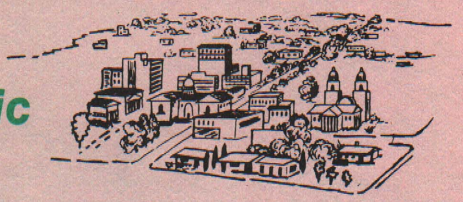
Community Needs and Priorities

as revealed by

The Michigan Public Opinion Survey



EXTENSION BULLETIN E-1082 **February 1977**

By William J. Kimball, Manfred Thullen, Alan Kirk and Christopher Doozan[1]

The Michigan Public Opinion Survey, conducted by researchers in the Michigan State University Department of Resource Development, was undertaken to determine how Michigan residents feel about community issues and spending of tax funds. The major purpose of this project was to provide county, regional and state leaders with information that could help them make decisions about community services. Questionnaires were randomly distributed to 21,792 Michigan households in late 1975; 13,296 residents responded with their opinions. This publication reports the general findings of the study. Several more detailed publications on various aspects of the study will be forthcoming.

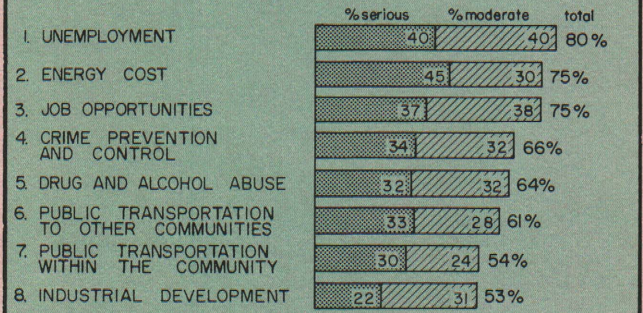
MICHIGAN RESIDENTS' OPINIONS ON COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

This survey asked residents their views on 55 areas of possible concern in their communities. They replied by choosing one of four responses: that the issue was **NOT** a problem,
a **SLIGHT** problem,
a **MODERATE** problem, or
a **SERIOUS** problem in their communities.

Eight issues were seen as **moderate** or **serious** problems by a majority (more than 50%) of the people who responded (see Figure 1). Three of the eight issues are economic: unemployment, job opportunities and industrial development. Two are concerned with transportation: public transportation to other communities and public transportation within the community. The other issues of concern as community problems are energy cost, crime prevention and control, and drug and alcohol abuse. It is interesting to note that none of these issues was considered a **serious** community problem by more than 50% of the survey respondents.

Figure 1

THE MOST SERIOUS COMMUNITY PROBLEMS IN THE STATE



Twelve of the 55 issues in the survey were considered **not** a problem in their community by a majority of the respondents (see Figure 2). Three of the 12 issues are related to education: adult education opportunities, community college, and elementary and secondary education. Two issues are concerned with emergency services: fire protection and ambulance and emergency service. Two issues are concerned with cultural activities: libraries and museums, and dining, movies and other evening entertainment. The other issues named as least serious community problems are religious expression, youth organizations, waste collection and disposal, shopping facilities and mobile home parks.

These findings, like the others reported here, indicate the respondents' **opinions** of the situations in their communities. Though these opinions do not necessarily reflect the actual state of any given community, they may give an indication of how people feel about various governmental programs or how people would be likely to vote on various issues.

