



## Central Michigan University Political Science Department Releases Survey of Rural Michigan

**Background:** Michigan is undergoing a series of significant political, social and economic changes as a consequence of the downturn in our national economy. Local units of government are consequently facing significant policy challenges in order to cope with these changes, particularly rural units of government where specific rural information is scarce.

In an effort to identify the issues, positions and concerns of rural Michigan residents to assist local government policymakers, the CMU Department of Political Science and the Center for Applied Research and Rural Studies partnered to conduct a statewide survey of 744 rural residents in the state. Using U.S. Census rural blocks in order to target only rural residents and to exclude urban and suburban areas in the state, the survey consisted of telephone survey responses from 502 rural residents and 242 written survey responses (to target those without a listed telephone number). The survey's margin of error is +/- 4.5%.

The telephone and mail surveys were conducted during the period of April 8 through June 13. Survey respondents were randomly selected and were 18 years or older. A total of 70 questions were posed. A summary of some of the major findings in the survey are as follows:

**1. Rural Michigan residents have a very positive outlook on their quality of life.**

73% of residents rated the quality of life in their community as excellent or good

**2. Rural Michigan residents rate fire protection and EMS services most highly.**

Rating of key government services in rural Michigan (per cent rating the services and "A" or "B"):

Fire protection services	78%
Emergency services	74%
Local sheriff	68%
Schools	67%
Access to health care	65%
Quality of health care	65%

**3. Rural Michigan residents feel most strongly about environmental protection and road issues.**  
 Priority issues for rural residents: (per cent rating the issue very important or somewhat important):

Stronger protection for groundwater	90%
Stronger protection for lakes and rivers	88%
Upgrading roads	87%
Increase access to public land for recreation	75%
More availability of affordable housing	61%
More cultural enrichment opportunities	55%
More assisted living or nursing home care	54%
More parks	34%

**4. Rural Michigan residents are most likely to support millage increases for fire protection and public safety.**

Attitudes towards millage increases by rural residents (per cent supporting or strongly supporting millage increases) for the following services:

Millage increase for fire protection	64%
Millage increase for police and public safety	62%
Millage increase for roads and transportation	56%
Millage increase for health care access	55%
Millage increase for schools	55%
Millage increase for libraries and the arts	50%

**5. Rural Michigan residents are most likely to support mergers of trash recycling services and road commissions if consolidations were proposed.**

Attitudes towards mergers and consolidations (Percent agreeing that a merger should occur):

Merge trash and recycling services	67%
Merge road commissions	63%
Merge nearby townships	53%
Merge nearby libraries	51%
Merge nearby schools	50%
Merge police services	50%
Merge fire protection services	47%

**6. Rural Michigan residents trust local governments over the state and federal government.**

Trust in government by rural residents (per cent that have a *low trust* in government):

Low trust in local government	29%
Low trust in the state government	58%
Low trust in the national government	66%

**7. Rural Michigan residents prefer moderate growth over the next ten years.**

Attitudes towards growth desired in the next 10 years:

Rapid growth desired	9%
Moderate growth desired	46%
Slow growth desired	29.5%
No growth desired	14%

**8. A majority of rural Michigan residents do not expect their quality of life to change over the next ten years.**

Expected change in quality of life over next ten years:

Increased quality of life	21%
Decreased quality of life	22%
Stay about the same	55%

**9. A majority of rural Michigan residents feel taxes are too high.**

Attitudes towards taxes:

Feel taxes are too high	54%
Feel taxes are about right	41%
Feel taxes are too low	3%

**10. Rural Michigan residents do not support abolishing the property tax, but if it were abolished, most would prefer the lost tax revenue be replaced with a sales tax rather than an income tax increase.**

Support abolishing the property tax	42%
If property tax abolished, replace lost revenue with sales tax increase	73%
If property tax abolished, replace lost revenue with an income tax increase	22%

**11. Rural Michigan residents do not support opening new casinos not owned by Native Americans, but also do not feel existing Native American casinos have had a positive impact on either the state economy or the quality of life of the state.**

Native American casino attitudes:

Support new casinos not owned by Native Americans	32%
Feel existing Native American casinos have a positive impact on the state economy	37%
Feel existing Native American casinos have a positive impact on the quality of life of the state	27%

**12. There is concern among rural Michigan residents that illegal drug activity has increased in the state.**

Illegal drug activity in the state:

Illegal drug activity has increased in the state	52%
Illegal drug activity has stayed the same in the state	34%

**13. Rural residents have mixed views of the impact of unions on the quality of life in their communities.**

Impact of unions on the quality of life in local communities:

Positive impact	34%
Negative impact	31%

**14. The Governor's approval rating and support towards his plan to cut business taxes are approximately the same among rural Michigan residents, although they strongly oppose his plan to tax retirement pensions.**

Approval rating of Governor Snyder:

Approve or strongly approve of Snyder job performance to date	47.5%
Support of Snyder plan to cut taxes on business	47.2%
Support of Snyder plan to tax retirement pensions	19.3%

If you would like further information about the survey, other issues analyzed in this survey, or are interested in further analysis of the findings of this survey as they relate to your region of the state, please contact Dr. James Hill or Dr. Chris Owens at 989-774-3442. You may also contact us at [hill1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:hill1jp@cmich.edu). Community and county level analysis services are also available.