

**Fighting Crime: The Saginaw County 2008 Voter Survey
Summary Report
March 23, 2009**

**by Burk Foster and Holly Child
Criminal Justice Department
Saginaw Valley State University
Telephone: (989) 964-2047
email: bfoster@svsu.edu**

“I was born in Saginaw, Michigan.
I grew up in a house on Saginaw Bay.
My dad was a poor, hard-working Saginaw fisherman.
Too many times he came home with too little pay.”
Lefty Frizzell, *Saginaw, Michigan*, 1964

Introduction

When Lefty Frizzell’s *Saginaw, Michigan*, topped the country music charts in early 1964, the city he was singing about was far from a humble fishing village on Saginaw Bay. There may have been commercial fishermen around, working out of Bay City, but Saginaw itself was a prosperous Midwestern industrial city of 100,000. With close ties to General Motors, Saginaw’s economy had flourished after World War II as the American automobile industry had come to dominate the world.

More than four decades later, Saginaw sings a different song—a mournful dirge to days gone by. The city’s foundries, factories, and auto plants are mostly a part of history. The commercial enterprises that did business with them have withered. Saginaw has lost almost half of its population and most of its tax base. Its middle class and young people have moved elsewhere—farther out in the surrounding Saginaw County, to other parts of Michigan, or out of state as jobs have flowed west and south. The people left in the city are the oldest—unable or unwilling to sell their homes and move away—and the poorest—trapped in place and too poor to relocate.

The urban problems that were tolerated in the glory days of the 1960s have intensified as industrial prosperity yielded to the advance of unemployment and urban poverty—drugs, gangs, and violence have spiraled in the blighted vortex of the old East Saginaw, east of the Saginaw River. Where other American cities have seen a strong, steady decline in rates of crime and violence over the past decade or more, Saginaw’s rates never went down. Its violent crime and homicide rates rank among the top five cities in the country, challenging Detroit and surpassing Flint on the list of “most dangerous” places to live. Its murder rate is eight to ten times the national average, and the only reason its name is not featured more prominently on lists of “high crime” cities is because its current population—about 56,000 according to the most recent census estimates—is below the minimum of 75,000 used to rank the American cities that make up such lists.

While the city's social problems have intensified over the years, its governmental resources have shrunk. A cap on municipal property taxes established in 1979 is still in place. The number of city workers has decreased steadily. The police department, which once numbered more than 200 police officers, was down to 91 sworn officers in 2006. Community policing, task forces, anti-gang units, all police services beyond essential patrol and criminal investigation, were eliminated as cutbacks occurred. What was left was a bare-bones police department so understaffed that its front desk was open only during daytime hours five days a week.

Saginaw's economic and social changes, and their impact on the criminal justice system that provides the foundation for civil order in the city, parallel the era now known as the "War on Crime" in America. A direct result of the 1964 presidential election between Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater, the "War on Crime" was announced in 1965 as part of Johnson's "Great Society" proposal to transform urban America. We have been at war—with crime, with criminals, with drugs, with ourselves—ever since.

How is the war going? On the national level, "tough on crime" politics have pushed imprisonment rates to record highs—rates five times higher than a generation ago—while crime levels across America have dropped to rates last seen when Lefty Frizzell was still singing *Saginaw, Michigan* live in the sixties.

On the local front, in Saginaw County, the war on crime has fared no better than other social and political initiatives. As already noted, rates of violent and property crime have remained high, while the resources available to control crime have diminished. How do these conditions affect the quality of life in Saginaw? What do the people who live in and around Saginaw think about the crime problem? What do they see as the important causes of local problems? What can the agencies of law enforcement and the legal system do to deal more effectively with the problems of crime in the community?

To provide some insight into public attitudes regarding crime and control in Saginaw, the Criminal Justice Department of Saginaw Valley State University completed the "2008 Voter Survey" at the request of the Saginaw County Crime Prevention Council (CPC). The CPC is a body of public officials—law enforcement, legal, and local government officials—and private citizens who share a common interest in crime control policies in Saginaw County. The CPC has met monthly on the SVSU campus for more than ten years. Its current chair is Michael Thomas, Saginaw County Prosecutor.

In its efforts to promote public safety in Saginaw County, the CPC strongly supported the "No Boundaries" tax election of August 2006. The proposed millage, which would have increased property taxes to add sheriff's deputies and local police officers across the county, was defeated by a vote of 16,160 "Yes," 24,290 "No," a 60/40 split against. The proposal carried just 14 of the 89 voting precincts in Saginaw County. None of the 30 townships or cities in the county approved it.

