

## STATE of the STATE Survey

# Presidential Race Nip and Tuck in Michigan

### Too Close to Call

Michigan is one of the "battleground" states that is considered potentially decisive to the 2004 reelection fortunes of President George W. Bush in his race against Democratic candidate US Sen. John F. Kerry. As part of its

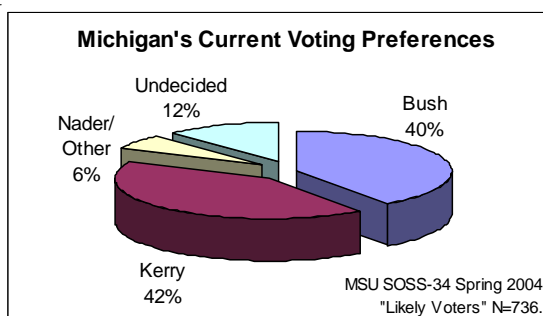
quarterly survey of public opinion in Michigan, the State of the State Survey (SOSS) has examined both the public images of these candidates and the expected vote choices on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Based on the results of the 34<sup>th</sup> State of the State Survey (SOSS-34), completed by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research April 19<sup>th</sup> through June 15<sup>th</sup>, the presidential race in Michigan is too close to call. By a simple count of the expected votes of 736 "likely voters," Kerry received 42% of the votes, Bush 40%, and Nader 6%, with 12% of the voters still undecided. These estimates have a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 3.6\%$ .

### Voting Differences

In the survey, Bush received support from a majority of likely voters in two regions: West Central and East Central. Kerry commanded a majority in the UP, Southwest, and Detroit. The region with the largest undecided vote was Detroit (18%), and the next in order was Southeastern Michigan (excluding Detroit), with 16%. Vote preferences

differed substantially by race. Whereas among whites, 44% declared their intention to vote for Bush (38% Kerry, 5% Nader/Other), among African American Michigianians, 69% favored Kerry (12% Bush, 2% Nader/Other). It is quite likely that those African American voters who were undecided at the time of



this survey, but do vote in November, will select Kerry over Bush.

Women preferred Kerry to Bush 45% to 38%, with just 3% preferring Nader (15% were undecided). Men were more likely to elect Bush: 42% to 39%, with 10% preferring Nader (10% were undecided). Kerry found younger voters to be his greatest fans, where he earned three votes for every one that Bush earned. Those ages 65 and over were Kerry's second-best supporters.

### Party ID and Voting

Both those who identified themselves as Republicans and as Democrats were strongly committed to the candidate of their own party. In contrast, independents spread their support broadly: although more preferred Bush over Kerry (31% to 22%), 20% supported third-party candidates such as Nader, and 26% were undecided. Thus, the electoral contest in Michigan will depend, in large part, on how independents vote.

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### About SOSS

The Institute for Public Policy and Social Research conducted the thirty-fourth round of the State of the State Survey (SOSS-34) by phone with 962 Michigan adults April 19 through June 15, 2004 (sampling error  $\pm 3.2\%$ ).

A cohort of 736 respondents were identified as "likely voters." These individuals were registered to vote, expected to vote in the November presidential election, and said they voted in the 2000 Presidential election.

IPPSR's State of the State Survey is the only survey conducted in Michigan that provides a regular systematic monitoring of the public mood on important issues in major regions of the state. More information on SOSS is online at [www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS](http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS)

This round of SOSS focused on views of the upcoming presidential election and Michigan public school performance, with attention paid to charter schools and education funding.

