


Omaha Conditions Survey: 1993



Citizens Look at the Best and Worst of the Omaha Area

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One of the primary purposes of the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1993 Metro Sample was to collect information on how residents view the Omaha area and their neighborhoods—what are the best and worst attributes and what problems should leaders be addressing. Because the same questions were asked in 1990 and 1991, comparisons can be made with the results of the surveys. Two open-ended questions on the survey asked their opinions on the three best

and the three worst things about the Omaha area. Another open-ended question asked respondents what they felt are the three most important problems that the Omaha area should be trying to address. Respondents who listed combinations of gangs, drugs, or crime for the worst thing and/or problem were given the opportunity to mention additional items.

Likewise, three similar opinion questions were asked about the respon-

dents' neighborhoods. However, respondents were asked only to give one answer for each question. Comparisons for this question are available only for 1991, because it was not asked in 1990.

The open-ended format was used because it allows respondents to characterize issues in their own words. In addition, open-ended questions make it possible to identify issues and priorities that researchers developing a social survey cannot anticipate.

To classify the open-ended responses, categories were developed, and the responses were placed into one of the categories. All the items in the tables in this report were generated in this manner.

For complete details on the sample and respondent characteristics, see the separate report, *Survey Methodology* (the complete list of Omaha Conditions Survey: 1993 report topics is on the back cover).

The Best of the Omaha Area

Table 1 presents summary information on the items most often mentioned in response to the question, "In your

Key Findings

- The five most often mentioned best things about the Omaha area were: friendly people (35.5 percent), quality of life (34.3 percent), jobs and business opportunities (31.2 percent), entertainment and cultural activities (22.9 percent), and schools (22.5 percent).
- The five most often mentioned worst things about the Omaha area were: crime (41.4 percent), street conditions (31.5 percent), gangs (21.1 percent), high taxes (14.4 percent), and weather (13.6 percent).
- The five most important problems the Omaha area should be trying to address were: crime (42.3 percent), gangs (29.4 percent), lack of jobs or business opportunities (25.8 percent), street conditions (20.2 percent), and youth needs (18.8 percent).

opinion, what are the three best things about the Omaha area?" The summary information is developed by counting the total number of times a particular item was mentioned. These sums, then, are divided by the total number of persons who answered the question and expressed as percentages. The percentages do not add to 100 percent because each respondent could give up to three answers. All tables in this report are constructed in a similar manner.

Friendly people or other comments about people was mentioned most frequently (35.5 percent) as being the best thing about the Omaha area. Four other attributes were mentioned by 20 percent or more of the respondents: quality of life (34.3 percent), jobs and business opportunities (31.2 percent), entertainment and cultural activities (22.9 percent), and schools (22.5 percent).

Filling out the top-ten rank are convenient location, low crime rate, low traffic volume, quality of the environment and recycling, and shopping.

Variations in Perceptions of the Best Attributes of the Omaha Area

To better understand respondents' views, the five most frequently mentioned items are examined across population subgroups using characteristics of age, gender, race,¹ education, and income. Several interesting patterns are identified and are summarized in the following sections.

Friendly People. Respondents with a college degree, compared to those with a high school diploma or less, were more likely to mention friendly people as one of the best things about the Omaha area. In addition, households with incomes above \$50,000 were more likely to mention friendly people.

Quality of Life. Respondents aged 65 or older, those with less than a high school education, and those with incomes less than \$20,000 were less likely to mention quality of life as one of the best aspects of the Omaha area. Respondents aged 35 to 64, Blacks, persons with a college degree, and persons in households with incomes above \$50,000 were more likely to mention quality of life.

Jobs and Business Opportunities. The largest difference occurred between men and women, with men mentioning jobs and business opportunities more than women. Mention of this item did not differ much across age, race, income, or education.

Entertainment and Cultural Activities. The largest difference in this item again occurred between men and women. However, women were more likely to mention entertainment and cultural activities.

Schools. Schools were mentioned most frequently by persons aged 35 to 64 in contrast to those aged 65 or older; persons with college degrees compared to those with a high school diploma or less; and persons in households with incomes \$35,000 or higher compared to those with incomes below \$35,000.