In the wake of this defeat, CPC members wondered about the reasons for the public's wholesale rejection of the proposal? Why had the margin of defeat been so great? Was it mostly a vote by township voters against the City of Saginaw? In bad economic times, was it a vote against new taxes? Was it a vote expressing no confidence in law enforcement agencies in the county? What did people think about crime, police services, and taxes?

The "2008 Voter Survey" was designed to provide insight into voter attitudes on these basic questions. Questions were designed to deal with five basic areas of concern:

1. Public opinion in regard to the severity of the crime problem and its impact on the quality of life in Saginaw City and Saginaw County;
2. Public opinion in regard to law enforcement services in the county;
3. Support for public safety taxes in general and the "No Boundaries" proposal in particular;
4. The causes of crime in Saginaw County; and
5. What law enforcement agencies should be doing to deal with crime more effectively.

A four-page questionnaire was prepared to address these issues. The first 13 questions asked voters to respond to statements with a range of choices from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" (a standard five-point Likert scale often used in survey research). Two questions asked voters to select their top three choices in regard to causes of crime and different police responses in controlling crime. After each of the first 15 opinion questions, space was provided to write in personal comments, which many respondents took time to do. The last page of the questionnaire asked 11 questions about the respondents' demographics—age, gender, income, place of residence, and so on.

In the third week of October 2008, 2,500 questionnaires (accompanied by self-addressed return envelopes) were mailed out to a random sample of registered voters across Saginaw County. The recipients were asked to complete the anonymous survey and return it to the SVSU Criminal Justice Department. Forty-five surveys (1.8%) were returned to sender as being undeliverable. Of the 2,455 delivered surveys, 710 (28.9%) were returned by the first week of January 2009, the cutoff date for responses to be counted and tabulated. The 710 valid surveys were processed by criminal justice research assistants under the direction of Professor Holly Child, Chair of the Criminal Justice Department. This work was completed by early February 2009.

Voter Survey Results: The Crime Problem in Saginaw and Saginaw County

The first group of four questions dealt with voter perceptions of the current local crime problem—citywide, countywide, in their own neighborhood—and feelings of personal safety based on these perceptions.

1. "I believe that the City of Saginaw has a serious problem with violent crime."

There is little disagreement with this statement; 68.7% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 26.8% agree. Only 12 of the 710 returns (1.7%) were in the disagree/strongly disagree category. The voter comments on this statement included:

“I think the worst in Michigan.”

“For the past 10 years.”

“My dad was robbed 2 times in 3 weeks.”

“We’ve lived here for 80 years and never thought it would get this bad.”

“It has gotten a little better.”

“You’re kidding me with this question, right?”

2. “I believe that the crime problem is generally getting worse across Saginaw County.”

Almost half the respondents (47.3%) selected strongly agree. Overall, 85.9% were on the agree side, while 4.2% were on the disagree side. This response indicates that voters agree that the crime problem is not only the city’s concern but also the county’s. The voter comments on this statement included:

“Crime is spreading out.”

“All areas are now within reach for thieves and almost all seem to be armed.”

“The news media keeps reporting all the time so we tend to believe it is worse.”

“The downturn in the economy will make matters worse.”

“Every year gets worse than the previous year.”

“Mostly the City of Saginaw.”

3. “I believe that the crime problem is getting worse in my own neighborhood.”

This statement brings the problem of crime closer to home. It asks for perceptions of crime in the respondent’s own neighborhood. The most common response was disagree (29.6%). Overall, 40.4% were on the disagree/strongly disagree side, while 31.3% were on the agree/strongly agree side. If you want to look at the responses from the half-filled cup perspective, you can respond either “half full” or “half empty.” Most people who made a choice did not see the crime problems of the city or the surrounding county spreading into their own neighborhoods, but almost three in five did not differ with the perception that the crime problem was getting worse where they lived. The divergent voter comments on this statement included:

“I have lived here for over 28 years. I know my neighbors and we watch out for each other.”

“My family feels pretty safe where we live.”

“Nope, I chose wisely.”

“The residents in my Saginaw Township subdivision aren’t the problem, but crime occurs from city residents coming into our neighborhoods.”

“Slightly worse, more home break-ins.”

“I live in a nice trailer park and it’s going to hell fast.”

4. “I feel safe going out for a walk in my neighborhood at night.”

