

# State *Of the* State Survey

***Michigan 1998:  
Problems  
and Priorities***

*by*  
*Larry Hembroff*  
*Karen Clark*  
*Briefing paper No. 99-43*  
*Series Editor: Margot Landa Kielhorn*

## ***Contributors to the State of the State Survey 1995-99***

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following units and organizations, whose financial support underwrites the quarterly **State of the State Surveys**.

### ***Organizations***

Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan  
Aspen Institute  
Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan  
Nonprofit Michigan Project  
United Way of Michigan

### ***Michigan State University***

Office of the Provost  
Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies  
Office of the Vice Provost for University Outreach  
College of Communication Arts & Sciences  
College of Human Ecology  
College of Human Medicine  
College of Osteopathic Medicine  
College of Social Science  
Department of Economics  
Department of Political Science  
Department of Psychology  
Department of Radiology  
Department of Sociology  
Institute for Children, Youth, and Families  
Institute for Public Policy and Social Research  
International Studies and Programs  
Legislative Leadership Program  
Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station  
MSU Extension  
School of Criminal Justice  
School of Labor and Industrial Relations  
School of Social Work  
Urban Affairs Program

# *Michigan 1998: Problems and Priorities*

*Prepared by*

**Larry Hembroff**

Senior Survey Methodologist  
Survey Research Division

Institute for Public Policy and Social Research

**Karen Clark**

Project Manager

Survey Research Division

Institute for Public Policy and Social Research

MSU State of the State Survey

Briefing Paper 99-43

©IPPSR, MSU

December 1998

**Please contact the following for further information:**

**About SOSS:** Brian D. Silver, Director of SOSS (Phone: (517) 355-2237) or visit the SOSS web site at <http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/soss/>. **About the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research:** Carol S. Weissert, Director (Phone: (517) 355-6672 Email: [Weissert@msu.edu](mailto:Weissert@msu.edu)). General contact for media and press: AnnMarie Schneider, or Amy J. Baumer at IPPSR (Phone: (517) 355-6672 Email: [annmarie@msu.edu](mailto:annmarie@msu.edu) and [baumeram@msu.edu](mailto:baumeram@msu.edu)).

*The analyses and interpretations in SOSS Briefing Papers are those of 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 the performance of the state and other public institutions in delivering services and protecting resources for citizens, on the quality of political discourse during the fall election season, on issues related to the development of electronic commerce in Michigan, and on issues concerning the status of organized labor. This briefing paper focuses on citizens' responses to questions about what they perceive to be the most pressing problems facing the state and about what problems they think the governor and legislature should address.

The overall sampling error is  $\pm 3.2\%$ . For questions discussed in this paper that were asked of only a portion of the 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

On a regular basis, SOSS interviews include two questions regarding public perceptions of the most important problems facing the state and the problems the public wants state government to spend time and energy to solve. These questions were once again included in the interview for SOSS-16. Both questions were asked as open-ended questions, so respondents were permitted to provide any answer they wished without direct prompting by interviewers. Under these conditions, it is expected that individuals interviewed will identify those problems they consider of greatest importance or salience. The various open-ended responses of those interviewed have been coded into topical categories.

