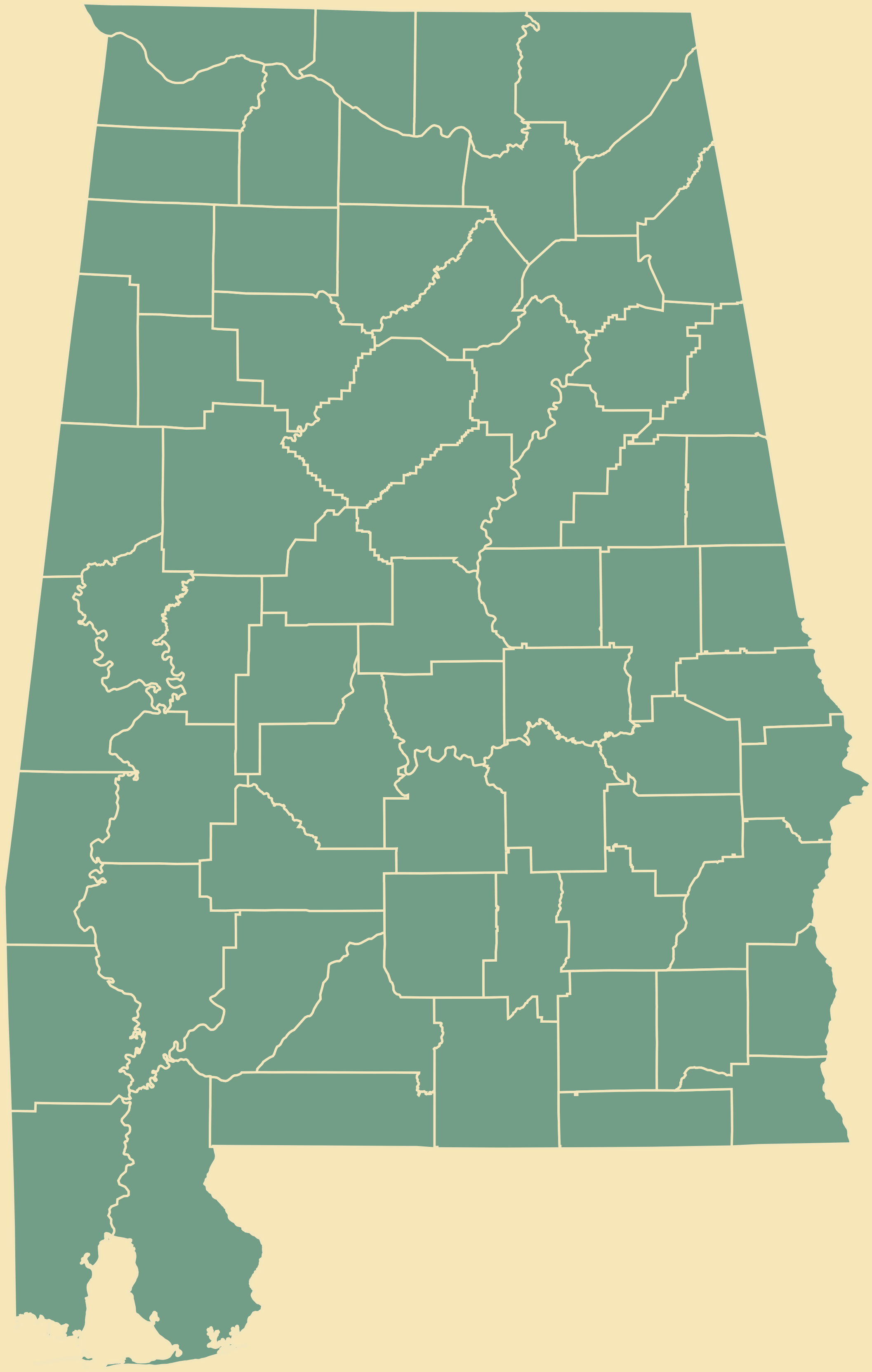

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Executive Summary

The Our State, Our Lives: Alabama Wellbeing Survey was developed to help better understand the experiences and challenges of Alabamians, and specifically, how those experiences and challenges may differ across geographic locations.[1] The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of how conditions and issues differ for rural, suburban, and urban dwellers. The survey included questions about quality of life, community attachment, migration intentions, health, care giving, income, and workforce participation. The survey was conducted online as a best-quotas sample, meaning the sampling frame was designed to reflect Alabama's demographics across age, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, gender, and geographic location, as measured by respondents' self-identification of their community as rural, urban, or suburban.[2] A total of 1,947 Alabamians participated in the survey in 2025.

The survey revealed that most respondents are satisfied with their communities, with suburban residents more satisfied than those in urban or rural areas. More than 40% of middle-aged adults reported struggling with bills at least every other month, compared with only 35% of younger adults and 22% of older adults. Rural households with at least one full-time working adult report more financial strain in keeping up with bills than their suburban and urban peers. Caregiving—whether it involves elder care or childcare—affects roughly one in three respondents' ability to work, with elder care having a particularly negative impact on self-reported wellbeing. Insofar as the desire to move somewhere else, Alabama rural residents express the greatest desire to stay in their communities, with urban dwellers accounting for the largest percentage of Alabamians who desire to move to a suburban or rural area but feel "stuck." The survey found that three out of every ten respondents either work from home or have a hybrid work location job.

The goal of the data presented in the following pages is to provide citizens, community decision-makers, elected officials, businesses, and researchers with helpful information about their communities and the perspectives of Alabamians.

[1] This work is supported by the Auburn University Rural Partnership Institute, project award no. 707500-38914, from the US Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or US government determination or policy.

[2] Respondents identified their locations using definitions provided in the survey (e.g., urban = city or metropolitan area; suburban = outskirts economically tied to an urban area; rural = open or sparsely populated areas).

Context and Overview

Alabama's total population has grown by 13% over the last two decades; however, economic and population growth have not occurred evenly across the state. Most urban counties in Alabama have experienced population growth, whereas rural counties have seen a decline in population.[3] Rural and urban counties also diverge on unemployment rates, with urban counties experiencing lower unemployment over the last two decades.[4] While some national surveys assess quality of life and workforce development, few existing surveys have examined these factors and investigated how rural, urban, and suburban residents differ in their perspectives or agree on key issues. Hence, the purpose of this survey was to explore how Alabamians living in these different settings view common challenges and issues related to the economy, workforce, caregiving, health, and community resources.

