

**The 2005 Annual Survey of Public Opinion and Life Quality
in the Sacramento Region**

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2005 Annual Survey of Public Opinion and Life Quality in the Sacramento Region is our fourth annual survey. The objective of this project is to assess the opinions of residents in the Sacramento region regarding their overall quality of life and important local, state, and national issues. For the purposes of this study, the Sacramento region includes Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, and El Dorado counties¹. The 2005 survey covers the following significant issues:

- Overall quality of life and future economic conditions in the region
- Major issues in the region, including traffic congestion, affordable housing and health care, public education, air-pollution, growth, and the economy
- Attitude toward a new arena for the Sacramento Kings
- Governor Schwarzenegger's job performance and support for his four political reforms
- Support for President's handling of the war and the Social Security reform
- Perceptions of California State University, Sacramento in the region

This study is based on a computer-assisted telephone interview of 1002 randomly selected adult residents age 18 or over in the Sacramento region. More than 20 students conducted the phone interviews in English and Spanish from February 15 to March 16, 2005, at the Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento. The sample is representative of the four counties in the Sacramento region and comparable to the 2000 U.S. Census (68% residents in the Census vs. 66% in the sample in Sacramento County, 14% in the Census vs. 15% in the sample in Placer County, 9% in the Census vs. 9% in the sample in Yolo County; and 9% in the Census vs. 10% in the sample in El Dorado County). The margin of error for the survey is approximately ± 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The error for group comparisons would be higher than ± 3 percentage points.

This research has compared the Sacramento region findings with those from other California regions, the state, and the nation. Data regarding the state and other California regions come from the Public Policy Institute of California's Statewide Surveys (PPIC). Nationwide data are from Gallup polls. Findings from this survey are also compared to the 2002, 2003, and 2004 annual surveys of public opinion and life quality in the Sacramento region. The following is the executive summary.

¹ This project has been funded by the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (SSIS) and Office of Community Collaboration (OCC) at California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State), and is directed by Dr. Amy Qiaoming Liu, professor of Sociology and project director, the Institute for Social Research, Sacramento State. Dr. Liu is an expert in public opinion polls, and has conducted over 20 surveys in the past eight years. Dr. Joseph Sheley and Dr. Otis Scott have provided a great deal of support and advice for this study. For more information on the project and results about specific counties, political party affiliations, or household incomes in the Sacramento region, please contact Dr. Amy Q. Liu, Department of Sociology, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J. Street, Sacramento CA 95819-6005; 916-278-7572 (phone); 916-278-6281 (fax); amyliuus@yahoo.com.

Perception of Quality of Life in the Sacramento Region

Satisfied and happy with life in the Sacramento region

The majority of the public in the Sacramento region (85%) are satisfied with their overall quality of life, with 29 percent stating they are very satisfied and 56 percent indicating they are somewhat satisfied. This level of satisfaction is similar to the levels seen in 2004 (85%) and 2003 (84%), although it has decreased slightly from the high of 89 percent reported in 2002 (Liu and Sheley 2004).

About two thirds (62%) of the public in the Sacramento region believe that things in the Sacramento region are going in the right direction. This perception does not differ significantly from that reported in 2004 (60%) or 2003 (58%). Despite a slight dip in 2003 (58%) from 2002 (65%), the Sacramento region has gradually recovered from the low observed in 2003 (Liu and Sheley 2004). Now, residents in the Sacramento area are much happier with the direction the region is heading, compared to California as a whole (62% in Sacramento vs. 35% in California) (Baldassare April 2005). This positive regional outlook on the future contrasts sharply with that observed statewide (35% in 2005, 35% in 2004, 28% in 2003, and 56% in 2002) (Baldassare February 2004; Baldassare February 2003; Baldassare February 2002; Liu, Hofer, and Sheley 2005; Liu and Sheley 2004; Liu and Sheley 2003; Liu 2002).

Optimistic about future economic conditions

Sixty-five percent of Sacramento region residents think that financially, during the next twelve months, the region will have good times. This is five percent higher than 2004 (60%) and a dramatic increase from 2003 when only 32 percent thought the region would have good times in the next 12 months (Liu and Sheley 2004). Moreover, compared to residents in California as a whole (38%) (Baldassare April 2005), the public in the Sacramento region (65%) are much more optimistic about their future economic conditions. For more details on this topic, please see the report by Liu, Hofer, and Sheley (2005).

