USC Dornsife UnionBank

LABarometer

Top 5 Takeaways
from
The Livability Survey

WAVE 2
Release Date: June 2, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five months after the release of our first LABarometer Livability survey in 2019, life as we knew it was upended by COVID-19. Rates of infection grew rapidly, businesses closed, unemployment soared, and millions of people were forced to shelter in place for months on end. Now, with the release of the second wave of our survey, we can take stock of just much how life has changed since the pandemic arrived in L.A.

Each year, the USC Dornsife-Union Bank LABarometer Livability survey assesses neighborhood quality of life in L.A. County, guided by the principle that a livable neighborhood is one in which residents feel happy, healthy, safe, socially connected, and with access to important goods, services and amenities. The survey covers a number of topics, from life satisfaction and experiences of stress to residents' housing circumstances and plans, housing costs, neighborhood satisfaction, exposure to crime and social connectedness. The survey also includes our consumer sentiment index, a set of six questions designed to track optimism about individual finances and the economy.

The results of the second wave of our Livability survey are based on questions fielded to our local panel of approximately 1,800 L.A. County residents from November 9, 2020, to January 7, 2021, as well as questions fielded to our national panel of more than 9,000 U.S. residents, from February 18, 2021, to March 17, 2021. Some of the results are specific to L.A. County, while others allow for comparisons of L.A. County with California and the rest of the United States.

To assess change over time on key dimensions of livability, including life satisfaction, neighborhood conditions, and consumer sentiment, our report compares results from the second wave of the Livability survey to results from the first wave. Wave 1 results were originally reported in October 2019 and are based on survey questions fielded to the L.A. County and national panels in June-July 2019 (you can read the report here)

In our review of the results, we see signs of progress in L.A. County but also signs of distress. After a period of decline between June 2019 and June 2020, consumer confidence is now on the rise in L.A. – a welcome sign of growing optimism about the future of L.A.'s economy. Neighborhoods also look and feel a lot safer for residents than they did before the pandemic, as residents perceive fewer social problems like crime, vandalism, and drug or alcohol abuse in their neighborhoods. This is likely due to pandemic-related declines in economic and social activity.

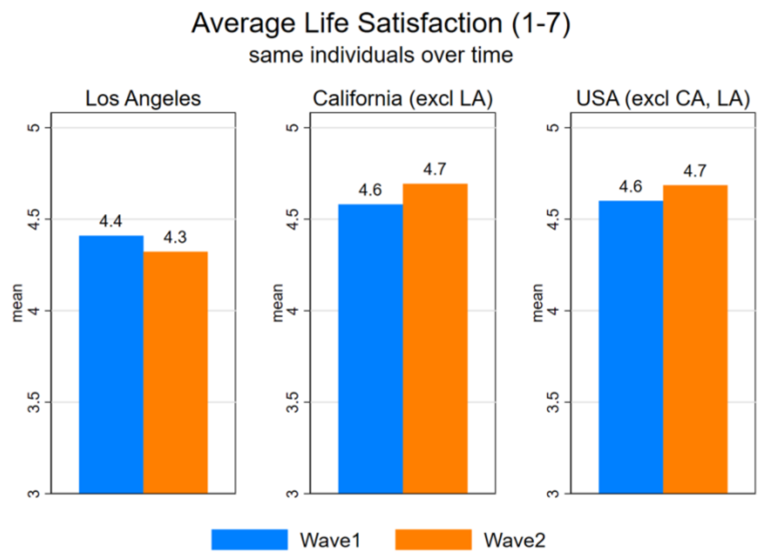
Improvements aside, we see signs of growing discontent as well. For one, Angelenos today are less satisfied with their lives, on average, than other U.S. residents, and the gap in life satisfaction between L.A. County and the rest of the U.S. has grown since 2019. Furthermore, the share of residents who plan to leave L.A. County in the next year has increased by 40%, from 7% of the population to 10%.

