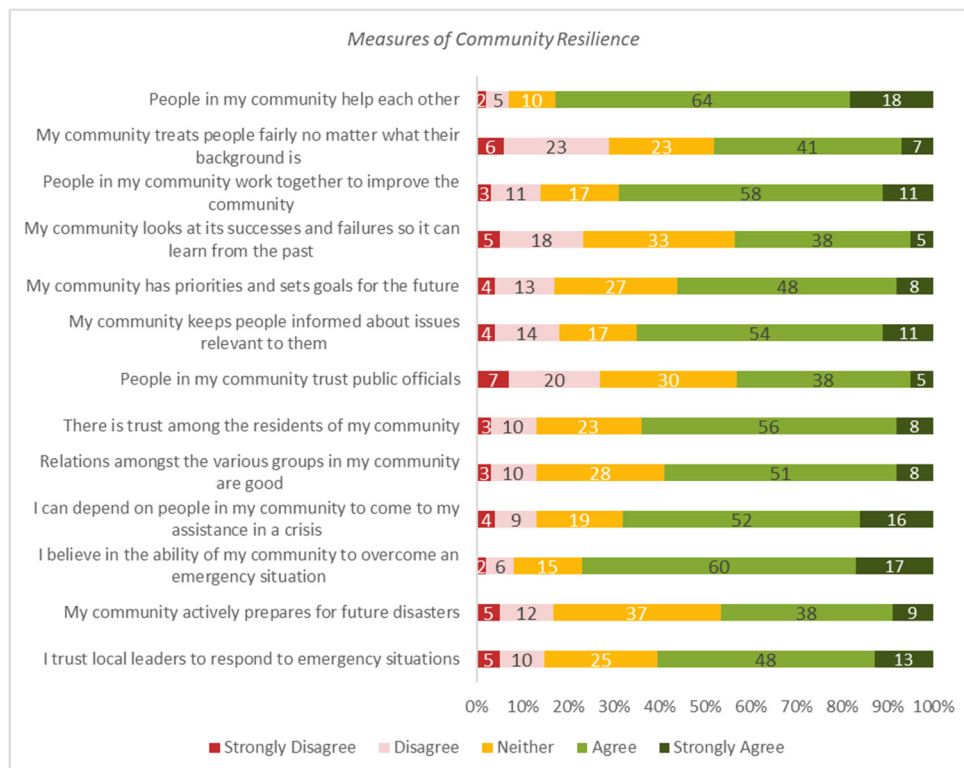# Cornhusker Economics

Relationships between Community Resilience and Perceived Community Outcomes

The definition of resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. Synonyms include toughness, perseverance and grit. The severe weather events of the spring of 2019 and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are likely testing the resilience of rural Nebraskans and their communities. The 2020 Nebraska Rural Poll examined how rural Nebraskans rate their communities on dimensions that measure its resiliency. While it is important to assess how resilient rural Nebraskans believe their communities are, it is also critical to understand how these perceptions correlate to perceived community change, perceived community powerlessness and ease or difficulty of leaving the community.

Respondents were first given a list of statements that measure the resilience of a community, based on the following domains: information, communication, cooperation, trust and disaster management. Most rural Nebraskans agree that their community contains most elements of resilience: trust among residents, ability to overcome an emergency situation, residents working together to improve the community, people that help each other, community information sharing and community priority and goal setting (see chart below). Rural Nebraskans are less likely to say their community treats everyone fairly, actively plans for future disasters, trusts public officials, and looks at its successes and failures to learn from the past.

Measures of Community Resilience

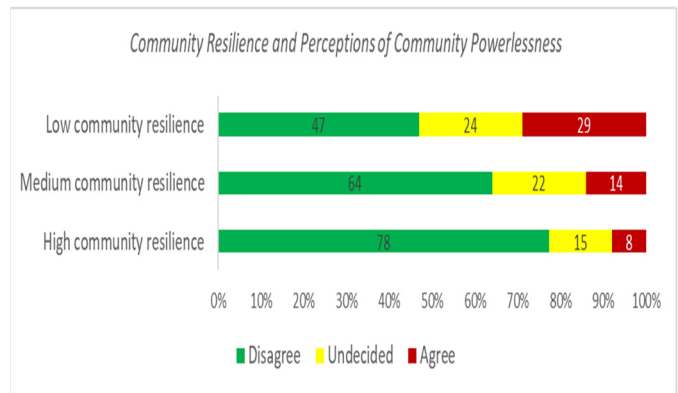| Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
People in my community help each other	2	5	10	64	18
My community treats people fairly no matter what their background is	6	23	23	41	7
People in my community work together to improve the community	3	11	17	58	11
My community looks at its successes and failures so it can learn from the past	5	18	33	38	5
My community has priorities and sets goals for the future	4	13	27	48	8
My community keeps people informed about issues relevant to them	4	14	17	54	11
People in my community trust public officials	7	20	30	38	5
There is trust among the residents of my community	3	10	23	56	8
Relations amongst the various groups in my community are good	3	10	28	51	8
I can depend on people in my community to come to my assistance in a crisis	4	9	19	52	16
I believe in the ability of my community to overcome an emergency situation	2	6	15	60	17
My community actively prepares for future disasters	5	12	37	38	9
I trust local leaders to respond to emergency situations	5	10	25	48	13