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Figure 2

THE LEAST SERIOUS COMMUNITY PROBLEMS IN THE STATE

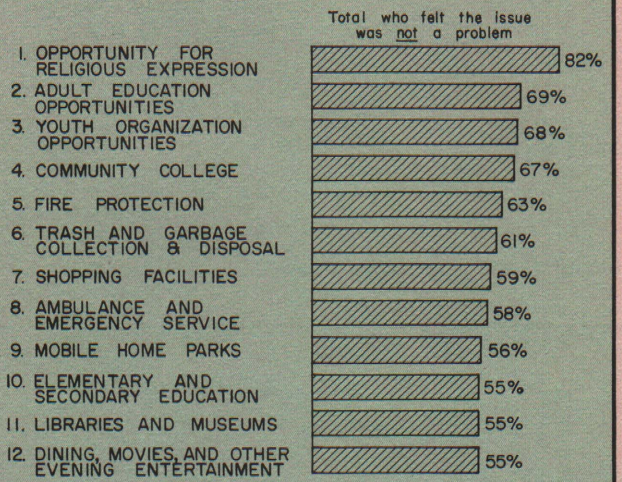
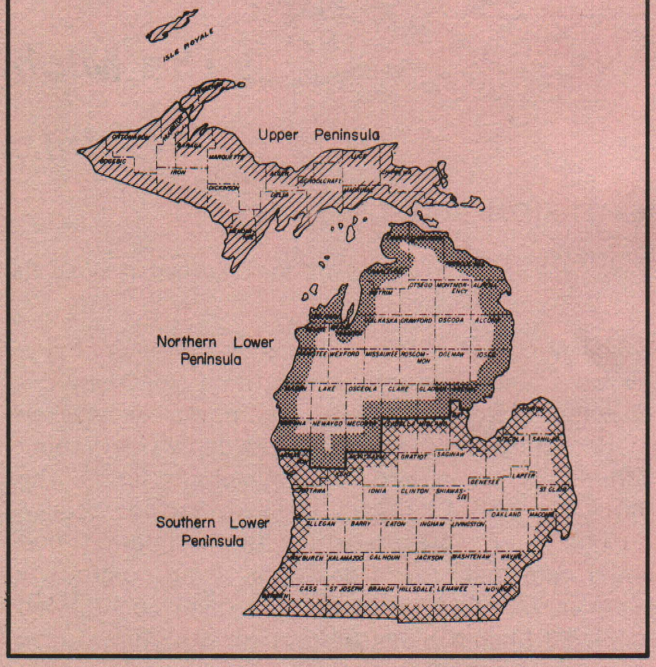


Figure 3

MICHIGAN REGIONS, AS USED IN THIS REPORT



A complete tabulation of opinions on all 55 issues covered in this section of the survey is included in Appendix A at the end of this report.

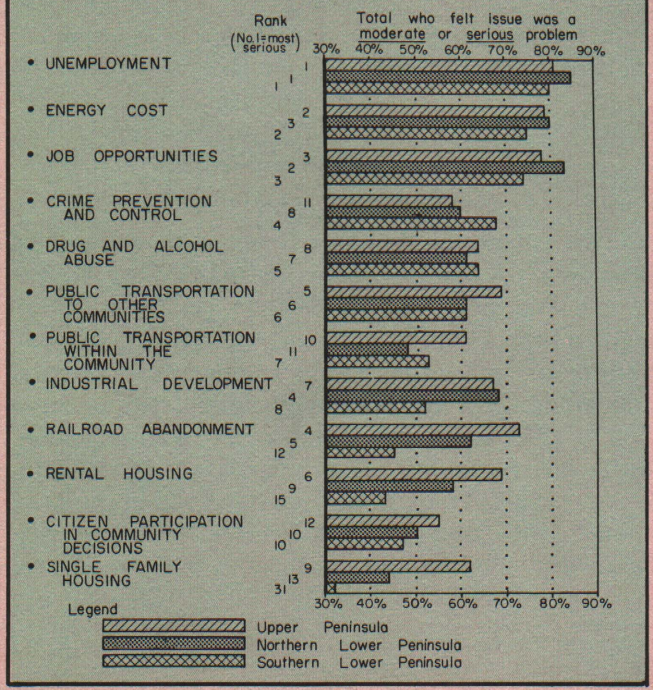
Regional Differences in Opinions

The findings here so far are statewide totals. However, the opinions of people on community problems were found to vary from one part of the state to another. To examine this variation in opinions, the researchers divided the state into the three commonly used broad regions of: Southern Lower Peninsula (38 counties), Northern Lower Peninsula (30 counties) and Upper Peninsula (15 counties). The dividing line between the two parts of the Lower Peninsula is the northern boundaries of Bay, Midland, Isabella, Montcalm, Kent and Muskegon counties, usually described as the "Bay City-Muskegon Line" (see Figure 3). Future publications will examine county and regional differences in more detail.