This booklet summarizes the 2025 Our State, Our Lives: Alabama Wellbeing Survey data. It is divided into the following sections: quality of life and community satisfaction, economics and financial wellbeing, caregiving, and migration and mobility. An appendix, which provides additional information about the survey and participant demographics, is also included at the end of this publication. More information about the survey and future iterations of it can be found at alwellbeingsurvey.auburn.edu.

Quality of Life and Community Satisfaction

Most respondents feel positive about the communities they live in. Statewide, nearly 7 in 10 respondents report being satisfied with their community, with only about 1 in 10 expressing dissatisfaction. Community satisfaction differs slightly across community contexts. Suburban residents exhibit the highest satisfaction (74.7%), while urban residents report lower satisfaction (66.4%) and higher dissatisfaction (14.6%) than their rural and suburban counterparts (figure 1).

[3] https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/farm-management/alabama-in-focus-population-trends-snapshot-2005-2024/

[4] https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/farm-management/alabama-in-focus-labor-trends-snapshot-2002-2024/

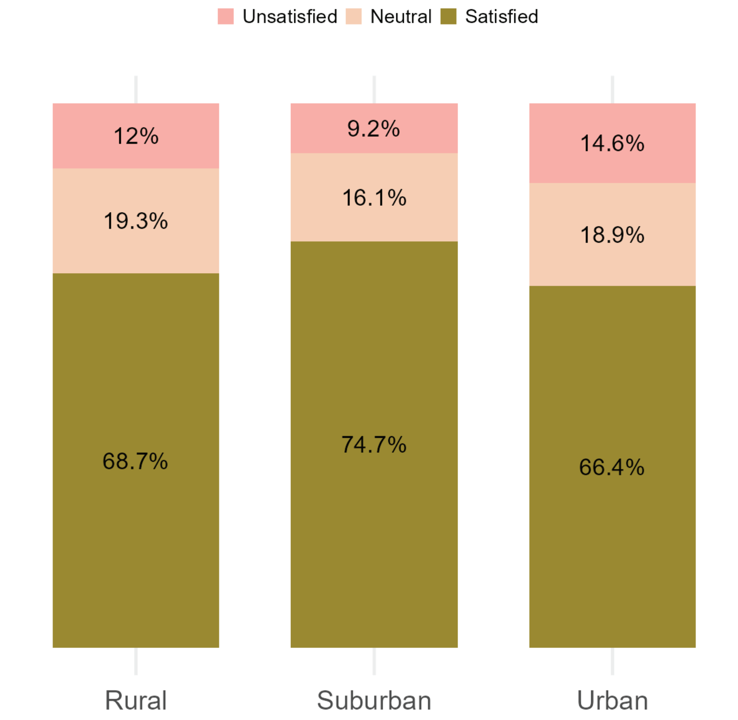

Figure 1. Overall community satisfaction by community context

Respondents report relatively high satisfaction with key community services, including easy access to medical care and internet availability. About 70% are satisfied with internet availability, with only a small share reporting dissatisfaction. Satisfaction with easy access to medical care is similarly high, though slightly lower: roughly two-thirds of respondents express satisfaction, and about one in five report neutral views (figure 2).

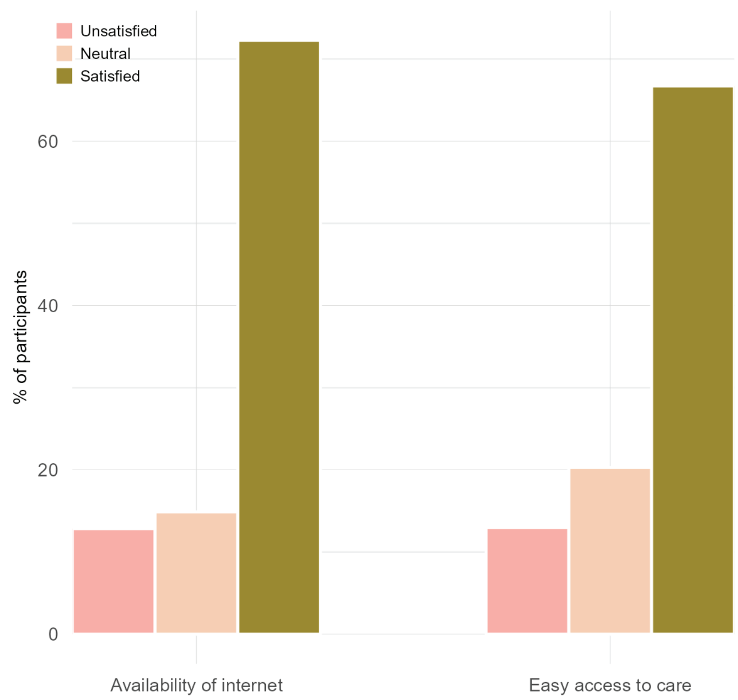

Figure 2. Overall satisfaction with community medical care services

Satisfaction with key community services varies across urban, suburban, and rural areas, with rural residents showing lower levels of satisfaction across indicators. Easy access to medical care receives the highest satisfaction in suburban communities (74%), followed by urban (66%) and rural areas (64%). Regarding internet availability, satisfaction is highest in suburban areas (79%), followed by urban (77%) and rural communities (68%). Rural residents also report higher levels of dissatisfaction (17%) relative to suburban (8%) and urban (10%) residents. Rural residents are more likely to report neutral views (23%) on medical care access and (17%) on the availability of internet, compared with urban and suburban respondents (figure 3).

