

THE STATE OF
PUBLIC OPINION

To merge or not to merge? (That was just one of the questions asked in a recent survey of Hampton Roads residents.)

Would you like to see the 14 cities and counties of Hampton Roads merge into a single jurisdiction? Surprisingly, 50.5 percent of 1,169 people polled recently believe that such a merger should occur. For cities or counties where at least 20 individuals responded to this question, the percentage of those desiring a merger ranged from lows of 41.7 in Suffolk and 42.4 in James City County to highs of 54.8 percent in Gloucester County and 55.8 percent in Norfolk. The region's largest city, Virginia Beach, split evenly on this issue, with 153 respondents preferring a merger and 153 opposing it. South Hampton Roads residents, at 51.5 percent, are slightly more in favor of a merger than Peninsula residents, 48.4 percent. Support for a merger is relatively even across racial and ethnic groups: 54.2 percent of African Americans favored a merger, while 49.7 percent of whites/caucasians and 52.4 percent of all others expressed support for a single jurisdiction.

TABLE 1

Percent of Individuals Supporting Merger of Cities and Counties into a Single Jurisdiction

City or County	Percent Supporting Merger
Gloucester County	54.8
James City County	42.4
York County	47.7
Chesapeake	53.3
Hampton	47.2
Newport News	52.1
Norfolk	55.8
Portsmouth	52.7
Suffolk	41.7
Virginia Beach	50.0
Overall	50.5

Merger or not, a large majority of Hampton Roads residents, regardless of where they live, see the region as one continuous community that they use to meet their daily needs. Whether they travel for employment, shopping, recreation, entertainment or personal business, survey respondents reported that they rely on free and open access to all parts of the region regardless of boundary lines that formally separate jurisdictions. Because of this, a clear majority of residents see the need for regional cooperation through joint arrangements and combining of public services. This is particularly the case for mass transit: respondents to the survey reported traffic congestion as a major problem.

Most of the people who were surveyed view politics and government, as well as competition among the cities and counties, as impeding regional cooperation. They would vote for candidates who favor combining public services on a regional basis and agree that their elected officials should encourage formal working relations among the different Hampton Roads jurisdictions.

Overall, three-quarters of the residents rate their city as well as the region as a good or excellent place to live. However, they give low ratings to such factors as cost of living, transportation and earnings. Forty-five percent of those who view earnings as very poor report that they would move out of Hampton Roads if they had the opportunity.

The findings reported here are based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,169 Hampton Roads residents, conducted by the Old Dominion University's Social Science Research Center, between May 8 and May 24, 2000. The sampling margin of error is ±2.9 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. That is, if another sample of the same size were repeated under the same conditions, then

95 percent of the time the deviation from the results reported would be no more than 2.9 percent in either direction (see page 17 for more details on the methodology).

To merge or not to merge was not the only question, however. Participants were asked about such matters as travel patterns, reasons for travel to different cities and counties, perceptions of regional cooperation among the different jurisdictions, perceived barriers to regional cooperation, perceptions of quality of life, and perceived constraints on the quality of life in the Hampton Roads region.