On the next page, you will find the top five takeaways from the second wave of Livability survey followed by our Livability Scorecard. The scorecard offers a side-by-side comparison of results from Waves 1 and 2 of the survey, noting when and how results have changed significantly between waves. To learn more about our Livability survey and other LABarometer surveys, please visit https://cesr.usc.edu/labarometer/overview.

TOP 5 TAKEAWAYS

1. Life satisfaction remains lower in L.A. County than in the rest of the U.S., and the gap in life satisfaction has grown.

In the release of the first wave of our Livability survey, we reported that average life satisfaction in L.A. County was significantly lower than the national average, due largely to regional differences in cost of living.



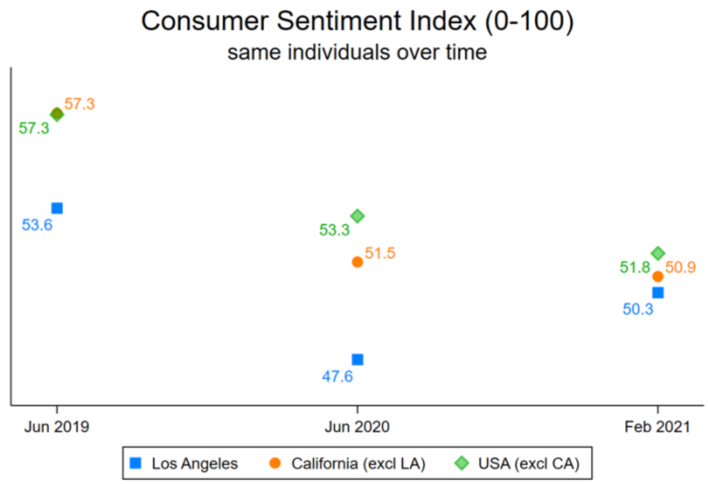
According to our second wave of data, the life satisfaction gap between L.A. County and the rest of the U.S. has since grown. On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 denotes low life satisfaction and 7 denotes high life satisfaction, average life satisfaction in L.A. County is currently at 4.3, almost half a point lower than the average (4.7) observed in other parts of the U.S. That is double the size of the life satisfaction gap observed in 2019.

This increase in the life satisfaction gap between L.A. County and the rest of the U.S. is driven by an increase in the share of L.A. County residents who agree with the statement "my life is close to ideal," coupled with a decrease in the share of other U.S residents who agree with the same statement. The relative impact of the pandemic on L.A. County residents may be to blame, as residents living in high-cost urban areas like L.A. faced particularly harsh conditions as a result of the pandemic, including high rates of job loss, economic insecurity, infection, and death.

***About the analysis**: To generate a life satisfaction score, we calculated the average response to a set of five life satisfaction questions included in each survey wave. To measure changes over time in life satisfaction, we restricted our survey sample to only respondents who participated in both waves of the Livability survey. We then compared life satisfaction scores in Wave 2 to life satisfaction scores in Wave 1.*

2. After a year of decline, consumer confidence in L.A. County is on the rise while elsewhere in the U.S. it has stalled.

On a scale of 0 to 100, where higher numbers denote more positive assessments of the economy, consumer sentiment in L.A. County is currently at 50.3, down from 53.6 in June 2019 but up from a low point of 47.6 in June 2020. After a difficult year, this trend signals a rebound in optimism about the future of L.A.'s economy. The gap in consumer sentiment between L.A. County and the rest of the country has also narrowed significantly.