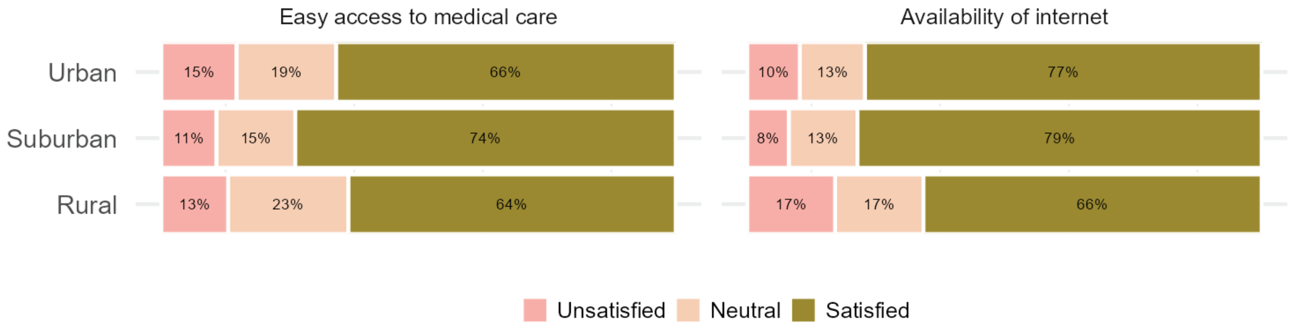

Figure 3. Satisfaction with community services by community context

Respondents also rated their levels of satisfaction across a range of indicators for activities and social infrastructure (figure 4). They express the highest satisfaction with outdoor recreation, where nearly two-thirds report positive experiences. Satisfaction with the availability of financial services is also relatively high.

In contrast, residents express much lower satisfaction with employment opportunities, activities for senior citizens, arts and cultural activities, and access to affordable housing. Less than half of respondents report satisfaction in these areas, and dissatisfaction is notably higher compared to other community features. Activities for families fall in the middle, with roughly half of respondents satisfied and many others neutral.

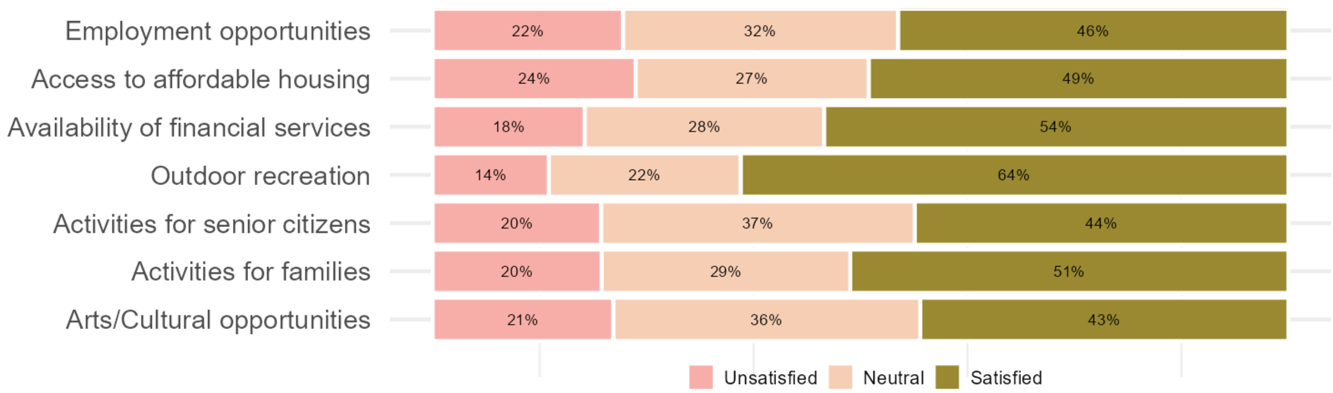

Figure 4. Satisfaction with activities and social infrastructure

The data shows differences in satisfaction with activities and social infrastructure across community contexts (figure 5). Rural respondents not only report the lowest level of satisfaction but are also more likely to express mixed or negative views across all indicators. Urban residents consistently report the highest satisfaction across most indicators. Among the indicators, cultural opportunities show lower levels of satisfaction in both rural and suburban contexts, while urban residents are less satisfied with activities for senior citizens.

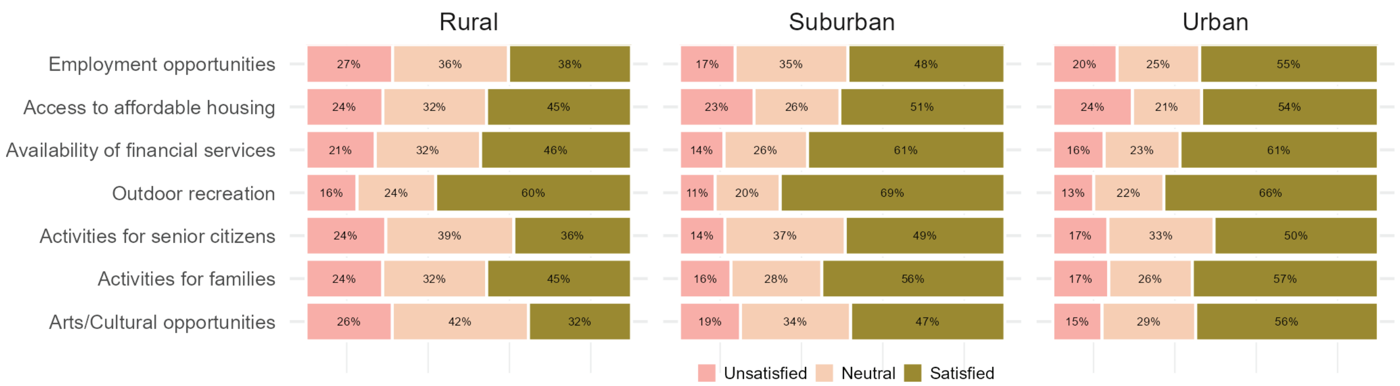

Figure 5. Satisfaction with activities and social infrastructure by community contexts

Across several indicators of personal and family wellbeing, most respondents report positive experiences (figure 6). Satisfaction is especially high among those with a spouse or partner and/or children: more than 80% say they are satisfied with these relationships. Nearly two-thirds also report having good relationships with their neighbors.

However, figure 6 indicates ongoing concerns about work–life balance and financial flexibility. Respondents express more dissatisfaction with their time off from work and their disposable household income. Fewer than half are satisfied with the amount of time they have away from their jobs, and satisfaction with their disposable income is even lower.

