

AZ Views

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Arizona Indicators Panel

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Arizonans Like Their Lives, But Worry Too

In four Morrison Institute reports between 1997 and 2004, titled *What Matters in Greater Phoenix*, residents said their quality of life (QOL) was generally good. Some of the same questions were asked of the statewide Arizona Indicators Panel and are reported below. In general, these results mirror the positive levels of quality of life reported in the Greater Phoenix *What Matters* reports. This suggests such perceptions are stable over time and under different economic conditions. In this sense, they are not sensitive barometers of change, but rather indicators of long-term levels of social stability, even for a state noted for its changing and growing population and its cycles of economic boom and bust.

Beyond the headline of Arizonans believing their quality of life is good, their outlooks show a lot of variety, for not everyone reports such positive views. Opinions differ significantly depending upon geographic location, racial/ethnic background, age, income, education, and other variables. The data reported here constitute a new baseline on quality of life in Arizona, and future panel surveys will explore it further.

Most, But Not All, Rate Quality of Life Highly

- 73% of Arizonans believe the quality of life where they live is excellent or good.
- 74% believe their personal quality of life is excellent or good.
- People over 60 and those with more education and affluence give quality of life the greatest ratings. Those in the majority population and retirees also gave QOL the thumbs up much more than minorities, workers, and non-workers.

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.

Many people are talking about quality of life these days. How would you rate the quality of life where you live?			
Area's quality of life...			
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
19%	53%	26%	2%

n=642

How would you rate your personal quality of life right now?			
Personal quality of life...			
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
18%	53%	23%	5%

n=642

Half See No Change in Quality of Life

- Just under half of Arizonans say quality of life has stayed about the same in the last few years. The other half are split on “improved” and “declined.”
- Majority population members (33%) said quality of life had improved nearly twice as often as minorities (18%).
- Tucson panelists (36%) were more likely to say quality of life had improved than those in the city of Phoenix (24%), the rest of Maricopa County (29%), or the rest of the state (22%).

Would you say the area's quality of life has improved, declined, or stayed about the same in the last few years?		
Area's quality of life...		
Improved	Declined	Stayed about the same
27%	24%	46%

n=642

Would you say your personal quality of life has improved, declined, or stayed about the same in the last few years?		
Personal quality of life...		
Improved	Declined	Stayed about the same
29%	25%	46%

n=642

Crime, Health, and Economy Are Top Concerns

- Respondents rated 9 areas on a scale 1-10 (10 was “very important”). Public safety and crime, health care, and the economy placed at the top overall. When panelists said what three were most important to them *personally*, they chose the same three issues—economy, health care, and public safety and crime—but in the reverse order.

A Better Economy Tops Most Arizonans' Wish List

- When asked, “What one thing do you think would most improve the quality of life where you live?” Their typed responses were grouped into 14 categories, with suggestions related to the economy coming out on top.

Rate the following on their importance to quality of life in the area where you live	
Quality of life item	Average score
Public safety and crime	8.4
Health care	8.4
The economy	8.2
Education	8.0
The status of families and youth	7.9
The environment	7.8
Transportation and mobility	7.8
Sense of community	7.6
Arts, culture, and recreation	6.4

n=642

The nearly 100 panelists who wrote something about the economy reflected concerns ranging from dissatisfaction with gas prices to the struggle of coping with tough economic times; for example:

- “Increase the annual salary of the population by bringing in better paying jobs for the middle and lower income families. Housing at \$200 per square foot is more than most people can afford without sacrificing some of the more important things that add to the quality of life.”
- “We need to stabilize the economy and lower food and other necessities so people can afford to have a social life and not just be able to barely get by.”
- “[We] need decent-paying jobs, good medical care that is affordable, and affordable housing. What the government calls affordable housing is a joke, I can’t even afford a house, so I live in an apartment for the rest of my life.”
- Minority group members (24%) wanted to improve the economy more often than majority group members (15%). Those households earning \$30-60K (26%) were more anxious to make the economy better than either those earning less (16%) or more (11%). The economy was also much more significant for those working (22%) than those not working (3%).
- Transportation was the issue for more of those with a high school or less education (20%) than those with some college (10%), and for more retirees (26%), than those working (11%) or not working (17%).
- Health was chosen as the issue by a larger percentage of those whose family income was \$30-60K (20%) than those earning less than \$30K (0%) or those earning \$60K and over (2%).
- Immigration was chosen as the issue by only 4% of panelists, by 6% of majority group members, and no minority group members.
- Criminal justice and public safety was the issue for more majority group members (14%), than minorities (3%).
- Culture and entertainment was chosen by a larger proportion of those not working (19%) than working (2%).

What <u>one</u> thing would you suggest to improve the quality of life for everyone in the area where you live?	
Category	Percent
Economy	18%
Transportation	16%
Criminal Justice and Public Safety	10%
Other	8%
Health	8%
Affordable Housing	8%
Environment	6%
Culture and Entertainment	6%
Community Engagement & Human Services	5%
Immigration	4%
Taxes	3%
Education	3%
Governance	3%
Urban Growth	2%

n=642

Generally, these rankings are similar to those found in the *What Matters* reports, again showing consistency over time. However, the economy was ranked a relatively more important issue than earlier; indeed, it was ranked *the* most important issue personally and the one thing most often suggested as likely to improve the quality of life for everyone in the area in which they lived.

