City of Modesto Citizen Survey Report

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During the spring of 2018, our team of researchers from the California State University-Stanislaus (CSU) agreed to assist the City of Modesto in conducting a survey of the residents of Modesto, California to gain insight into citizen attitudes and opinions concerning services provided by the City of Modesto. During several meetings between the two groups, we discussed the City of Modesto's preferences on what questions were to be included and the methodology for administration of the survey. The survey (see Appendix A—codebook for survey) has 76 questions that seek insight into how citizens view the City of Modesto, as well as various services that are provided by the city ranging from police and fire protection to parks and recreation. Additionally, five questions located at the end of the survey were used to assess the demographic backgrounds of citizen respondents (age, income, race/ethnicity, etc…). Most of the 76 questionnaire items in the survey are followed by a comment section which allows the citizen to voluntarily provide a follow-up statement to explain why they hold a particular opinion on any given question.

Meetings between representatives of the City of Modesto and CSU were conducted during the fall of 2018. The meetings centered on specific concerns the city wished to have addressed, methodology of fielding the surveys, and prospective analysis of the survey upon its completion. After consultation with CSU the City of Modesto opted to develop the questionnaire using an independent consultant and field the survey using its own online platform. CSU faculty agreed to produce a report once the data was collected, analyzed, and thoroughly assessed by stakeholders. Delays in completing a report of survey findings had occurred due to a number of exigent circumstances. First, the data provided to our team was in string format and thus was not suitable for software analysis. We were able to overcome this challenge by converting the data by hand to a more amenable format. Converting the data was rather time consuming, and once the process was complete, the end of the semester approached and members of our team had scheduling conflicts primarily due an escalation of end of the semester teaching responsibilities and other service-related obligations. As the summer approached most faculty are no longer on contract and have travel commitments thus creating scheduling conflicts. Despite these issues, the survey data was successfully analyzed and the results are reported in following sections.

Survey Administration

Although our research team provided consultation on what we believed to be appropriate questionnaire items and survey administration procedures, we were not directly involved in the administration of the survey instrument. Our team was primarily tasked with the analysis of the survey's results.

The survey was administered by the City of Modesto using a web-placed platform, and citizens were given access to the survey during the months of January and February of 2019. During this time the city used public relations methods to advertise the fielding of the survey and to solicit citizen participation. The survey was made available to citizens via web links that were located on the City of Modesto's website. By the closing of the survey the City of Modesto yielded a total of 697 responses from citizens.

In order for CSU faculty to be involved in any project dealing with human subjects, there has to be approval by the CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB is concerned with anonymity and how it is assured and safety of the research subjects. For anonymous online surveys, these assurances are very straightforward. Researchers keep all data received in a database that is password protected and anonymous. No one personally comes in contact with the subjects and safety is rarely viewed as an issue. IRB approval was sought and granted on December, 6th 2018.

Data Analysis

Our team at CSU was tasked with evaluating the survey's results. The survey questions are divided into various sub-topics which include; (1) living and working in Modesto; (2) perceptions of the community; (3) overall quality of city services; (4) quality of police services; (5) quality of fire rescue services; (6) city streets sidewalks and infrastructure; (7) city waste services; (8) parks and recreation services; (9) community engagement; (10) customer service; and (11) demographics. Many of the 76 questionnaire items in the survey use a Likert Scale (see Appendix A). These Likert Scale questions assess opinions of respondents using a five-point scale ranging from Very Satisfied to Very Dissatisfied. In our analysis we were able to quantitatively assess the patterns of resident responses in terms of the degree that citizens were either satisfied or dissatisfied with the community of Modesto or specific services provided by the city of Modesto.

The following sections reports statistical results from each other the topical sections that were assessed in the survey. IBM SPSS statistical software was used to assess patterns in the Likert Scale questionnaire item results, which are listed in the following section.

Additionally important, many of the 76 questions in the survey request respondents to provide a follow-up statement to explain why they gave such ratings. These follow-up statements could not be assessed statistically because the qualitative opinions of residents cannot be quantified. As a means of objectively assessing the reasons that residents gave for providing the ratings that they did, we used a software program NVivo[1], which is a tool that researchers used to identify patterns of opinions in the qualitative verbal responses provided by survey participants. This specialized software program assists researchers in interpreting patterns within verbal survey results by dividing citizen's responses into a thematic qualitative analysis.

