

Community Issues in Alabama:

- **Perceived quality of life in Alabama Communities is holding its own or improving.**
- **Local elected officials are leading their communities in positive directions.**
- **Economic Development, Education, Roads, and Crime are the most critical issues facing Alabama local governments.**
- **Alabamians strongly back a lottery provided that the proceeds go to public education.**

(Auburn, October 7) The *Ask-Alabama* statewide public opinion survey on the perceptions and attitudes of Alabamians regarding the quality of life and critical issues facing our local communities highlights the satisfaction and optimism which most Alabamians feel about their local community¹. The poll, conducted by the Center for Governmental Services at Auburn University, also indicates that most Alabamians believe that their local officials are making a positive contribution to their cities and towns.

For Alabamians, the most significant community issues in priority order are: (1) Economic Development; (2) Public Education; (3) Roads; and (4) Law Enforcement. Alabamians also strongly support a lottery, provided that the proceeds are used for public education. Opposition to a lottery was much higher among those who identified themselves as *Strong Republicans* or *Very Conservative* than among the general population.

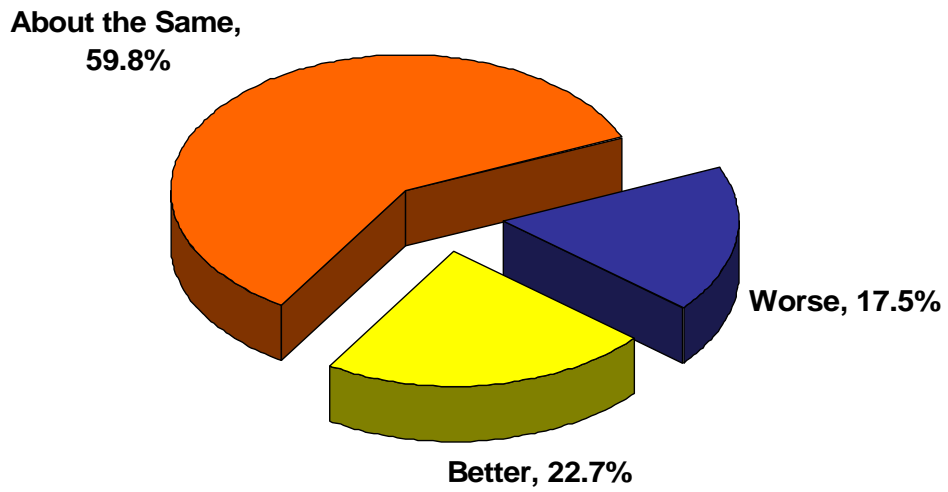
Quality of Life in Local Communities

Relatively few Alabamians (18%) believe that the quality of life in their city or town has deteriorated during the past year. Twenty-three percent (23%) assess the quality of life in their community to have improved, and 60% believe that it has remained the same since last year.

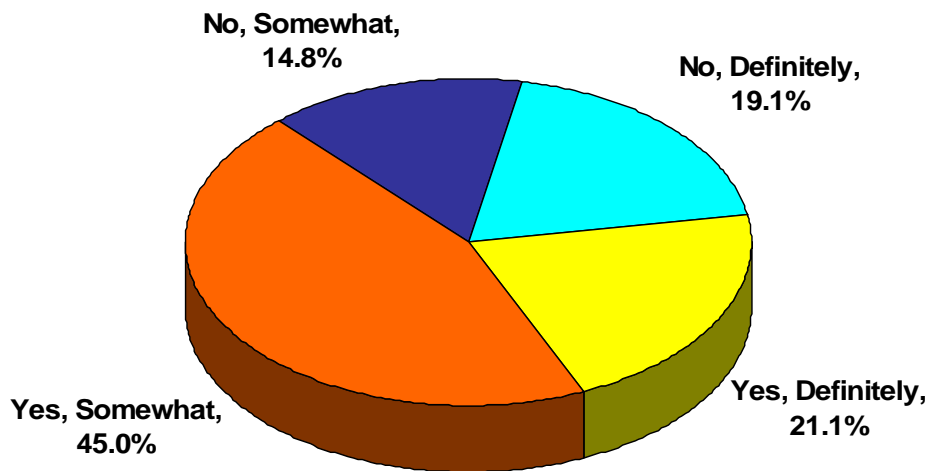
Sixty-six percent (66%) also express confidence that their elected leadership is leading their city or town in a positive direction, and only 19% believe that their local elected leadership is definitely not moving the community in a positive direction.