Comparisons with 1990 and 1991

Table 1 also presents comparisons among the lists of the best attributes from the 1990 and 1991 as well as the 1993 survey. The lists are not the same because some items have been added or deleted between the surveys. Generally there is a great deal of similarity among the years, both in terms of ranking and the percentage of respondents mentioning an item. The top five items have been the same for all three years, although the order varies from year to year.

The major difference is that schools dropped from the most mentioned item in 1990 and 1991 to the fifth item in 1993. Some of this drop might be explained by differences in the time of year the survey was conducted. The 1993

survey was conducted during the summer when school was not in session. For persons with children between the ages of 6 and 18, schools still ranks as the best thing about the Omaha area.

Looking at the ten most often mentioned best attributes of the Omaha area compared to 1991, low cost of living and parks and recreation facilities dropped out, while low traffic volume and quality of the environment and recycling were added.

The Worst of the Omaha Area

Table 2 summarizes the attributes mentioned in response to the question, "In your opinion, what are the three worst things about the Omaha area?" The data are developed using the same procedure described earlier. Table 2 shows that crime was perceived to be

Table 1. Respondents' Views of the Best Things About the Omaha Area

Rank	1993		1991		1990	
		Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
1	Friendly people	35.5	2	29.2	3	28.1
2	Quality of life	34.3	3	27.7	2	30.3
3	Jobs and business opportunities	31.2	4	26.8	4	26.4
4	Entertainment and cultural activities	22.9	5	18.8	5	20.6
5	Schools	22.5	1	29.8	1	30.4
6	Convenient location	14.0	7	13.2	7	10.5
7	Low crime rate	13.9	10	9.0	13	6.6
8	Low traffic volume	12.7	13	6.9	10	9.3
9	Quality of the environment and recycling	11.5	11	8.1	9	10.2
10	Shopping	10.7	6	14.7	6	14.1
11	Low cost of living	10.6	8	11.6	7	10.5
12	Parks and recreation facilities	9.2	9	11.2	14	6.2
13	Housing	6.1	14	6.8	12	7.7
14	Good community feelings	5.7	20	3.3	—	—
15	Climate	5.4	12	7.6	11	7.9
16	Slow-paced lifestyle	4.0	25	1.4	20	3.2
16	Medical facilities	4.0	15	6.7	17	4.6
18	City services	3.8	16	6.3	—	—
19	Community organizations and churches	3.3	18	4.2	15	5.2
20	Restaurants	3.0	17	5.3	16	4.7
21	Redevelopment efforts	2.6	24	1.9	19	3.5
22	Law enforcement	2.2	22	2.5	21	3.0
23	Sports	1.8	18	4.2	23	1.9
24	Quality leaders	0.8	21	3.0	18	4.2
25	People address problems	0.4	26	1.0	22	2.4
	Valid cases	757		607		738

Table 2. Respondents' Views of the Worst Things About the Omaha Area

Rank	1993		1991		1990	
	Item	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
1	Crime	41.4	5	16.9	4	18.8
2	Street conditions	31.5	1	30.6	5	18.0
3	Gangs	21.1	2	24.4	2	28.1
4	High taxes	14.4	3	20.8	3	20.4
5	Weather	13.6	8	11.3	6	14.5
6	Traffic congestion	12.6	9	10.1	8	9.2
7	Lack of jobs or business opportunities	10.9	10	8.3	7	10.4
7	City government	10.9	7	12.9	—	—
9	No youth activities	7.8	18	3.4	—	—
10	Run-down neighborhoods	7.7	15	3.8	11	5.6
11	Drugs	7.4	4	17.0	1	29.1
12	Quality of the environment and recycling	7.2	6	15.3	—	—
13	Limited entertainment	6.9	12	5.1	10	6.5
14	People	5.9	29	1.4	21	1.6
15	Overemphasis on development	5.7	13	4.2	12	5.1
16	Law enforcement	4.9	14	4.0	12	5.1
17	Race relations	4.1	19	3.1	19	2.9
18	Poor schools	3.6	23	2.8	14	4.5
19	Public transportation	3.2	11	5.5	—	—
19	Parks and recreation facilities	3.2	27	1.8	16	3.8
21	Low wages and incomes	3.1	21	2.9	15	4.1
22	Downtown area	3.1	16	3.6	—	—
23	Homelessness	2.3	17	3.5	17	3.4
24	Poor leaders	2.0	19	3.1	9	8.8
24	No community cooperation	2.0	26	2.2	—	—
26	Convention facilities	1.9	27	1.8	—	—
27	Poor snow removal	1.6	25	2.4	21	1.6
28	Mass media	1.6	—	—	—	—
29	Housing policies	0.8	30	1.0	20	2.5
30	Busing in schools	0.7	21	2.9	—	—
31	Housing costs	0.5	24	2.5	18	3.2
Valid cases		752	594		727	

