

IPPSR

Institute for Public Policy & Social Research

STATE of the STATE Survey

State
Of the
State
Survey

*Michigan Residents Express Satisfaction
with State Legislature and Legislators*

by Carol S. Weissert

Briefing Paper No. 95-03

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal opportunity institution.

Michigan Residents Express Satisfaction with State Legislature and Legislators

prepared by

Carol S. Weissert

Department of Political Science
IPPSR Research Affiliate
Michigan State University

MSU State of the State Survey
Briefing Paper No. 95-03
©IPPSR, MSU
March 27, 1995

Please contact the following for further information:

About this report: Carol Weissert, Associate Professor of Political Science, Michigan State University (Phone: 517-353-3292; Internet: weissert@pilot.msu.edu). **About SOSS:** Brian Silver, Professor of Political Science and Director of SOSS (Phone: 517-355-2237; Internet: Bsilver@pilot.msu.edu). **About the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research:** Philip R. Smith, Director, IPPSR (Phone: 517/353-9019; Internet: philip.smith@ssc.msu.edu). General contact for media and press: AnnMarie Schneider, Public Relations, IPPSR (Phone: 517/355-6672 x 143; Internet: wolf@pilot.msu.edu).

The analyses and interpretations in SOSS Briefing Papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of IPPSR or of Michigan State University.

KEY FINDINGS

The Survey

- A telephone survey of 1,007 adult residents of the state of Michigan was conducted by Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research between January 12 and February 2, 1995. This is the second quarterly MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS). It focused on community problems, governmental performance, and the state of higher education in Michigan. The sampling error is 3%.
- The sample is designed to provide representative information for respondents from major regions of the state: Detroit City, Southeast Michigan (excluding Detroit), Southwest Michigan, West Central Michigan, East Central Michigan, northern Lower Michigan, and the Upper Peninsula. (*See attached information sheet for a list of the counties included in each region.*) The data reported here are weighted to make the results representative of the adult population of Michigan.

Evaluation of State Governmental Institutions and Issues

- **Approval of the Michigan State Legislature.** Michigan residents seem well satisfied with their state institutions and elected officials, particularly compared to national-level entities. Nearly half (44.6 percent) of the survey respondents rated the Michigan legislature as excellent or good, compared to only 18.3 percent who feel Congress is excellent or good. (See Figure 1.) Residents in West Central and East Central parts of the state were most likely to rate the legislature as excellent or good (over 55 percent of residents of those regions chose these categories). Only 30.8 percent of respondents in Detroit rated the legislature as excellent or good. (See Figure 2; Q.1, Q.2--*question wording is given below.*)
- **Comparison with Other States.** Michigan's satisfaction with the legislature is higher than that found in surveys of other states asking the identical question. A 1994 Florida survey found that 33 percent of their respondents ranked the Florida legislature as excellent or good. Only 18 percent of Illinois residents rated their legislature as excellent or good in 1993.

However, the news is not all rosy for Michigan's legislative body. Only 2 percent of the respondents rated it as excellent and 11 percent rated it as poor. (Again, in comparison to Congress, even the poor category is not so bad. Over one-fourth of the respondents--27 percent-- viewed the Congress as poor.) Further, the legislature was more likely to be viewed positively by those in the best financial position. Some 52 percent of those who said their overall financial situation was excellent rated the legislature as excellent or good. Only 16 percent of those whose financial situation was poor rated the legislature in these two top categories. (Q.1, Q.3)

- **Approval of Michigan's State Elected Officials.** Michigan residents are also generally positive about their elected officials. Some 47.2 percent of respondents rated their own state senator as excellent or good; 42.9 percent rated their own state representative as excellent or good. The governor was rated excellent or good by nearly 60 percent of those surveyed. Only 3 to 4 percent of the respondents rated their representatives or senators as excellent; some 15 percent rated Governor Engler as excellent. (Q.4, Q.5, Q.6)

The gap between approval ratings of the legislature and individual members is not as high at the state level as it is with the Congress and its members. The ratings of the Michigan state legislature and state representatives are very similar, with nearly identical percentages of those saying the legislature and its House members are excellent or good. The gap widens between the percentage of respondents rating their individual members of Congress as excellent or good (50 percent) compared to those similarly rating the Congress as an institution (18.3 percent). (Q.1, Q.2, Q.4, Q.5, Q.7)