Helping Others: Many Talk, Fewer Act

- Half of the panelists said they considered themselves actively involved in the well-being of their neighborhood, yet far fewer reported regularly doing unpaid work in their community to help others. Still, 61% wanted to volunteer more.

- A third indicated that they could rely on lots of people in their neighborhood, besides family, if they had a personal problem.
- One in five panelists “don’t know” if community organizations or government does a better job on social needs. More people see government as taking note of problems than ignoring them.
- Among those who want to volunteer more are young women, suburban Maricopa County residents, college-educated, minorities, and workers with household incomes over \$60k. In other words, a diverse crowd wants to be more active in their communities.
- Current volunteers (those who say they do unpaid work in their community) are more likely to be women, have college degrees, be retired, or live in a relatively low income household (up to \$30K).
- Those who indicate they could rely on lots of people in their neighborhood besides family are more likely to be female, have a college degree, or have a household income of more than \$60K.
- Self-description of “actively involved” is more likely among those who are older, retired, female, live outside the cities of Phoenix and Tucson, or have a family with a middle income (\$30-60K)
- Those who believe nonprofit organizations deal with neighborhood social needs better than government are more likely to not be working.
- Government agencies are perceived to be ignoring problems more often by men, those with a high school education or less, minorities, and the non-working.

Statements about community involvement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I would like to be able to volunteer more	8%	53%	24%	6%	9%
I consider myself actively involved in the well being of my neighborhood	5%	45%	39%	7%	5%
I regularly do unpaid work in my community to help others	6%	25%	49%	17%	4%
If I had any personal problems I could rely on lots of people in my neighborhood, besides my family	4%	27%	45%	15%	8%
Nonprofit community organizations deal with the social needs of my neighborhood better than government	4%	31%	33%	10%	21%
Our area has many problems that our government agencies are ignoring	4%	33%	43%	9%	11%

n=549-552

Welcome Newcomers, But Not Illegal Ones

- Older people (60+) were more likely to consider their community tolerant of people with different views and welcoming to people new to the area, but they were also more likely to believe their community has too many illegal immigrants. Panelists were asked to indicate their level of agreement with six statements about their community, on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 indicated “total agreement” and 1 “total disagreement.”

- Minority group members were less likely to think of their community as tolerant of people with different views, welcoming to people who are new to the area, and as having too many illegal immigrants. But they had the same level of agreement as those in the majority group that their community welcomes immigrants from other countries.

Statements about their community	Average score
Has too many illegal immigrants	6.9
Welcomes people who are new to the area	6.4
Is fair-minded	5.8
Is tolerant of people with different views	5.8
Welcomes immigrants from other countries	5.5
Doesn't help people when they need it	4.4

n=642

Statements about community involvement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I enjoy living among people with different lifestyles and different backgrounds	12%	64%	17%	1%	6%

n=552

Three-quarters said they strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoy living among people with different lifestyles and backgrounds, but there were significant differences of opinion too.

- Minorities (24%) were much more likely to strongly agree with this statement than majority group members (5%).
- Those with at least a college degree (20%) were much more likely to agree than those with some college or a high school education or less (9%).
- Those not-working (22%) were much more likely to agree than those working (9%) or retired (6%).
- A few panelists suggested other ways in which people in their community were particularly different; these included religion, citizenship, and language.
- Consistently, males, minorities, workers, Phoenix residents, younger, more educated, and more affluent panelists were more likely to see differences in their community.

In general, in what ways are the people in your community particularly different from each other? Are they different from each other?			
Differences...	Yes	No	Don't know
By their work?	66%	20%	14%
By the range of age groups?	60%	31%	9%
By race and ethnicity?	56%	39%	4%
By who are new residents and who are longer-term residents?	49%	31%	20%
By how well they look after their homes?	44%	41%	15%
By their political opinions?	32%	13%	55%

n=555

We Need a New Approach to Gauging Quality of Life

These results show that although there are differences of opinion, Arizonans continue to report consistently high levels of satisfaction with their quality of life. This remains true even though the economy became a top concern for many when these questions were asked in May and July of 2008. Further research is needed to explore and understand the robustness of these views; for example, we need to examine if perceptions of quality of life are independent of panelist's material circumstances and have more to do with a sense of relative well-being, or if they reflect a general social ethos of optimism or self-reliance, perhaps also related to religious outlooks.

There is also a need to delve deeper into the social connectedness of Arizonans. If people feel they are actively involved in the well-being of their neighborhoods, how exactly is this manifest? And if so many say they would like to volunteer more, why don't they?

There is more to learn about Arizonans' perceptions of community diversity. Perhaps we need a more inclusive understanding of what diversity means to Arizonans and whether it is perceived as an asset or liability to community well-being. These findings show much ambivalence among Arizonans on community issues and strongly differing opinions by racial/ethnic background, educational level, and age. These results raise many new questions, which future surveys will explore.

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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