Table 3. Respondents' Views of the Priority Problems to Address in the Omaha Area

Rank	1993		1991		1990	
	Item	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
1	Crime	42.3	6	19.5	3	19.6
2	Gangs	29.4	1	33.5	2	38.9
3	Lack of jobs or business opportunities	25.8	7	16.5	5	16.6
4	Street conditions	20.2	5	20.8	7	14.1
5	Youth needs	18.8	10	8.2	8	11.3
6	High taxes	15.0	4	21.3	4	18.7
7	Drugs	13.7	2	31.7	1	51.0
8	Quality of schools	13.3	9	10.4	9	10.0
9	Urban redevelopment/rehabilitation	11.5	13	5.7	15	4.1
10	Attracting new business	10.2	12	8.1	11	7.1
11	Quality of government	9.4	8	10.9	17	3.0
12	Street congestion	7.6	17	4.4	12	5.5
13	Homelessness	6.0	10	8.2	5	16.6
14	Quality of the environment and recycling	5.7	3	27.9	13	5.0
15	Law enforcement	5.3	15	5.0	19	2.4
16	Race relations	4.9	21	2.2	17	3.0
17	Attitude	4.7	23	1.9	—	—
18	Helping the poor	4.0	16	4.6	—	—
19	Convention facilities	3.9	19	3.3	—	—
20	Public transportation	2.2	13	5.7	21	2.1
21	Health care	2.1	25	1.5	—	—
21	Discipline in schools	2.1	24	1.8	16	3.4
23	Sports and recreation programs	1.8	20	3.0	22	1.5
24	Public housing	1.5	17	4.4	14	4.3
25	Elderly needs	1.4	25	1.5	20	2.2
26	Ak-Sar-Ben	1.3	21	2.2	—	—
27	Lack of entertainment and cultural activities	1.0	29	0.9	22	1.2
28	Lottery	0.5	28	1.0	—	—
28	Child care	0.5	27	1.2	—	—
Valid cases		768	605		759	

the worst thing about the Omaha area (41.4 percent). Street conditions followed at 31.5 percent. (This includes comments related to smoothness of streets as well as traffic engineering.) Gangs were mentioned by 21.1 percent of the respondents. Rounding out the top five were high taxes (14.4 percent) and weather (13.6 percent).

Of the remaining items in the ten worst things about the Omaha, one item was also mentioned as one of the best things about the Omaha area—jobs and business opportunities. The other items in the top ten are traffic congestion, city government (including city services), no youth activities, and run-down neighborhoods.

Variations in Perceptions of the Worst Attributes of the Omaha Area

In the following sections, the five items ranked as the worst things about the Omaha area are compared across characteristics of the respondents. These are the same characteristics that were used in the previous section (age, gender, race, education, and income).

Crime. The perception of crime as one of the worst things about the Omaha area was more likely to be mentioned by women and Whites. It did not vary much among the other population subgroups.

Street Conditions. Respondents who were white or aged 18 to 34, in contrast with persons aged 65 or older, were more likely to list street conditions.

Gangs. Persons who mentioned gangs were more likely to have a high school diploma or less or have household incomes below \$20,000. Persons with some college or a college degree and those with household incomes of \$50,000 or above were less likely to mention gangs.

High Taxes. This item is least likely to be mentioned by women and respondents with household incomes below \$20,000.

Weather. Respondents who indicated weather as one of the worst aspects of the Omaha area were more likely to be aged 35 to 64, compared to those 65 or older; be a college graduate; or live in households with incomes of \$50,000 or more, in contrast to households with incomes below \$20,000.

