

Design Regional Detroit

Quality of Life Public Opinion Poll Results

April 10, 2006

METHODOLOGY

This is a summary of a public opinion poll conducted for Design Regional Detroit in late March 2006. The poll captures the responses of 400 adult residents of the ten-county Detroit Region to questions about the region's quality of life, image, job opportunities and the economy, and regional cooperation. The 400 respondents' counties of residence match each county's proportion of the region's population (that is, Wayne County is 38 percent of the region's population and 38 percent of the poll's sample, and so on). Younger respondents (aged 18–34) were also sampled at a rate proportionate to their representation in the general population of the region: this age group is approximately 30 percent of the population and 30 percent of the sample.

The poll has a margin of error of +/- 4.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval.

For this summary, PSC analyzed the frequency distribution of responses for the entire sample as well as by three major age groups—18–34-year-olds, 35–54-year-olds, and respondents who are 55 or older. In this summary, PSC discusses only those differences by age groups that are statistically significant. This means that we are 95 percent certain that the observed differences are not due to sampling or other errors.

KEY FINDINGS

1. One-third of respondents rate the quality of life in the ten-county region as excellent (4 percent) or very good (29 percent). Forty-two percent think it good and 25 percent fair (19 percent) or poor (6 percent).
2. Respondents were asked whether several aspects of the region were strengths or weaknesses. The following captures the percentage of people who gave a 4 or a 5 on a 0–5 scale, with 5 meaning they believe the feature is a great strength of the region or benefit of living there.

Sports and popular entertainment opportunities for fun and relaxation (76 percent; average score = 4.08)

Access to quality higher education (74 percent; average score = 3.96)

Parks, green space, lakes and rivers, and outdoor recreational opportunities (73 percent; average score = 3.98)

Cultural opportunities (61 percent; average score = 3.69)

Health care (56 percent; average score = 3.51)

Cost of living (26 percent; average score = 2.84)

Economic outlook (16 percent; average score = 2.37)

Job opportunities (11 percent; average score = 2.17)

Age differences are significant in the appraisal of just two of the eight factors that respondents were asked to rate: the availability of cultural opportunities and quality of health care are rated as strengths of the region more frequently by older respondents than by their younger counterparts.

3. Asked to assess the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement—“There are benefits to living in the southeast Michigan region above and beyond what my particular town or local community offers”—80 percent of respondents strongly (22 percent) or somewhat agree (58 percent) and 20 percent strongly (8 percent) or somewhat disagree (12 percent).
4. We asked the region’s residents to describe their own image of the region and then the region’s image to those living outside southeast Michigan. Almost two-thirds are very (14 percent) or fairly positive (51 percent) and 18 percent are neither positive nor negative. Their assessment of others’ opinions of the region is less flattering: 24 percent said it is very (5 percent) or fairly positive (19 percent) and 20 percent said it is neither positive nor negative.

Younger respondents (aged 18–34) tend to hold a more positive image of the region (71 percent have a very or fairly positive view), followed by respondents who are 55 and older (65 percent), and finally those aged 35–54 (60 percent).

5. Respondents were next read a pair of statements that could describe the economic situation in southeast Michigan and were asked which one is the closest to their own opinion. Slightly more than one-fifth (22 percent) chose “there are plenty of good quality jobs in southeast Michigan, but there are not enough talented people to fill them” and 78 percent favored “there are plenty of talented people in southeast Michigan, but there are not enough good quality jobs for them.”
6. Forty-four percent of non-retired respondents strongly (13 percent) or somewhat agree (31 percent) that the region has plenty of career opportunities for them; 56 percent strongly (25 percent) or somewhat disagree (31 percent).

Despite the majority view on the availability of career opportunities, there are significant differences by age of respondent. The younger the respondents, the more positive their appraisal of available career opportunities. Forty-eight percent of those aged 18–34—compared to 39 percent of those aged 35–54—either agree strongly or somewhat that there are career opportunities for them in southeast Michigan. The oldest group of respondents is the least positive—just 24 percent of this group agree that there are career opportunities for them in the region. However, this could reflect where respondents in this older age group are in their career trajectory—looking toward retirement rather than continuing to work or pursuing a new career.

7. Asked where their children or grandchildren would be living and working in the future, 34 percent said southeast Michigan, 15 percent say somewhere else in Michigan, and 51 percent say outside Michigan.
8. Asked three questions on the region’s economic future, respondents predict diversity over concentration.

82 percent strongly or somewhat agree that the economy will be based on a wider variety of industries than it is now.

46 percent strongly or somewhat agree that automobile design and engineering will always be the major source of employment and wealth in the region.

39 percent strongly or somewhat agree that automobile manufacturing will always be the major source of employment and wealth in the region.

Younger respondents tend more than older respondents to envision that automobile manufacturing will continue to be a major source of wealth and employment for the region. Forty-nine percent of the 18–34-year-olds either strongly or somewhat agree that automobile manufacturing will always be a source of wealth and employment for the region. By comparison, 37 percent of 35–54-year-olds and one-third of respondents aged 55 or older hold this view.

9. Respondents are divided on the extent to which people in the region currently work together for the benefit of the whole region. Forty-eight percent strongly or somewhat agree that people in the region work together and 47 percent strongly or somewhat disagree, with those who strongly disagree outnumbering those who strongly agree 20 percent to 13 percent.
10. Nevertheless, a large majority (91 percent) of respondents agree that the region’s success depends on people working together for the benefit of the whole region—63 percent strongly agree and 28 percent somewhat agree.
11. In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to offer one suggestion to business, government, and community leaders on how to improve the quality of life in the region. Fifty-three percent say more and better jobs, diversification, or policies more friendly to businesses; 12 percent say working together and better government; and 10 percent say better education and training. No other suggestion received more than 6 percent.