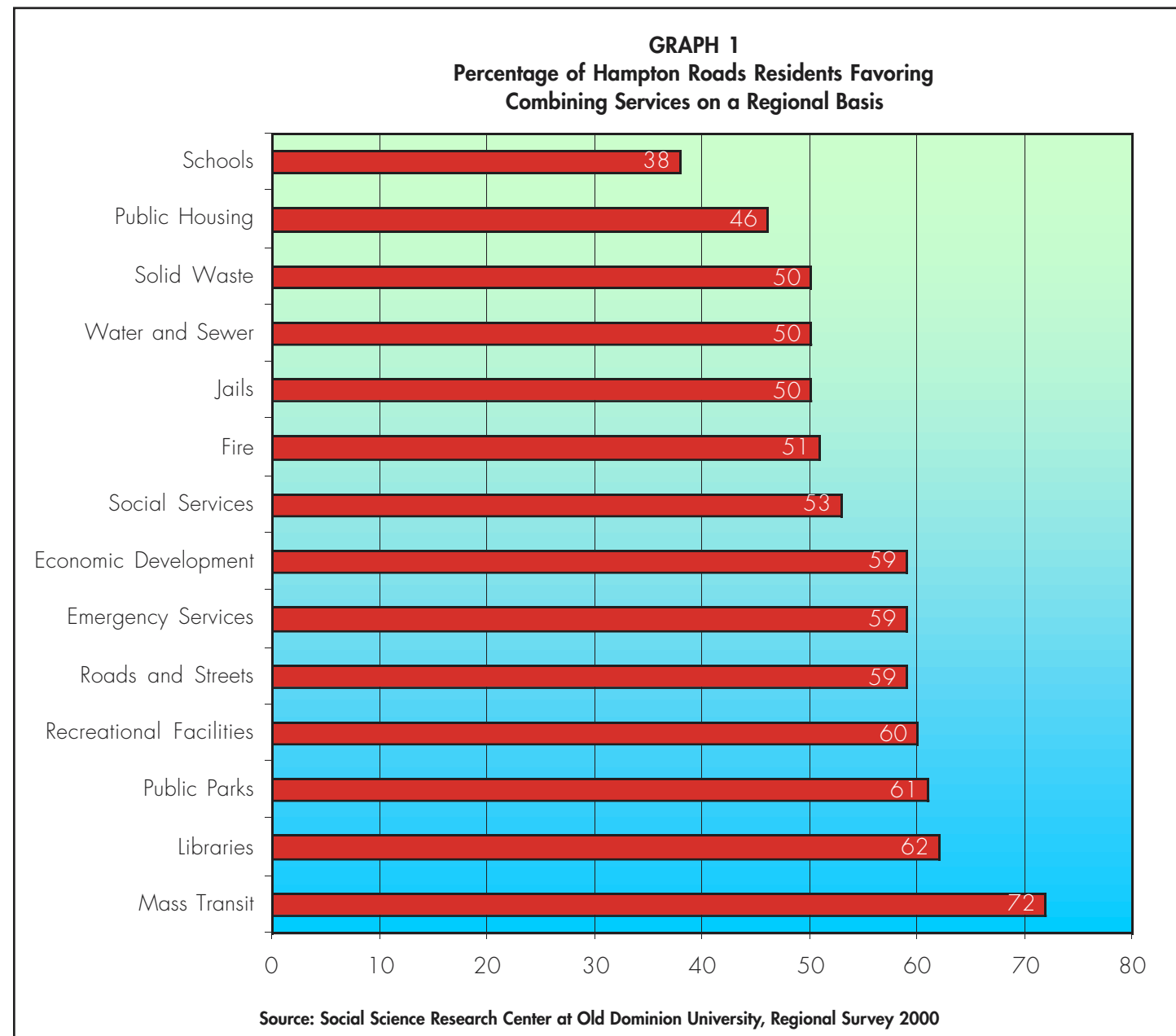
Key Findings

1. Survey data on travel patterns and activities of respondents show that Hampton Roads residents are as much a part of the regional community as they are of their particular city or county. Whether they travel for purposes of employment, shopping, recreation, entertainment or personal business, they depend on continuing access to all parts of the Hampton Roads region irrespective of formal boundary lines.
2. The inner-core cities (Norfolk, Portsmouth, Newport News, Hampton) continue to serve as the economic engine of the region, as measured by the number of people accessing jobs. Most jurisdictions, with the exception of the outer suburbs and Portsmouth, provide a broad range of services in meeting the needs of the respondents.
3. A majority of residents support combining public services among the different jurisdictions for the good of the region. This is particularly true for mass transit, where 72 percent favored combining transportation services. Other services receiving strong support for some form of joint arrangement included roads and streets, social services, emergency services, libraries, recreation facilities, public parks and economic development. On the other hand, merging public housing and schools did not receive majority support on this question.
4. On the question of merging several Hampton Roads cities into a single regional jurisdiction, 50 percent of the respondents approved and 50 percent were opposed.
5. Most respondents (62 percent) had not heard of the Hampton Roads Partnership, a regional organization that promotes regional cooperation.
6. Ninety-five percent of the people surveyed said their elected officials should encourage formal working relations among the various Hampton Roads jurisdictions. Seventy-six percent said they would vote for a candidate who favors combining services on a regional basis.
7. Most respondents (more than 60 percent) view politics and government, as well as competition among the cities and counties, as impeding regional cooperation. Business, the media and public employees are viewed as supporters by a majority of the residents.
8. A clear majority (more than 75 percent) report that the region and the city or county where they reside provide a high quality of life. Also, most of the respondents rated shopping, restaurants, entertainment, culture, museums and higher education as good or very good. On the negative side, cost of living, transportation and earnings were given a good or very good rating by only about a third of those surveyed.
9. Forty-nine percent view traffic congestion as the biggest problem in their city or county. A higher proportion of residents from the urban core (45 percent) identified crime and drugs as a great or very great problem, compared to 15 percent of those who live in the suburbs.

Perceptions of Regional Cooperation

