

AZ Views

October 2008

Arizona Indicators Panel

Volume 1 Issue 5

Arizonans Criticize Government, But Know They Need It

Arizonans have gained a reputation for their low opinion of government, despite—or perhaps because of—the major role played by all governmental levels in residents’ daily lives. This view was reflected in the responses to this segment of the survey, as panelists generally gave low ratings to the government services they were asked to judge. This was especially true of lower-income panelists. But the respondents’ low ratings might not always have been based upon personal experience: Few panelists said they had sought information from government or community agencies. This may be due to the increasing popularity of the Internet as a self-help source,¹ but it could also mean that relatively few residents need the services or know they are available. In any case, more than half of those who did seek information said they were satisfied with the result.

But panelists were not dismissive of all collective efforts at social betterment. They expressed high levels of agreement that good community-based programs can prevent many social problems, from drug and alcohol addiction to child abuse and juvenile delinquency. Asked how they themselves would distribute public funds for social problems, most respondents choose programs for children, affordable housing, and health insurance.

Arizona Indicators Panel

Data reported here come from the Arizona Indicators Panel. This is a *statewide* representative sample of Arizonans. Panel members have agreed to be surveyed online several times a year across many topic areas. This enables great depth and exploration of topics with the same sample group and solves some of the problems experienced in random sample telephone surveys. The results reported here come from two rounds of panel questions and were collected in May and July 2008. The results summarized here contain the statistically significant differences on selected demographic characteristics of panel participants that can be found at the end of this report.

Arizona Indicators is a partnership of Arizona State University, *The Arizona Republic*, Arizona Community Foundation, Valley of the Sun United Way, and Arizona Department of Commerce.

¹ A 2008 survey conducted by Behavior Research Center, Inc. found that over half of Phoenicians have visited the city’s Web site and that almost as many say they rely on the Internet to find out what is happening in the city.

Arizonans Find Most Local Government and Community Services Lacking

Panelists were asked to rate the quality of 11 local services on a scale from excellent to poor. Most services were found wanting: hospitals received the highest rating, but only 17% rated them as “excellent.” Only four services were rated “excellent” or “good” by more than half of respondents. In contrast to some other surveys, the public schools won relatively high marks. Services for the poor came at the bottom of the list.

Thinking about the quality of life overall where you live, would you rate the following items a excellent, good, fair, or poor?				
Items	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Quality of hospitals	17%	48%	27%	7%
Quality of local parks	16%	51%	23%	8%
Availability of arts activities to people of all ages	7%	40%	38%	13%
Quality of public schools	7%	47%	31%	14%
Convenience of public transportation	5%	29%	38%	25%
Availability of organized preschool activities and classes	3%	47%	38%	9%
Ease of finding information about government or nonprofit services when you need help with a problem	3%	41%	37%	17%
Responsiveness of local government to residents’ concerns	3%	39%	42%	13%
Availability of assistance for people who have trouble making ends meet	3%	34%	45%	16%
Quality of help for families and children	2%	38%	48%	11%
Affordability of housing	2%	27%	44%	26%

n=636-641

- Maricopa County residents (not including Phoenix) were significantly more satisfied with government and community services than those in other areas.
- Those 60 years and older tended to be the most satisfied with the quality of services than the younger groups.
- Panelists without a high school education tended to be less satisfied than those with more education.
- Panelists in households earning \$60K or more were more likely to be satisfied with the responsiveness of local governments to their concerns.
- Respondents with less than a high school diploma were very disappointed with the availability of assistance for people who had trouble making ends meet: 92% percent rated this as fair or poor.
- Respondents in Maricopa County (not including Phoenix) and Tucson were more satisfied with the quality of hospitals than those in the rest of the state.
- Panelists aged 60 or older were more satisfied with local parks (77% rated them good or excellent) than those 18 to 29 (48%).

- While more than half (52%) of the 18-29 age group found the convenience of public transit to be good or excellent, only 22% of those 60 or older felt this way.

Few Arizonans Sought Information from Local Community or Government Agencies

Respondents were asked whether they had tried to get information from local community or government agencies for six service areas (plus “other”). Few reported having attempted to do so, with healthcare and financial assistance being the leading areas. But 60% of the panelists had not tried to get information on any topic from local community or government agencies.

Arizonans Who Sought Information Had Mixed Opinions About What They Received

Overall, most of those who did seek out information went away satisfied. But most of those seeking it about employment or child care did not. The most acute dissatisfaction was reported by those seeking information about food, clothing, or emergency shelter.

- Overall, 56% of respondents were satisfied with the information they received.
- 44% of respondents with a high school education or less were somewhat or very satisfied, compared to 70% of those with a college degree.
- Those in Maricopa County outside of Phoenix or Tucson were more likely to be satisfied with the information they received than those living in the rest of the state.

In the past year, have you tried to get information from local community or government agencies for services related to...?	
Services	Yes
Physical or mental health	17%
Financial assistance	12%
Employment	8%
Food, clothing or emergency shelter	8%
Other	8%
School achievement or tutoring	6%
Child care	3%

n=651

How satisfied were you with the information you received?					
Category	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Not at all satisfied	Count
Food, clothing or emergency shelter	23%	44%	8%	25%	52
Financial assistance	21%	49%	20%	10%	81
Physical or mental health	12%	51%	18%	17%	108
School achievement or tutoring	11%	53%	36%	0%	37
Other	11%	53%	36%	0%	52
Employment	7%	41%	50%	2%	54
Child care	0%	43%	57%	0%	21

Arizonans Support Community-Based Programs

Panelists' general disdain for government did not mean they rejected the possibility that concerted community action could prevent social problems. In fact, respondents overwhelmingly said such efforts could work.

