



# CIGARETTE TAXES AND THE 1992 STATE ELECTIONS:

## *The Public Voices Its Desire for New Faces in the Legislature and Its Support for an Increase in the Cigarette Tax*

The Public Opinion Research Institute has just completed a survey for the American Lung Association of Michigan Poll Committee measuring the public's attitudes toward the upcoming November elections of state officeholders and the current Michigan cigarette tax. The ALA-MI Poll Committee is pleased to release the data from this poll to the general public and especially to each of the candidates for election to the state legislature this November.

### MAJOR FINDINGS

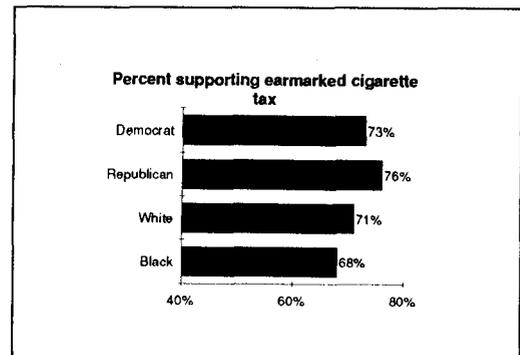
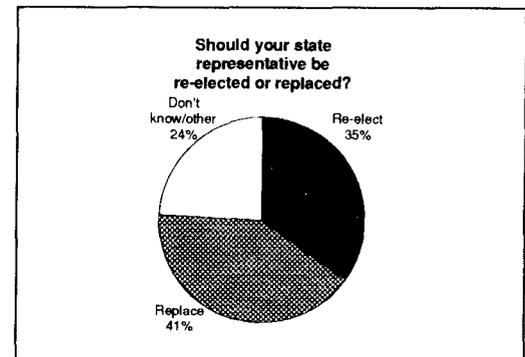
The Public Opinion Research Institute, a division of Public Sector Consultants, Inc., recently conducted a statewide telephone survey of 800 Michigan residents on June 13 and 14, 1992.

The survey was conducted for a coalition of groups including:

- American Lung Association of Michigan
- Gelman Environmental Sciences
- Northern Health Foundation
- Southeastern Michigan Health Association
- American Cancer Society

The complete survey, including questions and data, is available from Public Sector Consultants' Public Opinion Research Institute. For further information, call 484-4954.

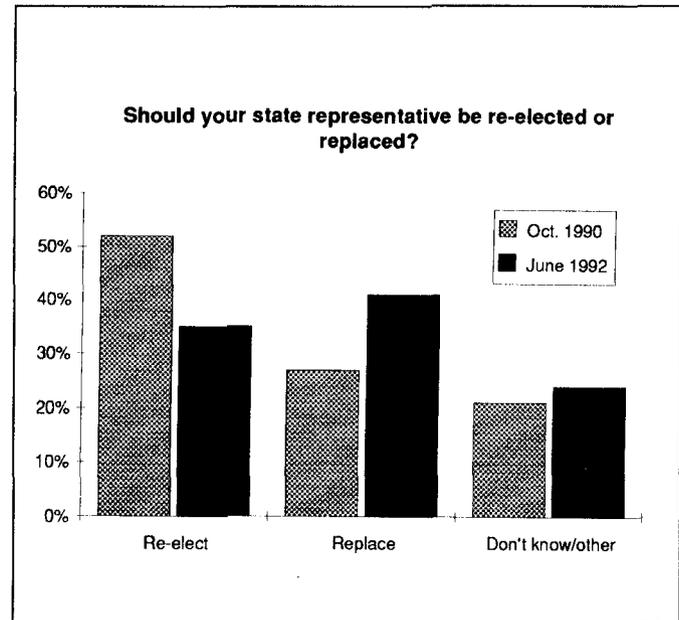
- **It will be a tough year for incumbents**, as 41 percent of the public wants to see new faces represent them in their districts. Thirty-five percent favor reelecting the current representatives, while 21 percent are undecided.
- **Three issues dominate state representative races: Health care, education, and the economy** are named as the most important issues in determining who voters will support in the upcoming elections.
- **The property tax is viewed as the most unfair tax** on Michigan residents.
- **Michigan voters support the cigarette tax, nonsmokers' rights, and antismoking legislation** regardless of race ideology, gender, and party affiliation.