Comparisons with 1990 and 1991

There are considerable differences in the ranking and percentages of two items in 1993 when compared to other years. The two largest changes are crime and drugs. Crime moved from the fifth most mentioned item in 1991 to the most mentioned item in 1993, and the percentage of persons mentioning it more than doubled, from 16.9 percent to 41.4 percent. Drugs, on the other hand, dropped from the fourth most mentioned item to the eleventh; in 1990, it was the first most mentioned item. During this three-year period, the percentage of respondents mentioning drugs as one of the worst things in the Omaha area fell from 29.1 percent to 7.4 percent.

In addition to drugs, quality of the environment and recycling dropped out of the top ten in 1993. Moving into the top ten were no youth activities and run-down neighborhoods.

Most Important Problems to Address

When asked what they felt were the three most important problems that the Omaha area should be trying to address, crime was mentioned by 42.3 percent of the respondents. Gangs were mentioned second most frequently (29.4 percent). Two other items were mentioned by more than 20 percent of the respondents: lack of jobs or business opportunities (25.8 percent) and street conditions (20.2 percent). Youth needs were listed by 18.8 percent of the respondents.

Rounding out the top-ten list of priority community problems were high taxes, drugs, quality of schools, urban redevelopment and rehabilitation, and attracting new business.

Variations in the Perceptions of the Most Important Problems

The five issues mentioned most frequently by the respondents are also compared across demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Crime. Crime was more likely to be mentioned as a priority problem by Whites or persons with some college or a college degree as opposed to those with less than a high school diploma.

Gangs. The only variation in the perception of gangs as a problem was by age. Persons aged 18 to 34 and 35 to 64 were more apt to see gangs as a problem than were people 65 or older.

Lack of Jobs or Business Opportunities. As a priority problem lack of jobs or business opportunities was viewed as most important by Blacks and persons aged 35 to 64. Persons 65 or older were less likely to mention jobs as a priority issue.

Street Conditions. Street conditions showed the least variation along demographic characteristics of respondents. Only respondents in households with incomes between \$20,000 and \$35,000 were more likely to list street conditions as a priority problem.

Youth Needs. Race and education explain the largest differences in respondents indicating youth needs as a priority problem. Blacks were apt to mention this item, while college graduates were less likely to mention it.

Comparisons with 1990 and 1991

Of the three open-ended questions asked, priority problems to be addressed showed the most movement among the top-five issues between 1991 and 1993. Crime moved from the sixth most mentioned problem to the first. Lack of jobs or business opportunities jumped from seventh to third, and youth needs went from tenth to fifth. Dropping out of the top five were drugs and quality of the environment and recycling. Quality of

the environment went from third to fourteenth.

Much of the movement in these issues might be explained by attention given them by the media. At the time of the 1991 survey, the Omaha Effort generated considerable controversy and media attention and may have led to an increased awareness of the environment and recycling. In 1993, much attention became focused on crime and youth violence as Omaha hosted a conference on youth violence.

Perceptions of the Best, the Worst, and the Most Important Problems in the Respondent's Neighborhood

In addition to being asked several questions concerning the Omaha area, respondents were asked to give their views of their neighborhoods. In contrast to the Omaha area, respondents were asked to list only one item for their neighborhood. Therefore, the percentages are not comparable between the Omaha area and neighborhood. Because of the small number of responses for some categories, the three tables in this section list only the ten most frequently mentioned items in 1993, along with their comparisons to 1991.

In comparing tables 4-6, an interesting pattern emerges. People are much more likely to say something good about their neighborhood than they are to list something bad or a problem. Almost everyone surveyed (772 respondents) mentioned something good about their neighborhood, but only 539 could find something bad, and only 557 could list a priority problem.

Best Things About My Neighborhood

By far the best things about neighborhoods in the Omaha area were their friendly people (28.4 percent) and their quiet, slow-paced lifestyle (21.2 percent). Nearly half of the respondents stated one of these attributes. Convenient location was indicated by another 12.3 percent, and low crime rate by 10.5

percent. Other aspects of their neighborhood that respondents mentioned as the best are quality of the environment and recycling, quality of life, good community feelings, schools, low traffic volume, and parks and recreation facilities (see table 4).

Many of the things that respondents like about the Omaha area they also like about their neighborhood. Friendly people rank as the best thing about the Omaha area and in their neighborhood. Convenient location, low crime rate, quality of the environment and recycling, quality of life, schools, and low traffic volume are also among the ten best things about the Omaha area.