As we come to believe in the severity of the crime problem in the city, and its spread out into the county, how does this perception affect our own personal habits, such as taking a walk around

the neighborhood? Would you feel safe enough to leave your home for a walk at night? By far the most common answer on the survey was agree (36.5%). Taken together, the agree/strongly agree responses amounted to 53.8% of the total, while the disagree/strongly disagree responses totaled 28.1%. Those who felt safe taking a walk in the neighborhood at night outnumber those who didn't by almost two to one. Interestingly, the voter comments on this statement tended to fall in the "unsafe" category, or the "safe but with extra precautions" category:

"Absolutely not!"

"As long as I am with my husband."

"As long as I have my pistol."

"I'm afraid to go out in my own backyard at night."

"I don't feel safe anywhere at night especially if I'm alone."

"If other neighbors are out, it's fine. I wouldn't walk in my neighborhood alone."

"I now live in the country, been here for two years. Don't see much crime out here... yet."

"I walk two Great Danes."

Voter Survey Results: Quality of Life and Economic Effects

The next two questions deal with voters' views of the countywide impact of crime—the ripples that spread from the splash of single stones. Respondents were asked about the impact of crime on the overall quality of life in Saginaw County and on economic redevelopment.

5. "Although crime may be a problem in certain parts of Saginaw County, I do not believe that it has much impact on the overall quality of life in the county."

The two most prevalent responses were disagree (40.0%) and strongly disagree (23.9%). The disagree/strongly disagree responses outnumber the agree/strongly agree responses by more than two to one. This collective opinion strongly supports the proposition that people's lives across Saginaw County are significantly influenced by crime. This viewpoint was reflected in voter comments:

"Crime permeates all aspects of life."

"Depends on where you are."

"Even the perception of high crime rates impacts the community."

"I hear people every day say they won't go to the East Side."

"Saginaw in general seems to be becoming a less desirable place to live for work and raising of children, due to the poor economy, which no doubt impacts the crime problem throughout the county negatively.

"The perceptions of crime problems in one area lead people to generalize to the entire area. This affects everyone."

6. "Outsiders' perception of the crime problem in Saginaw is a major obstacle to the future of economic redevelopment in Saginaw County."

For years Saginaw's business and community leaders—city and county—have talked of recreating the period of economic ascendancy that existed from World War II into the 1970s. New

proposals, new campaigns, new names—all based on a vision of growth and widespread prosperity—have come and gone. Where would the commercial and industrial enterprises needed to fulfill these dreams come from? What would attract them to locate in the Saginaw of today? Does the perception of Saginaw as a high crime area hinder efforts to bring business back to Saginaw? Even if businesses could be entreated to open up downtown, would customers go there?

The most common response to this question asking if outsiders' perception of Saginaw's crime problem is an obstacle to any redevelopment plans is strongly agree (43.1%), followed by agree (40.7%). Altogether, then, 83.8% of the respondents agree that crime is a big obstacle to any future growth plans; only 5.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Put in perspective, 15 of every 16 voters agreed that any future redevelopment initiative must contend with Saginaw's bad reputation as a high-crime locale. The voter comments on this statement included:

“If there is crime in a city, new people will not move in.”

“Economic redevelopment isn't even feasible at this point. We need a complete restructuring.”

“Except for the medical community, nothing else is thriving.”

“I can't believe how many people outside Saginaw County are afraid to go downtown.”

“I think Saginaw City took too long to start working on a solution. Maybe many years from now, but it's gonna take a long time.”

“So often perception become reality for people outside the city.”

Voter Survey Results: Law Enforcement

The five questions in this group ask voters about their views on law enforcement in Saginaw County—staffing, fragmentation, effectiveness, and tax support.

7. “I believe that the law enforcement agencies of Saginaw County need more officers to do an adequate job of maintaining public safety.”

The most common response was strongly agree (42.4%), with agree close behind (35.2%). Taken together, 77.6% of respondents agreed that more officers are needed to maintain adequate levels of public safety in Saginaw County, while 7.2% were in the disagree/strongly disagree category. The need for more officers is supported by a ratio of about ten to one. The voter comments on this statement included:

“I feel that we need more officers in the higher crime areas.”

“The city needs the most help.”

“More police, more patrols, higher visibility = safer communities.”

“It isn't the number of police; it is the job they're doing.”

“It has been my experience that Saginaw Township police are well-staffed and respond quickly; however, I believe the city police are understaffed.”

“I have two police scanners and the officers work non-stop during their shift (and off with paper work).”

8. “I believe there are too many separate, independent law enforcement agencies in Saginaw County.”