## **TOUGH YEAR FOR INCUMBENTS!**

Results from the American Lung Association of Michigan poll matched results from other recent public opinion surveys that report high voter dissatisfaction with the political process. A plurality of the respondents (41 percent) preferred to replace their current state representative with someone new.

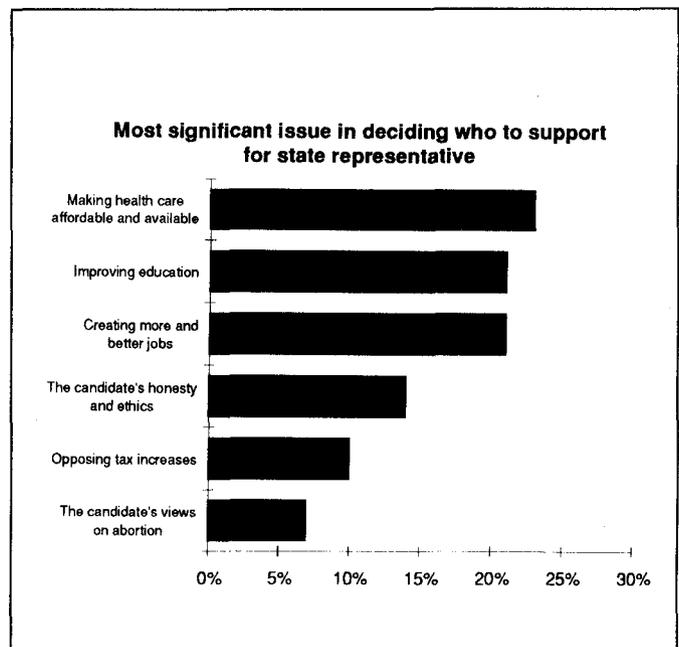
The figure at right shows a 14-percent increase from 1990 to 1992 in voters wishing to replace incumbents, an increase that reflects voters' rising frustration with politics and the political system. When asked which characteristics were most important in determining respect for and trust of elected officeholders, the public responded that both providing leadership on difficult issues and being independent of special interests (68 percent each) were very important. In contrast, a narrow majority (51 percent) indicated that not raising taxes was very important for increasing voter trust and respect.



## **THREE ISSUES DOMINATE REPRESENTATIVE RACES**

In this survey, the public named "providing affordable and available health care" (24 percent), "improving education" (21 percent), and improving the economy by "creating more and better jobs" (21 percent) as the three most important issues in determining who they would support for the state legislature this year.

There was no statistically significant difference among the top three issues. Some differences appeared, however, when the data were analyzed according to party affiliation. Democrats named improving the economy (22 percent) as the most important issue in deciding whom to vote for. Republicans identified health care (29 percent) as most important to them. Ticket splitters identified three different issues as their most important concerns: health care (23 percent), the economy (23 percent), and education (22 percent).



# IN A HYPOTHETICAL CAMPAIGN, THE CANDIDATE FAVORING AN INCREASE IN THE CIGARETTE TAX WINS

Another section of the survey tested the electability of candidates for state legislature based on the candidate's support for increasing the cigarette tax to help fund education and health programs. A hypothetical campaign was described to the respondents.

*Question: Assume you had to choose between two candidates for the state legislature about whom you knew only the following information. Candidate A previously said he opposed tax increases but then voted in favor of increasing the cigarette tax by 25 cents per pack to help fund health programs that include antismoking education. Candidate B consistently opposed tax increases, including the cigarette tax, and voted to cut funding for health programs. Would you prefer candidate A or B?*

