

State *Of the* State Survey

*The 1996 Presidential Election in Michigan:
An Early Look*

by David W. Rohde

Briefing Paper No. 96-16

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prepared by

David W. Rohde

University Distinguished Professor
Department of Political Science and
Institute for Public Policy and Social Research

Principal Investigators

David W. Rohde

Department of Political Science
and Institute for Public Policy and Social Research

Eileen van Ravenswaay

Department of Agricultural Economics
Michigan State University

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IPPSR, MSU

March 1996

Please contact the following for further information:

About this report: David W. Rohde, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Political Science and Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, Michigan State University (Phone: 517-355-7655; Internet: rohde@pilot.msu.edu). **About SOSS:** Brian D. 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 Michigan State University.

KEY FINDINGS

The Survey

- A telephone survey of 947 adult residents of the state of Michigan was conducted by Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research between January 26 and March 4, 1996. This is the sixth quarterly MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS). It focused on issues related to environmental policy, governmental performance, and the state of higher education in Michigan. The sampling error is 3.2%.

The sample is designed to provide representative information for respondents from major regions of the state: Detroit City, Southeast Michigan (excluding Detroit), Southwest Michigan, Central Michigan (West and East), northern Lower Michigan, and the Upper Peninsula. (See attached information sheet for list of counties included in each region.) The data reported here are weighted to make the results representative of the adult population of Michigan.

Results

- A Michigan focus is of national interest. A political survey focused on the presidential election in Michigan is of interest not only to the people of Michigan, but also to a larger, national audience. This is true for two reasons. First, it is a large state that will be of substantial import to all presidential candidates. Second, and perhaps more important, Michigan is an ideal state to look at in relation to national political forces. In fact, over the last four presidential elections the vote division in Michigan more closely approximated the national results than those in any other large state. (See Figure 1)
- President Clinton has an early lead. Among likely voters (Q. 1 and Q. 2), Clinton has the support of 51.0% of respondents in a two-candidate race against Senator Dole (Q. 3), who has 39.0% support. In a three-way race with Ross Perot (Q. 4), Clinton leads with 44.3%, Dole has 32.1%, and Perot gets 18.2%. (See Figure 2)
- Among 1992 voters, some stand pat and some switch. Figure 3 shows that in a two-candidate race, 83.7% of Clinton voters in 1992 (Q. 5) say they will choose him again, while 76.0% of Bush voters would pick Dole. Perot voters from 1992 are evenly split (39.6% for Clinton, 38.0% for Dole), with 22.4% undecided. With three candidates, about 10% of previous Clinton and Bush voters go for Perot. He receives the support of nearly half of the people who say they voted for him last time, and Dole gets more of the remainder than Clinton. (Clinton has a substantial lead in both races among people who did not vote in 1992 (Q. 6); see the discussion below.)
- Many more people approve of Clinton's job performance than Newt Gingrich's, and it makes a difference in their presidential choice. Respondents who approve of the job Clinton is doing (Q. 7) and disapprove of Gingrich (Q. 8) heavily support Clinton, while those who approve of Gingrich's performance and disapprove of Clinton's go heavily for Dole. This is true in both two- and three-candidate races (See Figures 4 and 5). (However, it is important to note that the former group is about twice as large as the latter.) In the two-way contest, the group that disapproves of both tilts strongly to Dole, while those who approve of both favor Clinton. With three candidates, this pattern is similar but less strong, and Perot does much better with the latter

two groups than the first two groups.

- The “gender gap” is more complex than it is usually portrayed to be. Overall, the results show a modest gender gap of +3.0% in the Clinton vote (52.4% among women, 49.4% among men—Q. 9) in the two-way race, and +5.2% with three candidates (46.7% and 41.5% respectively). However, as the data in Figures 6 and 7 show, the picture is more complex and variable when one controls for whether respondents are married and whether they have minor children (Q. 10 and Q. 11). In the two-candidate race, the gender gap is an enormous +25.7% among single people with minor children, but among married people with minor children it is -11.1%. That is, within this group the support for Clinton is greater among men (49.4%) than among women (38.3%). Similarly with three candidates, the gap is +25.2% for single respondents with minor children and -8.6% for married people with children. For respondents who do not have children, married and unmarried, the magnitude of the gap falls between these extremes in both types of contests.