Figure 1

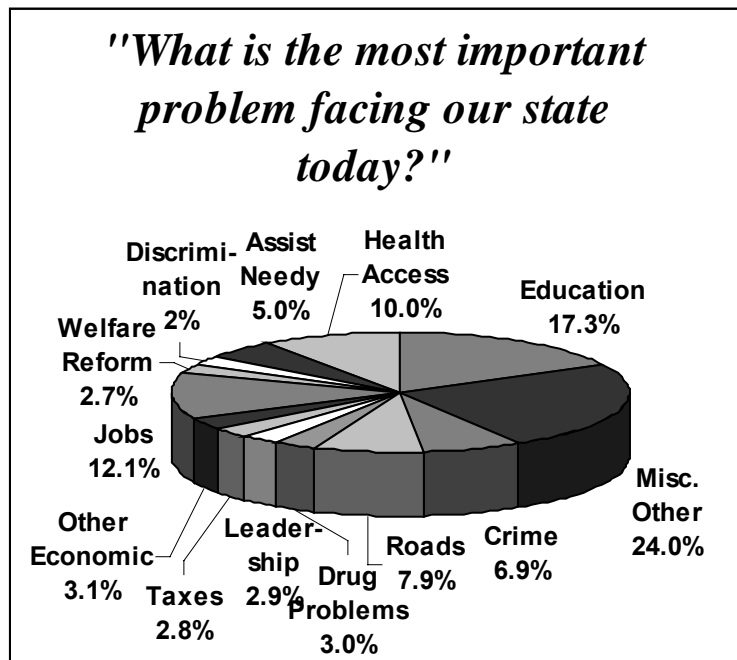


Figure 1 shows the percentages of respondents who gave responses falling into each of 18 different topical categories. The figure indicates:

- The category most frequently identified “most important problem facing the state” was Education (17.3%); the second most frequently mentioned was Jobs (maintaining, creating, and preventing loss — 12.1%); the third was Health Care Access (10.0%); the fourth was the Condition of Roads, Streets, and Highways (7.9%); and the fifth was Crime (6.9%).
- Virtually all those who mentioned Education as the most important problem were concerned about the quality of education rather than the financing of education.
- Taxes were identified as the most important problem by only 2.8% of respondents.

Figure 2

## *Change in the "Most Important Problem," 1995 - 1998*

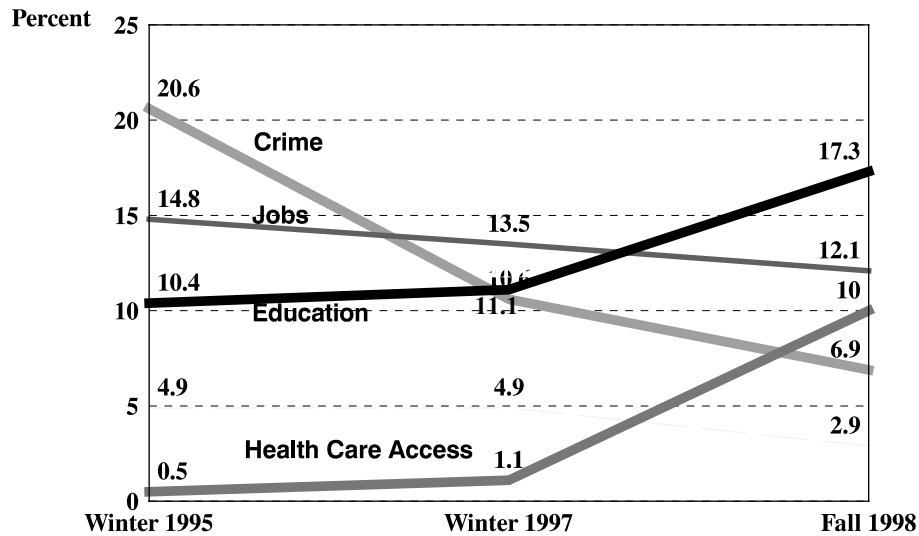


Figure 2 shows the changes that occurred during the previous four years in what citizens identified as the most important problems. The figure indicates that:

- There was a dramatic decline in the percentage of respondents who mentioned crime as the most important problem (declined from 20.6% in 1995 to only 6.9% in 1998).
- There was a slight decline in the percentages of respondents who mentioned either jobs or taxes as the most important problem, but the amount of change for each was less than the overall margin of sampling error for each of the surveys. Therefore, for all practical purposes, these appeared to be relatively stable, low level, ongoing concerns.
- There were substantial increases in the percentages of respondents who identified both education and access to health care as the most important problems. The same could also be said regarding the condition of roads, streets, and highways, a category that had not even been mentioned sufficiently often in the 1995 and 1997 surveys to be listed as a distinct category.