Survey Results

This survey yielded a wealth of data concerning citizen attitudes and opinions about the City of Modesto. In order to manageably and succinctly report these results we chose to summarize results from select questionnaire items that we believed capture breadth of citizen viewpoints on essential city services. Although, the following sections do not report results from every single questionnaire item, full details from all questionnaire can be found in Appendices A and B. Appendix A provides the complete list of survey questions, and Appendix B provides a detailed statistical summary of citizen responses to all 76 questions from the survey. Please note that statistical tallies for reported questions do not necessarily add up to 100%. The fact that some statistical summaries are less than 100% is a result of non-response errors on many questions. Non-response errors range between 2 and 8%, which constitutes a negligible threat to the validity of the results of this study. A small degree of non-response error is expected in social scientific research.

The following sections of this report provide an overview of citizen attitudes and opinions regarding the city of Modesto and satisfaction ratings of various city services.

Citizen Opinions: What could the City do to make Modesto a better place to live?

In the beginning of the survey citizens were asked, "What is one thing that the City could do to make Modesto a better place to live?" Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens were primarily concerned with issues of homelessness, crime, social disorder, revitalization of downtown Modesto, maintenance of public streets/spaces, and traffic congestion. For instance one citizen replied, "Clean the city up, Modesto streets look dirty especially downtown there are too many homeless in front of businesses and parks. Trash from the homeless is left in streets and in shopping carts." Another citizen stated, "Make the local parks and playgrounds safer for our children by making it illegal for adults to loiter around

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[1] NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International. It has been designed for qualitative researchers working with very rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required (NVivo, 2019).

playgrounds and splash pads." Countless respondents shared these sentiments and thus provided similar responses.

To address these issues citizens suggested the following;

(1). Clean up the homeless population and revitalize the downtown to be more attractive as Turlock has done.

(2). Affordable housing must be provided and city council must create and support policies that address housing.

(3). Adopt some form of rent control and/or build low-barrier, low-income housing.

(4). Create more bike lanes; especially along the busy roads.

(5). Pave all streets to a consistent standard and keep them clean by running the street sweepers through each street on a regular and consistent schedule.

Citizen Response by District

The following Table 1 reveals the particular districts of Modesto that citizens identified themselves as living in. The online survey (see Appendix A) provided respondents with a map so that they could determine which district that they live in. As you can see, 11% of respondents reported living in District 1, 4% reported living in District 2, 28% reported living in District 3, 16% reported living in District 4, 17% reported living in District 5, and 15% reported living in District 6. Response rates varied by district, which is an artifact of varying population densities within districts and differences in the demographic composition of survey respondents across districts (demographic results are reported in a following section).

Table 1: Citizen response by District
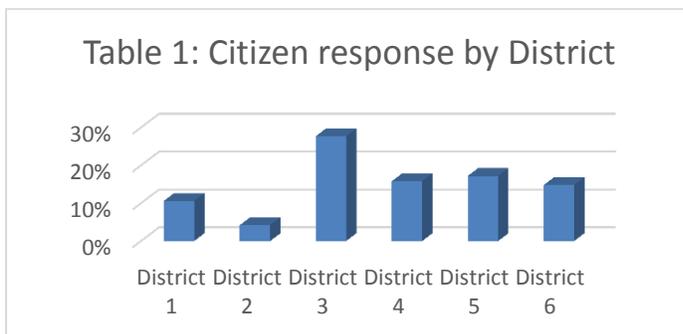
Citizen Ratings of Modesto as a Place to Live

Table 2 shows resident ratings of the City of Modesto in regards to the city as a place to live. 51.6% of residents reported being either very satisfied or satisfied with Modesto as a place to live. 1% reported that they do not know. The remainder reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with Modesto as a place to live.
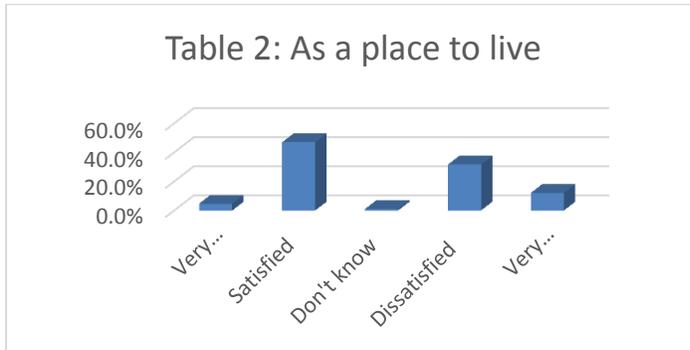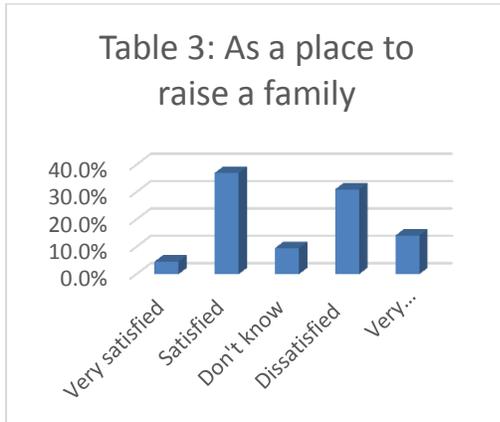