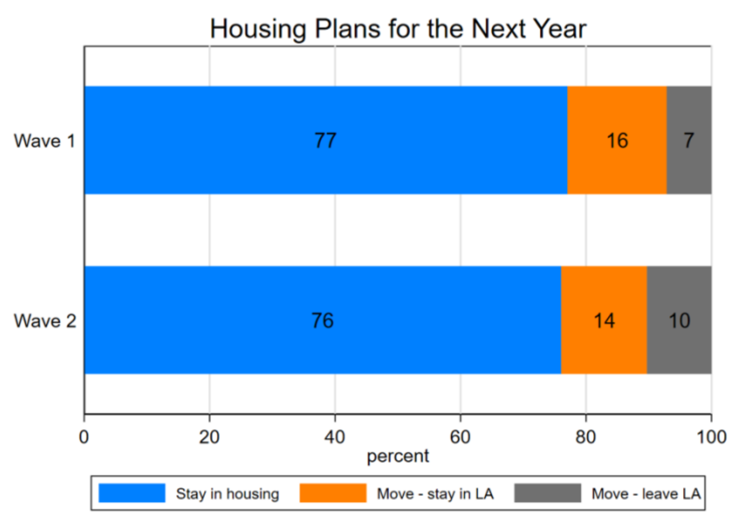


Compared to many other regions in the U.S., L.A. County was hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Angelenos struggled with high rates of unemployment, financial insecurity, and COVID infection. In fact, our data show that, between June 2019 and June 2020, consumer sentiment fell to a greater degree in L.A. than it did elsewhere in the U.S.

Since the summer of 2020, however, consumer sentiment has been on the rise in L.A. County while in other parts of the country it has plateaued.

About the analysis*: Consumer sentiment was calculated as the average of 6 individual-level reports indicating, on a 0-100 scale, subjective opinions about current and future individual financial situation, current and future business conditions in the U.S. and current and future business conditions in the county of residence. To measure changes over time in consumer sentiment, we restricted our survey sample to only respondents who participated in the first Livability survey (wave 1), in a general survey administered to all UAS members in June 2020 (wave 2), and in the second Livability survey (wave 3).*

3. 10% of Angelenos plan to leave L.A. County in the next year, up from 7% in 2019.



The share of L.A. County residents who plan to leave L.A. in the next year has increased 40% -- from 7% in Wave 1 (2019) to 10% in Wave 2 (2021).

This finding comes from a series of questions we asked residents about their housing plans in waves 1 and 2 of our survey.

In Wave 1, 23% of L.A. County residents reported that they planned to move out of their housing in the next year, including 16% who planned to move to new housing somewhere else in L.A. and 7% who planned leave L.A. altogether.

In Wave 2, a similar share (24%) reported plans to move out of their housing. However, a significantly higher share (10%) of respondents reported plans to leave L.A. County altogether.

A closer look: *To confirm that this increase in planned out-migration is not just attributable to population change or differences in the types of people who responded to Wave 2 versus Wave 1 of the survey, we performed a second, individual-level analysis in which we restricted our sample to only respondents who participated in both waves of the* *survey. We then compared responses in Wave 2 to responses in Wave 1. This analysis confirmed our initial finding that, today, L.A. County residents are more likely to plan to leave L.A. than they were in 2019. In Wave 1, 6% of repeat respondents indicated plans to leave L.A. in the next year; by Wave 2, the rate had increased to 12%*