DISCUSSION

A Michigan focus. Michigan is an important state to focus on because it is such a good approximation of the nation as a whole. Indeed, a good case can be made that Michigan has, in recent elections, been the pivotal state (i.e., the one that brought the winner the deciding electoral votes to achieve his majority), and that it may well be that again in 1996.

The data in Figure 1 demonstrate the case well. It lists, for the ten most populous states, the deviation between the percentage of the vote received nationally by the winning candidate for president and the percentage received in each state. As the most populous, these are also the most politically important states in terms of electoral votes. (We use the absolute deviation so that we can conveniently average the deviations across the years to get an aggregate figure that shows how well the states “track” with the national results.)

One can plainly see that no state has so closely approximated the nation politically in presidential races during this period as Michigan. Michigan’s total deviation across four elections is only 3.1 percentage points, an average of only 0.8 percentage points each election. The next closest states, New Jersey and Ohio, are also close approximations of the nation, but they have average deviations that are about 75 percent higher than Michigan’s. It is also easy to see that we are a much better “model” of national politics than much larger states like New York, Texas, and even California. (Of course, if we went back further in time we might find states that were better approximations of the national result over a long historical period, but we are not interested here in historical results but rather in how representative states are of the nation’s current politics.)

Clinton’s lead. Clinton’s twelve-point lead over Dole in both the two- and three candidate races is substantial—much larger than the president’s victory margin over the-President George Bush in Michigan in 1992. It is not, however a lead that can be regarded as secure. It is nearly eight months to election day, and things both within and outside the control of the candidates may have significant effects on their levels of support. Clinton has the advantage of occupancy of the White House and a substantially larger campaign budget for the period from now until August. Dole has had to endure the divisions brought on by a conflictual nomination process, and now he will be able to put some of those conflicts behind him, and try to build party unity. Among important factors outside the direct control of

the major-party candidates are what third- or fourth-party candidates will run, the Whitewater investigations, and foreign-policy events like Bosnia, Taiwan, and Cuba.

1992 voters. These results indicate that without Perot in the race, his 1992 voters divide almost evenly between the major-party candidates, with more than a fifth of them uncertain about what they will do. If Perot decides to enter the 1996 contest, that action would draw slightly more support from Dole than from Clinton among those voters. For respondents who did not vote in 1992 but say they will vote in 1996 (about 15% of those who are registered and plan to vote), Clinton is supported by 59.7% and Dole by only 33.5% in the two-way race. With three candidates, Clinton gets 49.0%, Perot runs second with 25.9%, and Dole has 24.4%.

Clinton's and Gingrich's job performance. About 37% of respondents approve of President Clinton's job performance and disapprove of that of Speaker Newt Gingrich. (The results for each leader individually in the full sample are: Clinton, 51.0% approve, 39.6% disapprove; Gingrich, 27.8 and 58.0% respectively.) This segment of the prefers Clinton over Dole 91.5% to 4.9% with two candidates and 85.1% to 1.9% (Perot 10.2%) with three. In the reverse case (approve Gingrich, disapprove Clinton), Dole is favored 91.1% to 1.9% and 84.3% to 1.9% in the two- and three-candidate contests respectively. (In the latter race, Perot has the support of 9.8%.) But that reverse preference is held by only 18.1% of the sample, giving Clinton a strong relative advantage. We should note that this relationship does not imply that judgments about Gingrich are a direct cause of presidential choice. It is more likely that the same political views that lead respondents to react negatively to the Speaker also.

Those people who disapprove of the job performance of both officials (17.5% of the sample) favor Dole by 63.5% to 20.6% with two candidates. In the three-candidate race, Dole gets 52.7%, Perot has 25.4%, and Clinton runs third at 16.2%. Finally, only 8.8% of respondents approve of both Clinton and Gingrich. With two candidates Clinton is supported by 53.0% and Dole by 36.8%; with three candidates Clinton gets 38.5%, Dole 29.7%, and Perot 27.2%. Thus we can see that for those voters whose evaluations are consistent with a partisan interpretation (approving of one official's performance and disapproving of the other's), Perot is the preference of only about one in ten. On the other hand, for those whose evaluations cross partisan lines (approving or disapproving of both), Perot captures the support of more than a fourth of respondents. (Some respondents answered "don't know" or did not choose a response to one or both of the approval questions. In all this was 18.5% of the sample. Their presidential preferences were: Clinton 45.6%, Dole 34.3%; and Clinton 33.9%, Perot 30.8%, and Dole 30.8%.)