Trust in State and Local Government. Over a third (33.4 percent) of Michigan respondents said they trust state government to do the right thing nearly always or most of the time. (See Figure 3.) Some 43 percent say they trust local government to do what is right nearly always or most of the time. In sharp contrast, only 16 percent said they trust the government in Washington do to what is right nearly always or most of the time. Regional variation was similar to that of the evaluation of the Michigan state legislature discussed earlier. Respondents from the West Central part of the state were the most positive--39.3 percent said they trusted state government to do what was right nearly always or most of the time. Only 15 percent of Detroit respondents picked that category. Over one-fourth (26.1 percent) of Detroit respondents said they almost never trusted state government to do what was right. (Q.8, Q.9, Q.10)

When asked from which government they felt they got the most for their money, 42.2 percent said states; 33.3 said local government. Only 13 percent said they got the most from their money from Washington. These findings in Michigan mirror the discontent found nationally by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR). In a 1994 poll, ACIR found that 46 percent of the respondents said the federal government gave them the least for their money. In that survey, roughly one fifth cited states and one fifth cited local governments. (Q.11)

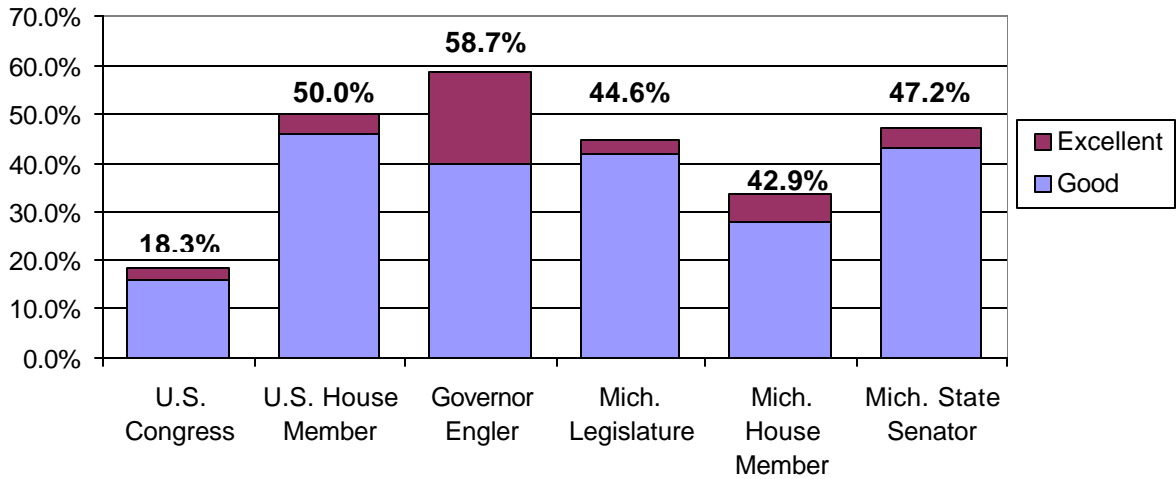
Change in Issue Priorities. Crime and education top Michigan citizens' list of issues they feel the legislature and governor should be working on. Some 18.3 percent of the respondents cited education as the most important issue for state leaders; 13.7 cited crime as the top issue. Education and crime were also the most important issues cited in the fall SOSS survey, conducted three months earlier. However, both have fallen in importance since that time. In October 1994, some 25 percent of the respondents cited education and 20 percent crime as the top issue. (See Figure 4.) (Q.12)

Interestingly, health has risen has a top concern--from being cited by 7.3 percent of the respondents in October to 12 percent in January-February 1995. Welfare has also risen in importance as an issue since the first survey. In October 1994, only 6 percent of the respondents cited welfare as the most important issue facing the state; in the 1995 survey, 10.5 percent of the respondents listed welfare as the single most important item. The economy fell as a top issue from 13 percent in 1994 to 5 percent in 1995. (Q.12)

When the respondents' first three choices are taken into consideration, education is cited by nearly a third of the respondents; crime is cited as first, second or third choice by 27 percent of respondents. Nearly 20 percent cited health and another 20 percent welfare as one of the highest three items of concern. Taxes were cited as one of the top three concerns by only 11 percent of the respondents; the economy by only 8 percent. (Q.12)