Table 4 shows that the best things about their neighborhood have not changed much since 1991. The first eight items are the same for both surveys with the ranking of quality of

life and quality of the environment changing places. Low traffic volume and parks and recreation facilities were added in 1993.

Worst Things About My Neighborhood

Table 5 shows that there was a wider variety of responses given as the worst thing about neighborhoods. This diversity lowers the overall percentage of responses for individual items. Traffic congestion was the top worst thing, but received only 16.3 percent of the responses. Quality of the environment was mentioned by 14.8 percent of the respondents.

Again there are many items mentioned as the worst things in their neighborhood and the worst things in the Omaha area. Respondents felt that traffic congestion, street conditions, crime, no youth activities, high taxes, run-down areas, and gangs were bad in their neighborhood and bad in the Omaha area.

Compared to 1991, the lack of youth activities in the neighborhood exhibited the largest change moving from the twentieth most mentioned item to the seventh.

Priority Problems to Address in My Neighborhood

Just as it was for the Omaha area, crime was perceived to be the biggest problem in the respondents' neighborhoods, mentioned by 21.6 percent of them. As shown in table 6, this is followed by quality of the environment and youth needs. In addition to crime, youth needs, street conditions, high taxes, schools' quality, urban development, and gangs were viewed as priority problems that should be addressed by the neighborhood and the Omaha area.

Also in table 6 are comparisons to 1991. As in the previous sections there is much overlap between the two years. However, crime and youth needs exhibit large increases in the percentage of respondents mentioning them. Even though they remain among the ten major problem areas, quality of the environment and street conditions were mentioned by a smaller percentage of persons.

Endnote

1. This analysis reports differences in responses across various population sub-groups. Comparisons across racial/ethnic groups report differences between Whites and Blacks. Other racial/ethnic groups were included in the survey and are reported in metropolitan totals. However, the number of respondents in each of these groups was too small for separate analysis.

Table 4. Respondents' Views of the Best Things About Their Neighborhood

1993		1991		
Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	
1	Friendly people	28.4	1	27.9
2	Slow-paced lifestyle	21.2	2	22.6
3	Convenient location	12.3	3	12.1
4	Low crime rate	10.5	4	7.4
5	Quality of the environment and recycling	7.1	6	5.2
6	Quality of life	4.7	5	6.1
7	Good community feelings	4.5	7	3.5
8	Schools	2.7	8	3.0
9	Low traffic volume	2.2	12	1.2
10	Parks and recreation facilities	1.3	15	0.9
Valid cases		772	595	

Table 5. Respondents' Views of the Worst Things About Their Neighborhood

1993		1991		
Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	
1	Traffic congestion	16.3	2	9.1
2	Quality of the environment and recycling	14.8	3	6.9
3	Street conditions	13.5	1	14.1
4	Crime	8.5	5	5.8
4	Overemphasis on development	8.5	12	2.4
6	People	6.7	6	4.7
7	No youth activities	4.8	20	1
8	High taxes	3.3	4	5.9
9	Run-down areas	3.0	9	3.1
10	Gangs	2.2	18	1.3
Valid cases		539	384	

Table 6. Respondents' Views of the Priority Problems to Address in Their Neighborhood

1993		1991		
Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	
1	Crime	21.6	2	13.1
2	Quality of the environment and recycling	10.4	1	15.4
3	Youth needs	9.3	5	4.4
4	Street congestion	8.4	11	2.6
5	Street conditions	8.3	3	10.1
6	Attitude	8.1	7	3.6
7	High taxes	3.9	8	3.3
8	Schools' quality	3.8	20	1.2
9	Urban development	3.4	9	3.2
10	Gangs	3.3	13	2.4
Valid cases		557	346	

About the Omaha Conditions Survey

The Omaha Conditions Survey: 1993 is the third in a series of studies conducted by the Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. This study is part of CPAR's initiative to monitor and improve the processes operating in Nebraska's urban areas by developing quality information for decision-makers.

This year's survey sampled adults in the Omaha metropolitan area and African-American adults in North Omaha. The metropolitan sample focused on regional development issues along with employment and labor force experience. The North Omaha sample focused on neighborhood shopping patterns, employment experiences, and job training. In addition, both samples included questions to assess opinions on quality of life as well as demographic features.

A list of Omaha Conditions Survey: 1993 report topics appears in the next column on this page.

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