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are primarily concerned with issues of homelessness, crime, social disorder, and traffic. For instance citizens provided the following statements which reflect common sentiments;

> (1). The problems associated with blight and homelessness dominate our city instead of the positive aspects we have.

> (2). The increasing percentage of individuals abusing drugs has led to needles to be found in parks and shopping centers.

> (3). The city has grown too large for the infrastructure. The streets are far too crowded with cars. Riding a bike on the street has become too dangerous because of the amount and speed of cars. The amount of crime is out of hand both in property crimes and violent crimes.

Citizen Ratings of Modesto as a Place to Raise a Family

Table 3 reports citizen ratings of the City of Modesto as a place to raise a family. 41.6% of residents were either very satisfied or satisfied with Modesto as a place to raise a family, whereas 9.5% reported that they do not know, and the remainder reported either being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with Modesto as a place to raise a family.

Table 3: As a place to raise a family

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are primarily concerned with issues of homelessness, crime, social disorder, economic opportunity, gangs and drug abuse. Responses to this request echoed responses to prior and later questions.

Citizen Ratings of Modesto as a Place to Start a Business

Table 4 reveals citizen ratings of the City of Modesto as a place to start a business. 17.9% of residents reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with Modesto as a place to start a business, whereas a majority, 42.3% reported that they do not know, whereas 35% reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the City of Modesto as a place to start a business.

Table 4: As a place to start a business

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are primarily concerned with issues of homelessness, crime, social disorder, regulations and high taxes. For instance the following statements reflect common sentiments among citizens;

(1). Lack of skilled workers. Few residents earn a bachelor's degree.

(2). High taxes, codes and restrictions.

(3). It depends on location, homeless are an additional problem.

(4). Crime and homelessness make business unattractive.

(5). I know quite a few small business owners and they have to lock their doors and let customers in one by one as they have safety issues.

Citizen Ratings of the Feeling of Safety in the City of Modesto

Table 5 reports citizen ratings of feelings of safety in the City of Modesto. 28.8% of residents reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with their feeling of safety in Modesto, whereas, .9% reported that they do not know, and a majority, 68% reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their feeling of safety in the city.
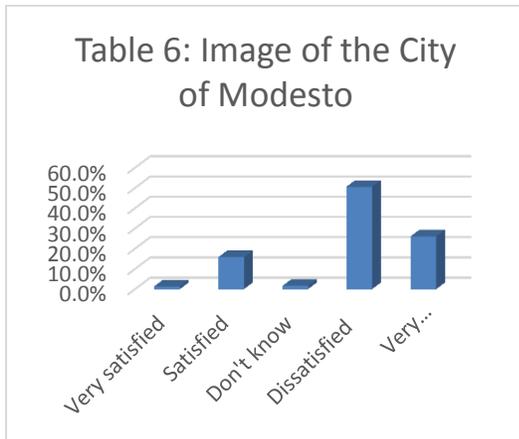

Table 5: Feeling of safety in the city

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are primarily concerned with issues of homelessness, crime, social disorder, drugs, gangs, and lack of police visibility. Citizens provided the following responses which reflect common sentiments;

(1). Gang activities seem to go unchecked in some places, and homeless contribute greatly to the finding of drugs and needles in parks.

(2). My neighborhood has the old orange looking lights and it's so dark, would love to get the new LED light to make neighborhood more safe.

(3). We live in a "nice" neighborhood, but there is so much mail theft, car theft, and package thefts.

(4). I don't feel safe walking in the evening anymore.

(5). Although we have the occasional break-ins, we feel secure walking in the neighborhood.