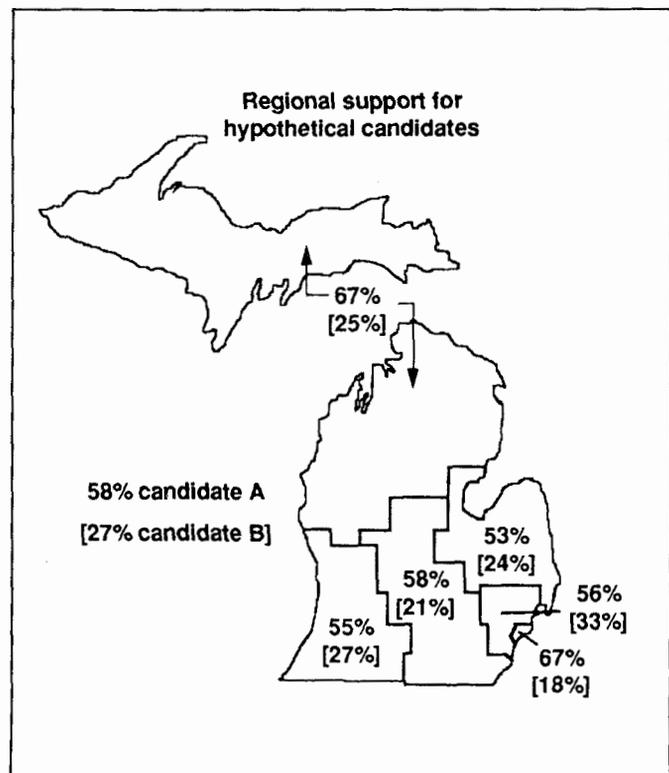
The highest level of support was found for candidate A, who voted to increase the cigarette tax. (See map below, which shows support by region.) Support for candidate A was especially strong among non-smokers (61 percent), people earning more than \$70,000 per year (71 percent), and college graduates (65 percent). Among anti-incumbent voters, 57 percent preferred the pro-cigarette tax candidate. These data corroborated the March 1992 *Public Opinion Monitor* survey, which found that 55 percent of the public would be more likely to support a candidate for the legislature who favored increasing the cigarette tax and dedicating the new revenues to local public health programs.



**58 percent supported Candidate A**, who previously opposed tax increases, but then voted in favor of increasing the cigarette tax by 25 cents per pack to help fund health programs.



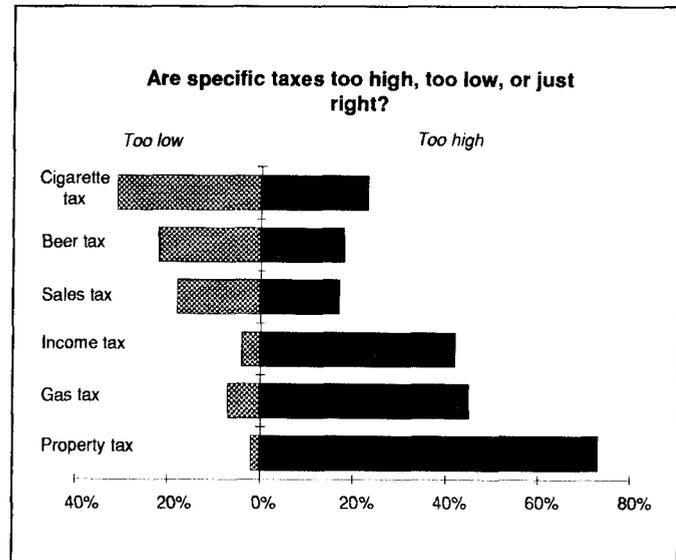
**27 percent supported Candidate B** who consistently opposed tax increases, including the cigarette tax, and voted to cut funding for health programs.



## VOTERS RANK THE FAIRNESS OF MICHIGAN TAXES

As candidates approach the 1992 elections, they will face voters who have clear opinions about which taxes are fair and which taxes are not.

Michigan residents believe that "sin" taxes on cigarettes and beer may be too low or at the right level. The figure at right also shows the evident unpopularity of the property tax. Yet candidates this year will not find it as easy to campaign on an antitax platform as in previous years. Only 10 percent of the public named opposing tax increases as the major criterion for voting for a candidate for state representative.