Perceptions of Major Problems in the Sacramento region

Traffic congestion: A top concern

Despite their satisfaction with the overall quality of life in the Sacramento region and their optimistic outlook for the future, Sacramento region residents have some serious concerns regarding a wide range of issues, with traffic congestion on major roads topping their list. An overwhelming majority (92%) view traffic congestion as a problem, with 66 percent thinking it is a big problem and 26 percent considering it somewhat of a problem. Traffic congestion has consistently remained at the top of Sacramento region residents' list of concerns, although the level of concern has fluctuated slightly over the past four years (66% in 2005, 67% in 2004, 58% in 2003, and 73% in 2002).

Furthermore, residents of the Sacramento region are more likely than other Californians (59%) to report that traffic congestion is a big problem (Baldassare November 2004). In fact, except for

Los Angeles (72%), the public in the Sacramento region are as likely to identify traffic as a major issue as residents in many other places well-known for their traffic problems, such as the San Francisco Bay Area (65%) and Orange County/San Diego (64%) (Baldassare November 2004).

Moreover, the concern for traffic congestion is widely shared by the general public and registered voters regardless of their county of residence, household incomes, racial backgrounds, and political party affiliations. In fact, when asked about several major issues facing the Sacramento region, respondents felt traffic congestion on major roads is more problematic than affordable housing (48%), quality of public education (46%), air pollution (42%), population growth and development (40%), affordable healthcare (38%), and the economy (17%). Please see the report by Liu, Hofer, and Sheley (2005) for more details.

Affordable housing: Another major problem in the region

Today, almost half of the area residents (47%) are not able to find a home that they can afford to buy in the four-county Sacramento region if they decide to purchase a new house in the near future. This includes 43 percent of current homeowners and half of the middle-class families who are making \$30,000 to \$99,999 a year. This American dream is even more illusive for households making less than \$30,000 (67%), non-homeowners (57%), the unmarried (57%), and elderly residents (58%). In fact, this high cost has made one-third (33%) of the public think about moving away, which is eight percentage points higher than the state as a whole (25%). This is particularly the case for non-homeowners (48%), people 40 or younger (43%), respondents with income less than \$30,000 (41%), and those who are nonwhite (37%). Of the people who are considering relocation, about two-thirds (65%) plan to leave California.

Although the availability of affordable housing in the Sacramento region (48%) is not regarded as big a problem as in the San Francisco Bay Area (58%), Los Angeles (59%), and Orange County/San Diego (63%), seventy five percent of Sacramento residents (75%) believe it is either a big problem (48%) or somewhat of a problem (27%). For the fourth year in a row, the availability of affordable housing has remained one of the top concerns (48% in 2005, 50% in 2004, 51% in 2003, and 47% in 2002). Although this level of concern has fluctuated slightly over the past four years, it has consistently remained as the second or third top concerns among region residents, who view it as more problematic than the quality of public education (46%), air pollution (42%), population growth and development (40%), affordable healthcare (38%), and the economy (17%). Please see the reports by Liu, Hofer, and Sheley (2005) and Liu and Livingston (2005) for more details.

More concerned about air pollution and population growth in the region than in the state

Compared to other Californians, residents of the Sacramento region are more worried about air pollution (30% in California vs. 42% in the Sacramento region) (Baldassare November 2004). This concern has remained quite consistent among region residents over the past four years (42% in 2005 vs. 43% in 2004, 2003, and 2002). Perceptions regarding air pollution do not vary significantly by county, age, race, or length of residence in the region. However, there are income and gender differences. Women (46%) and people with household income less than

\$30,000 per year (50%) are more likely than men (36%) and higher income groups (41% for those households with \$30,000 to \$99,999 and 36% for those with \$100,000 or more) to view air pollution as a big problem.

Sacramento region residents are also more concerned about population growth and development than other Californians (40% in the Sacramento region vs. 35% in California). This concern has stayed quite consistent since 2002 (39% in 2002, 43% in 2003, and 40% in 2004 and 2005). Perceptions regarding this issue do not differ significantly by county or race, but do vary by length of residence in the region, age, gender, and income. Residents who have lived in the region 20 or more years (48%), people who are age 65 and older (45%), women (43%), and people with household incomes less than \$30,000 per year (42%) are more likely to regard population growth and development as a big problem.