Some of the issues that respondents considered the most important problem facing the state—such as defense issues and moral issues—are outside the purview of the Michigan government. Also, some of the problems identified may represent more chronic concerns (such as moral decay, breakdown of the family) rather than problems requiring immediate attention. The SOSS-16 interview included a second question to hone in on those problems that might be more directly affected by state government. This question asked the respondents to identify the policy problem they most wanted the governor and legislature to spend time on out of all the issues they could address.

Figure 3

*'Of all the issues the governor and legislature could spend time dealing with, which issue is most important for them to focus on?'*

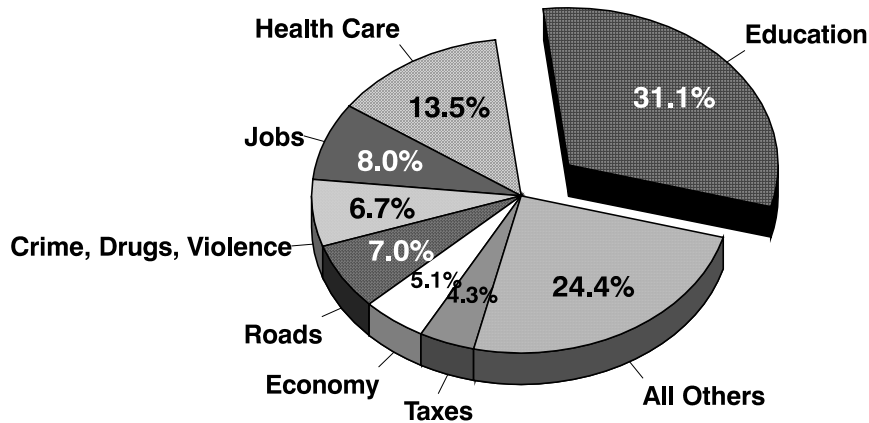


Figure 3 illustrates the results for this question. The figure indicates that:

- In this context, nearly one-third of the respondents (31.1%) identified Education as the issue they most wanted the governor and legislature to address.
- Health Care Access continued to be the second most frequently mentioned issue (13.5%), with jobs third (8.0%), roads fourth (7.0%) and crime fifth (6.7%).
- That is, the rank order of these problems remained largely the same; however, Education was the issue most often mentioned by a much wider margin than in the less specific first question. Typically, 10-38% of those who had named some other concern (excluding Health Care Access) as the most important problem facing the state named Education as the issue they most wanted the governor and legislature to address.

Figure 4  
***Change in "Most Important Issues for  
 Governor and Legislature to Address"  
 1994-1998***

