The 2004 Annual Survey of Public Opinion and Life Quality in the Sacramento Region

Executive Summary for Regional Issues

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April 2004

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The 2004 Annual Survey of Public Opinion and Life Quality in the Sacramento Region is our third annual survey. The objective of this survey 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 purpose of this study, the Sacramento region includes Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, and El Dorado counties\(^1\). The survey covers the following issues in the region and the state:

- Major issues in the region, including budget, traffic congestion, affordable housing and health care, public education, air-pollution, growth, and economy
- Preferred solutions to regional issues;
- A half-cent sales tax increase measure to fund local public transportation projects;
- Importance of regional identity;
- Housing preference in the region;
- Overall quality of life and future economic conditions in the region;
- Preferred solutions to state budget deficit.

The survey results are based on computer-assisted telephone surveys of 1003 randomly selected adult residents age 18 and older in the Sacramento region. Over 30 students conducted phone interviews in English and Spanish, from February 7 to March 2, 2004, at the Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). 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. 67% in the sample in Sacramento County, 14% in the Census vs. 16% in the sample in Placer County, 9% in the Census vs. 8% in the sample in Yolo County; and 9% in the Census vs. 8% in the sample in El Dorado County). The margin of error for the survey is approximately ± 3% at the 95% confidence level.

This survey compares the Sacramento region findings with those from other California regions and the state as a whole. Data regarding the state and other California regions come from the Public Policy Institute of California’s Statewide Surveys (PPIC). Findings from this survey are also compared to the 2002 and 2003 Annual Surveys of Public Opinion and Life Quality in the Sacramento Region. Following is a summary of findings of local and regional issues from the 2004 survey.

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\(^1\) 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 (CSUS), and is directed by Dr. Amy Qiaoming Liu, professor of Sociology and project director, the Institute for Social Research, CSUS. Dr. Liu is an expert in public opinion polls, and has conducted over 20 surveys in the past eight years. Dr. Joseph Sheley, Dean of SSIS, provided a great deal of support and advice for this study. Brad Candido produced the charts, and Brenda M. Hofer helped write two sections of this report. 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); liuqa@csus.edu.
Budget and Traffic Top Concerns in the Sacramento Region

In order to balance the state budget, Governor Schwarzenegger has proposed to take $1.3 billion in property taxes from local governments, cut health and welfare spending, and take as much as $2 billion from transportation funds statewide. This would adversely affect transportation projects and local governments in the Sacramento region, which depend heavily on the state to fund many essential programs. The specter of such cuts has not been lost on Sacramento area residents. For the second year in a row, budget deficits in local governments have topped their list of concerns. In both 2003 and 2004, 68% of Sacramento region residents viewed the budget deficits in local governments as a big problem (Liu 2003).

Perceptions of the budget deficit as a big issue do not vary much by county, gender, race, or income. However, registered voters of different party affiliations have different opinions on the issue. Democrats (77%) are much more likely than Republicans (61%) and other voters (66%) to think the budget deficit is a big problem for the local governments in the region.

The budget deficit in local governments is hardly the only worry for residents in the Sacramento region. Concern over traffic congestion on major roads has increased among Sacramento region residents from 58% in 2003 to 67% in 2004 (Liu 2003). Sixty-seven percent (67%) of Sacramento region residents view traffic congestion on major roads as a big problem, 27% view it as somewhat of a problem, and just 5% think it is not a problem.

Perceptions of traffic congestion do not differ very much by gender, race, income levels, or political party affiliations. They do vary along county lines. Among the four counties in the Sacramento region, residents of Sacramento (69%), El Dorado (67%) and Placer (66%) counties are more likely than residents of Yolo County (48%) to regard traffic congestion on major roads as a big problem.

Affordable housing (50%), quality of public education (46%), affordable health care (46%), air pollution (43%), urban sprawl (40%) %) are some of the other big problems facing the Sacramento region. However, only 23% think the economy is a big problem.