The most important issues in the Southern Lower Peninsula, which contains about 90% of the population of Michigan, are the same eight issues that were cited as most important in the statewide totals: unemployment, energy cost, job opportunities, crime prevention and control, drug and alcohol abuse, public transportation to other communities and within the community, and industrial development (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY PROBLEMS



Residents of the Northern Lower Peninsula cited seven of these eight issues as **moderate** to **serious** community problems. In addition to these, they also viewed railroad abandonment and rental housing as **moderate** to **serious** problems. They did **not** consider public transportation within the community as a **moderate** or **serious** concern.

In the Upper Peninsula, railroad abandonment, rental housing, citizen participation in community decisions, and single-family housing were viewed as **moderate** to **serious** problems, in addition to the eight issues cited as problems in the Southern Lower Peninsula.

As shown in Figure 4, the greatest regional differences of opinion concerned railroad abandonment, rental housing, and single family housing. The perceived seriousness of these issues differed greatly from the Upper Peninsula to the Northern Lower Peninsula to the Southern Lower Peninsula. Also, on the issue of industrial development, opinions of residents of the Upper Peninsula and Northern Lower Peninsula differed greatly from those of residents of the southern part of the state. To a lesser extent, Upper Peninsula residents' opinions on public transportation within the community and to other communities differed from those of Northern Lower or Southern Lower Peninsula residents. Also, residents of the Southern Lower Peninsula tended to view crime prevention and control as a more serious issue than did residents in the northern regions of Michigan.

The order of seriousness of the problems varied from region to region as indicated by the ranking of issues in Figure 4.

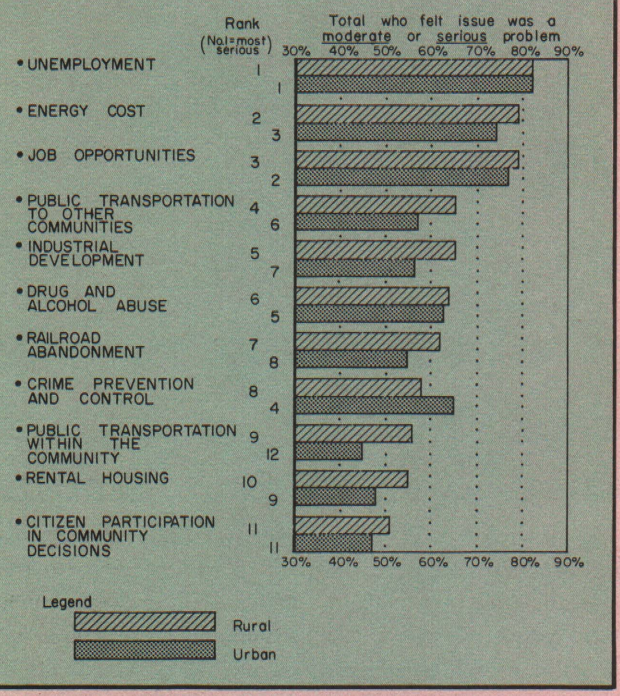
Rural-Urban Differences in Opinions

People's views of community problems were found to vary slightly by community size. Rural residents (people who live in communities with a population of fewer than 10,000, or in unincorporated settlements, or in the open countryside) identified more community problems than urban residents (people who live in cities with a population of 10,000 or more). For example, a majority of rural residents named public transportation within the community, rental housing and citizen participation in community decisions as problems, but a majority of urban residents did not.

The order of seriousness of the problems varied slightly between urban and rural residents, as indicated by the ranking of the issues in Figure 5.