¹ The survey of a random telephone sample of 609 Alabamians was conducted during the summer of 2004. The average estimated margin of error is +/- 4%.

Few Alabamians Believe that their Community is Deteriorating



Most Alabamians Believe their Local Elected Leadership is Moving the Community in a Positive Direction



Critical Issues Facing Alabama Local Government

The public perceives that certain issues in their local communities need immediate attention. When asked to name the most critical issues facing their local community, 17% cited *Jobs and Economic Development*, followed by *Public Education* (14%), *Road Improvement* (11%), and *Police Protection* (10%). Less than 4% of Alabamians identified issues such as *Traffic Congestion*, *Taxes and Government Waste*, *Recreation*, *Litter and Pollution*, *Water and Sewers*, *Race Relations*, and *Local Leadership* as the most critical issue facing their community.

Most Critical Local Issue Faced by the Community (In Percent)

| Rank | Most Critical Local Issue | Percent ² |
|------|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. | Jobs and Economic Development | 16.5% |
| 2. | Education | 14.1% |
| 3. | Road Improvement | 10.8% |
| 4. | Police Protection, Crime and Drugs | 9.7% |
| 5. | Taxes and Government Waste | 3.7% |
| 6. | Traffic Flow and Congestion | 2.9% |
| 7. | Need for New Local Leadership | 2.8% |
| 8. | More Recreational Facilities | 2.5% |
| 9. | Cleanup, Litter and Pollution | 2.4% |
| 10. | Water & Sewer | 1.9% |
| 11. | Affordability of Health Care | 1.5% |
| 12. | Race Relations, Social Issues | 1.1% |
| 13. | Public Infrastructure | 1.0% |
| 14. | Gas Prices | 0.8% |
| | Other Public Services | 4.0% |
| | Other Answers | 6.2% |
| | None, No Answer | 17.9% |

The Poll also queried respondents about the urgency of each of a group of fifteen selected local issues. The issue cited by most as an *Urgent* or *High Priority* issue was **Public School Education**, and 78% of respondents assigned an *Urgent* or *High Priority* to education. Seventy-two percent (72%) cited **Job Availability**, followed by **Honesty of Local Public Officials** (68%), **Crime and Law Enforcement** (67%), and **Availability of Health Care** (62%) as either *Urgent* or *High Priority* issues.

² Responses total more than 100% due to multiple answers.

Issues that 50% – 60% of Alabamians ranked as *Urgent* or *High Priority* include: **Business and Commercial Growth** (60%), **Roads** (57%), **Fire Protection** (54%), **Ethnic and Racial Respect** (54%), and **Senior Services** (51%).

Assessment of the Priority of Selected Local Policy Issues (In Percent)

| Rank | Local Issue | Urgent | High Priority | Combined ³ |
|------|------------------------------------|--------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Public Education | 32% | 46% | 78% |
| 2. | Job Availability | 28% | 45% | 72% |
| 3. | Honesty of Local Elected Officials | 24% | 45% | 68% |
| 4. | Crime and Law Enforcement | 19% | 48% | 67% |
| 5. | Availability of Health Care | 19% | 42% | 62% |
| 6. | Business and Commercial Growth | 16% | 43% | 60% |
| 7. | Roads and Bridges | 14% | 43% | 57% |
| 8. | Fire Protection | 12% | 43% | 54% |
| 9. | Ethnic and Racial Respect | 12% | 43% | 54% |
| 10. | Services for Senior Citizens | 14% | 38% | 51% |
| 11. | Water and Sewers | 12% | 36% | 47% |
| 12. | Traffic Congestion | 17% | 28% | 45% |
| 13. | Growth Management and Zoning | 11% | 34% | 45% |
| 14. | Parks and Recreation | 10% | 28% | 38% |
| 15. | Appearance/Beauty of the Town | 8% | 29% | 37% |