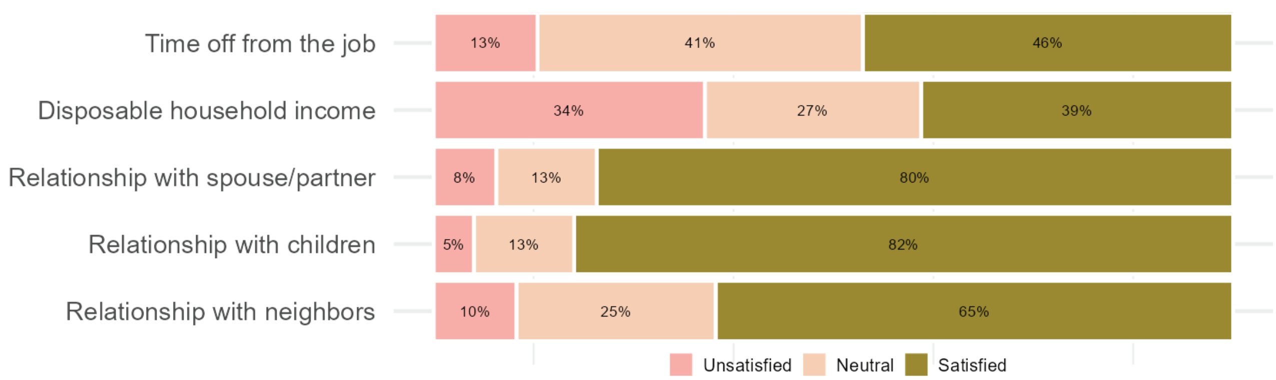

Figure 6. Levels of satisfaction with personal and family wellbeing indicators

Respondents were asked to reflect on how their quality of life has changed over the past 5 years and how they expect it to change in the next 5 years. While perceptions are mixed looking backward, expectations are more optimistic for the next 5 years (figure 7). About one-quarter of residents feel their quality of life has worsened, while slightly more report no change in the past 5 years. However, a larger share, around 45%, believe their quality of life has improved over the past 5 years. Looking ahead, only a small portion anticipate their quality of life getting worse, while roughly one-quarter expect no change. A large majority, more than 60%, feel hopeful about their future wellbeing.

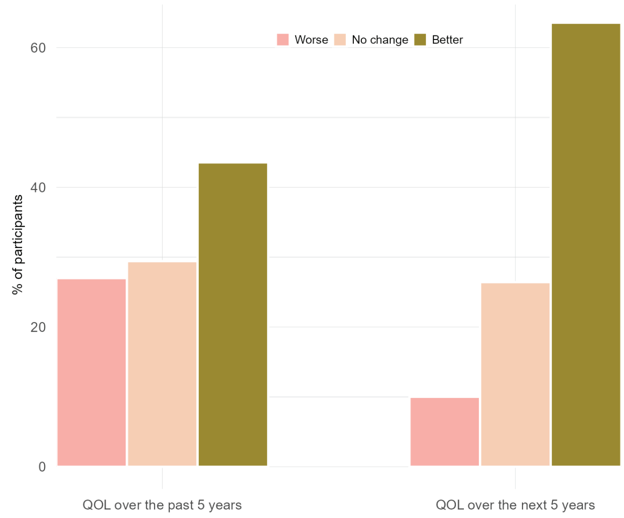

Figure 7. Perceived changes in quality of life over time

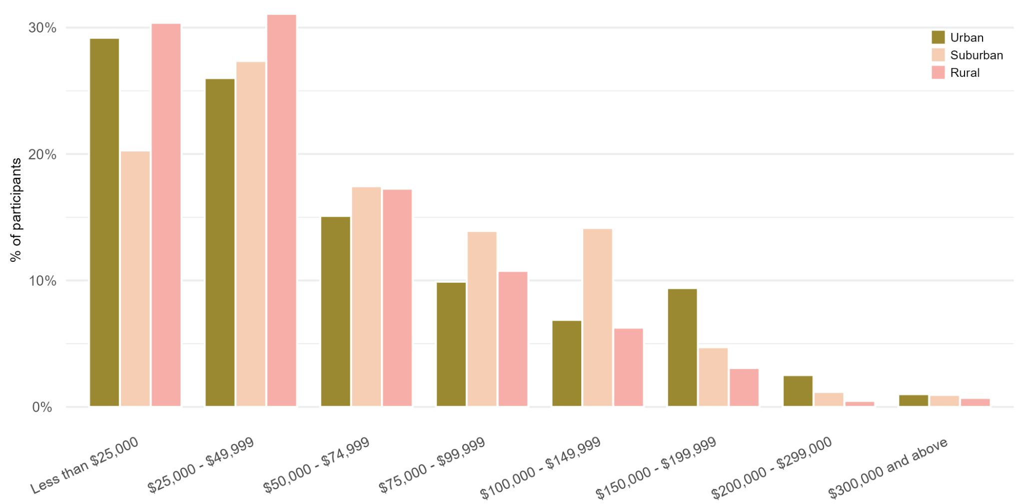

Figure 8. Total of household income in 2023 by community

Economic and Financial Wellbeing

Annual income levels were reported by residents, based on their location in rural, suburban, and urban areas (figure 8). Within the lowest two income categories, rural residents had the highest proportion. Middle-income categories ($50,000 to $149,999) were most commonly located in suburban areas. The highest-income respondents tended to live in urban areas. Expectations for income changes were mostly optimistic, with 49.9% of respondents expecting their incomes to increase in the future.

Residents of Alabama were asked about their ability to pay their monthly bills, and responses indicated that the majority of households (64%) either never have trouble or only have trouble 1 or 2 months of the year. However, a significant percentage of households (37%) have trouble paying their bills for 6 or more months of the year (figure 9). Rural households most commonly find it difficult to pay their bills in 6 of the past 12 months (40%), followed by urban households (36%) and suburban (27%) households (figure 10).