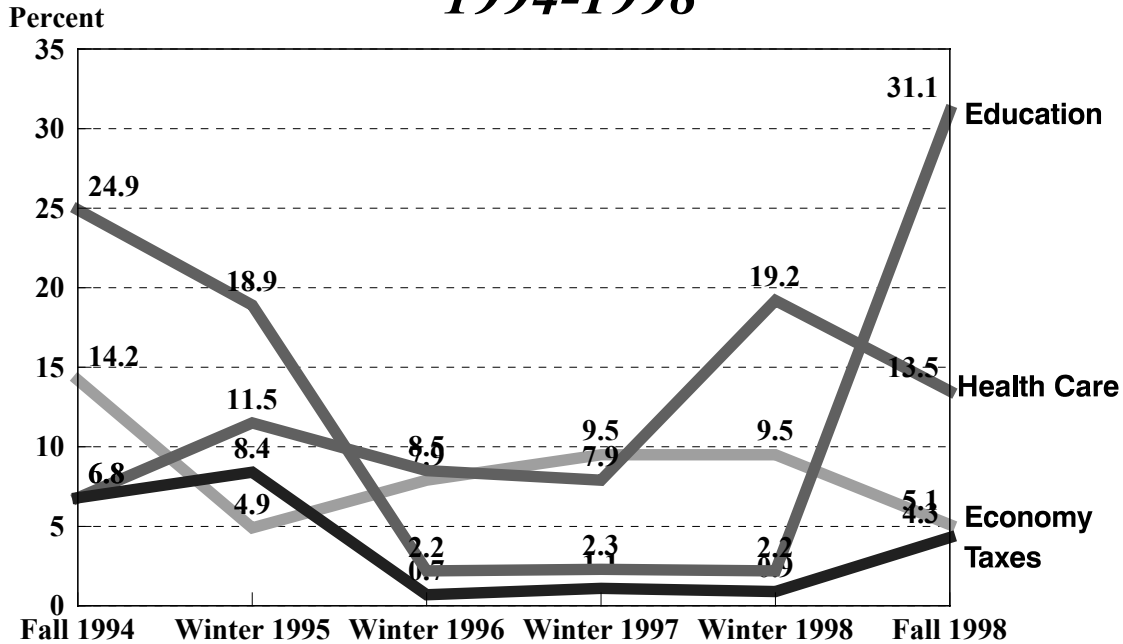


Figure 4 illustrates the percentages of respondents who singled out each of these different categories as “most important” in each of the seven different regions of the state. Figure 4 shows that:

- Education was the most frequently identified issue for the governor and legislature to address in every region of the state.
- Access to Health Care was the second most frequently mentioned problem in four of the seven regions. Crime was the second most frequently mentioned problem for respondents in the East Central region of the state. Taxes and Jobs were mentioned as often by respondents in the Northern Lower Peninsula region as was Health Care Access. And, respondents in the Upper Peninsula generally mentioned Jobs and the Economy as often as Health Care Access.
- Relatively, the Condition of Roads, Streets, and Highways was more often mentioned by respondents in the South East region and in Detroit than by respondents in other regions.
- Also relatively, Access to Health Care was more often mentioned by respondents in the West Central and Southwest Regions of the Lower Peninsula and in Detroit than in the other regions.

This particular question has been asked in six of the 16 State of the State Surveys at roughly one-year intervals. Figure 4 shows the changes in how often four of these issues (i.e., Education, Taxes, Health Care Access, and the Economy) were mentioned during these past four years. Figure 4 shows that:

- In the fall of 1994, 25% of respondents named Education as the most important issue for the state to address. This dropped to 18.9% in the winter of 1994, and even more sharply to only about 2% from the

Winter of 1996 through the Winter of 1998. In the Fall of 1998, the percentage increased dramatically to 31.1%.

- The percentage of citizens who wished state government to address the Economy as a priority declined in two steps. It dropped between 1994 and 1995, then leveled off from 1995 to the Winter of 1998, when it fell again.
- The percentage of respondents who considered Health Care Access a priority for state government rose from 6.8% in the Fall of 1994 to 11.5% in the Winter of 1995, then gradually declined to about 8% during the following two years. The percentage rose sharply to 19.2% in the Winter of 1998 and dropped again in the fall to 13.5%.
- The percentage of respondents who considered Taxes a priority for state government declined from 8.4% in the Winter of 1994 to roughly 1% from the Winter of 1996 through the Winter of 1998. The percentage then increased to 4.3% in the Fall of 1998 (a slightly greater increase than the margin of sampling error).

## DISCUSSION

**Education.** In early 1993, Governor John Engler and the State Legislature moved to eliminate property taxes as the primary funding mechanism for public education in Michigan. The state then explored a variety of education reforms and alternative education financing mechanisms before placing a proposal on a statewide ballot in the fall of 1993. Many of the specifics and implementation of voters' decisions were worked out over the subsequent months with implementation in 1994. Education was the dominant concern of Michigan citizens throughout the fall of 1994 and winter of 1995, then interest in it dropped precipitously through 1996, 1997, and part of 1998. This trend reflected a significant reduction in citizen concern over Education funding inequities. Education reform and refinancing efforts in 1993-94 opened the door to alternative approaches to public education, such as charter schools, "schools of choice," and "schools within schools." Proliferating throughout the state, such initiatives have now operated long enough for initial assessments of their outcomes. By fall 1998, Education once again headed the list of issues citizens wanted state government to address. In this survey, virtually all the respondents who identified Education as their priority issue were concerned about quality, not funding.

