

State *Of the* State Survey

*Serving the Citizens of Michigan:
A Report Card*

*by Larry Hembroff
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Briefing Paper No. 1999-42

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Serving the Citizens of Michigan: A Report Card on the State's Performance

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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.

THE SURVEY

A telephone survey of 963 adult residents of the state of Michigan was conducted by Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research between October 5, 1998 and November 20, 1998. This was the 16th quarterly MSU State of the State Survey (SOSS).

This State of the State Survey was designed to focus on issues regarding the performance of the state and other public institutions in delivering services and protecting resources for citizens, the quality of political discourse during the fall election season, issues related to the development of electronic commerce in Michigan, and issues concerning the status of organized labor. This briefing paper focuses on citizens' assessments of how well the state's government institutions, agencies, leaders, and media are performing in carrying out their missions.

The overall sampling error is $\pm 3.2\%$. For questions discussed in this paper asked of only a portion of respondents, the sampling error is slightly larger—how much larger depends on the number of people asked a question and how their answers are distributed.

The sample was 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 a list of the counties included in each region; see also regional map). The data reported here are weighted to be representative of Michigan's adult population.

KEY FINDINGS

A key goal of the State of the State Survey is to monitor citizen's opinions regarding current conditions in—Michigan to determine how well they believe their needs are being met by the public agencies responsible for assisting them. For SOSS-16, interviewers presented respondents with 15 areas in which state or local governments or agencies, public officials, or other institutions have responsibilities for serving the state's residents. Interviewers then asked respondents to grade either the current condition of things (such as roads, streets, and highways) or how well a task is being performed (such as the state's efforts to protect and improve the overall health of Michigan's residents) — see Survey Questions below for the complete list of areas and actual wording. Respondents were asked to assign a letter grade from A+ to F to indicate their evaluation in each of these 15 areas.

For purposes of simplifying the presentation, we have grouped the 15 performance areas into two broad categories: those that represent the direct responsibilities of state government, and those that represent the responsibilities of local governments, other public institutions, and the media. Table 1 shows the results for the first category, indicating the percentage of respondents who graded performance "A" (A+, A, and A-) or "F" and the letter grade equivalent of the average score for each area.

Table 1.
Report Card: State Government Performance

Activity	% Giving "A"	% Giving "F"	Grade
1. Efforts to reduce unemployment	20.4%	5.2%	B-
2. Helping business and industry expand opportunities for good jobs in Michigan	15.1%	4.9%	B-
3. The way it goes about providing health care to the poor	4.9%	16.3%	C
4. The way it goes about providing for the health care needs of the elderly	5.5%	13.4%	C
5. Efforts to protect and improve overall health of Michigan's residents	5.0%	4.4%	C+
6. The way it goes about trying responsibly to provide assistance to those in need (i.e., financial, mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence)	6.4%	7.6%	C+
7. The quality of Michigan's streets, roads, and highways	2.8%	34.2%	D+
8. Efforts to protect or improve the quality of the state's forests, waters, and wetlands	13.2%	6.0%	C+
9. The quality of the state's parks and public recreation areas	19.3%	4.8%	B-

Table 1 indicates that:

- Citizens gave the state relatively high grades for its efforts to help business and industry create jobs and to reduce unemployment:
 - The average grade given for the state's efforts to reduce unemployment was B-; one in five respondents gave the state a grade of "A" compared to the one in 20 who gave the state a failing grade in this area.
 - The average grade given for the state's efforts to help business and industry expand opportunities for good jobs was "B-"; three times as many respondents gave an "A" in this area as an "F."

Similarly,

- Citizens gave relatively good grades for the quality of the state's parks and recreation areas but somewhat lower grades for its efforts to protect or improve the quality of the state's forests, waters, and wetlands.
 - The average grade awarded the quality of the state's parks and recreation areas was "B-," with four times as many respondents giving the state an "A" as gave it an "F"— however,
 - The average grade given for efforts to protect or improve the quality of the state's forests, waters, and wetlands was "C+" with 13% giving the state an "A" compared to 6% giving an "F."
- Citizens gave the state "average" grades on its provision of health care for the poor and the elderly and a "C+" for its efforts to protect and improve health in the state generally.
 - More than twice as many respondents gave the state failing grades for the manner in which it provides care to the poor and the elderly as gave it excellent grades.
 - Respondents with lower household incomes did not grade the state differently than did others on the manner in which it provides care for the poor or the elderly.
 - Respondents ages 50-64 graded the state lower for both of these activities than did respondents in all other age groups.
 - Respondents with children in the home graded the state higher than did other respondents, while those with at least one elderly resident (65+) in the home graded the state more harshly on its efforts to protect and improve health generally.
 - Compared to other respondents, those with at least one elderly resident in the home did not differ in how they graded the way in which the state provides health care for the elderly.
- Citizens gave the state an average grade of C+ for the manner in which it provides assistance to those in need.
 - About as many respondents gave the state an "A" as gave it an "F."