Figure 5

RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY PROBLEMS



MICHIGAN RESIDENTS' OPINIONS ON PUBLIC SPENDING

To find out how Michigan residents would like to see their tax dollars spent, the Michigan Public Opinion Survey listed 51 categories of public spending and asked respondents to indicate whether:

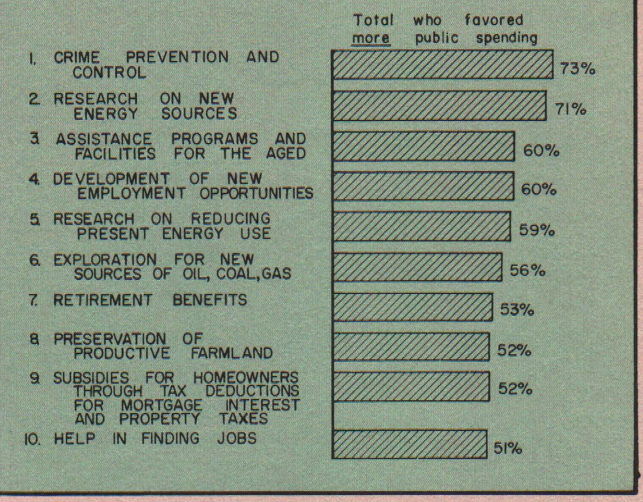
NO public funds,
LESS public funds,
the **SAME** amount of public funds, or
MORE public funds should be spent on each category.

The 51 categories were comparable to the issues listed in the "Community Problems" part of the survey. The aim of this series of questions was to identify what people's priorities were for public spending and to see how these priorities compared with residents' views on community problems.

A majority of the respondents indicated 10 categories of public spending that should receive **more** funds (see Figure 6). Crime, energy needs and employment were also noted in the previous section as major community problems. Some items, though not cited as **moderate** to **serious** community problems by a majority of respondents, did emerge as areas that people felt deserved increased public funding. These areas included: assistance to the aged, retirement benefits, preservation of farmland and tax deductions for homeowners.

Figure 6

TOP AREAS IN WHICH
MORE PUBLIC SPENDING WAS FAVORED

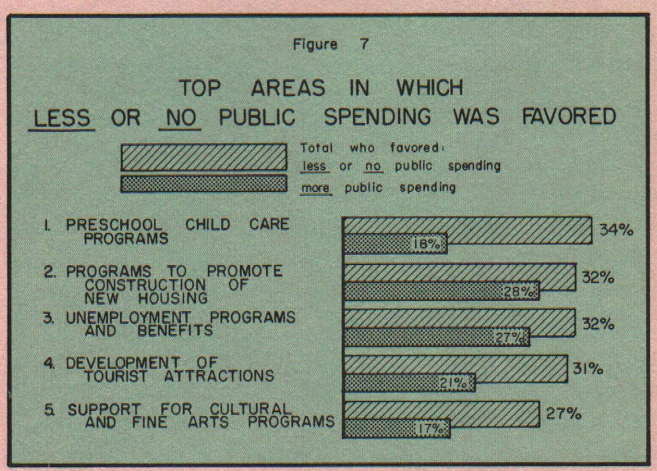


Some areas that were cited as major community problems in Michigan (shown in Figure 1) were **not** seen as top priority areas for public spending. These included: drug and alcohol abuse, public transportation to other communities, public transportation within the community and industrial development.

On the other end of the spending priority scale, not a single category was named by a majority of the respondents as an area that should receive **less** or **no** funding. Instead, people favored the **same** amount or **more** public spending in all 51 categories. The five top categories in which **less** or **no** public funding was favored are listed in Figure 7. In each category a greater percentage of people favored **less** or **no** public funding than **more** public funding (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

TOP AREAS IN WHICH
LESS OR NO PUBLIC SPENDING WAS FAVORED



The items indicated in Figure 7 were not cited by most respondents as the least serious community problems in the state (shown in Figure 2). However, these five items were among those of less concern of the 55 issues listed. For instance, 69 percent of those surveyed saw child care opportunities as a **slight** or **no** problem. Sixty-six percent saw tourist facilities as a **slight** or **no** problem.