Saginaw County, with an estimated 2006 population of 206,000, has 18 independent local law enforcement agencies—a sheriff’s department, eight municipal and village police departments, and nine township police agencies with at least one officer each. Most people apparently accept this fragmented structure without giving it a great deal of thought. The most common response in the survey was neutral; almost half the respondents (43.5%) indicated neutrality on this issue. This was the only survey question in which neutral was the most prevalent response.

Among those who expressed a preference, 30.2% were on the disagree/strongly disagree side, while 24.0% were on the agree/strongly agree side. The overall position was one of ambivalence likely resulting from lack of knowledge about this issue. Fewer than a third of the voters surveyed indicated support for the present decentralized network of local departments, but even fewer would apparently support consolidation of local agencies if this were possible. The voter comments on this statement overall expressed an inability to make an informed response:

“I don’t know anything about this.”

“I was not aware that there were many law enforcement agencies.”

“This is probably true, but I really don’t know.”

“There are not too many, they just aren’t working together as a team.”

“We can work together, rather than consolidate.”

“I don’t know enough to information to make this decision.”

“Let sheriff run all law enforcement.”

9. “I believe that in general the law enforcement agencies of Saginaw County are doing a satisfactory job of controlling serious crime.”

This question considered the relation between the crime problem and the law enforcement agencies charged with controlling it. Is it possible for the public to perceive a serious crime problem yet still believe that law enforcement agencies are performing satisfactorily? In this instance, apparently so. The most common response was agree (31.8%), followed closely by disagree (27.7%) and neutral (25.9%). Among voters expressing opinions one way or the other, the balance slightly favored disagree/strongly disagree (37.1%) over agree/strongly agree (36.0%). In the overall context, slightly more than a third of Saginaw County voters expressed confidence that their law enforcement agencies were doing a good job of crime control. Considering that upwards of 85% of voters believed the crime problem was getting worse, this should not be a big surprise. The voter comments on this statement included:

“I believe they do a good job with what little resources they have.”

“Satisfactory would be when it was under control.”

“They are doing better than they should be considering their numbers.”

“The agencies are doing their job. Schools and other family support organizations are not.”

“It’s hard to control random acts, violent or not.”

“Law enforcement is reactive, they show up after.”

10. “I am willing to pay higher taxes to support hiring more law enforcement officers and expanding police services provided in my own particular municipality or township.”

This question and the next asked voters if they were willing to pay higher taxes to provide for hiring more police—either in their own unit of local government or countywide. Regarding the first question, about higher taxes to support their local law enforcement agency, the agree/strongly agree respondents (39.9%) outnumbered the disagree/strongly disagree respondents (35.9%) by four percentage points.

The voter comments on this statement included:

“I need to see our law enforcement do an adequate job now before I would agree to pay for more officers.”

“I am not sure if it is needed in my township.”

“I would gladly pay more taxes if I thought it would help. But I don’t think it would....”

“Our area is safe. Higher taxes should help in areas of need.”

“My own township.”

“Let Saginaw pay its way and others (township, etc.) pay their own way.”

“Rightful money distribution in correct departments.”

“We are taxed past limits now—no new taxes!”

11. “I am willing to pay higher taxes to support hiring more law enforcement officers and expanding police services for all law enforcement agencies across Saginaw County.”

When this question of higher taxes was broadened from the local department to a countywide proposition, the response shifted by two to three percentage points on each side. Although agree drew the highest response (27.9%), it was followed closely by neutral (24.1%) and disagree (23.1%). Overall the disagree/strongly disagree respondents totaled 38.0%, while the agree/strongly agree totaled 36.6%. From the small margin expressing support for higher taxes for more police on the previous question, the margin shifted to those opposing higher taxes when the issue was expressed in terms of more officers countywide. The voter comments on this statement in general expressed suspicion or hostility about the City of Saginaw’s share of any higher taxes generated; these included:

“Absolutely not. This would benefit the city disproportionately.”

“City residents should pay for their own law enforcement. The city is the worst of the problem. I shouldn’t have to pay for their law enforcement.”

“I should not have to pay for the protection I won’t get.”

“Saginaw is mostly a ‘fixed income’ senior base that can’t afford any more taxes.”

“They did raise taxes for that. Then turned around and cut anyway.”

“We pay enough already to support our own areas.”

“You cannot put a price tag on law enforcement and safe neighborhoods.”

Voter Survey Results: No Boundaries

Two questions addressed the “No Boundaries” proposal rejected by voters in August 2006. This complex plan, which would have added 68 new police positions—at least one to every local department in the county—two new prosecutors, and funding for volunteer fire fighters, was the most recent effort to address public safety funding countywide through a tax millage increase.