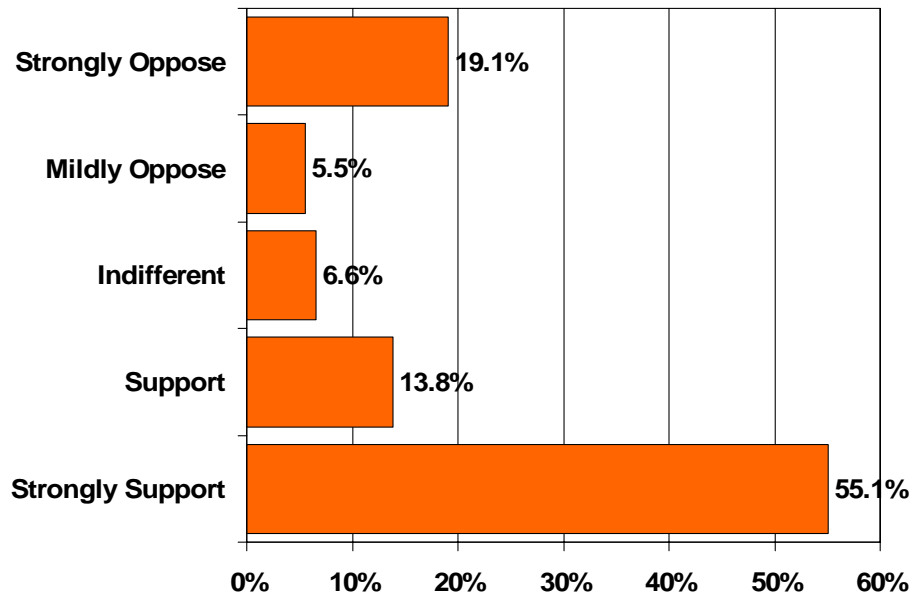
Strong Support for a Lottery for Education

Alabamians indicated strong support for a lottery to benefit education in their communities. Fifty-five percent (55%) strongly support this measure, and an additional 14% mildly support a lottery on behalf of education. Only 19% are strongly opposed to a lottery dedicated to education, and less than 6% are mildly opposed to this measure.

Support or opposition to an educational lottery in Alabama does not seem to be impacted strongly by gender, occupation, income, education, race, or size of community. Political party identification and political philosophy, however, seem to make a difference. Those who identified themselves as *Strong Republicans* or *Very Conservative* were much more likely to *Strongly Oppose* a lottery than the general population. Among *Strong Republicans*, 32% were *Strongly Opposed* to a lottery to support education; and among those who identified themselves as *Very Conservative*, 46% *Strongly Opposed* the adoption of a lottery.

³ Differences in the sums are due to rounding.

Support for a State Lottery to Benefit Education



Summary of Findings

- 83% of Alabamians believe that the quality of life in their local community has either remained the same (60%) or improved (23%) over the past year.
- Only 19% of the respondents are unhappy with the actions of their local elected leadership in moving their community in a positive direction.
- Jobs, Education, Roads, and Police Protection are the most commonly cited critical local issues.
- Education, Jobs, Honesty of Local Officials, Police Protection, and the Availability of Health Care are the local issues that Alabamians are most convinced should be given the highest priority.
- There is strong and widespread support for a lottery, with proceeds tied to education funding.