- Household is making less than \$30K were more likely to think that good community-based programs could help prevent drug and alcohol addiction (83%), and help prevent homelessness (80%), than other income groups.
- Those ages 18-29 overwhelming agreed (97%) that good community-based programs could help prevent high school drop outs.
- Minorities were more likely than majority group members to think that good community-based programs could help prevent child abuse (80% vs. 67% respectively) and juvenile delinquency (85% vs. 71% respectively).

How likely do you think it is that good community-based programs could help prevent the following problems?					
Problem	Very likely	Likely	Not likely	Not at all likely	Don't know
Drug & alcohol addiction	27%	42%	22%	3%	5%
High school drop outs	24%	51%	18%	2%	5%
Property crime	23%	48%	22%	2%	6%
Child abuse	22%	45%	23%	4%	6%
Juvenile delinquency	18%	54%	20%	2%	5%
Homelessness	16%	43%	29%	5%	7%

n=478-480

Arizonans Favor Different Ways to Spend State Money

Respondents were asked how they would allocate \$100 in state funds across 10 human-services areas. The following table shows the average amount they thought should go to each area (mean), and how widely respondents differed on each choice (standard deviation). Values ranged from zero to \$100 dollars for each item. "Help for children" received the highest amount of funding, but also had the widest variation in funding levels. On the other hand "assisting immigrants" received little overall support and had comparatively little variation in amounts, with 44% of respondents (287) indicating that they would spend \$0. However, a few said they'd spend all \$100 on this issue.

- Women apportioned significantly more funds than men to homeless shelters, affordable housing, abused and neglected children, adult job education and training, and services for domestic-violence victims.
- Majority-group members apportioned significantly more funds than minorities to substance abuse treatment, homeless shelters, and adult job education and training; while minorities apportioned more to affordable housing.
- Those with high school or less apportioned significantly more to affordable housing and to abused and neglected children.

Imagine you are responsible for distributing the state of Arizona's funds for 10 human services areas (\$100 stands for the total funding the state has). How would you spend it?			
Service area	Average	Standard Deviation	Distribution*
Help for children who have been abused or neglected	\$15.45	15.05	
Affordable housing	\$14.04	14.24	
Health insurance for those who don't have it now	\$14.03	10.74	
Assistance to elderly residents	\$12.31	8.79	
Shelter for homeless individuals and families	\$10.68	7.01	
Food boxes and meals for individuals and families	\$10.42	7.13	
Services for victims of domestic violence	\$10.10	7.06	
Substance abuse treatment for adults and youth	\$10.01	8.10	
Helping adults get more education, learn to read, or get new training for better jobs	\$9.37	7.47	
Assisting immigrants with learning English	\$5.50	8.04	
* Bars show the distribution of funding over 11 amounts: from left to right, 0; \$1-5; \$6-10; \$11-15; \$16-20; \$21-25; \$26-30; \$31-35; \$36-40; \$41-50; \$50-100.			

n=651

How Do Arizonans Really Feel About Government?

These survey results might contribute to the perennial debate over Arizonans' "real" attitudes toward government, but they certainly won't settle it. Respondents' general negativity about public services is strong, but it's unclear how much of it actually derives from personal disappointments given how few panelists seem to have sought information. Are Arizonans unaware of these services and information? Do they feel they don't need them? Are they resistant to seeking them for other reasons? These and related questions deserve further inquiry—and not simply because of an abstract pro- vs. anti-government debate. Governmental services on all levels are critically important to Arizonans' quality of life, and promise to become more so as the population continues to grow in

size and diversity and as the state's economy increasingly interacts with those of other states and countries. These survey findings suggest that residents' suspicion of government—while potent—is somewhat balanced by their belief that collective community action can have an impact on social ills. If so, this suggests there are ways to forge a better fit between Arizona's government services and its community needs.

Panel Data Participant Demographic Variables ¹					
Demographic Characteristics		First round – May 2008		Second round – June 2008	
Gender	Male	309	48%	268	48%
	Female	342	52%	288	52%
Age	18-29	98	15%	75	14%
	30-44	210	32%	188	34%
	45-59	184	28%	156	28%
	60+	158	24%	136	24%
Education	High school diploma or less	267	41%	241	43%
	Some college	208	32%	162	29%
	College degree+	176	27%	152	27%
Household Income	Up to \$30K	156	24%	11	20%
	\$30-60K	224	34%	198	36%
	\$60K+	271	42%	248	45%
Race/ethnicity ²	Majority	401	62%	365	66%
	Minority	250	38%	191	34%
Employment ³	Working	371	57%	306	55%
	Not-working	152	23%	145	26%
	Retired	128	20%	105	19%
Region ⁴	Phoenix	149	23%	158	29%
	Rest of Maricopa	195	30%	167	30%
	Tucson	134	21%	88	16%
	Rest of state	170	26%	140	25%
Total		n=651		n=556	

¹ These data are weighted to be representative of Arizona as a whole.

² Majority comprises "White, non-Hispanic" (61.6%); Minority comprises, "Black non-Hispanic" (4.1%), "Other, non-Hispanic" (7/0%), "Hispanic" (26.0%), "two-races, non-Hispanic" (0.9%). Percentages are for first round.

³ Working comprises "Working as a paid employee" (49.7%) and "Self-employed" (7.3%); Not Working comprises "Not working, looking for work"(8.4%), "Not working, disabled" (7.8%), and "Not working, other" (7.1%); Retired is 19.6%. Percentages are for first round.

⁴ Regions were defined from a combination of zip code and county information. Phoenix was defined as all of the panelists living in Phoenix zip codes (23%) and Rest of Maricopa as all of the Maricopa County residents not in Phoenix (30%). Tucson was defined as all of the panelists in Tucson's zip codes (21%) and Rest of State as any panelists not living in the other three categories (26%). Percentages are for first round.



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