

STATE of the STATE Survey

Institute for Public Policy and Survey Research
Michigan State University, College of Social Science
321 Berkey Hall, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-111

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The Institute for Public Policy and Social Research conducted the twentieth round of The State of the State Survey (SOSS) by phone with nearly 1000 Michigan adult residents during the months of January and February, 2001.

This survey is part of ongoing research used to:

- Assess citizen's views on the work of public officials, agencies, and institutions;
- Measure public sentiments and behaviors in areas relevant to public policy;
- Monitor the state of affairs regarding important aspects of life in Michigan; and,
- Develop and evaluate methods to measure citizens' attitudes and behaviors.

The survey gained timely information about citizens' opinions on:

- Quality of life in their Michigan community;
- Priority issue for the Governor and Legislature;
- Household Economic Well Being and Expectations (Consumer Confidence), and;
- Election Reform.

Ratings of the Overall Quality of Life in Communities Depends on Where People Live

Substantial majorities (80%) of the residents of rural areas, small town and village, and urban areas as a whole outside of Detroit all rate the quality of their life as good or excellent. In Detroit, 43% regard the quality of life as good (35%) or excellent (8%).

There is a sharp difference by race: while 85% of whites judge the quality of life to be good (63%) or excellent (22%), only 39% of African Americans judge the quality of life in their communities to be good (34%) or excellent (5%).

Women and men, people across the age spectrum, and people with different educational attainments all have highly favorable images of the quality of life in their communities.

Union members and non-union members are nearly equally likely to have a strongly favorable image of the quality of life in their communities.

Life is Good for Most Michigan Residents

Eighty percent (80%) of Michigan adult residents evaluate the overall quality of life in their communities as good (59%) or excellent (21%).

Asked to rate the quality of services and institutions in their communities, people give the highest rating to local churches (90% good or excellent), followed by businesses (74%), health and medical services (71%), air and water quality (70%), law enforcement (70%), parks and recreational facilities (69%), and courts (66%).

Nearly two-thirds (65%) rate their public schools as good (51%) or excellent (14%).

Other services rated good to excellent are: social services (54%), labor unions (48%), and road maintenance (29%).

College educated survey participants more frequently rate the quality of life as excellent.

SOSS Structure and Methods

- *Random Digit Dial sample of telephone numbers in Michigan*
- *State geographically stratified into 7 regions*
- *Margin of sampling error: +3.1%*
- *Multiple call attempts, refusal conversion efforts, random selection within households, calls spread across times, days, weeks.*
- *This survey was funded in part by Michigan State University's Provost Office and MSU Extension.*

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Priorities for the Governor and Legislature

EDUCATION is by far the most important issue that Michigan residents choose for the Governor and the Legislature to focus attention on – 42% of Michiganders identify education as the number one issue.

Following Education, the Economy (11%), Health and Medical Care (7%), Welfare/Poverty (7%), Taxes (6%), and Roads (5%) are the next most commonly mentioned issues.

Over the past six years, Education has grown enormously in priority. In 1995, the number one issue was Welfare (26%), while Education was second (14%), followed closely by Crime (13%), Health and Medical Care (12%), and Taxes (11%).

Statewide, 56% rated their public schools as good or excellent. It is notable that, while 68% of whites rate the public schools as excellent or good, only 30% of African Americans give the same ratings.

Is Election Reform in Michigan's Future?

A majority (70%) of survey participants ranked the quality of Michigan's elections as good (20%) or excellent (50%). Thirty percent described the elections as fair (20.9%) or poor (9.2%).

When asked about the amount of counting problems with the 2000 election; 8.7 percent felt that there were a lot of problems while the majority (67%) of respondents answered that there were some problems (38.7%) or a few problems (28.1%). Almost a quarter (24.5%) of respondents felt that there was no problem at all.

A large majority (87%) of those surveyed believe that it is the responsibility of the individual to make sure that they cast their votes in such a way as to insure that their votes will be counted completely and correctly. Sixty-three percent strongly agreed that it was the individual's responsibility while 24 percent somewhat agreed.

On the issue of whether or not it is the government's fault if voters are confused and make mistakes that nullify their vote, 57.3 percent answered that they strongly agreed (25.6%) or somewhat agreed (25.6%) that it was the government's fault. Forty-two percent disagreed with 20 percent answering that they somewhat disagreed and 22 percent strongly disagreed.

When asked whether they strongly or somewhat strongly support five different voting reforms, Voting equipment reform was the most strongly supported with 75 percent strongly supporting the measure and 20 percent somewhat strongly in support.

Following voting equipment as the first choice of election reform were local election conformity (67.8%), declaration of a state holiday for voting (65.4%), Internet voting (68%), Saturday voting (50.2%), and multiple day voting (30%).

Party Preferences

When split into Republicans and Democrats the reform most favorably supported by both parties was voting equipment with 73 percent of Republicans and 81 percent of Democrats strongly in support.

Republicans were more satisfied with the quality of Michigan voters than their counterparts with 97 percent rating the elections as good (54%) or excellent (33%). Following Republicans, Independents were the next most satisfied group with 73 percent ranking the elections in Michigan as good (57.2%) to excellent (15.4). Democrats were the least satisfied group with 69 percent responding good (44.3%) to excellent (13.6%).

Split by Race

When split by race, reform of voting equipment remains the most strongly supported reform measure with 73 percent of African-Americans and 75 percent of whites strongly in support. There is a decisive split on support for a state holiday with 56 percent of African-Americans and 36 percent of whites in support.

Regional Choices

Separated by region, the Upper Peninsula, Northern Lower Peninsula, West Central, and East Central Michigan respondents were strongly in favor of three of the reform measures. South Western Michigan and Detroit were in favor of four of the voting reforms. South East Urban Michigan supported all five of the reforms.

Over half of the respondents (52.5%) said that they would be willing to pay more in taxes to finance the voting changes while 47.5 percent were opposed to paying more in taxes for the reforms.

Household Economic Well being and Expectations (Consumer Confidence)

Six out of ten Michigan adults report that their household's current financial situation is excellent (11%) or good (48%).

There are significant differences among segments of the population regarding this, with African Americans and single and uncoupled households reporting they are doing less well than their counterparts; there were no significant differences between union member or elderly respondents and their counterparts on this.

Better or Worse

More than half (53%) of respondents reported they were better off now than they were a year ago, while another 25% said they were about the same.

There were no significant regional differences on this.

Expectations

Nearly six out of ten respondents (58%) expect that they will be better off a year from now than they are now.

However, only four out of ten expect inflation to go down (33%) or to stay the same (9%) over the next 12 months.

Only 42% expect the employment situation in this country to be better (9%) or to stay the same in the next 12 months as in the past year.

Respondents from Detroit and Southeast Michigan were less optimistic on this than other regions of the state.

Overall

Overall, economic confidence, which had been rising generally from 1994 to 1998, flattened out through 1999, fell sharply in the first quarter of 2001.

For more information about the State of the State Survey and about IPPSR, call 517-355-6672 or see our website at www.ippsr.msu.edu.