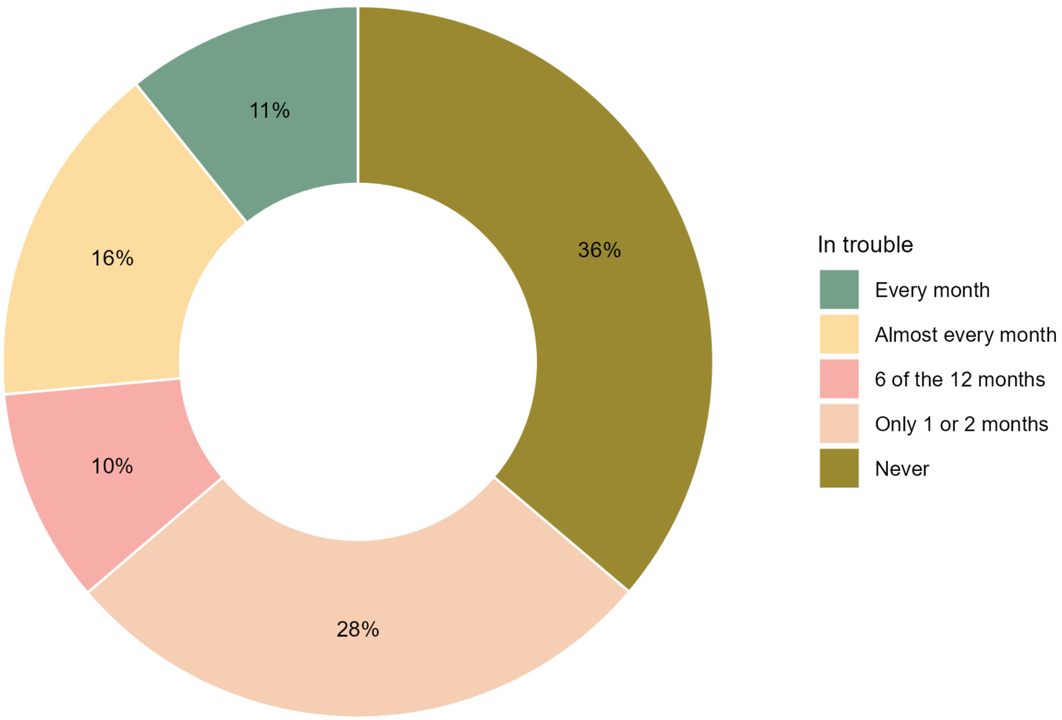

Figure 9. Trouble keeping up with household bills

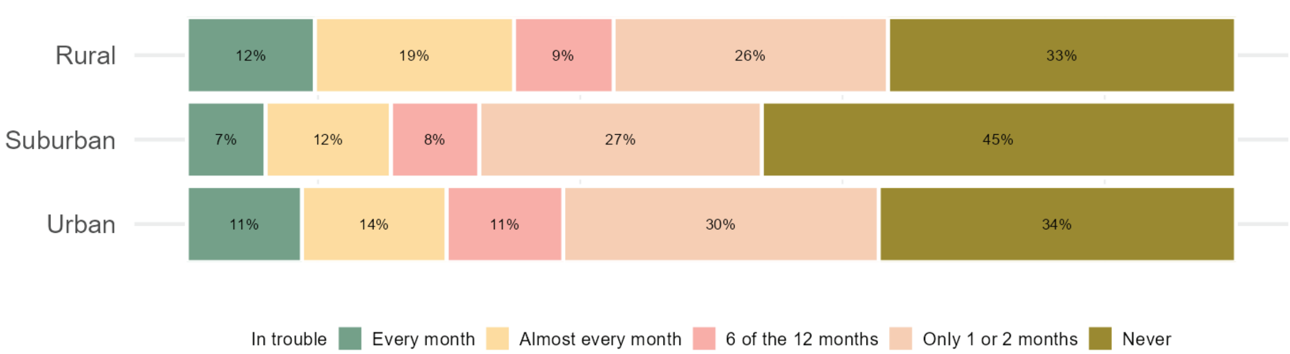

Figure 10. Trouble keeping up with household bills by community context

Another indicator of the ability to pay bills was the percentage of working households that had trouble paying bills in 6 of the last 12 months (38%) relative to the percentage of retired households (28%), as pictured in figure 11. This result reveals the challenges working households face in meeting their financial obligations.

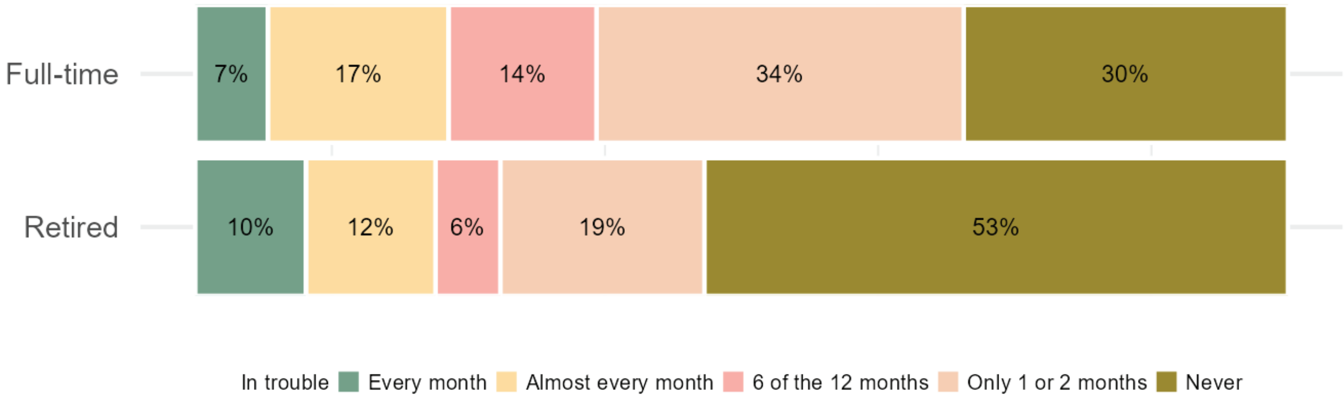

Figure 11. Trouble keeping up with household bills between full-time employees and retirees

Respondents were also asked to identify where they primarily work. Of those working full-time, 31.5% work from home or in a hybrid setting. This may be a lasting impact of the work arrangements first started during the COVID pandemic.