The items listed as **least** serious community problems in Figure 2 were **not** necessarily targets for reduced spending. As one example, adult education opportunities was seen as one of the least serious community problems in Michigan (see Figure 2), but only 11 percent of the people surveyed named it as an area that should receive less tax support. Sixty-seven percent said the **same** funds should be spent, and 22 percent said **more** tax dollars should be spent in this area. Similar support for the **same** or **more** public spending appeared for community colleges, emergency services, waste collection and disposal, elementary and secondary education, and libraries and museums.

A complete tabulation of opinions on all 51 areas of public spending covered in the survey is included in Appendix B at the end of this report.

Regional Differences in Opinions on Public Spending

Michigan residents' opinions on public spending varied from region to region, just as their opinions on community problems varied (see Figure 8). People in the Southern Lower Peninsula favored **more** public spending in the same items that were cited as priorities in the statewide totals (Figure 6). People in the Northern Lower Peninsula had similar priorities, though support for increased spending was slightly lower in some of the items. In addition, a majority of Northern Lower Peninsula residents felt that there should be **more** funds spent on incentives to attract industry. In the Upper Peninsula, a majority of the respondents favored **more** public spending in four additional items: incentives to attract industry, health and medical services, road and highway systems, and public transportation to other communities.

The ranking of items for each region in Figure 8 shows that the greatest differences in spending priorities among the three regions were in the following areas: preservation of productive farmland, incentives to attract industry, health and medical services, road and highway systems, and public transportation to other communities.

Rural-Urban Differences in Opinions on Public Spending

Differences in opinions on public spending between urban and rural residents were slight (see

Figure 9). Both groups identified the same categories for increased public spending, and similar percentages of each group favored **more** spending.

The greatest differences of opinion between urban and rural residents concerned crime prevention and control, and incentives to attract industry. A noticeably larger percentage of urban residents than rural residents favored **more** public spending on crime prevention and control, and rural residents more strongly favored increased spending on incentives to attract industry.

CONCLUSION

In late 1975, when the Michigan Public Opinion Survey was conducted, Michigan residents saw three issues as most important: job opportunities, energy resources and crime. Other major concerns included drug and alcohol abuse, transportation, industrial development, assistance for the aged, preservation of farmlands and tax deductions for homeowners. Some of the concerns expressed in the survey may reflect particular circumstances that existed when the survey was conducted. Other opinions may reveal community problems that are equally or more prevalent today.

This survey has yielded much useful information on Michigan residents' concerns about their communities and views on spending tax dollars. This report has focused upon citizen opinions statewide, the variation of opinion from one major region of the state to another and the comparison of opinions of urban and rural residents. Forthcoming reports will contain more detailed information on the opinions of residents of each Michigan county as well as each of Michigan's 14 multicounty Planning and Development Regions.

Information on citizen opinions about community issues is playing an increasingly valuable role in decision making at the local and state level. More citizens today are asking that their concerns be considered in community decision making. And, as public officials decide upon alternative uses of scarce tax funds for public services, they are interested in the needs felt by the people. Authorities in the agencies that provide the services are also concerned about being able to respond to the needs of the people who are to benefit from their programs.

Of course, in using such information on public opinion, decision makers must be careful to consider it in the context of other information regarding their community. It is only in this way that they may gain a balanced view of conditions in the community and establish realistic goals for community improvement.

Figure 8

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN OPINIONS ON PUBLIC SPENDING