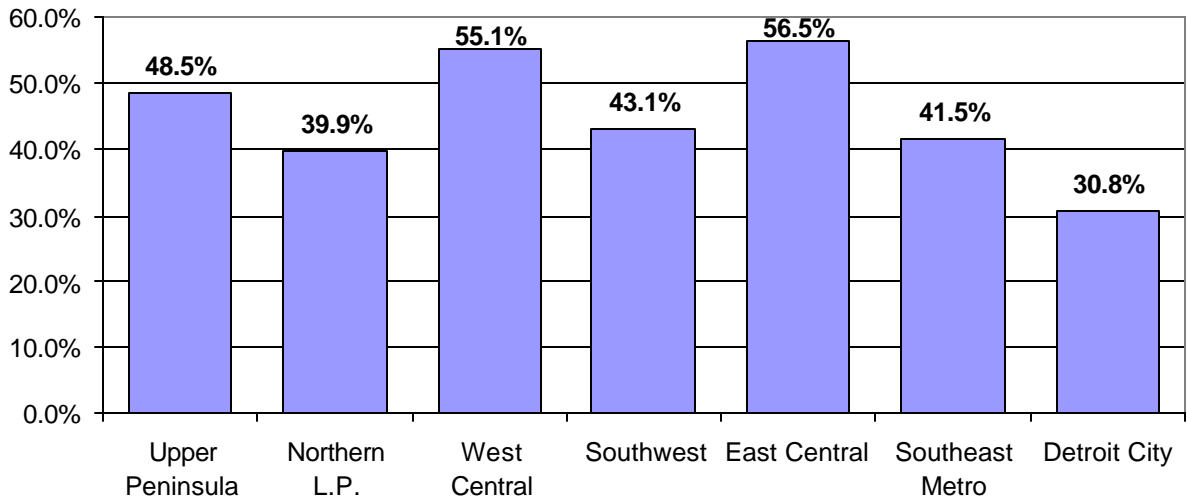
Institutional Change. Given the public's general satisfaction with Michigan government, the findings regarding their lack of support for institutional changes make sense. Only 14 percent of the respondents support a change in the method of selection of state judges and 21 percent support a change in the selection of trustees of the state's three research universities. A fourth--24.5 percent--support a unicameral house in Michigan, a proposal that has been considered in the state off and on for decades. The idea of changing to a two-year state budget garnered more support (37 percent). (Q.13, Q.14, Q.15, Q.16)

Figure 1. Ratings of Michigan Legislature, U.S. Congress, and Michigan and U.S. Legislators



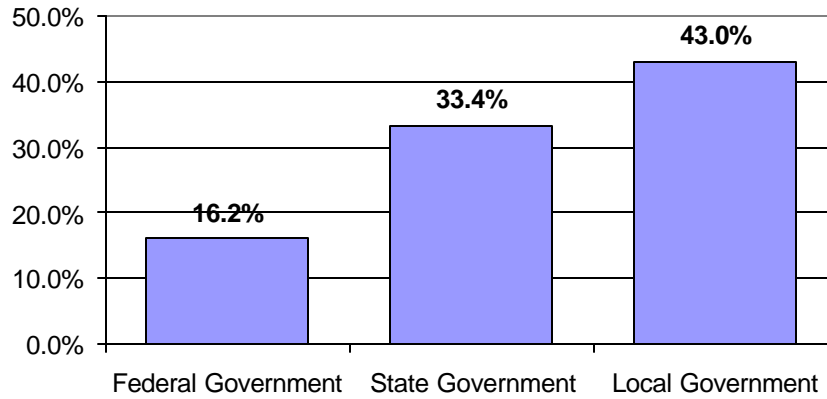
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), January 1995, N=1,007, Sampling Error=3%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 2. Percent Rating Michigan Legislature as "Excellent" or "Good", by Region



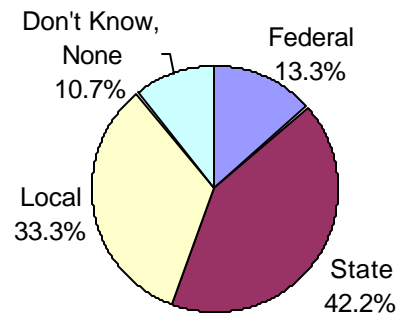
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), January 1995, N=1,007, Sampling Error=3%
Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 3A. Percent Who Trust Government To Do What Is Right "Nearly Always" or "Most of the Time," by Level



