CIVIC CONFIDENCE SURVEY
COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JULY, 1996

PROJECT DIRECTORS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to gauge Twin Cities metropolitan area residents attitudes towards government, students and faculty of Metropolitan State University’s College of Management have conducted the first annual Metro State Civic Confidence Survey. It is the first independent poll ever taken of residents views towards government services in the seven county Twin City metropolitan region. About half of Minnesota’s population lives in the region.

The survey focuses on citizens’ views on government services and employees, ethics of elected officials, major issues facing government, and the regional economy. The Survey gives more attention than most surveys to residents’ views on their local government, usually overlooked in public opinion polls.

Because 95% of Metro State’s students come from the seven county region, Metro State has been committed to improving the professional and community life of the metropolitan area since the University’s founding twenty five years ago. The Civic Confidence Survey is part of that long-term commitment. It is hoped that both policy makers and citizens can use the Survey’s findings to improve performance and accountability of public institutions.

The study was first conceived by two students in a Public Policy Analyses class in the College of Management. The students, Todd Ferrara and Wendy Klancher, were frustrated by lack of anything more than anecdotal accounts of metropolitan area citizens’ views of government performance and leadership. As a consequence, for their required final paper the two wrote the initial survey questionnaire and coordinated the first stages of the Civic Confidence Survey.

Metro State’s intention is to annually conduct a similar survey. This survey will serve as a base line study for future comparisons.

Some of the key findings of the poll are:

- About half of residents believe elected officials are less honest than average Minnesotans;
- Public employees do as well or better at their jobs as other, non-government employees, according to a majority of Metro residents;
- Crime is seen as the most significant problem facing the metropolitan area;
- Personal fear of crime, particularly among women, is very common;
• An overwhelming majority of the region’s citizens oppose using tax dollars to help finance a new sports stadium;
• Although almost half of Metro residents oppose toll roads, a core group does support them. More significantly, there is a substantial group open to persuasion on this issue;
• Metro residents are satisfied with quality and quantity of services provided by local government. The service with the highest level of dissatisfaction is administration of welfare programs;
• Despite criticisms of the public schools, a majority of residents have confidence in their local school districts and are satisfied with their performance; and
• Most Metro residents are confident they will be better off in 3 to 5 years than they are today. However, in the past year, a majority have cut back spending due to economic uncertainty and insecurity.

CRIME

When asked, in an open-ended fashion, what the chief problem facing the Twin Cities metropolitan region is, 67.6% replied crime (see Figure 1.) No other issue came close. The second leading problem, traffic congestion, was ranked most important by 8.3% and while education was ranked first by 3.9%.

Personal fear of crime is common, especially among Metro area women. When asked if there were areas within one mile of home where they were afraid to walk at night, 60% of women replied yes, while 39% of men did so. Of both sexes, 51% of Metro residents said they would be afraid to walk in some areas at night within a mile of their home. 61% of Minneapolis residents said they were such places while 51% of St. Paulites and 49.3% of suburban dwellers said there were.

Despite fear of crime, 61% of Metro residents say they are satisfied with law enforcement, while only 14% say they are either dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied. Most also think local police are honest. When asked whether they thought local police would lie in order to make an arrest, 70% felt either definitely not or probably not.

OFFICIALS HONESTY/EMPLOYEES WORK QUALITY

Possibly due to the rash of wrong-doing by state legislators in the past year, Metro residents do not highly regard the honesty of elected officials. When asked what they thought about their honesty, 49.3% thought elected officials were less honest than the average Minnesotan (see Figure 3.) Of those 14.5% thought they were actually dishonest while 34.8% thought they were less honest than average Minnesotans. Only 0.5% thought elected officials were more honest than average Minnesotans and 47.5% thought they were as honest.

While Metro residents doubt elected officials honesty, they respect the work of government employees. 58.6% thought local government employees did as good a job as the average Twin Cities worker. An additional 8.1% thought they did a better job while
24.8% thought they did not do as good a job as the average worker. 8.0% answered not sure to this question.

**STADIUM FINANCING**

Backers of a publicly financed stadium for pro sports teams will have difficulty finding public support. 71.6% of Metro residents oppose using regional tax dollars to help finance a sports stadium for the Twins and Vikings. (See Figure 2.) Only 11.5% say they definitely support public financing. There are not very many in the middle of this issue, presumably the easiest to persuade by either side. 6.6% said they probably would oppose use of tax dollars and 7.8% said they probably would support use of tax dollars. There is no difference of opinion on this issue from central or suburban communities.

**TOLL ROADS**

After crime, traffic congestion was seen as the most serious problem facing the Metro region. Toll roads, a potential partial solution to traffic congestion woes, meets with more ambivalence than taxes for a pro sports stadium. Though, far from a majority, 21.3% say they definitely support toll roads while 46.8% definitely oppose them. However, the key persuadable middle is larger in this situation than the stadium. 18.1% say they probably support toll roads while 11.5% say they probably would oppose them.

**GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE**

By most measures, Metro area residents are happy with state and local governments. When asked which level of government they trust to do the right thing most often, 54.7% answered their local government, 30% said state government, while only 7.6% replied federal government, and 11% said were not sure. (See Figure 4.)

When asked about level of satisfaction with quality of government services, Metro area residents preferred levels of government closest to home. 43% of Metro area residents say they are dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the federal government. 28.7% are not satisfied with the state government; 22.8% with local school districts; 22.3% with county governments; and 19.8% with city governments.

With the exception of welfare, Metro area residents are also satisfied with specific government services. Libraries, parks, snow plowing, 911 service, garbage/recycling collection, and law enforcement met with either partial or complete satisfaction from over 80% of residents. Libraries had the highest marks receiving 84% complete satisfaction while parks and garbage/recycling received 81% complete satisfaction approval ratings.

The chronic Minnesota summer curse of road repair received 49.3% full satisfaction and 28.7% partial satisfaction ratings from residents.
A significant exception to the overall high level of satisfaction with government performance was administration of welfare programs. 33.4% expressed full of partial dissatisfaction with administration of welfare programs. Only 35.8% felt somewhat or completely satisfied with welfare programs. Presumably because of lack of familiarity with welfare delivery, 30.9% of residents were not sure about their options, or in a few cases, refused to answer the question.

However, the intensity of dissatisfaction can be seen in that of those that answered the welfare question, 48.2% were either completely or somewhat dissatisfied with their administration.

Metro residents do not think that their local governments are too big. Of city services, 63.5% say their city governments provide the right amount of services while 14.7% said there were too many services and 15.7% said they did not provide enough services. 54.7% said their county offered the right amount of services while 19.6% said it offered too many and 17.5% said it did not offer enough.

SCHOOLS

Public education is the single biggest public expenditure and activity in the Metro region, as in other parts of the country. Three questions were asked Metro residents regarding public schools. The questions addressed amount of confidence in local school districts; level of satisfaction with quality of services; and opinion on amount of services. (Answers to school questions may have been affected by the release of the results of statewide test scores of eighth graders during the surveying period.)

34.8% of Metro area residents said they had a lot of confidence in the schools and 34.3% said they had some confidence. Only 7.8% had no confidence and 13.0% said they did not have very much confidence. 10.1% were not sure.

36.0% were completely satisfied with their local school district and 19.4% were somewhat satisfied. 13.2% said they were dissatisfied and 9.6% said they were somewhat dissatisfied. Presumably because of perceived lack of familiarity with schools, 21.8% of residents did not answer this question. Significantly, of those who answered the question, 46.1% were completely satisfied with their schools.

Many people want more from their schools. 24.8% said their local schools were not providing enough services while 11.5% said too many services were offered while 45.8% said their local school system offered the right amount of services.

FUTURE CONFIDENCE

Metro residents feel moderately confident in the Twin Cities’ economy, considered to be among the strongest in the nation. 27.8% say the local economy is improving while 48.4% believe it is staying the same while 23.8% believe it is getting worse. Surprisingly
in view of the Twin Cities’ robust economy, 59.8% say they have cut back their day to
day spending in the last year due to economic uncertainty and insecurity.

When it comes to their own personal situation, Metro residents have much less
ambivalence. 72.8% of residents say they are either somewhat or fully satisfied with their
own current financial situation. Even more significant is their optimistic views of the
future. When asked whether they thought they would be better off in 3 to 5 years than
they are right now, 47.5% said they were confident they would be better off and 31.6%
said they were somewhat confident they would be. Only 18.1% either had no or little
confidence that they would be better off financially in 3 to 5 years.

**Facts about the Confidence Survey**

Results are based on a Metropolitan State College of Management poll conducted
June 5-17 1996 by telephone with 408 randomly selected adults in the seven county Twin
Cities metropolitan area.

The margin of error in the poll is five percentage points or less, for results based on all
inadvertently introduced by question order, wording, and practical difficulties in
conducting the poll, including events that may have occurred during the interviewing
period.

The Metro State Civic Confidence Survey is directed by Ken Peterson, Associate
Professor of Public Administration (612-341-7567) and David O’Hara, Assistant
Professor of Economics (612-341-7674). Dr. O’Hara can also be reached via the internet
at dohara@msus1.msus.edu. Student co-directors are Todd Ferrara and Wendy Klancher.
Chief Problem Facing the Twin Cities

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Should Tax Dollars Be Used To Help Finance a Stadium for the Twins and Vikings?

Figure 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Not</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Not</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused/ Not Sure</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elected Officials’ Honesty Compared to the Average Minnesotan
Figure 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As Honest</th>
<th>More Honest</th>
<th>Less Honest</th>
<th>Dishonest</th>
<th>Refused/Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which Government Do You Trust To Do What is Right Most Often?
Figure 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Refused/Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>