(6). No police presence, lots of gang, drug, mental health issues.

Citizen Ratings of the Perceived Image of the City of Modesto

Table 6 reports citizen ratings of their image of the City of Modesto. 17.2% of residents reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with their image of Modesto, whereas, 1.6% reported that they do not know, and an overwhelming majority, 76.7% reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their image of the city.

Table 6: Image of the City of Modesto

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals citizens are primarily concerned with issues of homelessness, crime, social disorder, physical disorder (i.e. litter graffiti), and drugs. Citizen statements echoed sentiments reported in prior and later questions.

**Citizen Ratings of the Overall Quality of City Services in Modesto**

Table 7 reports citizen ratings of the overall quality of city services. 48.8% of residents reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the quality of city services, whereas, 7% reported that they do not know, and the remainder reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the overall quality of services.

Table 7: Quality of city services

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens voiced similar concerns as expressed in previous open-ended statements. These concerns involved issues of homelessness, traffic and street maintenance, and lack of police visibility.

Citizen Ratings of City Efforts to Deal with the Homeless

Table 8 reports citizen ratings of city efforts to deal with the homeless. 12.9% of residents reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with efforts to deal with the homeless, whereas, 6.5% reported that they do not know, and a majority of residents, 76.5%, reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with efforts to deal with the homeless.
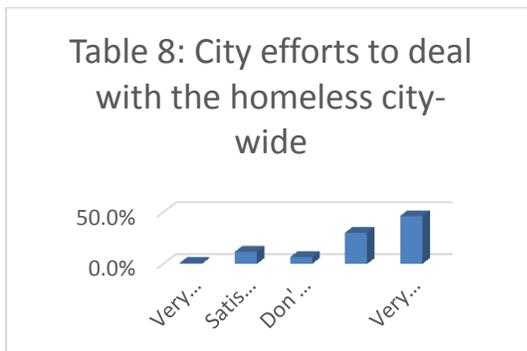
Table 8: City efforts to deal with the homeless city-wide

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are primarily concerns with the issues of increased presence of the homeless, homeless in parks and public spaces, panhandling, and perceived lack of services to deal with homeless population. Similar to the responses to prior questions citizens stated the following;

(1). Adopt best practices from municipalities successful in providing shelter.

(2). I know the City is trying, but until transients are not laying/sleeping/occupying our parks and streets, I will remain dissatisfied.

(3). They need to have programs to help them find a job and cheap housing.

(4). We have seen very little done over the last several years. It is now an epidemic.

(5). I hate playing ball or going to park w/ kids and the homeless are all around where kids play. I know you are working on it, not the parks department's fault.

(6). Homeless people ask young single women for money in parking lots and gas stations. It's very scary.

(7). The city needs more housing options.

Citizen Ratings of the Effectiveness of Local Police Protection

Table 9 reports citizen ratings of the effectiveness of local police protection. A majority of citizens, 43.7%, reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the effectiveness of local police protection services, whereas, 13.3% reported that they do not know, and 38.1% of residents reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the effectiveness of local police protection services.
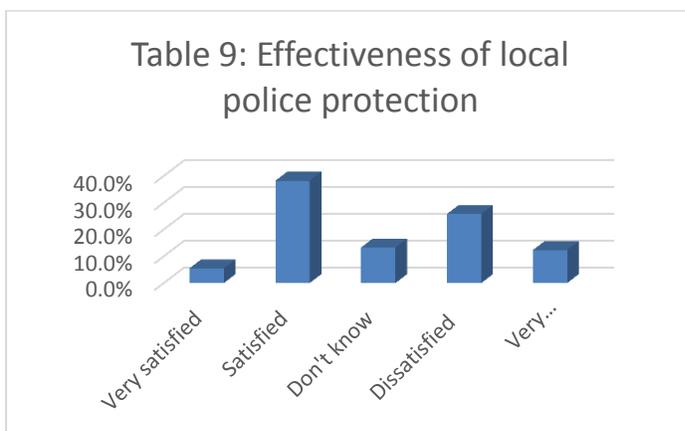

Table 9: Effectiveness of local police protection

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals citizen are primarily concerned with issues of homelessness, crime, response times, property crime, lack of police visibility, and a general desire for more police officers. For instance, citizens provided the following statements which reflect common sentiments;

(1). Slow response times.

(2). Not their fault. There's not enough police.