The "gender gap." Defining the gender gap in the Clinton vote as the percentage for Clinton among women minus the percentage among men, we find a difference among all respondents of +3.0% in the two-way race, and +5.2% with three candidates. Once we control for whether respondents are married and whether they have minor children, we find that the gender gap is not consistent in direction and varies greatly in magnitude.

In particular one should note that among males in both the two- and three-candidate races, there is relatively little variation in the level of Clinton's support across categories among men. With two candidates, it ranges only from a high of 50.8% to a low of 47.1%; with three candidates, the range is from 45.2% to 39.3%. Among women, however, the picture is very different. The level of preference for Clinton varies greatly across the categories of marriage status and whether respondents have minor children. With two candidates it ranges from a high of 72.8% to a low of 38.3%, while with three

candidates the range is from 67.6% to 30.7%. This suggests that the voting choices of women are strongly affected by factors linked to their marital status and whether they have children, while the votes of men are determined by different forces, and it is this difference that produces the direction and magnitude of the gender gap.

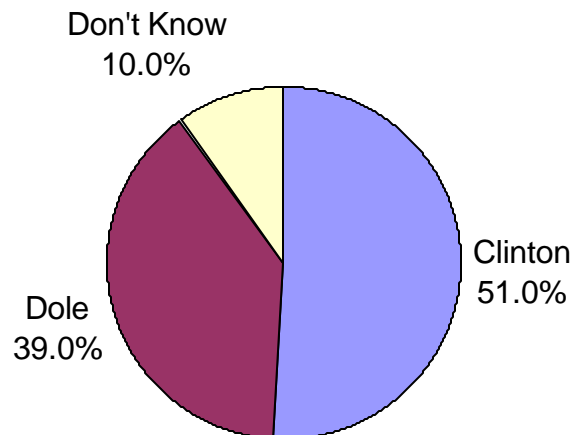
Figure 1. States and the National Presidential Vote

STATE	YEAR				Average Deviation
	1992	1988	1984	1980	
California	3.0	2.3	1.3	2.0	2.2
Florida	4.0	7.5	6.5	4.8	5.7
Illinois	5.6	2.7	2.6	1.1	3.0
Michigan	0.8	0.2	0.4	1.7	0.8
New Jersey	0.0	2.8	1.3	1.3	1.4
New York	6.7	5.9	5.0	4.0	5.4
N. Carolina	0.3	4.6	3.1	1.4	2.4
Ohio	2.8	1.6	0.5	0.8	1.4
Pennsylvania	2.1	2.7	5.5	1.1	2.9
Texas	5.9	2.6	4.8	4.6	4.5

This figure shows the absolute percentage deviations between a state's vote and national vote for the winner for president in the ten largest states over the last four presidential elections.

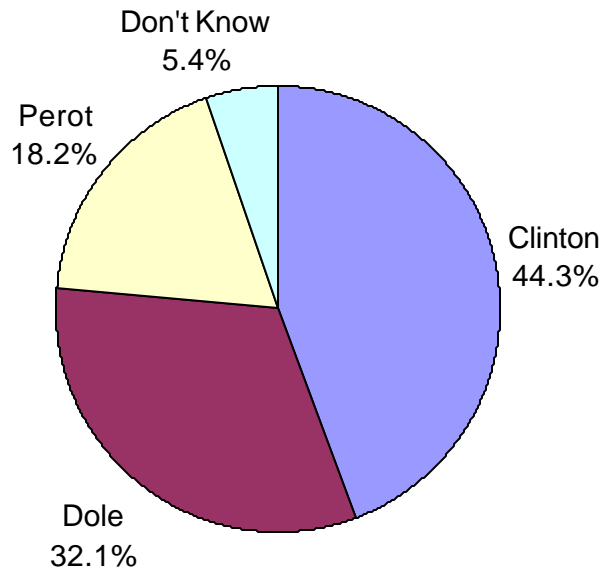
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), March 1996, Michigan State University, IPPSR