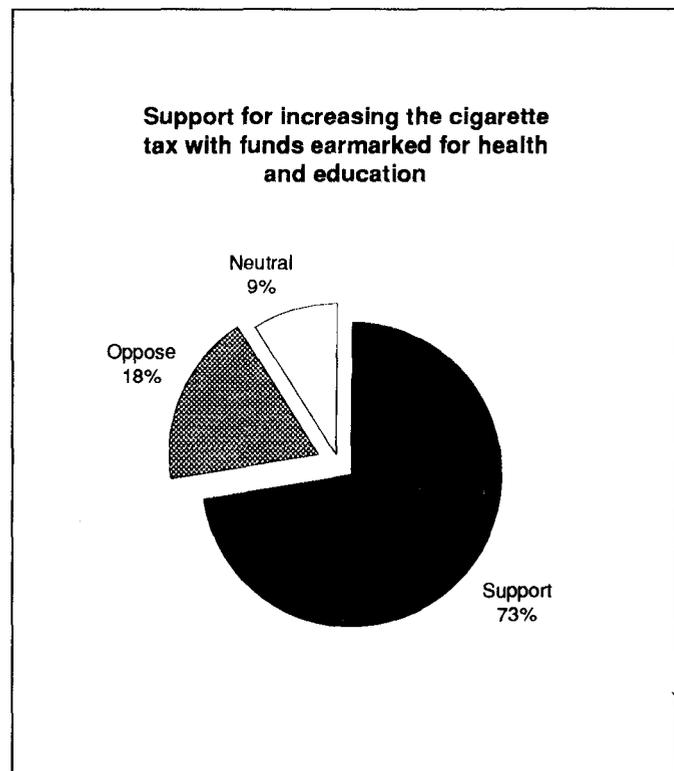


## 72 PERCENT OF MICHIGAN RESIDENTS SUPPORT INCREASING THE CIGARETTE TAX WHEN THE FUNDS ARE EARMARKED FOR HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The major purpose of this survey was to measure the level of public support for a proposal to increase the cigarette tax. A majority of respondents (52 percent) supported an increase in the cigarette tax, while only 16 percent favored a decrease.

Support for increasing the cigarette tax increases substantially if the proposal earmarked the cigarette tax revenue for health and education purposes. This poll, like other surveys asking similar questions (including the October 1991 *Public Opinion Monitor* survey), found that 72 percent of the public supported raising the cigarette tax if the additional revenue was targeted for specific purposes.

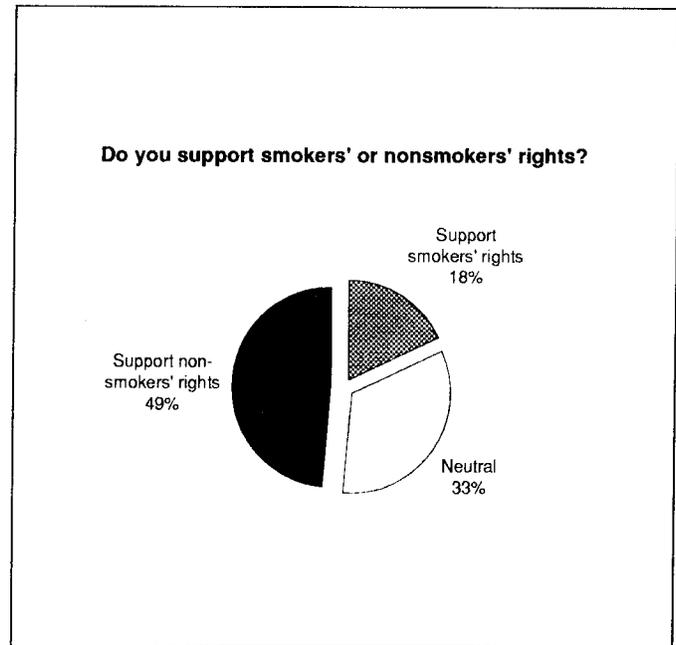
Seventy-eight percent of nonsmokers supported the raising the cigarette tax (10 percent opposed). Surprisingly, 55 percent of smokers also supported raising the tax (36 percent opposed). Support was nearly identical (76 and 73 percent, respectively) among Republican and Democratic voters.



# ***NONSMOKERS' RIGHTS AND THE MICHIGAN VOTER***

The movement to protect the rights of nonsmokers has grown significantly over the years. The Michigan legislature has responded to this trend by enacting a number of statutes aimed at increasing the number of smoke-free public environments.