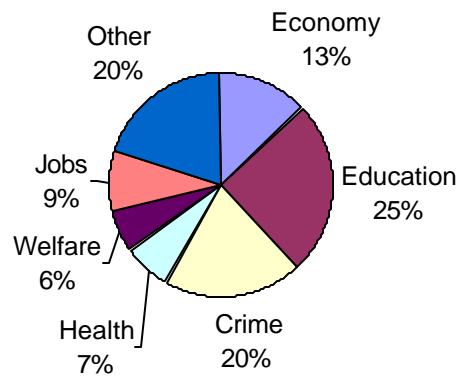
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), January 1995, N=1,007, Sampling Error=3%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 3B. What Level of Government Gives You the Most for Your Money?



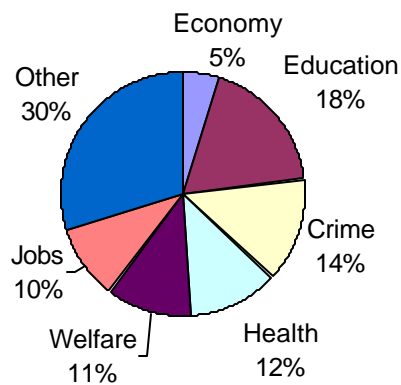
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), January 1995, N=1,007, Sampling Error=3%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

**Figure 4. Issue Cited As Most Important For
Legislature and Governor, October 1994**



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), October 1994,
Michigan State University, IPPSR

**Figure 4. Issue Cited As Most Important For
Legislature and Governor,
January 1995**



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), January 1995, Michigan State
University, IPPSR

REGIONAL CATEGORIES

NOTE: These regions are the ones used by the Michigan State University Extension Service, except that we treat Detroit City as a separate region.

Detroit: City of Detroit

Southeast: Genesee, Lapeer, Lenawee, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, Wayne (excluding Detroit)

Southwest: Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Van Buren

West Central: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa

East Central: Arenac, Bay, Clare, Clinton, Gladwin, Gratiot, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac, Shiawassee, Tuscola

Northern L.P.: Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Iosco, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Missaukee, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Otsego, Oscoda, Presque Isle, Roscommon, Wexford

U.P.: Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, Schoolcraft

Background Information

Michigan State University State of the State Survey [MSU SOSS]

What Is MSU SOSS?

The MSU State of the State Survey is a quarterly statewide survey of a random sample of the residents of Michigan. Although dozens of surveys are conducted in Michigan every year, none is designed to provide a regular systematic monitoring of the public mood in major regions of the state. Through SOSS, MSU aims to fill this information gap. SOSS has five main purposes: (1) to provide timely information about citizen opinions on critical issues; (2) to provide data for scientific and policy research by MSU faculty; (3) to provide information for programs and offices at MSU; (4) to develop survey research methodology; and (5) to provide opportunities for student training and research.

Each quarterly round or “wave” of SOSS has a different main theme: (a) October (even numbered years) – politics, the election, and political issues; (odd-numbered years) – health and the environment; (b) January – quality of life, governmental reform, higher education; (c) April – family, women, and children; (d) July – ethnic and racial groups, Michigan communities.

Who Is Conducting SOSS?

The State of the State Survey is administered by the Survey Research Division (SRD) of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR), using its computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology.

The design and overall planning of SOSS is the responsibility of a 14-person Steering Committee chaired by Dr. Brian D. Silver, Professor of Political Science. The Steering Committee consists of representatives from sponsoring units, which are primarily colleges and other administrative offices within MSU.

Subject to final approval by the Steering Committee, the questionnaire for each wave of SOSS is developed by a Working Group, most of whom also serve as principal investigators or analysts for that wave. The Working Group for the January 1995 wave was comprised of:

Dr. Paula S. Kearns, Asst. Professor, Dept. of Political Science: (517) 355-3406

Dr. Jack H. Knott, Professor and Director, IPPSR: (517) 355-6672

Dr. Mary Lou McPherson, Professor, MSU Extension Service: (517) 355-2313

Dr. David W. Rohde, Professor, Dept. of Political Science: (517) 355-7655

Dr. Lorilee R. Sandmann, Director of Community Outreach, Office of the Vice-Provost for University Outreach: (517) 355-4589

Dr. Brian D. Silver, Professor of Political Science: (517) 355-2237

Dr. Carol S. Weissert, Assoc. Professor, Dept. of Political Science: (517) 353-3292