Most respondents favor some form of joint effort to combine public services on a regional basis (see Graph 1). This is particularly the case for mass transit, where 72 percent favored combining services. Other services that rated high for combining services (more than 50 percent) were roads and streets, social services, emergency services, libraries, recreation facilities, public parks and economic development. Neither the merging of the region's public housing, nor its schools, received majority support.

Taking into account geographic location on the question of combining services, no difference was found between residents on the Peninsula and those in South Hampton Roads. However, in comparing respondents from the outer suburbs with those from the



inner suburbs and the urban core, 40 percent of those in the outer suburbs, 46 percent from the urban core and 30 percent of the inner suburb residents favored combining schools. Income also influenced views on combining schools. Low-income residents (45 percent) were more likely to favor combining schools as compared to those who are classified as upper income (32 percent of those earning more than \$75,000). High-income residents were more likely to favor combining roads, mass transit, prisons and economic development (see Table 2).

Most respondents (62 percent) had not heard of the Hampton Roads Partnership. No differences could be noted comparing the core cities, the outer suburbs and the inner suburbs. However, high-income respondents (earning more than \$75,000) were more likely to have heard of the Partnership (54 percent) than those earning less than \$25,000 (26 percent). Ninety-two percent of respondents said their elected officials should encourage formal working relations among the different Hampton Roads jurisdictions.

Of the respondents who gave an opinion, 76 percent said they would vote for a candidate who favors combining services and 24 percent said they would vote for a candidate who opposes formally combining services. Eighty-three percent of the urban-core residents, 72 percent from the inner suburbs and 68 percent from the outer suburbs reported they would vote for a candidate who favors formally combining services.

TABLE 2
Respondents In Favor of Combining Services and Income (Percent Reporting "Favor" to "Strongly Favor")

Option	Low Income (<\$25,000)	High Income (>\$75,000)
Combine Schools	45%	32%
Combine Roads and Streets	50%	66%
Combine Mass Transit	64%	75%
Combine Prison/Jails	41%	60%
Combine Economic Development	57%	68%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

Opinions on the Pros and Cons of Regionalism

Most the people who were surveyed (more than 60 percent) view politics and government and inter-jurisdictional city and county competition as barriers to regional cooperation (see Table 3). On the other hand, a large majority view business and economic interests as being supportive of regionalism. Other supportive entities reported included the media (newspapers and television) and employees in the public sector. Residents living in the outer suburbs were less likely to view politics and government as a barrier (45 percent) as compared to those from the inner suburbs (65 percent) and the urban core (63 percent).