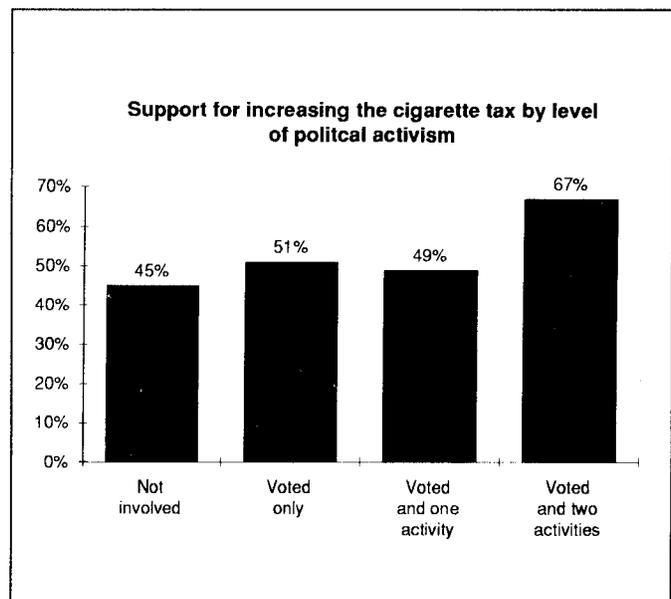
This survey found strong support, as shown in the figure at right, for the rights of nonsmokers. In fact, in this study more people were willing to identify themselves as advocates for the rights of nonsmokers than to vote consistently for Republicans or Democrats. These findings lay a strong foundation for legislative candidates to support an increase in the cigarette tax. Individuals identifying themselves as strong supporters of nonsmokers' rights describe themselves as conservative (55 percent) and regular voters (56 percent say they vote in every general election).



## ***POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT***

This survey tested the level of each respondent's political activity. The more active respondents were in the political process, the more they supported both increasing the cigarette tax and nonsmokers' rights.

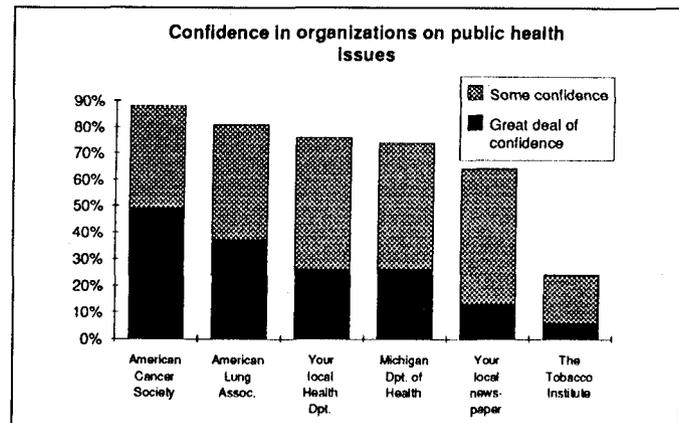
To measure this activity, the survey developed a four-level scale to classify respondents' political activism. The lowest level included people who had not participated in the political process (8 percent). The second group contained people who had only voted (44 percent). The third group both voted and involved themselves in one other political activity, like working on a campaign (24 percent). The highest level of political activity included those people who had voted and participated in two or more additional activities (13 percent). The figure at right shows the level of political activism of those who support increasing the cigarette tax.



# ***PUBLIC CONFIDENCE ON HEALTH ISSUES***

Michigan voters were most confident about the information they receive about health issues from organizations like the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association. Other important sources of information were state and local health departments.

The figure at right shows that the American Cancer Society was the most highly regarded source of health information. In contrast, the Tobacco Institute, which lobbies extensively against antismoking legislation, had little credibility as a source of health information.



## ***CONCLUSIONS***

- 72 percent of the public support increasing the cigarette tax when funds are earmarked for health and education programs.
- More than twice as many people defined themselves as advocates of the rights of **nonsmokers** than as advocates for smokers.
- Likely voters and politically active individuals are among the strongest support of the cigarette tax.
- Candidates running for the state legislature will be helped more than hurt by their support of the cigarette tax increase, according to survey data.

### ***Methodology***

Public Sector Consultants' June 13-14, 1992, survey sampled 800 Michigan residents over the age of eighteen, yielding a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7 percent in 95 out 100 samples. Survey participants had to either be registered voters or have indicated that they were planning to register. This sample was stratified with respect to geography and gender and was designed to represent the population correctly. The surveys were conducted by Florence Morros Interviews in Oak Park, Michigan.