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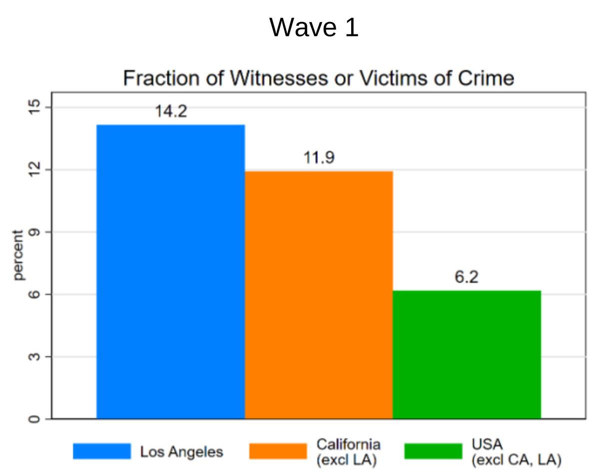
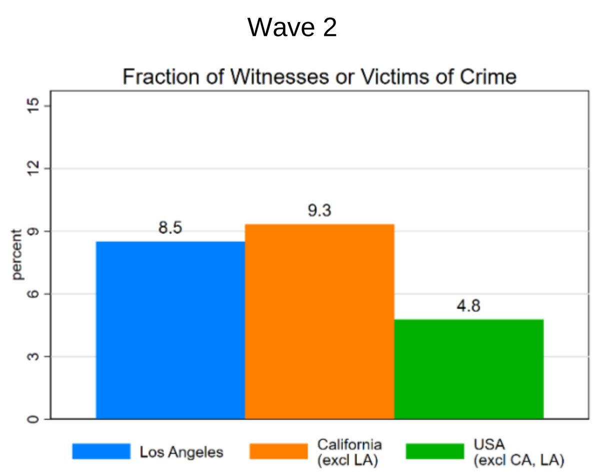
4. Exposure to crime has fallen 40% since June 2019, narrowing the crime gap between L.A. County and the rest of the U.S.

Exposure to crime – regardless of whether one is a victim, witness, or simply hears about the crime from others – can have lasting consequences for a person's health and well-being. Research shows that people who are exposed to crime and violence in their community are at greater risk for poor health outcomes later in life, including mental health disorders, obesity, and substance abuse. Children exposed to violence are also more likely to struggle with academic and behavioral problems in school.

In Wave 1 of our survey, we asked residents whether or not they had witnessed or been victimized by a violent or property crime in the last year and we found that L.A. County residents were substantially more likely than residents in other parts of the U.S. to be exposed to crime. In Wave 2 of our survey, however, we see that the rates of crime exposure have fallen dramatically, and to greater degree in L.A. County (where the rate has fallen 40%) than in the rest of the U.S. (where the rate has fallen 20%). This has cut the crime exposure gap between L.A. County and the rest of the U.S. in half.



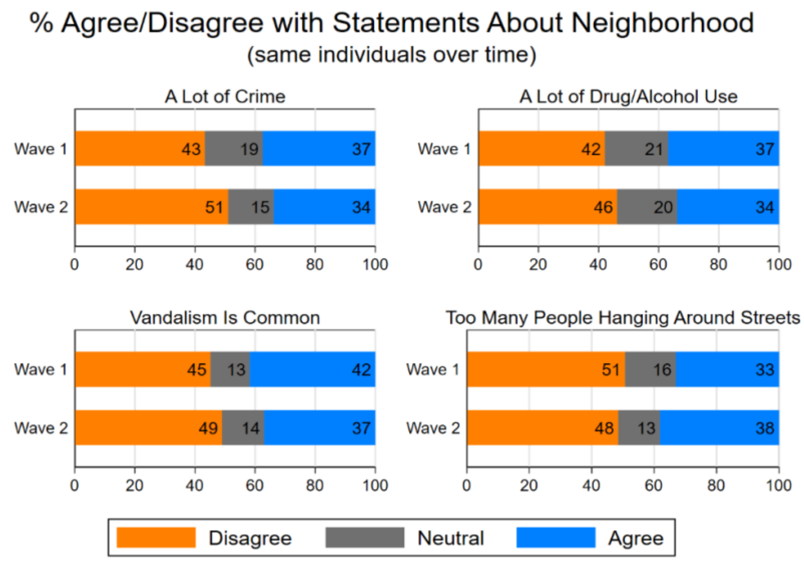


This finding comes from the national supplement to our Livability survey, in which we asked residents throughout the U.S. if they had witnessed or been the victim of a property or violent crime in the last year. The dip in crime we observe between waves 1 and 2 of this survey is likely attributable to the decline in social and economic activity that occurred as a result of the coronavirus pandemic