Worry about economy and affordable healthcare has dropped in the region

As economic conditions continue to improve, anxiety about the economy and affordable healthcare has decreased in the Sacramento region. In 2005, concern over the economy has hit a three-year low of 17 percent. This is much lower than the levels reported in 2004 (23%) and 2003 (40%). However, those whose households make less than \$30,000 per year (30%), non-white persons (24%), Democrats (22%), women (20%), and people age 65 and older (20%) are more likely than others to worry about the economy. Similarly, the public in the Sacramento region are less likely to view affordable healthcare as a major problem. In 2005, 38 percent of respondents are very concerned about this issue, compared to 42 percent in 2002, 49 percent in 2003, and 46 percent in 2004.

Remain deeply concerned about quality of public education

Unlike healthcare, public education does not seem to have recovered from the recession in the early 2000s. Today, the public in the Sacramento region are just as concerned over this issue (46%) as they were in 2004 (46%), no matter which racial background they come from, what their household income is, or which county they live in. Although this level of concern is slightly lower than that seen in 2003 (50%), it is much higher than that from 2002 (37%).

Attitude towards Building a New Arena for the Sacramento Kings

Strongly oppose using public tax dollars to pay for the new arena for the Kings

The majority of the residents (56%) in the Sacramento region do not feel that the Sacramento Kings need a new arena. If a new one were to be built, only one percent of the public think the funding should come strictly from public tax dollars. More than half (51%) claim it should be paid for by private money only. Thirty-seven percent say a combination of private and public funding would be acceptable, 8 percent prefer other means, and 3 percent have no opinion. Of those 8% who prefer using other means, more than half feel the owners of the Kings, and to some extent, the players, should pay for it. Many other options of funding are also mentioned,

including private donations by people with money, fans, players, and the public, other fund-raising activities, private investment, and bond-floating. For more details on this topic, please read the report by Liu and Sumati (2005).

Little support to exchange land for a new arena for the Kings

Only 32 percent of the public in the four-county region report they would vote “yes” on a ballot measure that would open up about 10,000 acres for development in North Natomas in return for landowners paying for a new arena for the Sacramento Kings. More than half (51%) oppose the measure, and 17 percent remain undecided. Sacramento County has the highest support with 36 percent approval, while the endorsement from Placer, Yolo, and El Dorado counties is 29 percent, 22 percent, and 22 percent respectively. Even fewer people (26%) support a similar ballot measure of land development in exchange for landowners paying \$275 million for a generic sports facility not restricted to the Kings.

Present location remains the first choice for a new arena

When asked about their preference of the location for a new arena if it were built for the Kings, 38 percent prefer it next to Arco Arena. Therefore, the present location is still the most popular selection. This is specially the case for the public in Sacramento County (42% for Sacramento County, 35% for Yolo, 34% for Placer, and 25% for El Dorado).

Governor Schwarzenegger’s Job Performance and Political Reforms

Divided on Governor Schwarzenegger’s four political reforms

In January 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger proposed four political reforms for California: legislative redistricting, state spending control, merit pay for public school teachers, and pension reform for public employees. Since these reforms do not have enough support from the state Legislature, Governor Schwarzenegger has put three of them in a special election so voters can make the decision for themselves. However, with the exception of the merit pay initiative (63% favor), less than half of the public in the Sacramento region support the political reforms the Governor has been advocating: 23 percent favor the legislative redistricting plan; 38 percent support the pension reform; and 48 percent endorse the state spending proposal. A large number of the public do not know about these proposals: 52 percent are unaware of the proposal for legislative redistricting, 32 percent for the pension plan, 27 percent for the state spending, and 11 percent for the merit pay. For more results about specific counties, political party affiliations, or household incomes in the Sacramento region, please see the report by Liu and Sheley (2005).

Governor Schwarzenegger more popular in the region than in the state

The majority of the public in the Sacramento region (56%) approve of the way Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as the governor, and those who support his reforms are much more positive about his job performance, with 73 percent to 66 percent approval. The governor remains more popular in the Sacramento region than in California (40%, Baldassare April 2005), even though his approval rating is 9 percent lower than a year ago (56% in 2005 vs. 65% in 2004, Liu and Meyer 2004). This is consistent with the pattern we observed in 2004 when 65 percent of the public in the Sacramento region were positive about his overall job performance, whereas only 55 percent of Californians share this optimistic view (Baldassare February 2004; Liu and Meyer 2004).