**Figure 2. The 1996 Presidential Race in Michigan:
2A. Clinton or Dole**



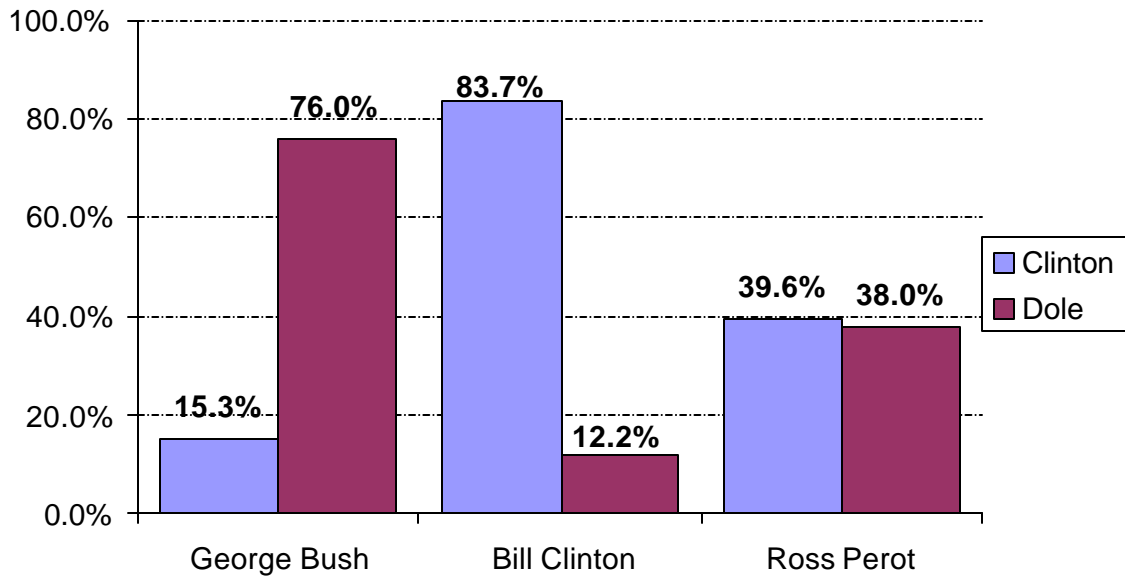
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling error=3.2%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 2. The 1996 Presidential Race in Michigan: 2B. Clinton, Dole or Perot



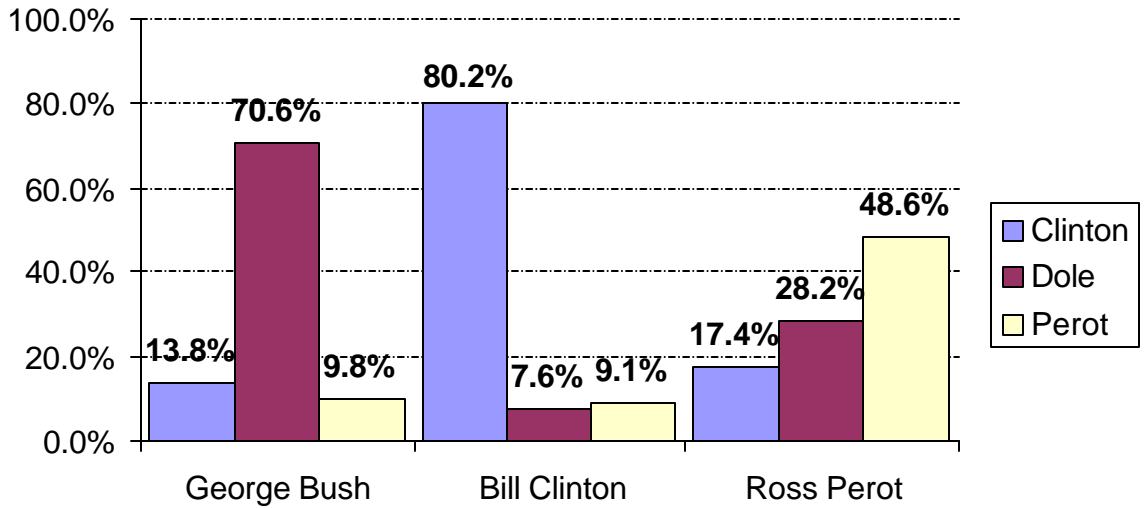
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling error=3.2%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 3. The 1996 Presidential Choices of 1992 Voters: 3A. Clinton or Dole