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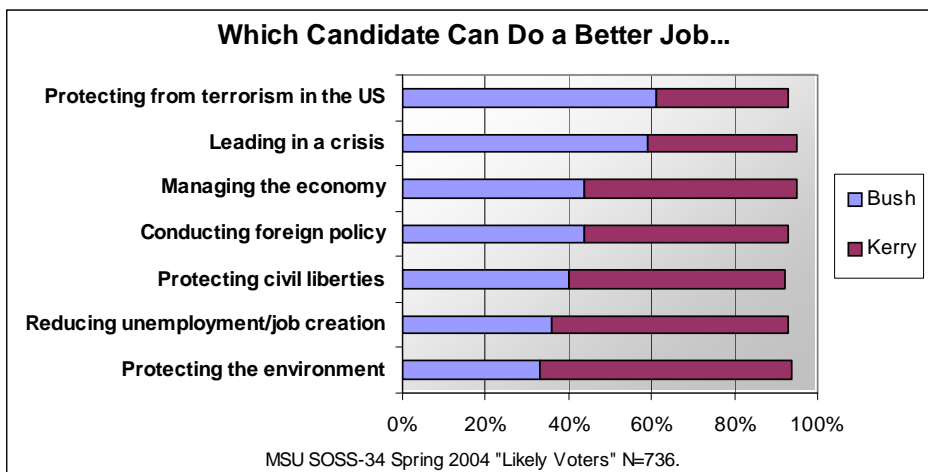
## Presidential Approval

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These results reflect not only the influence of partisanship and political ideology but also the influence of events that develop over the course of a presidency and the campaign itself. Moreover, voters' preferences are commonly influenced by their sense of economic well-being and optimism about the future.

### Bush and Kerry

An incumbent President's performance can be an important factor in his reelection. Michiganians' approval of Bush's performance has changed markedly in the past two years. In Winter 2002 (SOSS-24), 77% of Michiganians judged President Bush's performance to be excellent or good. By May-June 2004 (SOSS-34), however, Bush's popularity was much lower: only 40% of Michiganians judged the President's job performance to be excellent or good. Bush was perceived as better able to protect America from terrorism at home, while Kerry was perceived as better able to lead America's foreign policy. This is consistent with a recent national ABCNews/Washington Post poll which showed for the first time that Kerry was perceived as better able to lead our international policy and lead the war against terrorism.<sup>1</sup> The figure above highlights residents' perceptions of Bush and Kerry.



### Michigan Elections

In addition to voting for President on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Michigan voters will have the opportunity to vote for the state legislature and US Congressional delegation. Despite the plurality of self-identified Democrats in the Michigan electorate, 45% of likely voters in Michigan said they will vote for a Republican house candidate, while 36% expected to vote Democratic, and 18% volunteer that "it depends on the candidate." Judging by these responses, it would appear that the Republican majority in the Michigan legislature is likely to be preserved.

And yet, when prospective Michigan voters were asked if they would like to see the Michigan state legislature remain in Republican control, or if they would prefer Democratic control, 52% said they would like it to change, and 7% stated that it depends on the candidates. The seemingly contradictory preferences in answer to these two questions reinforces the old cliché that the only poll that really counts is the one that takes place on Election Day.

### Conclusions

The presidential election in Michigan remains close. However, based on the SOSS survey, as well as those reported by major news organizations, public opinion is quickly changing. Factors include people's assessment of the situation in Iraq and the general conduct of foreign policy. Events beyond the campaigns also continue to shape and reshape perceptions of the contending parties and candidates in the upcoming contest.<sup>2</sup>

### Consumer Confidence is Steady

Consumer confidence has remained steady in Michigan over the past year.

In this round (SOSS-34), 10% of those interviewed said their current financial situation was excellent, while 47% described it as good, and 31% said their financial condition was just fair.

When asked whether they were better off or worse off financially than a year ago, 38% said better off, 36% said worse off, and 26% said about the same.

When asked to consider their financial condition a year from now, 58% expect to be better off, while 19% expect to be about the same, and 23% expect to be worse off next year.

As expected, the more optimistic an individual was about their financial condition, the more likely they were to support Bush. For example, 56% of those who expect their financial situation to improve supported Bush, while 71% of those who expect their financial situation to be worse off supported Kerry.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> "Bush Loses Advantage in War on Terrorism," *Washington Post*, June 21, 2004. [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/trend\\_062104.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/trend_062104.html)

<sup>2</sup> Later rounds of SOSS will be relied upon to monitor developments through the summer and fall. In addition, two national surveys have been conducted to address the impact of the terrorist threat on Americans' political beliefs. A third national survey will be in the field during the summer and early fall 2004. More information is at [www.msu.edu/~bsilver/CivLibPage.htm](http://www.msu.edu/~bsilver/CivLibPage.htm)