These 13 items were combined to create a community resilience scale. The values of this scale range from 13 to 65, with a mean value of 45.4. To simply look at the relationships between this scale and other measures of community well-being, responses to this scale were collapsed into three categories: low (values ranging from 13 to 42), medium (values ranging from 43 to 50) and high (values from 51 to 65). These categories are roughly even in size: low (31%), medium (37%) and high (32%). All of the relationships discussed below are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Community resilience has a positive relationship to perceived community change. Persons who perceive their community as having high resilience are more likely than persons rating their community resilience as low to believe their community has changed for the better this past year. Over one-half (54%) of persons rating their community as having high resilience say their community has changed for the better, compared to 12% of persons who perceive their community as having low resilience. This same pattern occurs when asked about the future of their community. Almost one-half (45%) of persons rating their community as having high resilience believe their community will be a better place to live ten years from now, compared to 11% of persons rating their community resilience as low.
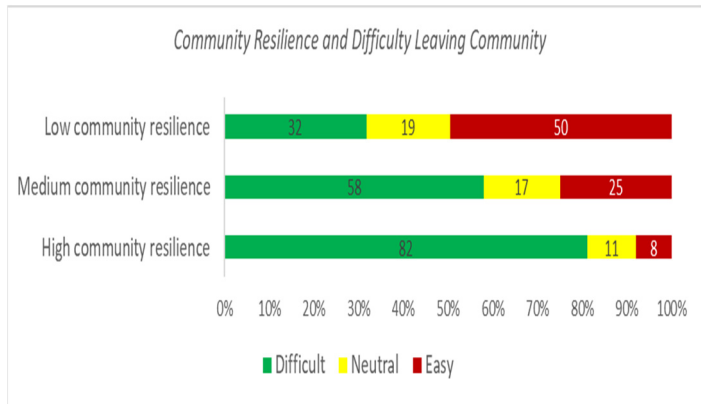
| | Community Change | | |
	Worse	About the same	Better
When you think about this past year, would you say…My community has changed for the…			
Low community resilience	42%	47%	12%
Medium community resilience	14%	47%	38%
High community resilience	9%	37%	54%
Based on what you see of the situation today, 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?			
Low community resilience	37%	52%	11%
Medium community resilience	13%	56%	31%
High community resilience	6%	50%	45%

The perceived powerlessness of their community can determine if residents believe their community is capable of achieving its desired future. Thus, any relationship between community resilience and community powerlessness can have important implications. To measure community powerlessness, respondents were asked, "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? My community is powerless to control its own future." They were given a five-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. There is a relationship between community resilience and its perceived powerlessness. Persons who rate their communities as having high resilience are more likely than persons who rate their community as having low resilience to *disagree* that their community is powerless to control its own future, 78% compared to 47%. Therefore, higher levels of community resilience are related to higher levels of perceived control in the communities to achieve their desired outcomes.

Community Resilience and Perceptions of Community Powerlessness

There is also a relationship between perceived community resilience and difficulty of leaving the community. Respondents were asked a question about how easy or difficult it would be to leave their community. The exact question wording was, "Assume you were to have a discussion in your household about leaving your community for a reasonably good opportunity elsewhere. Some people might be happy to live in a new place and meet new people. Others might be very sorry to leave. How easy or difficult would it be for your household to leave your community?" They were given a seven point scale where 1 indicated very easy and 7 denoted very difficult. Respondents who rated their community as having high resilience are more likely than persons rating their community as having low resilience to say it would be difficult to leave the community, 82% compared to 32%. Furthermore, one-half (50%) of residents who perceive their community as having low resilience say it would be easy to leave it. Thus, higher levels of community resilience positively correlate to residents feeling attached to the community and less inclined to leave it.

Community Resilience and Difficulty Leaving Community

In summary, higher levels of perceived community resilience are related to positive community outcomes: positive perceived change in the community, low levels of perceived community powerlessness, and difficulty in leaving the community. While these relationships do not imply causation, it is important to consider in community development work. Communities can cultivate stronger levels of perceived resilience by improving communications to residents, building trust among residents, increasing cooperation in the community and actively planning for emergencies. This proactive role may then enhance future community wellbeing. Or, enhanced community wellbeing could lead to higher community resilience – both desirable outcomes for communities.

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