A closer look: *To confirm that this decline in exposure to crime is attributable to a real improvement in crime conditions rather than a difference in the types of people who responded each survey wave, we conducted an individual-level analysis in which we restricted our sample to only respondents who participated in both waves of the survey. This analysis confirms the finding that L.A. County residents who reported exposure to crime in Wave 1 were far less likely to report exposure to crime in Wave 2.*

5. Angelenos perceive less crime, vandalism, and drug and alcohol use in their neighborhoods than they did in 2019.

Just as the prevalence of self-reported crime has decreased, so, too, has the prevalence of self-reported problems in people's neighborhoods. In Waves 1 and 2, we asked residents a series of questions about their neighborhoods, including whether or not social problems like drug and alcohol use, vandalism, crime, and loitering were common. We then restricted our sample to respondents who had participated in both waves and analyzed how their responses in Wave 1 compared to their responses in Wave 2.



According to our results, L.A. County residents who agreed in Wave 1 (2019) that crime, drug or alcohol use, or vandalism were common in their neighborhood were significantly less likely to agree that such problems were common in their neighborhood in Wave 2 (2021).

This decline in the perceived prevalence of neighborhood problems is likely attributable, at least in part, to pandemic-related declines in economic and social activity. Notably, reports of unwanted loitering on streets have increased since Wave 1 – a consequence, perhaps, of the increasing rates of unemployment, housing insecurity, and remote work brought on by the pandemic. Time will tell whether these neighborhood changes are unique to the pandemic or whether they will persist even as residents resume their normal activities.

For scorecard explanation, see pages 8-9.

LIVABILITY SCORECARD		Population-level analysis[A] (all respondents)			Individual-level analysis[B] (repeat respondents)
Measures	Scale	Wave 1	Wave 2	Significant Change[C]	Significant Change[C]
LIFE SATISFACTION SCORES					
Life overall	Min: 1 (not at all satisfied) Max: 7 (very satisfied)	4.4	4.4	∅	∅
Financial situation	Min: 1 (not at all satisfied) Max: 7 (very satisfied)	4.0	4.2	+	+
Social life	Min: 1 (not at all satisfied) Max: 7 (very satisfied)	4.8	4.5	–	–
Health	Min: 1 (not at all satisfied) Max: 7 (very satisfied)	4.9	4.9	∅	∅
Amount of free time	Min: 1 (not at all satisfied) Max: 7 (very satisfied)	4.8	4.8	∅	∅
Job or other daily activities	Min: 1 (not at all satisfied) Max: 7 (very satisfied)	4.7	4.7	∅	∅
Family life	Min: 1 (not at all satisfied) Max: 7 (very satisfied)	5.3	5.3	∅	∅
NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY SCORES					
Neighborhood overall	Min: 1 (low satisfaction) Max: 7 (high satisfaction)	4.8	4.9	∅	∅
Built / natural environment	Min: 1 (low quality) Max: 7 (high quality)	4.3	4.3	∅	∅
Social order / safety	Min: 1 (low order/safety) Max: 7 (high order/safety)	3.7	3.6	∅	+
Affordability	Min: 1 (low affordability) Max: 7 (high affordability)	4.6	4.8	+	∅
Social cohesion	Min: 1 (low cohesion) Max: 7 (high cohesion)	4.3	4.3	∅	∅
ECONOMIC SENTIMENT SCORES					
Consumer sentiment overall	Min: 0 (low confidence) Max: 100 (high confidence)	53.5	50.8	–	–
County business conditions	Min: 0 (low confidence) Max: 100 (high confidence)	51.7	45.8	–	–
US business conditions	Min: 0 (low confidence) Max: 100 (high confidence)	51.2	46.8	–	–
Individual financial situation	Min: 0 (low confidence) Max: 100 (high confidence)	57.6	59.9	+	∅

[A] Under "Population-level analysis," we report weighted results from our cross-sectional samples: the full sample of respondents who participated in Wave 1 and the full sample of respondents who participated in Wave 2. Each weighted sample may be considered representative of the L.A. County population. The goal of this analysis is to assess change over time at the population level.