Caregiving

Around 54% of respondents reported providing care for children and/or elders. Of those, 35% report caring only for children, while a similar share (34%) provides care only for older adults. Nearly one-third (31%) is responsible for both children and elders (figure 12).

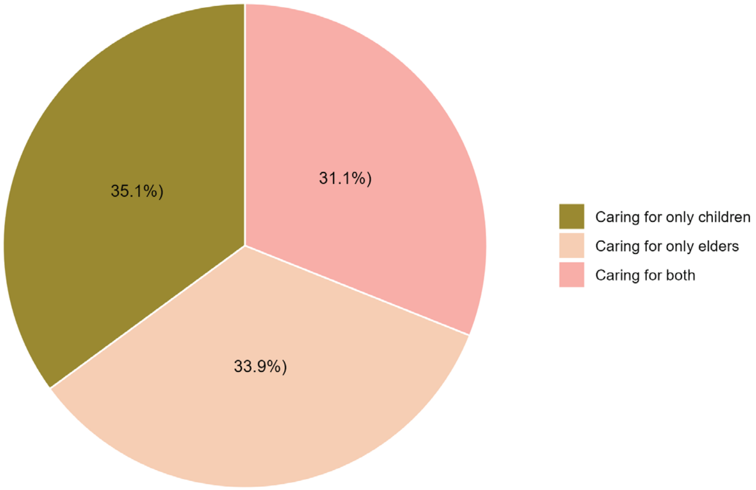

Figure 12. Caregiving responsibilities among respondents

Caregiving roles vary across the life course. Younger adults are more likely to provide childcare (39%), while middle-aged adults often balance care for either children (36%) or aging relatives (34%). Among older adults (65 years old or more), caregiving shifts primarily toward elder care (50%). Gender differences are present but nuanced: women are more likely to be primary caregivers for children, while both genders participate at similar levels in elder care, and men are slightly more represented among those caring for both generations (figure 13).

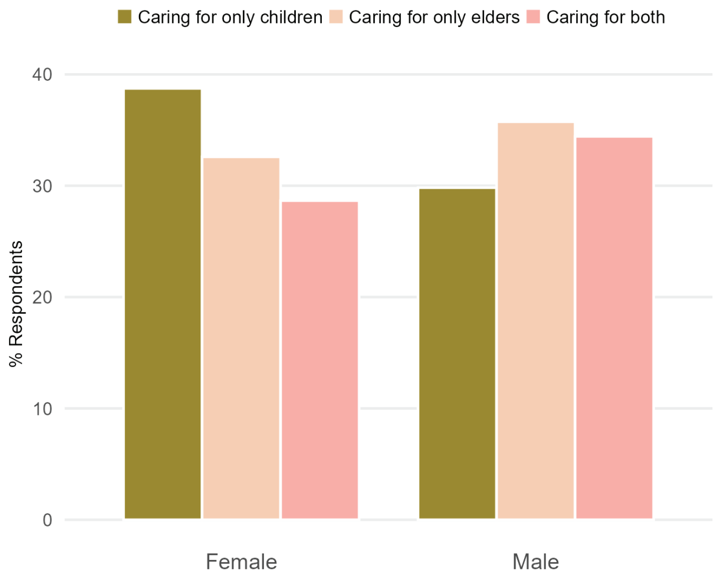

Figure 13. Caregiving responsibilities by gender

More analyses of the data also show that full-time workers make up the largest share of caregivers across all care types, representing 49.2% of those who provide childcare only, 40.3% of elder care providers, and 58% of both child and elder caregivers. About 1 in 3 respondents reports that their caregiving responsibilities have limited their ability to work. These constraints are more pronounced among those who care for both children and elders (figure 14). Most caregivers (44%) are in rural areas. Across all caregivers, around 40% report consistent financial trouble or inability to pay household bills in at least half of the past 12 months.

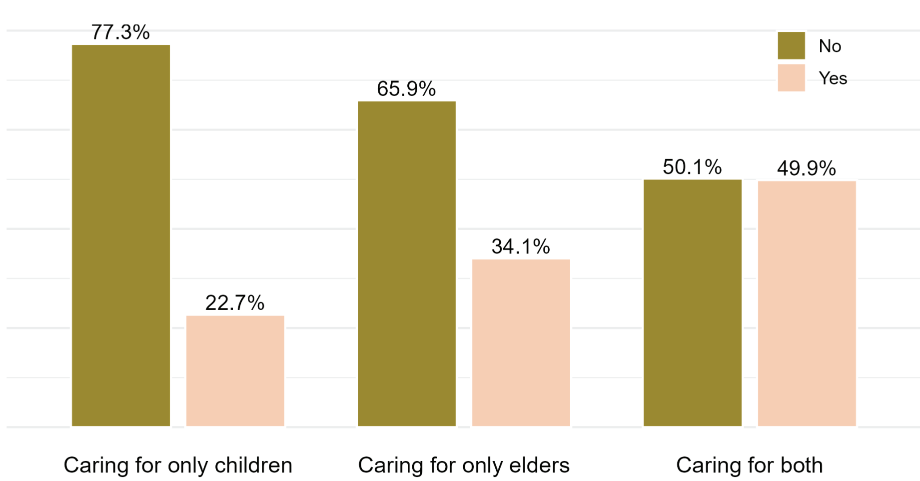

Figure 14. Caregiving responsibilities constrain ability to work

Migration and Mobility

People's intention to stay where they are currently living or move away is a strong indicator of community satisfaction. Respondents were asked whether they intend to stay in their current community, move to another community, or whether they would like to move but feel unable to do so (referred to here as being "stuck"). Among our respondents, roughly two-thirds indicated their desire to stay where they are currently living, while about one in five reports feeling "stuck." However, as shown in figure 15, the desire to stay or move varies among rural, suburban, and urban residents. Most notably, while 70% of rural and suburban residents expressed a desire to stay in their communities, only about 55% of urban residents expressed the same view. Urban residents are more likely to express a desire to move to a new community, though nearly a quarter say they are unable to do so.

