Survey Results - MSU Center for Urban Affairs

In October and November of 2001, the MSU Center for Urban Affairs commissioned a survey asking Michigan residents their opinions about term limits, urban sprawl, public school infrastructure, and consolidation and cooperation among local governments.

Findings in Brief...

Term limits
The present survey confirms the findings of other recent opinion polls, documenting broad support (over 60%) for continuing the present system of term limits for state elected officials. Strong support is evident regardless of political party affiliation, education, gender, income, or age.

School Infrastructure
A surprisingly high proportion of Michigan residents (nearly 70%) rates the physical condition of public school buildings in their community as good or very good. At the same time, support was strong (87%) for state assistance to local districts for improving school infrastructure.

Urban Sprawl
When asked about specific consequences of urban sprawl, respondents expressed greatest concern about increased pollution/energy consumption and the loss of farmland and open space. When asked where responsibility lies for reducing the negative effects of sprawl, state government (42%) and local government (24%) were most commonly cited.

Local governance
About 85% of respondents support financial incentives from state government to encourage greater local cooperation. More than 70% support the consolidation of local units of government if it would improve efficiency or service delivery.

Results In Detail...

Term Limits
Respondents were asked how the performance of their own state representative/senator, and the performance of state government as a whole, compares now to their performance before the passage of term limits. The survey also asked whether term limits should be eliminated, continue with longer terms, or continue unchanged.

School Infrastructure
Respondents were asked to rate the physical condition of public school buildings. Only 11.1% rated conditions as “very poor” or “poor.” A separate question asked, “To what extent would you favor or oppose the state government providing assistance to public school districts to improve the physical condition of buildings and facilities in Michigan?”
Urban Sprawl
Respondents were asked “How concerned are you about urban sprawl?” in their own county or region, and for the state as a whole.

The survey also contained questions about specific possible consequences of sprawl. Percentages below are those stating they were “very concerned.”

Respondents were also asked “Which level of government do you think should have the main responsibility for reducing the negative effects of sprawl?” The most common response was state government (42%), followed by local government (24%) and county government (17%).

Finally, those who identified state or local government as the level most responsible for addressing sprawl were asked HOW government might address issues of sprawl. Those favoring state government action were more likely to support financial incentives than state land use planning and regulation; in comparison, for those preferring local government intervention, planning and regulation were more acceptable than financial incentives. Both groups strongly supported information and education to influence how land is used.

Local governance
Regarding local governance, respondents were asked “Should state government provide financial incentives to local units for working together to reduce costs and improve delivery of services?” and “Should local governments be consolidated if it saves money and improves efficiency in delivery of services?” Substantial majorities responded “yes” to each question.

For more information, contact the MSU Center for Urban Affairs at (517) 353-9555, or on the web at www.msu.edu/unit/cua