**The Economy.** Michigan's economy has performed throughout the 1990s. The rebound of the auto industry and the strength of the national economy energized the state's economy in general and especially in the Lower Peninsula. This helps account for the drop in the percentage of respondents from fall 1994 to 1995-1998 claiming that the economy should be the focus of state government's activity. Early in 1998, the state was cited for leading the nation in business expansion and investment and, thus far, the state's economy has weathered the turbulence in the Asian economies relatively well. Not surprisingly, the percentage of respondents identifying the economy as the primary concern of the legislature dropped even more during fall 1998. Should the difficulties with the Asian markets continue, with ripple effects on layoffs such as those now being experienced at Boeing, this relatively low level of concern about the State's economy could change rapidly.

**Health Care.** Michiganians' concern about health care rose from fall 1994 until winter 1995 (about the time the Clinton Health Care Reform effort collapsed in Congress), moderated somewhat, and remained stable into 1997. Concern then rose substantially as managed care was widely implemented for both privately insured and government sponsored programs (e.g., Medicaid). The modest decline in concern over health care after the winter of 1998 may reflect either reduced anxiety about the impact of these transitions, greater perceived urgency regarding the quality of Education, or both.

**Taxes.** While mentioned by only 9% of respondents, identification of Taxes as state government's most critical issue declined appreciably after winter 1995, precipitated by a shift in Education funding from a property tax base and subsequent sales tax increase to help fund Education. Earlier surveys found that respondents favored funding Education through sales or income taxes rather than through property taxes. The single business tax and the intangibles tax, considered unfair and excessive, were soon modified significantly. The significant drop since 1995 in the percentage of citizens who identified Taxes as state government's most pressing issue suggests that most concerns regarding state taxes were addressed by these changes in tax policies. The modest rise in concern since winter 1998 does not appear to be linked to a particular tax, but may reflect election year discussions, primarily among Republicans, about the need and financial wherewithal to provide tax reductions.

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

NOTE: The full wording of questions for items discussed in this briefing paper is given here. The order in this list conforms to the order of questions in the survey instrument. The actual question number for the instrument is presented in brackets before the question, for example >E1<. Overall, the interviews lasted an average of 21 minutes.

**Q. 1.** Now on another topic, in your opinion, what is the most important problem facing our **state** today? [E1]

**Q. 2.** There are many issues that the governor and legislature could spend time dealing with after the election. Of all the issues they could work on, which issue do you think is the **most important** for them to focus on? [GL]

## 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:

### **Principal Investigators**

Dr. Larry A. Hembroff, Senior Survey Methodologist, IPPSR, (517) 355-6672, ext. 122

Ms. Karen Clark, SOSS Project Manager, IPPSR, (517) 355-6672, ext. 123.

Ms. AnnMarie Schneider, Communications Coordinator, IPPSR, (517) 355-6672, ext.

### **Research Team**

Dr. Brian D. Silver, Professor of Political Science, and Director of SOSS.

Dr. Larry A. Hembroff, Senior Survey Methodologist, IPPSR

Karen Clark, SOSS Project Manager, IPPSR

Dr. Hairong Li, Assist. Professor, Department of Advertising

Dr. Cheng Kuo, Department of Advertising, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

Dr. Richard N. Block, Professor of Labor and Industrial Relations

Dr. John Revitte, Professor of Labor and Industrial Relations

AnnMarie Schneider, Communications Coordinator, IPPSR