12. “I recall the ‘No Boundaries’ proposal of 2006 in enough detail that I could go today and explain it to my neighbor.”

This survey was conducted little more than two years after the “No Boundaries” proposal was rejected. Although the proposal benefitted from a prolonged marketing campaign and a wealth of publicity explaining its costs and purposes, it does not appear to have entered the long-term memory of Saginaw County voters. The most frequent response to the “I remember it” question in the survey was disagree (41.0%). Disagree/strongly disagree respondents made up 65.9% of the total, while agree/strongly agree respondents made up 13.0%. Thus for every voter who could recall and explain “No Boundaries,” five could not. The voter comments on this question included:

“I didn’t understand it then.”

“I don’t remember anything about this proposal.”

“I think this was the city only.”

“Sorry, can’t say I recall this proposal.”

“Never heard of it.”

“I was a strong supporter of this creative concept.”

“Absolutely against this proposal.”

“Was not explained to voters well. When I talked to people about it they had many misconceptions.”

13. “I was in favor of the ‘No Boundaries’ proposal.”

Most respondents could not remember much about the proposal in the previous question, and on this question almost half (46.5%) indicated they were neutral. Another 11.8% provided no answer to this question, so essentially the majority stayed home. It is interesting to note that while “No Boundaries” was defeated by a vote of 24,290 to 16,140, 60% opposed to 40% in favor, in this survey the vote was much closer. Among these respondents, 21.0% were on the agree/strongly agree side, while 20.6% were on the disagree/strongly disagree side. Counting individual responses, 149 replied that they were in favor of the proposal, while 146 were opposed. This would be close enough for a recount, but it is markedly different from the margin of defeat in the 2006 election. The voter comments on this question included:

“I remember voting for the proposal.” (This was the only one of the 45 written comments that stated clearly that the respondent favored the proposal.)

“I was in favor at first, but parts of the plan were not explained fully.”

“I wasn’t, because I didn’t think it would help in my neighborhood.”

“Nope, Saginaw is not getting my money.”

“Not living in this area until 2002.”

“I live in Saginaw County but not in the city.”

“What was it?”

Voter Survey Results: Causes of Crime and Law Enforcement Improvements

The survey’s final two content questions asked voters to select their top three choices (numbering them 1, 2, and 3) from a list of 11 possible choices on two tables. These two tables are reproduced in their entirety here.

14. What are the most important causes of crime in Saginaw County?

- _____ General decline in the economy
- _____ Drug and alcohol abuse
- _____ Poor schools and social institutions
- _____ Ready availability of firearms
- _____ Moral decline
- _____ Inept law enforcement
- _____ Dysfunctional families
- _____ High unemployment
- _____ Ineffective court system
- _____ Child abuse and neglect
- _____ Problems of the urban poor

This is the composite table showing the distribution for each possible choice.

Table 1
Causes of Crime in Saginaw

	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Drug and alcohol abuse	151	21.3	129	18.2	82	11.5	362	51.0
Moral decline	104	14.6	78	11.0	82	11.5	264	37.2
Economic decline	92	13.0	74	10.4	66	9.3	232	32.7
Dysfunctional families	89	12.5	95	13.4	86	12.1	270	38.0
High unemployment	73	10.3	65	9.2	64	9.0	202	28.5

Problems of urban poor	29	4.1	38	5.4	52	7.3	119	16.8
Firearms	26	3.7	51	7.2	40	5.6	117	16.5
Ineffective court system	10	1.4	18	2.5	40	5.6	68	9.6
School and institutions	8	1.1	21	3.0	39	5.5	68	9.6
Inept law enforcement	7	1.0	8	1.1	17	2.4	32	4.5
Child abuse and neglect	7	1.0	17	2.4	23	3.2	47	6.6

Respondents emphasized social problems far more than problems within the system. First by far was drug and alcohol abuse. Dysfunctional families and moral decline were close in second and third places, with economic decline and high unemployment following in fourth and fifth places. The voter comments on this question were extensive and very diverse; they include:

“Gang activity.”

“All of the above apply to our crime problem.”

“I’m a CASA for family court and every case I have had for the last seven years is drug- and alcohol-related causing abuse or neglect.”

“It is hard to choose just three.”

“Parents don’t care what their kids are doing.”

“The sale of illegal drugs.”

“We need to set higher standards for our young people.”

“Women are not always able to raise children alone adequately. Absent fathers are a major problem.”