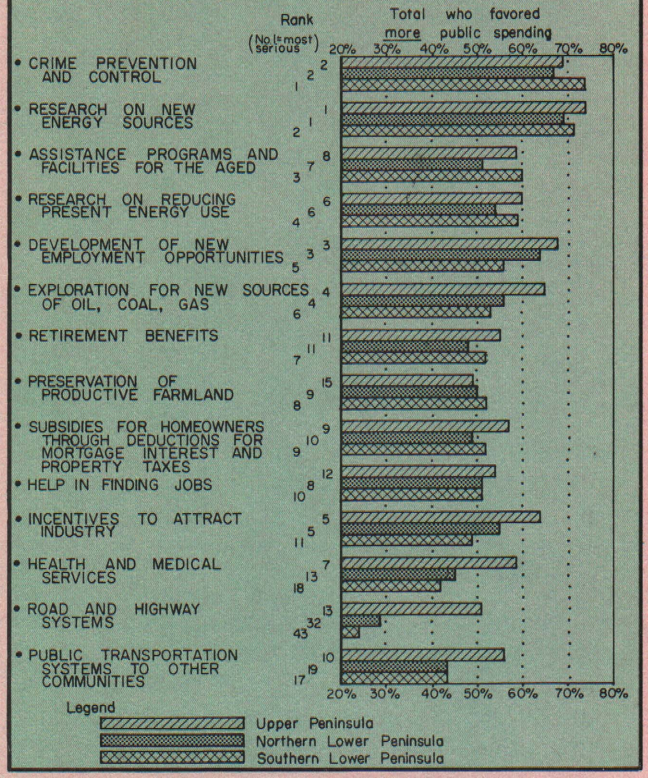
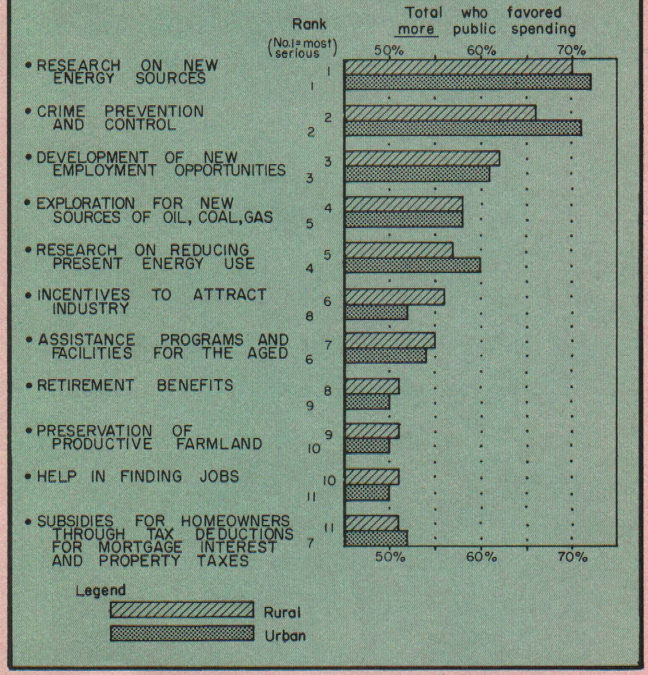


Figure 9

RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES IN OPINIONS ON PUBLIC SPENDING



The Michigan Public Opinion Survey is supported by funds from Title V of the Rural Development Act of 1972, and by the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service of Michigan State University.

For further information concerning this project, contact William J. Kimball, Department of Resource Development, 323 Natural Resources Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824.

SURVEY METHODS

The Michigan Public Opinion Survey was conducted in every county of Michigan. Survey questionnaires were mailed to households randomly selected from current telephone listings. One adult from each household was asked to respond. The required number of households in each county was determined statistically so that there was reasonable assurance that the survey responses would represent the total range of opinion.

When the responses from each county were combined to make regional or state totals, they were mathematically weighted to account for the differences in population from one county to another.

Details on sample size, rate of response and statistical error are shown below:

A. Total number of survey questionnaires mailed: (The number of questionnaires sent to any one county ranged from 224 to 283. The average was 263 per county).	21,792
B. Number of households that could not be contacted: (approximately 10% of the total).	2,288
C. Total number of households contacted:	19,504
D. Total number of responses:	14,812
E. Total response rate:	76%
F. Number of usable returns:	13,296
G. Usable response rate:	68%
H. Maximum statistical error	
1) Statewide survey data:	±1%
2) Regional survey data:	±2%
3) Urban/Rural survey data:	±2%

PROFILE OF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A knowledge of the background characteristics of the survey respondents is useful to interpret the survey findings in this report. Following is a profile of the people who responded to the Michigan Public Opinion Survey.