(3). They seem to know where the trouble spots are and work them effectively.

(4). I feel like police are dealing with so much big crime (homicides, etc…) they don't have time for the little (but still important) things.

(5). They do an outstanding job with their resources.

(6). Not enough officers to help prevent crime. They come after the crimes are committed.

(7). Would appreciate greater visibility through graveyard shift.

Citizen Ratings of the Effectiveness of Ambulance and Emergency Medical Services

Table 10 reports citizen ratings of the effectiveness of ambulance and emergency medical services. A majority of citizens, 56.8%, reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the effectiveness of ambulance and emergency medical services, whereas, 34.7% reported that they do not know, and 3.7% of residents reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the effectiveness of ambulance and emergency medical services.

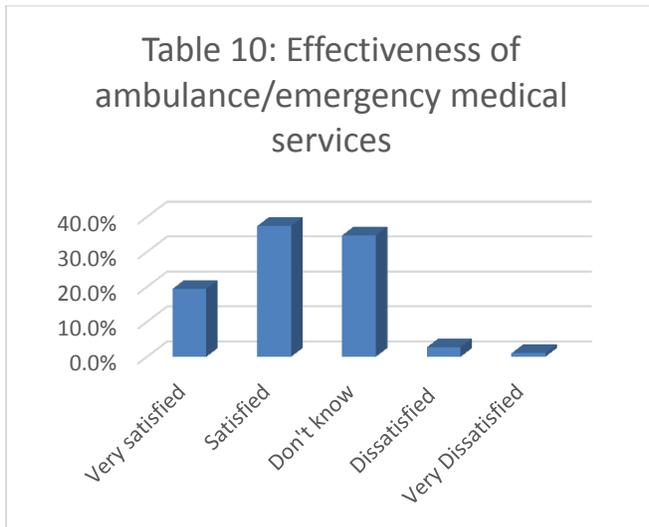Table 10: Effectiveness of ambulance/emergency medical services

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are overwhelmingly satisfied with the effectiveness of ambulance and emergency medical services and many express a desire to see more investment in such services.

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Citizen Ratings of the Effectiveness of Local Fire Protection Services
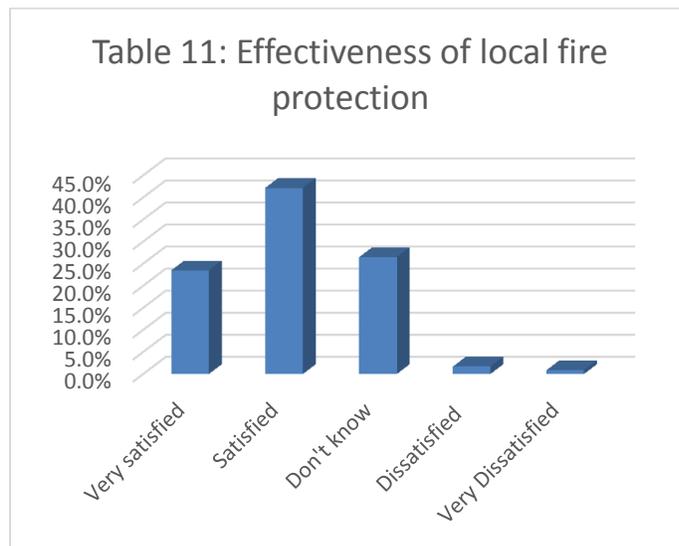
Table 11 reports citizen ratings of the effectiveness of local fire protection services. A majority of citizens, 65.7%, reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the effectiveness of local fire protection services, whereas, 26.5% reported that they do not know, and 2.6% of residents reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the effectiveness of local fire protection services.

Table 11: Effectiveness of local fire protection

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are overwhelmingly satisfied with the effectiveness of local fire protection services and many express a desire to see more investment in such services.

Citizen Ratings of the Effectiveness of the Condition and Maintenance of City Streets

Table 12 reports citizen ratings of the condition and maintenance of city streets. 32.2% of residents reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the condition and maintenance of city streets, whereas, 1.6% reported that they do not know, and a majority of residents, 63.3%, reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the condition and maintenance of city streets.