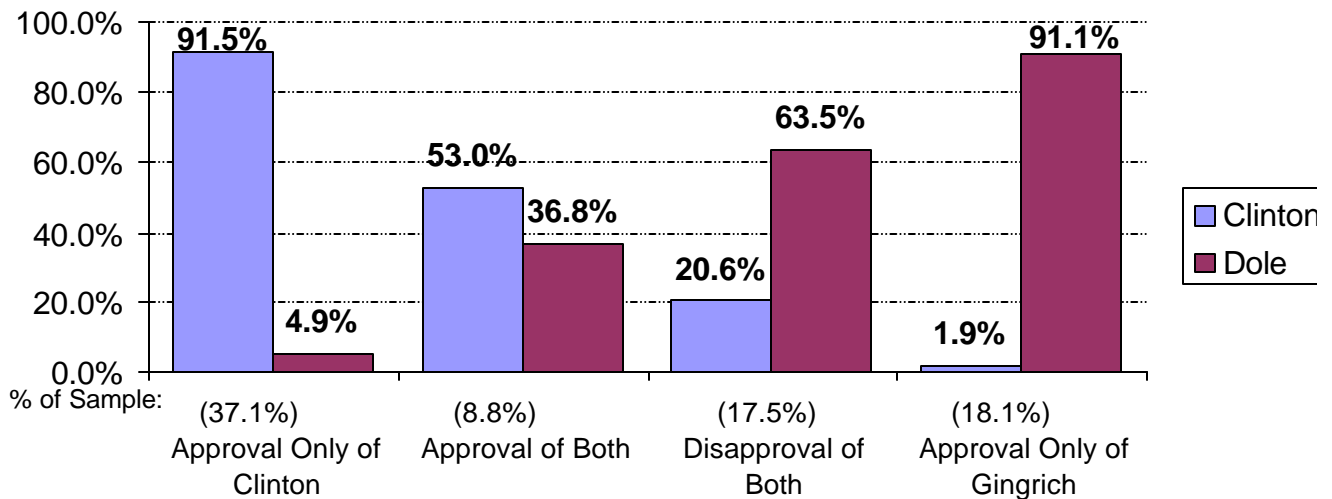
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling error=3.2%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 3. The 1996 Presidential Choices of 1992 Voters: 3B. Clinton, Dole or Perot



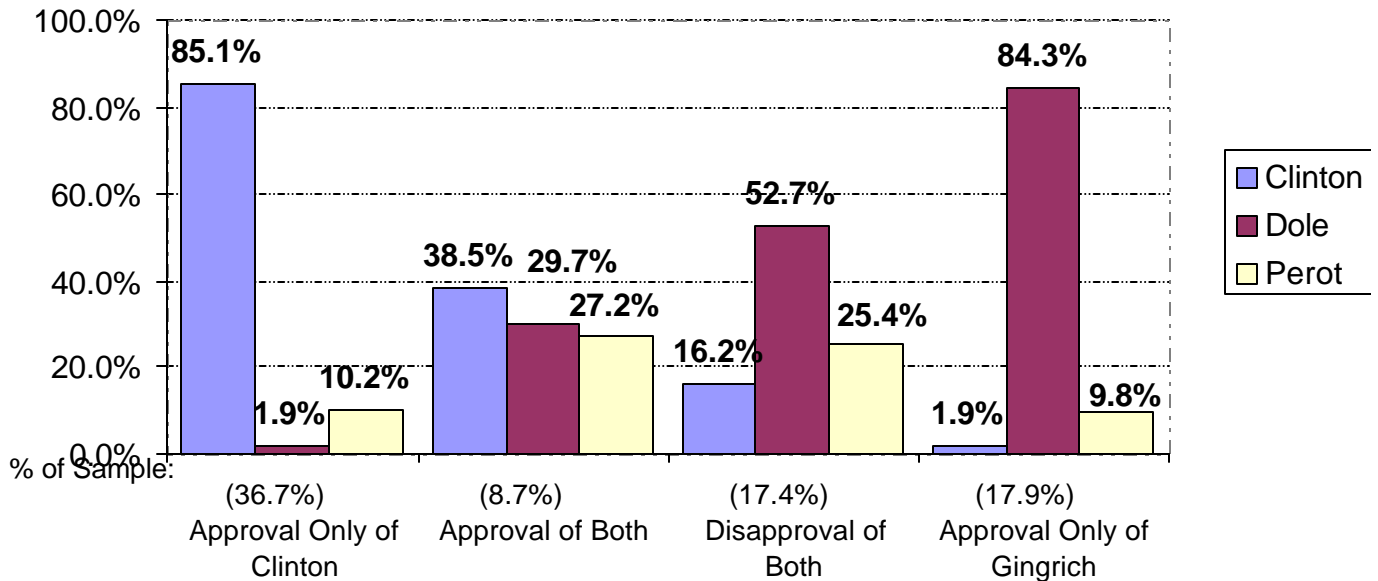
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling error=3.2%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 4. Presidential Choice Controlling for Approval of Clinton and Gingrich (2 candidate Race): Clinton or Dole