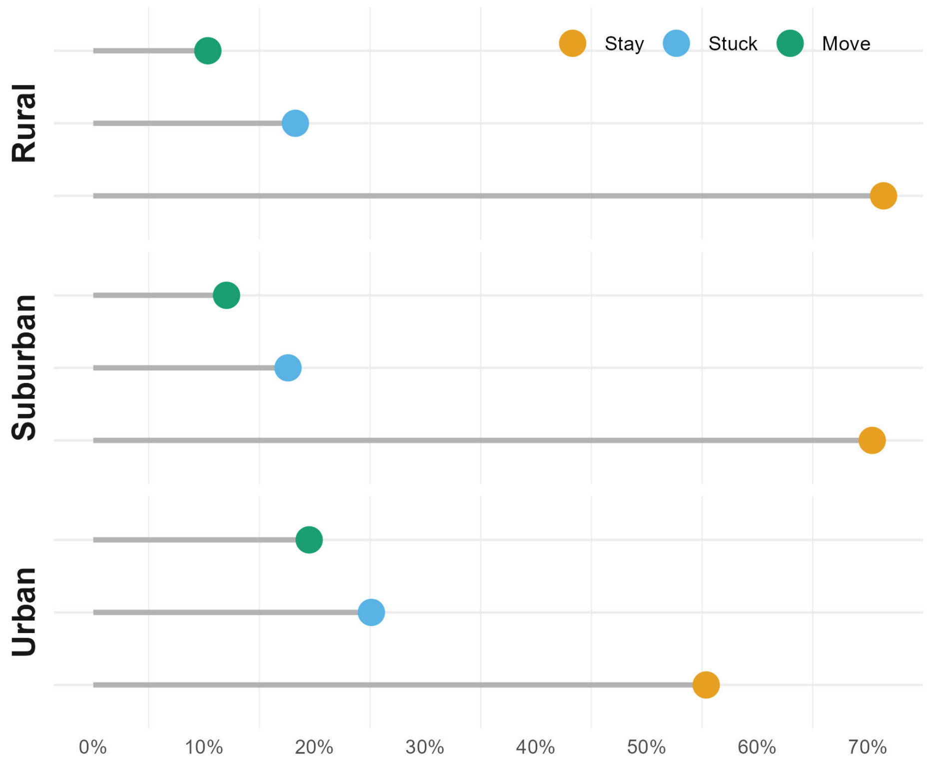

Figure 15. Intention to stay in or move from current location

Respondents who expressed a desire to move were asked to indicate where they would like to move. While 28% of respondents indicated a desire to leave the state or the country, more than two-thirds expressed a desire to stay in Alabama, whether in the same community, in the same county, or elsewhere in the state.

Why People Want to Move or Stay

Among respondents who indicated a desire to move, several reasons were cited for doing so. As seen in figure 16, 33% wish to move due to family or life changes, while 25% have issues with their current housing situation. The remaining respondents reported undesirable characteristics in their communities or a lack of community amenities. Surprisingly, respondents did not express a desire to move for economic reasons.

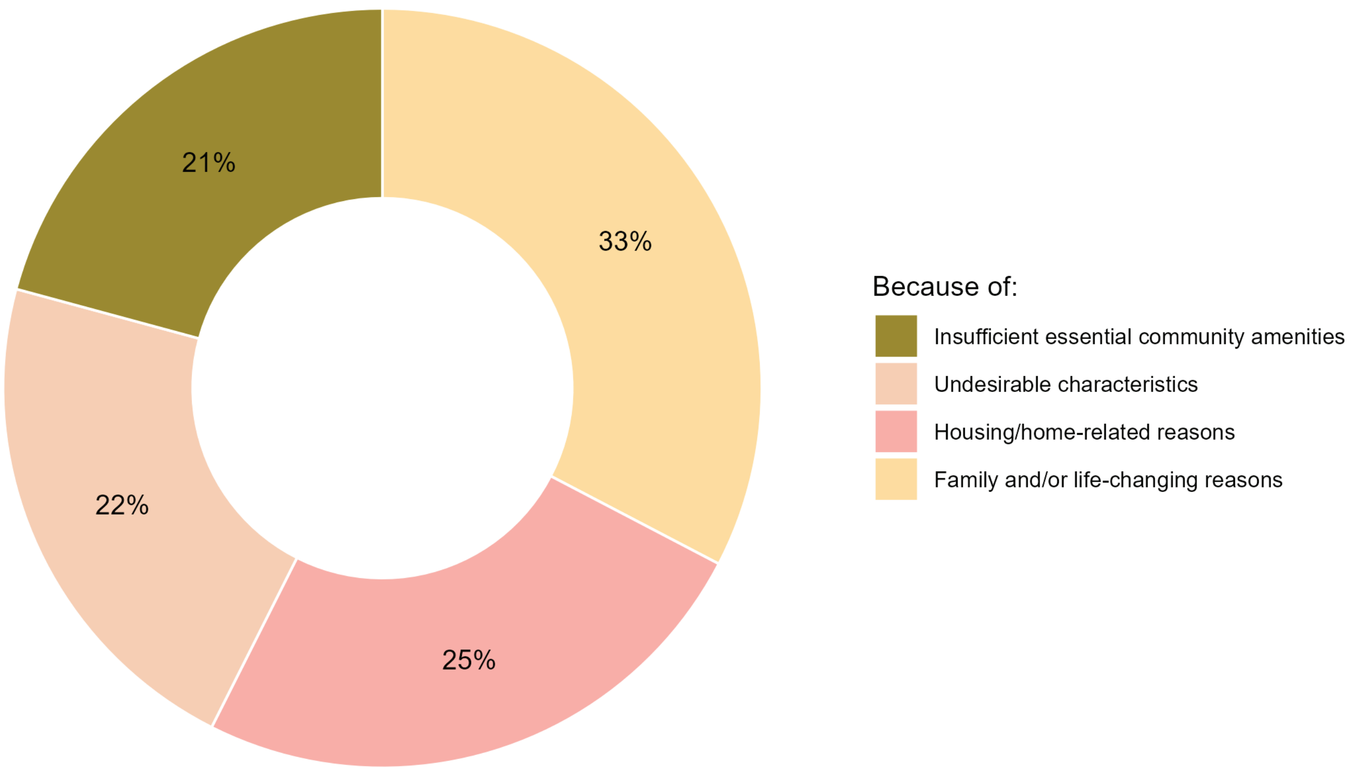

Figure 16. Reasons behind the desire to move

Similarly, respondents were asked why they want to stay in their current locations. Among respondents who expressed a desire to stay where they are, as shown in figure 17, roughly half cited community amenities or desirable community characteristics as reasons for staying. About one-fourth indicated that they would like to stay for economic reasons, such as a job, or for family and personal life.