The Iraq War and President Bush's Social Security Reform

Tepid support for President's Social Security reform

A majority of residents in the Sacramento region (71%) think the Social Security program has major problems. A similar majority (65%) believe it is essential for Congress and President Bush to deal with it this year. However, more than half (54%) disapprove of how President Bush is handling Social Security, and this disapproval rating has increased 10 percentage points from a year ago (54% in 2005 vs. 44% in 2004). Moreover, Sacramento residents (38%) are less likely to favor President Bush's proposal to allow workers to invest part of their Social Security taxes in stocks and bonds, compared to the public in California (49%) and in the country (48%). For more information on this topic, please see the report by Liu, Carrigan, and Livingston (2005).

Support for the war in Iraq has dropped significantly in the region

In 2003, the majority of Sacramento region residents (52%) supported the invasion, and 42% opposed it (Liu 2003). In 2004, support for the invasion began to shrink while disapproval began to increase; half (50%) said it was worthwhile, whereas 45 percent indicated it was not (Liu 2004). However, by 2005, the majority (57%) oppose the military action, and only 38 percent support it. Residents of Placer County (50%) are more likely than residents in El Dorado (39%), Sacramento (37%), and Yolo (28%) counties to report that it was worthwhile to take military action in Iraq. Seventy-two percent of Republican voters believe it was worth going to war, while 77 percent of Democrats hold the opposite view.

Divided on the President's handling of situation in Iraq

Compared to 2003 and 2004, support for President Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq (42% in 2005 vs. 46% in 2004 and 2003) also declined slightly. Residents in the Sacramento region (42%) are also less likely than other Americans (45%) to approve of how the President deals with the Iraqi situation (Newport March 03, 2005). Please see the report by Liu and Hofer (2005) for more information on this topic.

Not too optimistic about U.S. future in Iraq

Despite the relatively successful Iraqi election in January 2005, residents in the Sacramento region are not too optimistic when asked whether they think the U.S. situation in Iraq will be better, worse, or about the same in 2006. Only 36 percent say things will become better a year from now, which is more pessimistic than when we first asked the question in our 2004 survey. At that time, almost half (47%) believed the U.S. future in Iraq would be better in 2005.

Perception of California State University, Sacramento

A vibrant higher education institute with strong academic programs

More than two-thirds of residents (68%) in the Sacramento region believe California State University, Sacramento, also known as Sacramento State, has strong academic programs. Only 3 percent hold a negative view, and 29 percent do not know. This positive perception is shared by two-thirds of the public, regardless of their age, race, gender, or household income. Registered voters of different party affiliations, whether they are Republicans, Democrats or other voters, also share similar views.

A majority of area residents also believe that Sacramento State is an exciting, vibrant university, with 57 percent agreeing with this statement, 10 percent disagreeing, and 33 percent reporting they do not know. Residents from Sacramento County (62%) are more positive about Sacramento State than the public in other counties. This may be because many do not know Sacramento State that well (50% don't know in Yolo, 44% don't know in Placer, 43% don't know in El Dorado, and 27% don't know in Sacramento).

A well-connected campus vital to the Sacramento region

California State University, Sacramento and the Sacramento region are closely tied to each other. One out of four respondents (25%) has attended Sacramento State, and about three out of four (78%) have visited the campus. In addition, an overwhelming majority of the public (83%) think Sacramento State makes the overall quality of life in the Sacramento region better. Eighty-five percent think the university provides the future workforce for the Sacramento region. Nine out of ten residents (92%) believe it is valuable that Sacramento State provides opportunities for students to work for and do research with the state government, with 72 percent saying it is extremely or very valuable.

A highly recommended university

An overwhelming majority of the public (85%) indicate that they would recommend Sacramento State to people who plan to go to college, with 69 percent reporting that they would recommend Sacramento State to people not just from the Sacramento region or California, but to people in the United States. This positive recommendation comes from an overwhelming majority of

residents, regardless of whether they are young or old, men or women, black or white, rich or poor.

Needs to better inform the public

Compared to those who do not know the university well, those residents who are well-informed about the university's activities are much more likely to view it positively, with 73 percent considering it an exciting school (73% vs. 48%), 85 percent reporting Sacramento State has strong academic programs (85% vs. 58%), and 92 percent recommending it to those who plan to attend college (92% vs. 81%). However, only 37 percent of the residents in the Sacramento region are well-informed about events and activities at Sacramento State that are open to the public, and people in El Dorado (20%), Placer (29%), and Yolo (35%) counties are much less informed than those in Sacramento County (42%). Therefore, Sacramento State needs to make a more concerted effort to keep the public better informed, especially residents living in Yolo, El Dorado, and Placer counties (Liu, Edwards, Gonzales, and Gutierrez 2005).

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