- Of all areas listed, citizens gave the lowest grade to the quality of Michigan’s streets, roads, and highways—a “D+.”
 - More than ten times as many respondents failed the state in this area as gave it an “A.”
 - More than one in three respondents gave the state an “F” for the condition of its streets, roads, and highways.
 - Respondents in the East Central Region of the state and especially those in the Southeast Region and Detroit gave much worse grades to the state’s roads than did others. In fact, 40% of respondents from the Southeast Region and 63% of the respondents from Detroit gave an “F” for the condition of streets, roads and highways.

**Table 2.
Report Card: Performance of Other Institutions**

Activity	% Giving “A”	% Giving “F”	Grade
1. Local and state law enforcement officials’ efforts to make communities safe (for example preventing crimes, catching people who commit crimes, and enforcing other laws and statutes)	18.4%	3.1%	B-
2. Michigan’s public schools’ efforts to educate students	10.8%	9.6%	C+
3. Michigan’s colleges and universities in educating students and increasing knowledge through research and outreach	29.5%	0.8%	B
4. The overall quality of race relations in the state	3.9%	6.2%	C+
5. Public officials’ efforts to help foster and strengthen citizens’ sense of community and belonging	2.7%	4.8%	C
6. The news media in the state for providing information to citizens on vital issues in their communities and the state	19.3%	5.7%	B-

Table 2 shows the grades awarded by respondents for other governmental and media activity. Table 2 indicates that:

- Of all 15 areas of activity, citizens gave the highest average grade—”B”—to Michigan’s colleges and universities for their efforts in education, research, and outreach.

- Roughly one in three respondents gave Michigan's higher education institutions an "A"; less than 1% gave them a failing grade.
- In general, respondents with more education tended to award higher grades. Those who had graduated from college gave higher grades to Michigan's colleges and universities than did other respondents (4.5 vs. 4.9 respectively, both "B," although 4.5 borders a "B+").
- Citizens gave a "B-" to both law enforcement officials' efforts to make communities safe and to the state's news media for providing information on vital issues.
 - Roughly six times as many respondents gave an "A" for these efforts as gave an "F."
 - **There were no significant differences across regions regarding the performance of the media.**
 - Respondents from Detroit gave lower grades (by a statistically significant margin) than respondents from other regions for law enforcement efforts to make communities safe; those from the U.P. and West Central Regions gave the highest average grades for this activity.
 - African American respondents gave lower grades for efforts to make communities safe than did white respondents; there were no significant differences between the grades given by males and females for these efforts.
- Overall, respondents gave a "C+" to public school efforts to educate students.
 - Respondents from the Southeast Region and especially those from Detroit gave lower grades for public school efforts than did respondents from other Michigan regions.
- Respondents gave an average grade of "C+" for the overall quality of race relations in the state; however,
 - White respondents gave appreciably higher grades in this area (7.2, "C+") than did African American respondents (8.9, "C-").
 - African Americans in the East Central and Southeast Regions and especially Detroit gave lower grades for the quality of race relations than did African Americans living elsewhere in the state. Regional differences in grades given were much smaller among white respondents than among African Americans.
- Within this set of activities, respondents gave the lowest grade, "C," to the efforts of public officials to foster and strengthen a sense of community and belonging.
 - Respondents from the West Central and Southwest Regions gave the highest grades in this area of activity (7.1 and 7.2 respectively, "C+"), while Detroit respondents gave the lowest (9.2, "C-").
 - Women gave lower grades in this area than did men.
 - Younger respondents tended to award higher grades than did older respondents.

- African American respondents gave lower grades in this area than did white respondents.
- There were no significant differences in grades for this area across income groups in the state.

We have combined the responses to the 15 activity areas into a single index, an **overall grade**. As with the individual areas of activity, grade scores could vary from a “1” for an A+” to a score of “13” for an “F.” This index score represents the average score each respondent gave across the 15 activity areas (i.e., an index score of “1” would mean the respondent gave an “A+” in all 15 activity areas; an index score of “13” would mean the respondent gave an “F” in all).

- Across all 15 areas, the average score given by respondents was 7.0, a “C+.” Scores varied from 1.3 to 12.7.
 - For the nine activity areas that are the direct responsibility of state government officials, the average grade score was 7.4 (“C+”); for the six activity areas that are the responsibility of other public institutions, leaders, and the media, the average grade score was 6.5 (“B-”).
 - In general, Detroit respondents gave the lowest grades, followed by respondents in the Southeast Region, while those in the West Central and Southwest Regions gave the highest average grades (see Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

From time to time, it is useful to collect feedback from clients, customers, and constituents as to how they think you are doing. Elections provide an opportunity to obtain such feedback for politicians. Feedback provided in that form is quite relative, however. That is, while voters may re-elect a candidate if s/he is considered likely to do a better job than the opponent, they may still not be altogether pleased with how things are going. Furthermore, voters may be pleased with their particular representative yet displeased with the policy decisions of the governor and legislature as a whole, or with other departments of government. In SOSS-16, we have tried to provide a medium through which Michigan residents can give more direct feedback on the performance of public officials on their behalf.