TABLE 3
Percent of Respondents Viewing Component as Barrier or Support to Regional Cooperation

Component	Viewed as Barrier	Viewed as Support
Competition of Jurisdictions	65%	35%
Politics and Government	63%	37%
Virginia State Legislature	46%	54%
Public Employees	30%	70%
Media	30%	70%
Business & Economic Interests	27%	73%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

Rating Quality of Life and Amenities

In rating their city or county on quality of life, 75 percent of the respondents believe it to be good to excellent; also on this issue, 50 percent said their city/county was better to much better in the past five years. In rating the Hampton Roads region, 77 percent reported good to excellent; and 57 percent said it has gotten better or much better over the past five years.

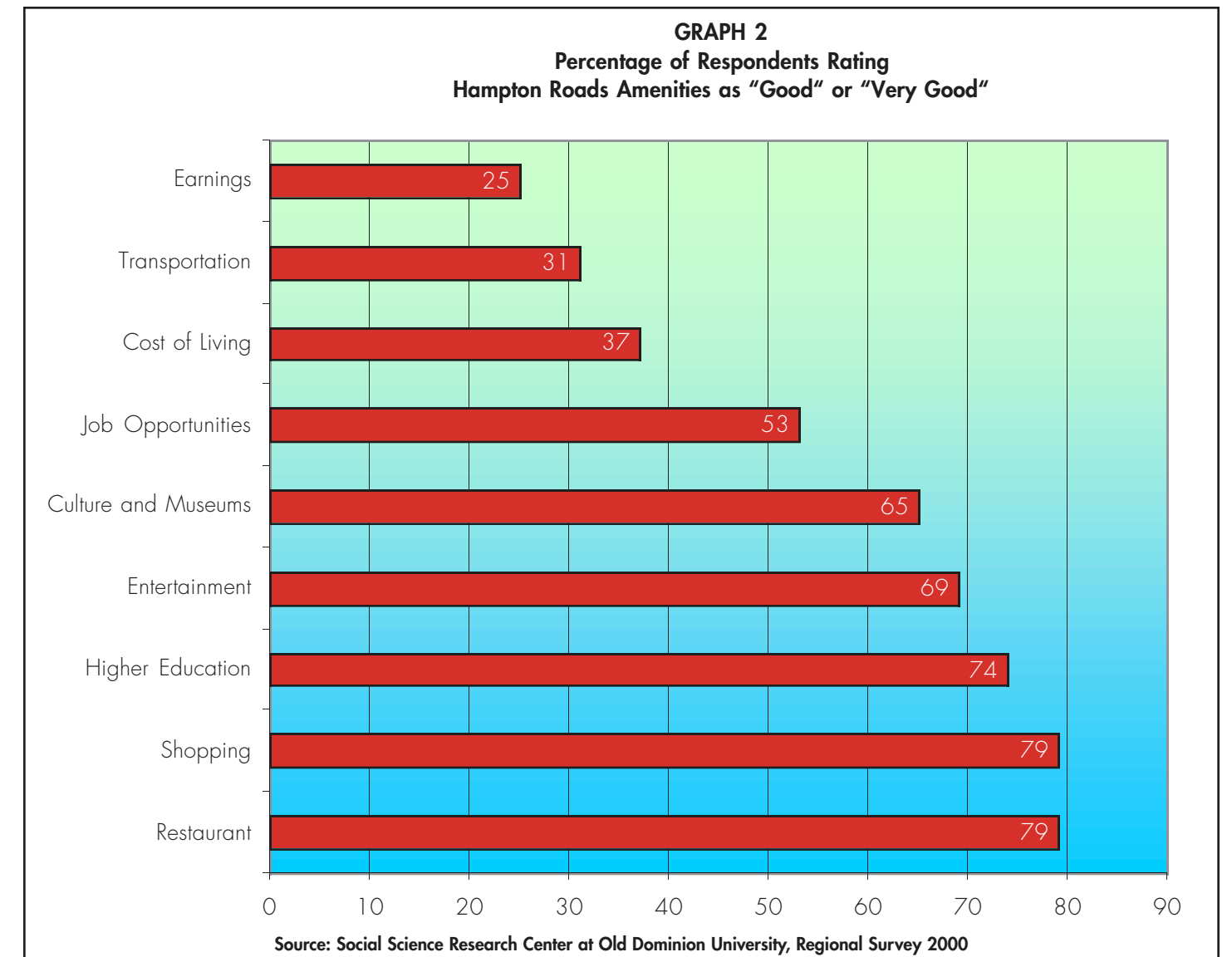
Residents from the inner and outer suburbs were more likely to rate their city as excellent (38 percent and 34 percent, respectively) as compared to 14 percent from the inner core. Individuals who earn more tended to be more positive in rating their cities than did low-income respondents (see Table 4). Eighty-five percent of those earning more than \$75,000 rated their city as good or excellent. In contrast, 50 percent of those who earn less than \$25,000 rated their city as good or excellent.