Age:

26% - 18 to 34 years old
48% - 35 to 59 years old
26% - 60 years old and over
Average age: 46 years old

Race or Ethnic Group:

93% - white 7% - nonwhite

Sex:

67% - male 33% - female

Length of Residence:

In present community

21% - 5 yrs. or less 21% - 36 yrs. or more
58% - 6 to 35 yrs. Average: 20 years

In Michigan

3% - 5 yrs. or less 55% - 36 yrs. or more
42% - 6 to 35 yrs. Average: 32 years

Level of Education:

21% - less than 4 years of high school
30% - completed high school
49% - formal education beyond high school

Annual Family Income:

25% - less than $9,000
30% - $9,000 to $14,999
45% - $15,000 or more
Average Income: $13,500

Employment Status:

64% - employed 2% - student
4% - unemployed 20% - retired
10% - homemaker

APPENDIX A

STATEWIDE OPINIONS ON COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

Many communities face a series of problems for the people that live in them. A list of most of these problems is provided below for you. Using the following categories, please indicate how you feel about the seriousness of each one for your general community.

NOT means Not a problem in my general community.
SLIGHT means A slight problem in my general community.
MODERATE means A moderate problem in my general community.
SERIOUS means A very serious problem in my general community.

Number		Extent of problem in my general community: % NOT	% SLIGHT	% MODERATE	% SERIOUS
1.	Job opportunities	6	20	38	37
2.	Unemployment	4	16	40	40
3.	Industrial development	22	24	31	22
4.	Tourist facilities	41	25	22	12
5.	Shopping facilities	59	16	18	7
6.	Crime prevention and control (drugs, theft, rape, fraud, etc.)	8	25	32	34
7.	Police - community relations	36	29	27	8
8.	Traffic safety and control	42	33	19	6
9.	Special education for gifted, retarded, and handicapped	42	29	19	9
10.	Elementary and secondary education	55	22	16	6
11.	Vocational and technical education (job training for youth)	34	25	25	15
12.	Community college	67	14	12	7
13.	Adult education opportunities	69	17	11	3
14.	Assistance programs for the aged	28	35	26	12
15.	Child care opportunities (day care, nurseries, licensed babysitters)	40	29	21	9
16.	Assistance programs for people with low income	29	29	27	15
17.	Family planning programs	44	27	22	7
18.	Health care facilities and staff	42	25	22	10
19.	Mental health and counseling services	34	29	25	12
20.	Drug and alcohol abuse	14	22	32	32
21.	Fire protection	63	21	12	4
22.	Ambulance and emergency service	58	21	14	6
23.	Air pollution	34	32	24	10
24.	Water pollution	32	31	24	13
25.	Water and sewage treatment facilities	47	24	20	9
26.	Trash and garbage collection and disposal	61	22	12	5
27.	Streets and roads	31	33	25	11
28.	Public transportation within the community	25	21	24	30
29.	Public transportation to other communities	18	21	28	33
30.	Railroad abandonment	36	17	18	29
31.	Land use conflicts	26	32	27	14
32.	Shoreline erosion and flooding	50	16	16	18
33.	Youth organization opportunities (Scouts, 4-H, Little League, etc.)	68	19	9	3
34.	Recreation opportunities for youth	44	27	18	11
35.	Recreation opportunities for adults and families	41	27	22	10
36.	Recreation opportunities for aged	30	29	26	16
37.	Libraries and museums	55	22	16	7
38.	Cultural and fine art opportunities (drama, music, art, lectures, etc.)	46	24	19	12
39.	Dining, movies, and other evening entertainment opportunities	55	18	16	11
40.	Citizen participation in community decisions	23	29	31	16
41.	Overall willingness of people to work for good of community	23	31	30	16
42.	Community planning	24	33	30	13
43.	Community spirit and pride	31	29	27	13
44.	Race relations	42	23	23	11
45.	Protection of individual freedom and rights	43	26	19	12
46.	Equal opportunity for all (education, services, employment)	47	26	17	9
47.	Housing mortgage money	26	29	30	15
48.	Rental housing	28	28	27	17
49.	Single family housing	39	28	20	13
50.	Mobile home parks	56	21	16	8
51.	Energy cost	9	16	30	45
52.	Energy supply	32	25	27	17
53.	Unnecessary energy use	23	28	31	18
54.	Opportunity for religious expression	82	11	6	1
55.	Rapid population change (decline or growth)	44	26	20	10

APPENDIX B

STATEWIDE OPINIONS ON PUBLIC SPENDING

Local, State, and Federal governments spend public tax money in many ways which affect your social well-being. Some of these ways of listed below. Please indicate whether you feel that **NONE, LESS,** the **SAME** amount, or **MORE** public funds should be spent in these categories.