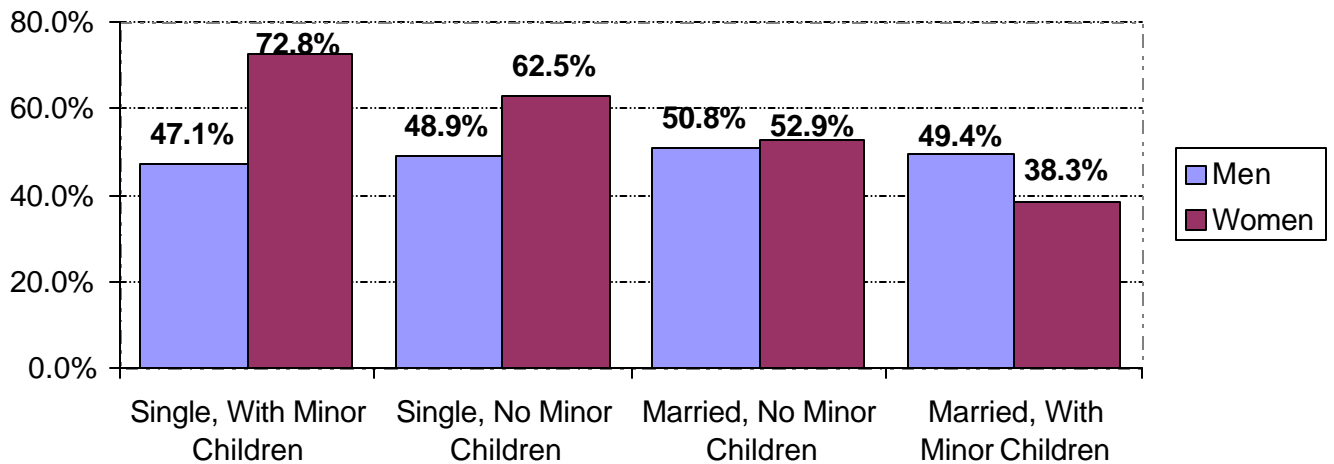
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling error=3.2%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 5. Presidential Choice Controlling For Approval of Clinton and Gingrich (3 Candidate Race): Clinton, Dole or Perot