In viewing amenities in the region, 60 percent of the respondents rated the following as good or very good: shopping, restaurants, entertainment, culture, museums and higher education (see Graph 2).

TABLE 4
Rating of City and Hampton Roads
(Percent Rating "Good" or "Excellent")

Location	Low Income (<\$25,000)	High Income (>\$75,000)
Your City	50%	85%
Hampton Roads	66%	85%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000



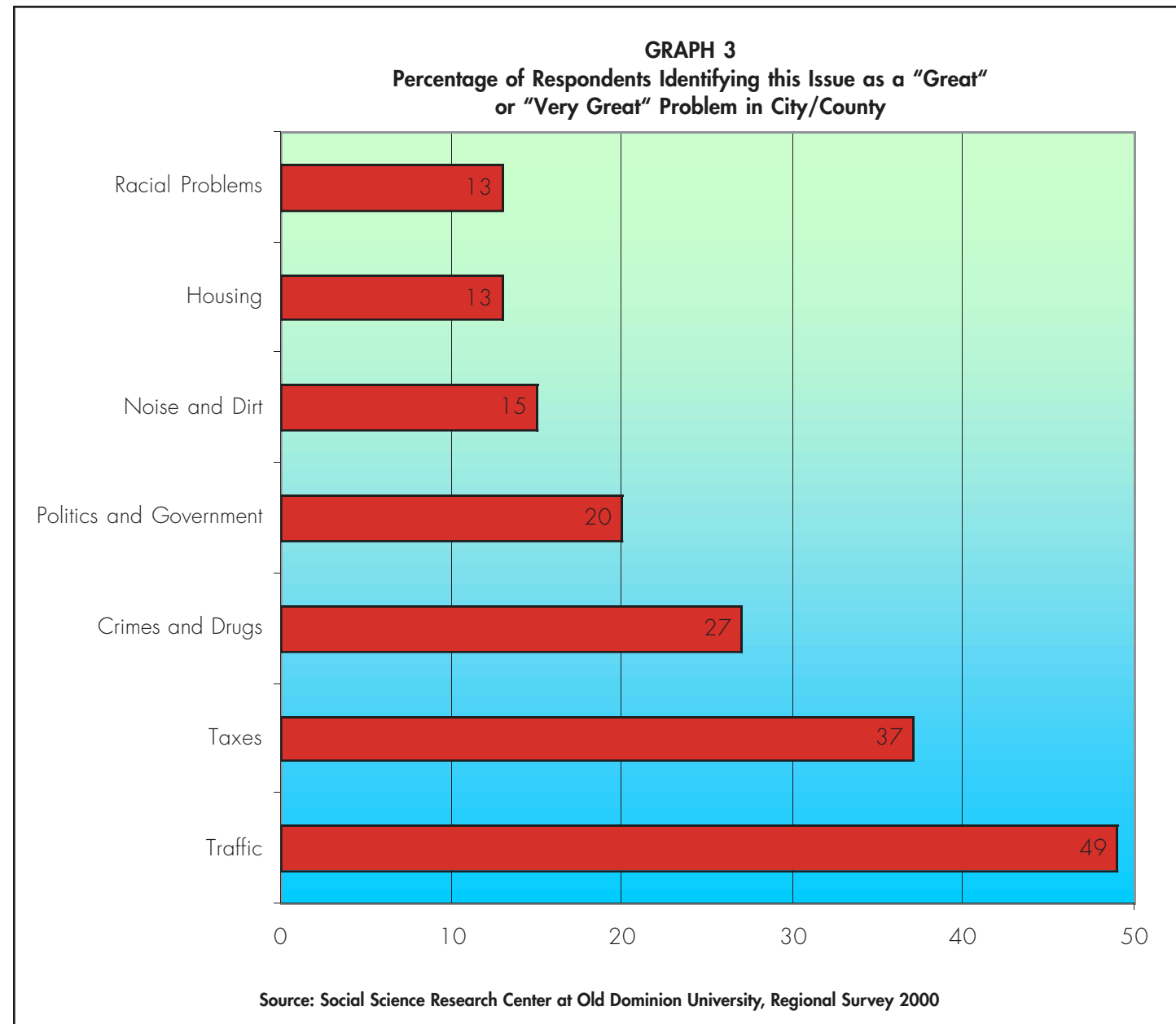
On the negative side, cost of living, earnings and transportation in the region received good or very good ratings from only about a third of the people surveyed. Earnings were viewed positively by a mere 25 percent of respondents. While there appears to be little difference among respondents based on location, some differences can be noted based on income. Those earning less than \$25,000 were less likely to rate job opportunities (44 percent), cost of living (24 percent) and earnings (17 percent) as good or very good, as compared to those earning more than \$75,000 (60 percent, 31 percent and 32 percent, respectively).