Voters to Decide How to Solve Regional Problems

More than half of the residents in the Sacramento region (55%) think that the best way to deal with regional issues should be decided by the voters, rather than state or local governments (8% + 26% = 34%) or special interest groups (2%). Thus, very few residents have a great deal of confidence in the government’s ability to solve regional problems. Respondents also think that local governments are more effective dealing with regional issues than the state government. Less than ten percent of respondents (8%) regard the Governor or the state Legislature as effective channels to address important issues in the Sacramento region, while far more residents (26%) think local governments are effective.
Support a Half-cent Sales Tax Increase to Fund Local Transportation Projects

Many Sacramento region residents are willing to “put their money where their mouth is” regarding the issue of traffic congestion on major roads. When asked how they would vote on a measure that would increase sales tax by a half-cent on the dollar to pay for public transportation projects in their county, 56% of Sacramento region residents said they would vote yes on such a measure.

However, opinions on the measure to increase sales tax vary among counties and voters with different party affiliations. Almost two-thirds of the residents in Yolo County (65%) support this measure and more than half of the residents in Sacramento (57%) and Placer (51%) counties favor it. Residents in El Dorado County are divided, with 49% supporting it and 48% opposing it. Democrats (69%) and other voters (62%) show much stronger support than Republicans (42%).

Split over the Importance of Regional Identity

Residents in the Sacramento region are not in agreement on the importance of regional identity. When asked whether they felt it was very important, somewhat important, or not important to feel that their city is part of the Sacramento region, thirty-five percent (35%) think it is very important, 32% think it is somewhat important, 31% think it is not important, and 2% don’t know.

There are significant differences regarding this issue across the four counties and among respondents with different political party affiliations and with different racial backgrounds. Sacramento County residents (44%) are far more likely than Yolo (21%), Placer (17%), and El Dorado (13%) county residents to identify strongly with the Sacramento region. Sacramento City residents (54%) are the most likely to value their connection to the Sacramento region. Compared to Republicans (28%) and other voters (37%), Democrats (42%) are more likely to hold this view. Other racial groups (50%) are much more likely than white (30%) to think this is the case.

It is interesting to note that those who responded that it is very important for them to feel that their city is part of the Sacramento region (69%) are more likely than those who feel it is somewhat important (57%) or not important (41%) to vote yes to increase sales tax by a half-cent on the dollar to pay for public transportation projects in their county.

Very few residents in the Sacramento region consider Yuba County (37%), Sutter County (31%), Stockton (25%), or South Lake Tahoe (11%) part of the Sacramento region.

Prefer Living in Single-Family Housing either Close to Work or in the Suburbs

An overwhelming majority of residents in the Sacramento region (73%) prefer living in single-family housing close to work, about half (48%) prefer living in single-family housing in the suburbs even with a long commute, and 43% want to live in single-family housing close to
parks. Only a third (34%) want to live in multi-story or multi-family housing close to shops, schools, and mass transits. This is similar to our survey results in 2002 (Liu 2002).

Housing preferences vary a great deal from county to county. Living close to work is a major concern for many residents in Yolo County; over half of the residents (53%) definitely prefer living in single-family housing close to work, while 49% definitely do not want a long commute. Over two-thirds of the residents in Placer (67%) and El Dorado (66%) counties definitely do not want to live in multi-family housing.

Marital status and household income are also significant factors in housing choices. The majority of married respondents (62%), those with a household income of $100,000 or more (64%), and those whose household income is between $30,000 and $99,999 (55%) definitely do not want to live in multi-family housing. On the other hand, sixty percent (60%) of those who are divorced or separated definitely want to live close to work.

**Satisfied with Quality of Life and Optimistic about Future Economic Conditions**

The majority of residents in the Sacramento region are satisfied with their quality of life (85%). Such a level of life satisfaction does not vary much from 2003 (84%) to 2004 (85%). However, it decreased a little bit from 2002 (89%).

Sixty percent (60%) believe that things are going in the right direction. This perception is very similar to that in 2003 (58%, Liu 2003). However, it is not as good as that in 2002 when 65% of residents in the region thought we were going in the right direction.

Sixty percent (60%) are very optimistic about the region’s future economic condition. This is quite different from 2003 when only 32% thought that we would have good times in the next 12 months (Liu 2003). Compared to residents in California on the whole (43%, PPIC, February 2004), people in the Sacramento region (60%) are much more optimistic about their economic future.