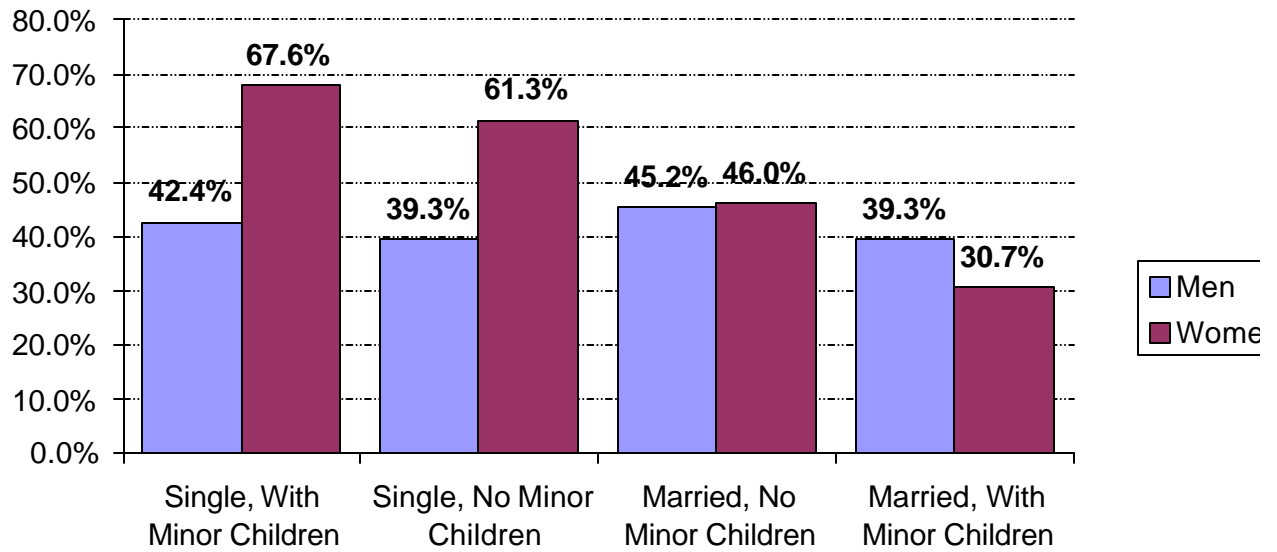
MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling error=3.2%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

Figure 6. The Gender Gap and the Clinton Vote (2 Candidate Race): Clinton's Percentage



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling error=3.2%, Michigan State University, IPPSR

**Figure 7. The Gender Gap and the Clinton Vote
(3 Candidate Race): Clinton's Percentage**



MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS), Jan-Mar 1996, N=947, Sampling Error=3.2%,
Michigan State University IPPSR

SURVEY QUESTIONS

NOTE: The full wording of questions for the items discussed in this briefing paper is given below. Answer categories are shown if other than yes and no. The order in this list conforms with the order of the bulleted items above, not the order for the questions in the survey instrument.

Q.1. Are you currently registered to vote?

Q. 2. Do you intend to vote in 1996?

Q. 3. Suppose the 1996 presidential election were being held today. If Bill Clinton is the Democratic candidate and Bob Dole is the Republican Party's candidate, who would you be more likely to vote for—Clinton the Democrat or Dole the Republican?

Q. 4. Now suppose the 1996 presidential election included not only Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, but also Ross Perot running as an independent candidate as well. Would you be most likely to vote for Bill Clinton the Democrat, Bob Dole the Republican, or Ross Perot the independent?

Q. 5. In the 1992 presidential election, did you vote for George Bush, Bill Clinton, Ross Perot, or someone else?

Q. 6. People sometime find that they are unable to vote on election day even if they had planned to do so. Do you recall that you did vote in the 1992 election for President, that you did not vote, or don't you recall?

Q. 7. Now I have a couple of questions about the performance of various public officials and institutions. In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as President?

Q. 8. In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Newt Gingrich is performing his job as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?

Q. 9. RECORD GENDER OF RESPONDENT HERE; ASK ONLY IF IN DOUBT.

Q. 10. Are you currently remarried, married, divorced, separated, widowed, member of an unmarried couple, or have you never been married?

Q. 11. How many children younger than 18 live in your household?

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, no other one 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) January–quality of life, governmental reform, higher education; (b) April–family, women, and children; (c) July–ethnic and racial groups, Michigan communities; (d) October (even numbered years)–politics, the election, and political issues; (odd-numbered years)–health and the environment.

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 17-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 February 1996 survey was comprised of:

Dr. Darren Davis, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science: (517) 432-0028

Ms. Mary Lou McPherson, Specialist, MSU Extension: (517) 355-2313

Dr. Charles Ostrom, Professor, Department of Political Science: (517) 355-6602

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

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

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

Ms. Julie Stoneman, Director of Land Programs, Michigan Environmental Council: (517) 487-9539

Dr. Eileen van Ravenswaay, Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics: (517) 353-8628

Dr. Carol Weissert, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science: (517) 353-3292

Mr. Mark Wyckoff, President, Planning and Zoning Center, Inc.: (517) 886-0555