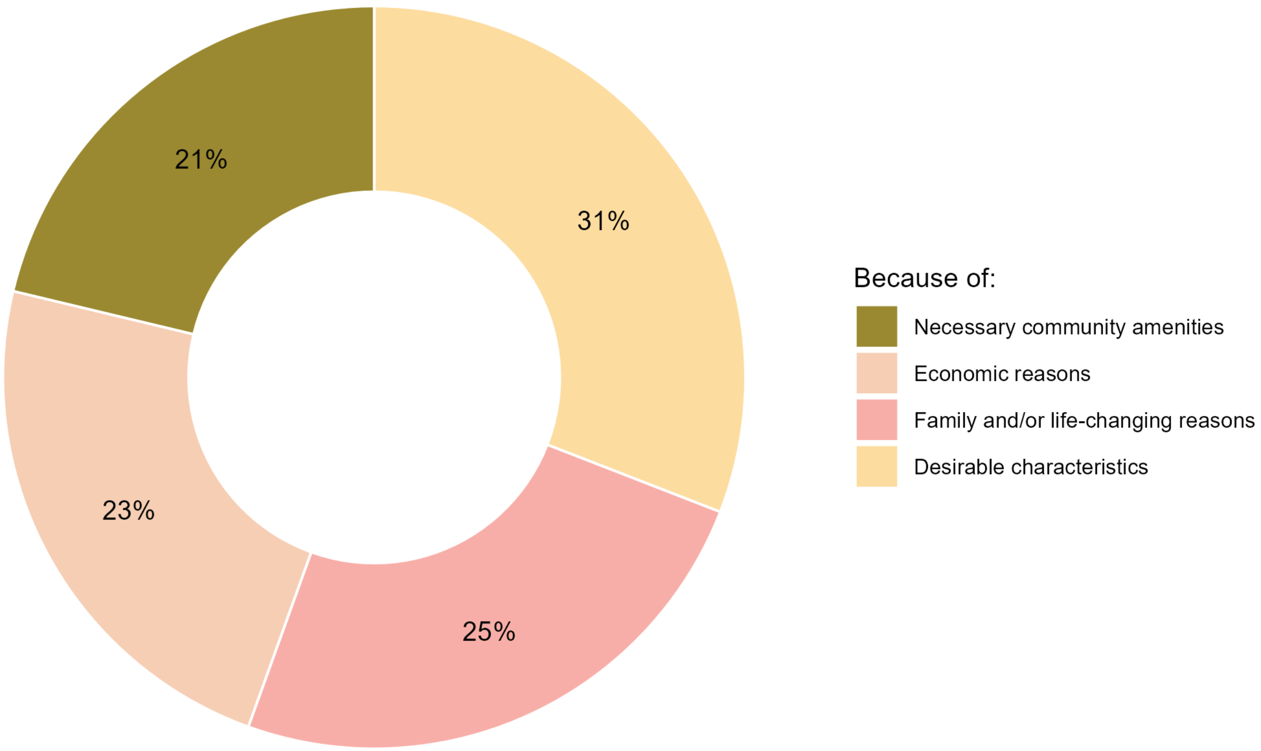

Figure 17. Reasons behind staying desire

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the type of community context they would prefer to live in. More than 40% expressed a preference for living in a rural community, while slightly more than a quarter preferred a suburban or urban community.

Overall, these responses provide insights into community satisfaction. Residents of rural and suburban areas are more likely to express a desire to stay in place, whereas residents of urban areas are less likely to do so. People who wish to stay in place pointed to factors such as personal life, family, economic access, and community amenities and desirability. Further, most respondents wish to stay in the state, with a strong preference for living in rural areas.

Conclusion

The 2025 Our State, Our Lives: Alabama Wellbeing Survey provided valuable insight into the strengths and challenges influencing the wellbeing of residents across the state. Overall, most respondents report being satisfied with their communities and remain optimistic about their future quality of life. However, differences emerge across community contexts: suburban residents generally report the highest satisfaction with community services, activities, and social infrastructure, while rural residents tend to report lower satisfaction levels and greater financial strain. Urban residents, meanwhile, are more likely to express a desire to move to a different community.

Many respondents also balance caregiving responsibilities alongside employment, with childcare and elder care limiting the ability to work for roughly one-third of caregivers. Despite these challenges, most respondents express a strong attachment to where they live, with a majority indicating a desire to remain in their current communities. These findings provide important insight for community leaders, policymakers, and organizations seeking to strengthen quality of life and support the diverse needs of residents across Alabama.

For More Information

About the survey (table 1)

Total participants: 1,947 Alabamians

Data for the survey were collected through a 15-minute online survey administered by Qualtrics XM. Participants were recruited to reflect Alabama's demographics in a best-quotas sampling design.

Table 1. Survey Participants by Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	Percent
Household type	Family	64.9
	Non-family	32.7
	Others	2.5
Age	Under 35	25.1
	Middle Age (35–64)	48.4
	Older (65+)	26.4
Gender	Female	55.7
	Male	44.3
Race/Ethnicity	White	65.1
	People of color	34.9
Education	High school or less	43.4
	Vocational school/Community college	26.7
	Bachelor/Graduate degree	29.9
Community Context	Rural	45.2
	Suburban	22.8
	Urban	32.1
Employment	Full-time	39.3
	Retired	30.6
	Unemployed	16.4
	Part-time	10.6
	Student	2.6
	Multiple jobs	0.5
Income	Below $50,000	56.3
	$50,000 to $99,999	27.8
	$100,000 and more	15.9

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