[B] Under "Individual-level analysis," we report weighted results from our longitudinal sample: the sample of "repeat" respondents who participated in both waves of the survey. The goal of this analysis to assess change over time at the individua level. Restricting our sample to repeat respondents removes sample composition (i.e. respondent selection) as a source of variation between survey waves, ensuring that any change we observe over time reflects a real change in the responses of individuals.

[C] This column notes any change from Wave 1 to Wave 2 that is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. + denotes a significant increase in the outcome; – denotes a significant decrease; ∅ denotes the absence of a statistically significant change.

Livability Scorecard Explained

Our Livability Scorecard includes select results from the first and second waves of the LABarometer Livability survey.

Under **Population-level analysis**, we report results from each cross-sectional sample (i.e. ”all respondents”), which include the full sample of respondents who participated in Wave 1 of the survey and the full sample of respondents who participated in Wave 2. The goal of this analysis is to assess change over time at the population level for our outcomes of interest. Any change between survey waves that is statistically significant at the 0.05 level is noted in the column “Significant Change.” Each weighted survey sample from may be considered representative of the L.A. County population.

Both waves of the Livability survey were fielded to members of the LABarometer panel. Respondents were free to opt in or out of each survey. Thus, respondents who participated in Wave 1 may differ from respondents who participated in Wave 2. 1,036 respondents participated in both waves of the survey.

Under **Individual-level analysis**, we report results from the longitudinal sample (i.e. ”repeat respondents”), which refers to the sample of respondents who participated in both waves of the survey. The goal of this analysis is to assess change over time at the individual level for our outcomes of interest. Restricting our sample to “repeat respondents” removes sample composition as a source of variation between survey waves, ensuring that any change we observe between waves reflects an individual-level change (a change in *how* individuals have responded to each survey) rather than a sample composition change (a change in *who* has responded to each survey).

Any individual-level change between Waves 1 and 2 that is statistically significant at the 0.05 level is noted in the column “Significant Change.”

Livability Scorecard Measures

Life Satisfaction - We use the following validated measures to assess overall life satisfaction and domain-specific satisfaction:

- **Overall life**: Mean response to five general statements about life: “In most ways my life is close to ideal”; “The conditions of my life are excellent”; “I am satisfied with my life”; “So far I have the important things I want in life”; “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.” Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Financial situation**: Response to the statement “I am satisfied with my financial situation.” Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Social life**: Response to the statement “I am satisfied with my social life.” Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Health**: Response to the statement “My health is excellent.” Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Amount of free time**: Response to the statement “I am satisfied with the amount of free time I have.” Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Job or other daily activities**: Response to the statement “I am satisfied with my job or other daily activities.” Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).

- **Family life**: Response to the statement "I am satisfied with my family life." Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).

Neighborhood Quality - We use the following validated measures to assess neighborhood quality:

- **Overall neighborhood**: Response to the question "How satisfied are you with your neighborhood?" Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Built / natural environment**: Mean response to the following statements about the built and natural environment of the neighborhood: "There are safe and convenient public transit options"; "I am satisfied with the number and quality of businesses and services (grocery stores, health care services, restaurants, etc.) in my neighborhood"; "I am satisfied with the number and quality of parks and green spaces in my neighborhood"; "My neighborhood is clean and the roads and sidewalks are in good condition"; "There is a lot of traffic in or around my neighborhood" (reverse-coded); "My neighborhood is noisy" (reverse-coded). Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Social order / safety**: Mean (reverse-coded) response to the following statements about social problems in the neighborhood: "Vandalism is common in my neighborhood"; "There are too many people hanging around on the streets near my home"; "There is a lot of crime in my neighborhood." Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Affordability**: Response to the statement "My neighborhood is affordable for me." Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).
- **Social cohesion**: Mean response to the following statements about social ties in the neighborhood: "In my neighborhood, people watch out for each other"; "I can trust most people in my neighborhood." Seven-category likert scale (strongly disagree…strongly agree).