As a reflection of degree of satisfaction with the region, 77 percent report they would continue to reside in Hampton Roads. Of this number, 54 percent would stay where they are, 13 percent would move out of their neighborhood but stay in the same city or county, and 10 percent would move out of their city but remain in some other location in Hampton Roads. The remaining 23 percent indicated they would leave the region. It should be noted that the desire to leave is associated with perceptions of job opportunities and earnings. Of those who rated job opportunities as very poor, 35 percent said they would move out of Hampton Roads, as compared to 17 percent of those who rated job opportunities as very good. Of those who rated earnings as very poor, 45 percent said they would move out of Hampton Roads. In contrast, of those who rated earnings as very good, only 4 percent said they would leave Hampton Roads.

Age and the number of years one had lived in the area were also factors. Newer residents (38 percent) were more likely to report a desire to move out of Hampton Roads, as compared to those who had lived in the area for more than 40 years (11 percent). Younger people, age 30 or less, were more likely to say they would move out of Hampton Roads if given the opportunity (33 percent), as compared to 18 percent of those over the age of 50.

Perceived Problems

Respondents also were asked what they viewed as problems in their city/county (see Graph 3). **Traffic congestion was viewed as the biggest problem overall, with 49 percent of the respondents rating it as a great to a very great concern.** There was virtually no difference in the views of respondents on the Peninsula and those on the Southside for any problem.



A higher proportion of respondents from the urban core (45 percent) reported that crime and drugs are a great or very great problem, as compared to 15 percent of those who live in the suburbs (see Table 5). Slightly more than half of the residents from the urban core and inner-suburban areas viewed traffic as a great or very great problem. In contrast, just 22 percent of the outer-suburban residents rated traffic as a great or very great problem.