NONE means No public funds should be spent in this category.
LESS means Less public funds than are now being spent should be spent in this category.
SAME means The same public funds that are now being spent should be spent in this category.
MORE means More public funds than are now being spent should be spent in this category.

Category Number	Categories of Concern	Should Local, State, and Federal governments spend NONE, LESS, the SAME, or MORE public funds? % NONE	% LESS	% SAME	% MORE
1.	Development of new employment opportunities	6	6	28	60
2.	Job training for adults	5	7	44	45
3.	Help in finding jobs	6	6	37	51
4.	Development of tourist attractions	12	19	47	21
5.	Incentives to increase agricultural production	9	9	41	42
6.	Incentives to attract industry	9	9	33	50
7.	Crime prevention and control (drugs, theft, rape, fraud, etc.)	1	2	24	73
8.	Police - community relations	3	4	53	40
9.	Traffic safety and control	2	5	68	25
10.	Public education (elementary and secondary)	3	8	57	31
11.	Community colleges	5	9	64	21
12.	State-supported colleges and universities	5	15	58	22
13.	Special education for gifted, retarded, and handicapped	2	2	49	48
14.	Adult education opportunities	3	8	67	22
15.	Vocational and technical education	2	5	52	41
16.	Preschool child care programs (day care, nurseries, licensed babysitters)	16	18	48	18
17.	Unemployment programs and benefits	6	26	41	27
18.	Retirement benefits	2	5	39	53
19.	Assistance programs and facilities for the aged	1	3	36	60
20.	Assistance programs for families with low income	4	21	45	30
21.	Health and medical services	2	6	49	43
22.	Family planning and population control	11	15	48	26
23.	Mental health and counseling services	3	7	55	36
24.	Alcohol and drug addiction programs	4	7	43	47
25.	Emergency services (ambulance, fire, etc.)	2	2	65	30
26.	Air pollution control	4	10	51	35
27.	Water pollution control	3	6	51	41
28.	Trash and garbage disposal	4	5	72	20
29.	Water and sewage treatment facilities	3	3	65	29
30.	Road and highway systems	2	13	60	25
31.	Local public transportation facilities	7	10	44	39
32.	Public transportation systems to other communities (trains, buses)	7	8	40	44
33.	Land use planning and control	6	13	50	31
34.	Preservation of productive farmland	4	6	38	52
35.	Preservation of wildlife and wilderness areas	2	5	45	48
36.	Shoreline protection and flood prevention	4	6	46	45
37.	Purchasing new lands for public parks	10	15	46	29
38.	Further development of forests and parks for public use	7	12	49	32
39.	Development of public recreational facilities and programs	6	12	54	28
40.	Support for libraries and museums	4	9	64	23
41.	Preservation of historical sites	4	12	59	26
42.	Support for cultural and fine arts programs (music, drama, art, lectures, etc.)	9	18	56	17
43.	Legal aid programs	5	16	53	25
44.	Court system (procedures, personnel, facilities)	5	15	51	29
45.	Prison facilities and correctional programs	4	10	46	40
46.	Programs to promote construction of new housing	12	20	40	28
47.	Programs to prolong useful life of existing housing (improvements, rehabilitation)	7	11	42	40
48.	Subsidies for home owners through tax deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes	7	6	35	52
49.	Exploration for new sources of oil, coal, and gas	7	6	31	56
50.	Research on new energy sources	3	3	23	71
51.	Research on reducing present energy use	4	5	33	59

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