Economic Sentiment - We use the following validated measures to assess economic sentiment:

- **Consumer sentiment index**: Mean response to the following statements about the economy and individual financial situation: "I feel that my current financial situation is..."; "I think that my financial situation a year from now will be…"; "I think that current business conditions in the US are…"; "I think that current business conditions in my county are…"; "I think that business conditions in the US a year from now will be…"; "I think that business conditions in my county a year from now will be…" Sliding scale: 0 (poor)…100 (excellent).
- **County business conditions**: Mean response to the following statements about county business conditions: "I think that current business conditions in my county are…"; "I think that business conditions in my county a year from now will be…" Sliding scale: 0 (poor)…100 (excellent).
- **US business conditions**: Mean response to the following statements about US business conditions: "I think that current business conditions in the US are…"; "I think that business conditions in the US a year from now will be…" Sliding scale: 0 (poor)…100 (excellent).
- **Individual financial situation:** Mean response to the following statements about individual financial situation: "I feel that my current financial situation is…"; "I think that my financial situation a year from now will be…" Sliding scale: 0 (poor)…100 (excellent)

ABOUT US

USC Dornsife LABarometer

LABarometer is a quarterly, internet-based survey of approximately 1,750 randomly selected Los Angeles County residents, designed and administered by the *Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research* at the University of Southern California. The survey monitors social conditions in Los Angeles, with a focus on four key issues: livability, mobility, sustainability & resiliency, and affordability & prosperity. By following the same residents over time, LABarometer aims to capture trends and shifts in residents' attitudes and circumstances, allowing decisionmakers in the public and private sectors to better understand the evolving lives and needs of L.A. residents. LABarometer is made possible by the finanåcial support of Union Bank.

About the Livability Survey

The LABarometer Livability Survey assesses neighborhood quality of life in Los Angeles, guided by the principle that a livable neighborhood is one in which residents feel happy, healthy, safe, socially connected, and with access to important goods, services and amenities. The survey covers the following topics: life satisfaction, stress, housing circumstances and plans, housing costs, neighborhood satisfaction, crime and safety, and social engagement. The survey also includes LABarometer's consumer sentiment index, a set of six questions designed to monitor optimism about individual finances and the economy.

Data and Methods

A total of 1,386 Los Angeles County residents participated in the Livability Survey from November 9, 2020 through January 7, 2021. Participants were recruited from LABarometer's survey panel of 1,740 adults living in randomly selected households throughout Los Angeles County. The participation rate for the survey was 80%. The margin of sampling error† is 2.6 percentage points.

A total of 6,909 adults living in households throughout the United States participated in the National Livability Supplement from February 18 through March 17, 2021. The sample included 1,328 adults living in Los Angeles County and 863 adults living elsewhere in California. Participants were recruited from the Understanding America Study, a national panel of 9,015 United States residents that includes, as a sub-panel, the 1,740 Los Angeles County residents who belong to our LABarometer panel. The participation rate was 77%. The margin of sampling error† is 1.2 percentage points.

The survey was conducted in respondents' choice of English or Spanish. To participate in a survey, respondents could use any computer, cell phone, or tablet with Internet access. Internet-connected tablets were provided to respondents without internet access.

†Sampling error is calculated at the 95% confidence level, using a sample proportion of 0.5 to generate an upper bound of uncertainty. Please note that factors other than sampling error, including question wording, question order, sample type, survey method, and population coverage, may affect the results of any survey.

For More Information

For a complete description of our data, methods, and findings, please visit our website at https://cesr.usc.edu/labarometer/overview. For more information, contact us at labarometer-l@usc.edu.