TABLE 5
Perceived Problem and Location
(Percentage of Respondents Reporting Crime or Traffic as a "Great" or "Very Great" Problem)

	Outer Suburbs	Inner Suburbs	Urban Core
Crime	15%	15%	45%
Traffic	22%	52%	50%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

Those who have lived in Hampton Roads for more than 40 years were more likely to rate drugs and crime as a great or very great problem (39 percent). In contrast, 22 percent who have lived in the region for five years or less rated crime and drugs as a great to very great problem.

Respondents earning less than \$25,000 a year were more likely to rate crime, housing and taxes as great or very great problems. This contrasts with higher income respondents who view these matters as less of a problem (see Table 6).

TABLE 6
High- and Low-Income Respondents Perceive Problems Differently
(Percent of Respondents Rating Crime, Housing or Taxes as a "Very Great" or "Great" Problem)

	Low Income <\$25,000	High Income > \$75,000
Crime	41%	22%
Housing	20%	7%
Taxes	40%	28%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

Regional Travel Patterns

In the subject of travel patterns in Hampton Roads, respondents were asked to what city or county they traveled most often in the month prior to the survey. Norfolk was the leading city, followed by Virginia Beach, Chesapeake and Newport News (see Table 7).

TABLE 7
Most Frequent Cities Traveled to in the Past Month

City	Percent of Respondents
Norfolk	24%
Virginia Beach	15%
Chesapeake	10%
Newport News	10%
Did not travel to other places	15%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

On the Peninsula, almost half of the respondents from Gloucester, Isle of Wight County, James City County, Mathews County and York County identified Newport News as the city they traveled to most frequently in the past month. Hampton was identified by 5 to 18 percent of the respondents traveling from these areas. Among Newport News residents, 32 percent identified Hampton, while 19 percent identified Norfolk. Twenty-four percent of Hampton respondents reported no travel to other cities for any reason in the month prior to the survey.

On the Southside, almost half (47 percent) of the Virginia Beach respondents identified Norfolk as their prime destination. Among Chesapeake residents, 38 percent identified Virginia Beach and 28 percent listed Norfolk as prime destinations. Among Norfolk residents, 41 percent identified Virginia Beach as their prime destination, and 20 percent reported no travel to other

cities for any reason in the month prior to the survey. Portsmouth respondents indicated Norfolk (26 percent), Chesapeake (22 percent) and Virginia Beach (19 percent).

Residents from the urban-core cities were most likely to travel to Virginia Beach (20 percent) or reported no travel to other places in the month prior to the survey (18 percent). Among inner-suburban residents, 56 percent reported traveling to Norfolk and 13 percent reported no travel to other cities in the month prior to the survey. Among outer-suburban residents, the greatest number (28 percent) reported traveling to Newport News. The remaining outer-suburban residents listed their most frequent destinations as follows: Chesapeake, 15 percent; Hampton, 13 percent; Virginia Beach, 12 percent; no travel, 12 percent.

The most common reasons given for traveling in Hampton Roads were business (39 percent), shopping (19 percent), personal chores (19 percent) and recreation/entertainment (13 percent). Those living in the outer suburbs were slightly more likely to report traveling to another city to shop (39 percent) than for job-related business (35 percent). However, for those in the inner suburbs, 42 percent traveled to another city for job-related business. Thirty-nine percent of the urban-core residents traveled for job-related business, while 17 percent traveled for the purpose of shopping.

Most of the people who traveled to Portsmouth did so for work-related reasons. A greater proportion of those who traveled to Norfolk (45 percent) came for work than to shop (15 percent). Of those who traveled to Chesapeake, 35 percent did so for work, while 30 percent went to shop. Residents traveled to Newport News for similar reasons: 33 percent came for work and 29 percent came to shop. Table 8 summarizes the percentage of respondents who traveled to the seven most frequently selected destinations for a particular purpose.