Overall, respondents gave higher grades to the state's economy, the state's parks and recreation resources, higher education, crime control, and public information about vital issues. Respondents gave their lowest grades to the state for street, road, and highway maintenance. The latter grades are especially noteworthy, in that they were given after a construction season in which the state resurfaced more roads and highways than it had for many, many years. As a result, many highways were, in fact, in a much improved state at the time of the survey compared to their condition 10 months earlier. It is possible that road and highway condition may have been more salient because it was raised as an issue in the fall gubernatorial election and due to considerable highway construction during the prior year. It is possible, therefore, that respondents were more likely to give lower grades. However, the low grades in this area have some basis in actual fact: recent reports indicated that interstate truckers had particularly low regard for southern Michigan highways compared to those in other states, and that auto repair costs associated with highway damage (e.g., potholes, etc.) in the Detroit area are among the highest in the nation.

Citizens continue to voice concern over health care access and adequacy, particularly regarding the needy. And, citizens appear to believe there is considerable room for improvement in the performance of the state's public schools. Not only do they give relatively lackluster grades in this area, they most frequently identified this as the top priority for the governor and the legislature (see *Briefing Paper 98-42*).

By repeating this series of questions in a year or two, following opportunities to address some of these areas of concern, we will be able to tell whether Michigan residents believe conditions are improving or getting worse. At this point, we only know how good or how bad they rate the state is performance in each of these fifteen areas.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

NOTE: The full wording of questions for items discussed in this briefing paper is given here. The order in this list conforms with the order of questions in the survey instrument. The actual question number for the instrument is presented in brackets before the question, for example >E2<. Overall, the interviews lasted an average of 21 minutes.

Q. 1. Next, I would like to ask you some more questions about how things are going in Michigan.

Using the grading scale used in most schools, A+ to F, please tell me what grade you would give each of the following.

What grade would you give state government regarding efforts to reduce unemployment? [E2]

<1> A+ <4> B+ <7> C+ <10> D+ <13> F
<2> A <5> B <8> C- <11> D <98> DO NOT KNOW
<3> A- <6> B- <9> C <12> D- <99> REFUSED-NO ANSWER

Q. 2. What grade would you give state government for helping business and industry expand opportunities for good jobs in Michigan? [E3]

Q. 3. How would you grade the quality of Michigan's streets, roads, and highways? [E4]

Q. 4. What grade would you give Michigan's public schools in their efforts to educate students? [E5]

Q. 5. (What grade would you give) local and state law enforcement officials' efforts to make communities safe? [E6]

(For example preventing crimes, catching people who commit crimes, and enforcing other laws and statutes)

Q. 6. (What grade would you give) Michigan's colleges and universities in educating students and increasing knowledge through research and outreach. [E7]

Q. 7. (What grade would you give) state government for the way it goes about providing health care to the poor? [E8]

Q. 8. (What grade would you give) state government for the way it goes about providing for the health care needs of the elderly? [E9]

- Q. 9.** (What grade would you give) public officials for their efforts to help foster and strengthen citizens' sense of community and belonging? [E1]
- Q.10.** (What grade would you give) Michigan in the way it goes about trying responsibly to provide assistance to those in need (for example financial, mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence)? [E11]
- Q. 11.** How would you grade the state's efforts to protect or improve the quality of the state's forest waters and wetlands? [E12]
- Q. 12.** (How would you grade) the quality of the state's parks and public recreation areas? [E13]
- Q. 13.** (How would you grade) the overall quality of race relations in the state? [E14]
- Q. 14.** (How would you grade) the state's efforts to protect and improve the overall health of Michigan's residents? [E15]
(For example through research, through regulation, through promotion efforts, and through clinical efforts)
- Q. 15.** (How would you grade) the performance of the news media in the state for providing information to citizens on vital issues in their communities and the state? [E16]

REGIONAL CATEGORIES

NOTE: This survey was conducted using regions established by the Michigan State University Extension Service, with one exception: Detroit City is treated as a separate region.

Detroit: City of Detroit

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

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

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

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

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 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) Winter–quality of life, governmental reform, higher education; (b) Spring–family, women, and children; (c) Summer–ethnic and racial groups, Michigan communities; (d) Fall (even numbered years)–politics, the election, and political issues; (odd-numbered years)–health and the environment. This wave of SOSS departed from this pattern and focused predominantly on health care-related issues.

Who Conducts 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, Director of SOSS for IPPSR. 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 October 1998 survey was comprised of:

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