15. In their efforts to control crime, what should the law enforcement agencies of Saginaw County be doing that is different from what they are doing now?

- _____ Nothing: things are fine as they are now
- _____ More emphasis on community policing
- _____ Better management and leadership
- _____ A significant increase in personnel
- _____ Consolidating smaller agencies with larger ones
- _____ Higher training and professional standards
- _____ Better pay and working conditions
- _____ More help from state and federal agencies
- _____ More aggressive policing targeting crime “hot spots”
- _____ More coordination among agencies
- _____ Greater use of technological innovations

This is the composite table showing the distribution for each possible choice.

Table 2
Different Approaches in Law Enforcement in Saginaw

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	Total
--	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------	-------

	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Targeting hot spots	210	29.6	113	15.9	69	9.7	392	55.2
Community policing	59	8.3	88	12.4	84	11.8	231	32.5
Personnel increase	101	14.2	61	8.6	52	7.3	214	30.1
State and federal help	48	6.8	61	8.6	51	7.2	160	22.5
More agency coordination	30	4.2	63	8.9	67	9.4	160	22.5
Management/leadership	36	5.1	29	4.1	47	6.6	112	15.8
Pay/working conditions	10	1.4	32	4.5	43	6.1	85	12.0
Technological innovations	5	0.7	25	3.5	52	7.3	82	11.5
Training and standards	12	1.7	29	4.1	31	4.4	72	10.1
Consolidation	15	2.1	24	3.4	20	2.8	59	8.3
Nothing: status quo	1	0.1	1	0.1	2	0.3	4	0.6

The three dominant answers, in order, were more aggressive policing targeting hot spots, which was by far the most popular choice, followed by more emphasis on community policing and a significant increase in personnel. Better agency coordination and more help from state and federal governments were also common choices. The voter comments on this question included:

“Community policing is an effective tool when funds are available.”

“Gang activity is a major problem. These groups need to be aggressively pursued by police.”

“I don’t have an answer. I believe bad behavior starts with families and grows.”

“More police or better training will not help much, this is not a police problem. It’s a ‘how we raise our kids’ problem.”

“One department, sheriff, eliminate all others, including the City of Saginaw. Combine all departments.”

“Not regionalism! No consolidation.”

“Stronger enforcement of laws. Build a larger jail and fill it up. Elect judges with balls.”

“Build more prisons. Make it worse in prison than out!”

“If only they had enough officers. It’s hard to do a good job with a little group of officers. Doing a great job with what they have to work with.”

Voter Survey: Demographics

This section considers the demographic makeup of the voters who participated in the survey. Survey participants were not expected to precisely match the general population characteristics of residents of Saginaw County. The 2,500 persons to whom surveys were recent voters listed on Saginaw County voter rolls. They were distributed proportionate to population in each of Saginaw County’s 24 ZIP codes; that is, the number of surveys sent to each ZIP code was intended to be proportionate to the area’s percentage of the total county population (estimated at 206,300 in 2006). Saginaw County had about 158,000 voters on the rolls as of October 2008, but only about 110,000 of these are valid. About one of every 44 voters received a survey in the mail.

Exactly 2,500 survey were mailed out. A total of 45 were returned to sender by the post office as

undeliverable. Of the 2,455 delivered, a total of 710 were returned by January 12, 2009. This is a response rate of 28.9%. Here are their responses to the questions in the demographics section.

16. Are you a registered voter?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	699	98.5
No	5	0.7
Missing	6	0.8

17. What is your sex?

	Frequency	Percent
Male	312	43.9
Female	391	55.1
Missing	7	1.0

18. What is your race/ethnic origin?

	Frequency	Percent
White	602	84.8
Black	45	6.3
Hispanic	22	3.1
Asian	3	0.4
American Indian	2	0.3
Other	1	0.1
Mixed	13	1.8
Missing	22	3.1

19. What is your present age?

	Frequency	Percent
18 to 24 years	22	3.1
25 to 34 years	64	9.0
35 to 44 years	88	12.4
45 to 54 years	156	22.0
55 to 64 years	169	23.8

65 to 74 years	127	17.9
75 years and older	75	10.6
Missing	9	1.3

20. What is your marital status?

	Frequency	Percent
Single/Never Married	87	12.3
Married	476	67.0
Divorced	69	9.7
Separated	5	0.7
Widowed	62	8.7
Missing	11	1.5