TABLE 8
Percent of Respondents Reporting Reasons for Traveling to City

City Traveled To	Business	Shopping	Recreation/ Entertainment	Personal	Other	Total
Chesapeake	35%	30%	5%	22%	8%	100%
Hampton	42%	20%	9%	18%	11%	100%
Newport News	33%	29%	8%	17%	13%	100%
Norfolk	45%	15%	16%	12%	12%	100%
Portsmouth	52%	0%	9%	21%	17%	100%
Virginia Beach	31%	18%	16%	26%	8%	100%
Williamsburg	36%	20%	24%	16%	4%	100%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

Of the 373 people who said they traveled to another city for employment, 34 percent said they traveled to Norfolk, followed by 14 percent who traveled to Virginia Beach, 11 percent to Chesapeake, 11 percent to Newport News and 10 percent to Hampton.

Of the 181 respondents who said they traveled to another city to shop, 24 percent said they went to Norfolk, followed by 19 percent to Chesapeake, 19 percent to Newport News, 18 percent to Virginia Beach and 11 percent to Hampton.

Of the 121 respondents who traveled to another city for recreation or entertainment, 36 percent traveled to Norfolk, followed by 23 percent to Virginia Beach and 14 percent to Williamsburg.

Notes on Methodology

DATA COLLECTION

The results reported here are based on a random sample of 1,169 Hampton Roads residents interviewed by telephone between May 8 and May 24, 2000. The interviews were conducted by the Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University. Interviews were conducted between 3 and 9 p.m. on weekdays, and from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays. The sampling margin of error is ± 2.9 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. Each interview typically required approximately 10 minutes to complete. The sample was derived from a population of random-digit-dialed telephone numbers. All numbers were subsequently randomly sorted for allocation to interviewers during the course of the study. The sample is stratified to represent the proportion of adults in the population age 18 or older for each geographic location in Hampton Roads.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The resulting stratified, random sample matched the actual population distribution across municipalities in Hampton Roads (see Table 9).

TABLE 9
Sample Distribution Compared to Hampton Roads

Municipality	Raw Count	Survey Sample Percentage	Hampton Roads Actual Percentage
Gloucester County	32	2.7	2.3
Isle of Wight County	19	1.6	1.9
James City County	37	3.2	3.0
Mathews County	6	0.5	0.6
York County	48	4.1	3.8
Chesapeake	152	13.0	13.1
Hampton	98	8.4	8.8
Newport News	131	11.2	11.6
Norfolk	161	13.8	14.6
Poquoson	15	1.3	0.8
Portsmouth	81	6.9	6.4
Suffolk	43	3.7	4.2
Virginia Beach	342	29.3	28.1
Williamsburg	4	0.3	0.8
Total	1169	100.0	100.0

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

TABLE 10
Annual Household Income

Range of Income	Percentage in Sample
Less than \$25,000	16.7%
\$25,001 - \$50,000	39.9%
\$50,001 - \$75,000	25.4%
\$75,001 - \$100,000	11.3%
More than \$100,000	6.7%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

TABLE 11
Age in Years

Age Group	Percentage in Sample
30 or younger	24.0%
31 – 40	20.6%
41 – 50	23.3%
51 – 65	19.5%
66 or older	12.7%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

TABLE 12
Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity Group	Percentage in Sample
White/Caucasian	66.8%
African American	25.0%
Hispanic	2.3%
Philippino	0.3%
Asian	1.2%
Other	4.3%

Source: Social Science Research Center at Old Dominion University, Regional Survey 2000

The median reported annual household income for all of Hampton Roads in the sample was between \$25,001 and \$50,000. The average reported age in years in Hampton Roads in the sample was 44.5.

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The average survey respondent has lived in Hampton Roads for 24 years. Thirty-nine percent of the sample have lived in the region for 26 or more years, while 18 percent have lived here for five or fewer years. Slightly more than 60 percent of the sample were female. Almost 40 percent had at least a college degree. Nearly 30 percent of the sample reported working in professional or managerial occupations, while about 7 percent described themselves as working in the military.