Whites (62%) and residents in Placer (71%) and El Dorado (64%) counties are more optimistic than other racial groups (52%) or residents of Sacramento (58%) and Yolo (46%) counties. Among registered voters, Republicans (75%) are the most optimistic, compared to Democrats (52%) or other voters (53%).

**Divided on How to Handle the State Budget Deficit**

There is little consensus among residents in the Sacramento region on how to deal with the state budget deficit. Thirty-five percent (35%) want to mix spending cuts and tax increases; thirty-five percent (35%) prefer cutting spending and avoiding tax increases; nine percent hope to mix spending cuts and borrowing money; seven percent want to increase taxes and avoid spending cuts; two percent prefer borrowing money and running a budget deficit; ten percent do not want to take any of the above actions; and two percent do not know what to do.
More than half of Republicans (51%) prefer reducing spending and avoiding tax increases rather than mix spending cuts and tax increases (21%). In contrast, 47% of the Democrats and 42% of other voters wanted to mix spending cuts and tax increases rather than reducing spending and avoiding tax increases (22% for the Democrats and 29% for other voters).

If spending has to be cut to balance the state budget, 46% want to cut corrections most heavily. Eleven percent (11%) endorse cutting funding for public health and social services, and 8% want to cut funding for public colleges and universities. Only 2% would cut spending for K-12 education. However, about a third of the respondents (30%) do not want to make any of the above spending cuts. Residents held similar views in our 2003 annual survey (Liu 2003).

References


Chart 1. Perception of Major Issues in the Sacramento Region

- Budget deficits in local government: 68%
- Traffic congestion on major roads: 67%
- Affordable housing: 50%
- Quality of public education: 46%
- Affordable health care: 46%
- Air Pollution: 43%
- Urban sprawl or growth: 40%
- The economy: 23%

Chart 2. Registered Voters' Opinions on Budget Deficit

- Big problem
  - Republicans
  - Democrats
  - Others
- Somewhat a problem
- Not a problem
- Don't know
Chart 3. County Perceptions of Traffic Congestion

Chart 4. Registered Voters' Opinion on How to Solve Regional Problems

- Big problem
- Somewhat a problem
- Not a problem
- Don't know

- Voters decide what to do
- Local governments decide what to do
- State government decide what to do
- Specific interests decide what to do
- Depends on specific issues
- Don't know

2004 vs 2002
Chart 5. Opinions on Increasing Sales Tax for Transportation Projects

Chart 6. Registered Voters' Opinions on Sales Tax Increases
Chart 7. Importance of Regional Identity

Chart 8. Sense of Regional Identity in the Sacramento Region
Chart 9. Political Affiliation and Regional Identity

Chart 10. Race and Regional Identity
Chart 11. Regional Identity and Opinions on Sales Tax Increases

Chart 12. Housing Preference in the Sacramento Region
(% Definitely and Maybe Yes)
Chart 13. Preference for Single-family Housing Close to Work


Chart 19. Future Economic Conditions

Chart 20. County Comparison of the Future Economic Conditions
Chart 21. Registered Voters' Opinion on the State Budget

- **Mix spending cuts and tax increases**
  - Republicans: 21%
  - Democrats: 47%
  - Other Voters: 42%

- **Reduce spending and avoid tax increases**
  - Republicans: 51%
  - Democrats: 29%
  - Other Voters: 22%

- **Mix spending cuts and borrowing money**
  - Republicans: 7%
  - Democrats: 6%
  - Other Voters: 14%

- **Increase taxes and avoid spending cut**
  - Republicans: 7%
  - Democrats: 4%
  - Other Voters: 11%

- **Borrow money and run a budget deficit**
  - Republicans: 1%
  - Democrats: 1%
  - Other Voters: 2%

- **None of the above**
  - Republicans: 12%
  - Democrats: 12%
  - Other Voters: 7%

Chart 22. Preference for Spending Cuts

- **Corrections, such as prisons**
  - 2004: 46%
  - 2003: 49%

- **Public health and welfare**
  - 2004: 11%
  - 2003: 10%

- **Public colleges and universities**
  - 2004: 8%
  - 2003: 8%

- **Kindergarten-12th grade public schools**
  - 2004: 2%
  - 2003: 2%

- **None of the above**
  - 2004: 31%
  - 2003: 29%

- **Don't know**
  - 2004: 2%
  - 2003: 2%
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