21. What is your level of educational attainment?

	Frequency	Percent
Less than HS grad	34	3.8
HS grad or GED	203	28.6
Some college	256	36.1
Bachelor's degree	120	16.9
Advanced degree	86	12.1
Missing	11	1.5

22. What is your approximate annual family income before taxes?

	Frequency	Percent
less than \$20,000	83	11.7
\$20,000 to \$29,999	73	10.3

\$30,000 to \$39,999	86	12.1
\$40,000 to \$49,999	92	13.0
\$50,000 to \$74,999	137	19.3
\$75,000 to \$99,999	77	10.8
\$100,000 and over	72	10.1
Missing	90	12.7

23. What is your employment status?

	Frequency	Percent
Employed full-time	265	37.3
Employed part-time	92	13.0
Not presently employed	338	47.6
Missing	15	2.1

24. How would you describe your own voting history?

	Frequency	Percent
Always vote	492	69.3
Usually vote	183	25.8
Occasionally vote	17	2.4
Rarely vote	3	0.4
Never vote	7	1.0
Missing	8	1.1

25. How long have you lived in Saginaw County?

	Frequency	Percent
Less than one year	4	0.6
One to five years	36	5.1
Five to ten years	41	5.8
Ten to twenty years	75	10.6

More than twenty years	548	77.2
Missing	6	0.8

26. What is your ZIP Code?

Zip	City	Frequency	Percent
Missing	--	21	3.0
48415	Birch Run	34	4.8
48417	Burt	11	1.5
48457	Montrose	3	0.4
48460	New Lothrop	3	0.4
48601	Saginaw East	73	10.3
48602	Saginaw Center-West	99	13.9
48603	Saginaw Township	121	17.0
48604	Saginaw North	39	5.5
48607	Saginaw Center-East	1	0.1
48609	Saginaw West	59	7.0
48614	Brant	2	0.3
48616	Chesaning	22	3.1
48623	Freeland	48	6.8
48626	Hemlock	22	3.1
48637	Merrill	10	1.4
48638	Saginaw Township	60	8.5
48649	Oakley	5	0.7
48655	St. Charles	21	3.0
48722	Bridgeport	16	2.3
48724	Carrollton	1	0.1

48734	Frankenmuth	36	5.0
48757	Reese	2	0.3
48841	Saginaw Far Southwest	1	0.1

The survey respondents came from all parts of Saginaw County, but they were most likely to live in the City of Saginaw or Saginaw Township. Female respondents outnumbered males by more than 10 percentage points. About 75% of the respondents were age 45 or older. Two out of three were married, two out of three had at least some college credits, and about 85% were white. Their median family income averaged in the \$40,000 to \$49,999 range. Over 95% of them were usual or always voters.

The two most distinctive features of the respondents were, first, that almost exactly half of them were unemployed; and, second, that three-quarters of them had lived in Saginaw County more than 20 years.

These are people who have a deep attachment to Saginaw. They have lived the changes city and county have gone through over the years, and their remarks, sometimes impassioned, sometimes perplexed, indicate their deep concern with what the future may hold. What are the remedies for the deep-seated problems of crime and social disorder that they see in their communities? What are the prospects for the future of the area where so many of the respondents have spent so much of their lives?

Voter Survey: Conclusions and Concluding Comments

In this report’s “Introduction,” we indicated that the voter survey was intended to address three important areas of concern in Saginaw County—the crime problem, policing, and taxes. After soliciting opinions on these issues, the survey also asked for views on two other fundamental questions:

1. What are the causes of crime in Saginaw County?; and
2. What should law enforcement agencies be doing to more effectively deal with crime?

In this section we would like to summarize the views of the voters who responded to this survey.

In regard to the crime problem, there was virtually unanimous agreement that the City of Saginaw has a serious problem with violent crime. There was likewise very strong agreement that the general crime problem is getting worse across Saginaw County. Voters were split on the immediate threat of crime in their own neighborhood. Of those who expressed an opinion, the majority did not see the problem as getting worse in their immediate area, and two of every three felt safe walking in their neighborhood at night (though if we had defined this question as not relying on guns, dogs, or spouses for protection, the responses might have been very different). About two-thirds of voters agreed that crime has an important impact on the quality of life countywide, and more than eight out of ten agreed that Saginaw County’s economic redevelopment is negatively affected by outsiders’ perception of high crime rates in the county.

In regard to policing, more than three-quarters of the survey respondents agreed that more police

officers are needed to maintain public safety. About the same number either supported or expressed no opinion regarding the presently fragmented structure of law enforcement in Saginaw County—the numerous small agencies at the township and village level with the three larger agencies in the City of Saginaw, Saginaw Township, and the Saginaw County Sheriff’s Department. Consolidation is apparently not an issue many of them had ever thought about. Slightly more than a third of the voters agreed that law enforcement agencies are doing a good job of controlling serious crime; the surprising turn here was that one in every four voters did not have an opinion on this important question.

In regard to higher taxes for law enforcement services, about a quarter of the respondents had no opinion one way or the other. Of those who did, support was greater if any taxes were used for individual departments at the municipal or township level rather than distributed countywide. If these voters were deciding the outcome, a tax election for township, village, or city police services would pass by four percentage points; an election for countywide police services would fail by two percentage points. Few voters remember the last countywide tax proposal for law enforcement, the “No Boundaries” proposal of 2006. Of those who can remember what their position was on “No Boundaries,” the split was almost exactly 50/50 for and against. Since “No Boundaries” lost 60/40, then either the electorate has changed, or memories have faded, or the strong majority of “no” voters were not very responsible about returning their questionnaires (or all of the above).

As to the causes of the serious crime problem in Saginaw County, respondents emphasized drug and alcohol abuse at the highest level, with family and moral decline at the second level, and economic and unemployment issues at the third level. As to what police should be doing differently, by far the most popular response was more aggressive policing targeting crime “hot spots.” This response was followed by more community policing and more officers at the second level, and better agency coordination and expanded help from state and federal governments at the third level.

In reviewing the written comments made throughout the survey, it is apparent that voters feel very strongly about crime and crime control issues. We would summarize these comments in this way:

1. People still see the crime problems of Saginaw’s east side as the worst in the county, but these problems have spread to the west side of the city and other nearby areas;
2. People expect these problems to continue to spread and increase in severity as problems of unemployment and poverty increase;
3. City government officials are blamed for not dealing more effectively with their own crime and financial problems;
4. Police agencies are doing a reasonable job with the resources they have now, but the police mode is more responsive than proactive. More resources would be needed to step up preventive or targeted approaches;
5. Many voters outside the city do not feel much of a connection to the City of Saginaw or its people, and they distrust city officials. They want no part of any countywide plan that they see as taking rural or suburban economic or human resources to deal with the problems of the inner city;
6. New taxes are a tough sell (“No new taxes, please!” “Is this all about raising taxes?”), but many respondents do see the need to financially support policies that will reverse the long-term deterioration of social order in Saginaw; and

7. There is support for the idea that public safety must come first in any long-term campaign to restore the City of Saginaw to economic vitality.

This summary reflects our own conclusions based on our review of 710 completed questionnaires. The individual respondents drew their own varied, often contradictory, sometimes extreme conclusions. Of the 710 voters returning completed surveys, just over one-third (266) took the time to write their own general concluding comments about the crime problem and public safety in Saginaw County. Limited to three lines to write on, some voters tried to squeeze in mini-essays about crime, policing, taxes, and social problems. Here is a selection from their comments.

“All police agencies should work together with existing money. No new taxes.”

“Be more aggressive with gangs. Enforce curfews. Bring back the gang task force, please!”

“Change must come from within families. The government cannot change the behavior of people.”

“Crime on the east side of the river is very high. The near west side is becoming more and more involved. It is a shame that people are afraid to go into either of those areas, especially at night.”

“Desperate people do desperate things; families—I don’t know how the police could cure that.”

“Don’t go into Saginaw City after dark.”

“I’m glad to see Community Policing coming back more. I worked with the officer in my neighborhood when we had one. He made a difference!”

“I believe police from the county and cities should work together. Station more police in high crime areas. Keep their positions mobile so they can serve where most needed.”

“I strongly agree in more taxes for law enforcement.”

“I think the negative portrayal of Saginaw by the media is a significant factor undermining efforts to improve Saginaw and its image.”

“I will never, ever vote for county wide taxes to police, buses, or anything else that only benefits Saginaw.”

“It is nice to see a police car or a policeman on a bike go through the neighborhood.”

“Law officers do more to solve crimes after they happen than to prevent them.”

“People are not willing to approve millage increases for health and safety.”

“Safety first, more police. If area is safe, schools become safer and the neighborhoods do, too! Everything starts with safety.”

“The police officers are professional and are doing the best they can with the resources they have.”

“The urban problems seem to be pushing and expanding themselves into the suburbs, which is scary.”

“Until crime in Saginaw is controlled, business and job development will be hindered.”

“Will the time I spent with this survey really make a difference in the crime problem in Saginaw?”