Table 12: Condition and maintenance of city streets
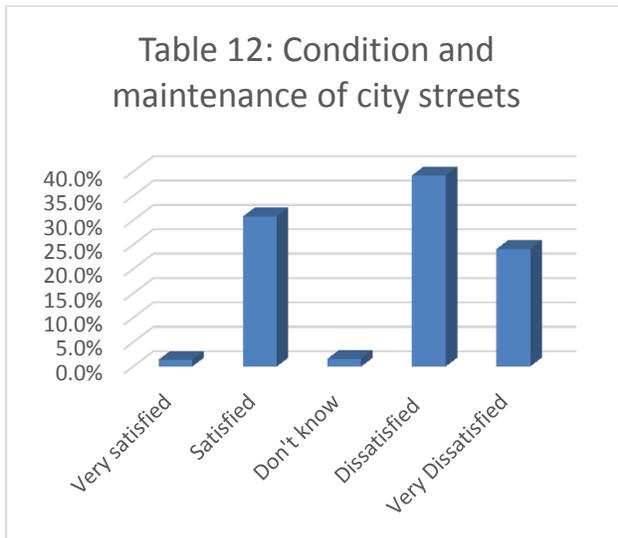
This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are primarily concerned with issues of general road maintenance, potholes, lack of street sweeping, litter, lack of tree trimming, and overall perception of poor condition. The following statements reflect general sentiments that citizens have regarding the condition and maintenance of city streets;

(1). Our streets are in poor condition and many need new pavement.

(2). Lots of pot holes.

(3). City needs more street sweeping.

(4). Pavement quality is rough for riding bikes on. Weeds grow up through streets. It's much more expensive to defer road maintenance in the long run.

(5). The quality of our streets is very inconsistent -- even in the same neighborhood.

Citizen Ratings of the Availability of Parks and Recreational Facilities

Table 13 reports citizen ratings of the availability of parks and recreational facilities. 57.4%, a majority of residents, reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the availability of parks and recreational facilities, whereas, 8% reported that they do not know, and 32.2% of residents reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the availability of parks and recreational facilities.

07/09/2019

Table 13: Availability of parks and rec facilities

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are primarily concerned with issues of homeless in parks, presumed drug abuse in parks, restroom availability/condition, maintenance, and safety concerns. Citizen responses greatly echo responses to prior questions. The following statements reflect these sentiments;

(1). There are large homeless populations at all our parks. Our family no longer uses them sadly.

(2). I love our parks but we must get rid of the homeless and drugs in them all. Especially during the day.

(3). Need restrooms open during peak hours.

(4). Homeless are a major factor in deciding on what park to visit.

(5). Older equipment needs to be updated and or replaced. Bathrooms need to be kept open and kept clean. More park workers are need to remove graffiti and keep parks clean.

Citizen Ratings of the Effectiveness of Access to City Officials

Table 14 reports citizen ratings of access to city officials. 41.3%, a majority of residents, reported that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with of access to city officials, whereas, 36.2% reported that they do not know, and 18.1% of residents reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with access to city officials.
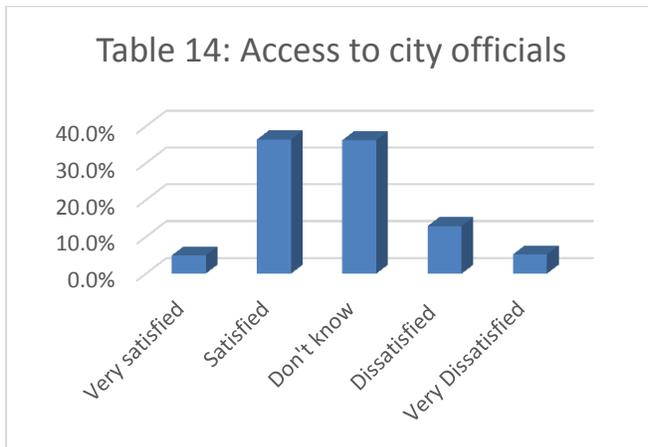

Table 14: Access to city officials

This multiple choice question was followed by the open-ended request, "Please tell us why you gave this rating." Qualitative analysis of these open-ended statements reveals that citizens are overwhelmingly satisfied with their level of access to city officials. For instance, one citizen replied, "Their social media presence is actually pretty good." Another citizen stated, "I myself seem to be able to contact or get through to most if not all officials and representatives." Some citizens expressed a concern about a lack of responsiveness to letters and emails. For instance, one citizen stated, "I wrote a letter to each council member and mayor...no response." Another resident stated, "They never answer emails and some email addresses are not valid."

Global Analysis of Citizen's Comments

NVivo software was used to analysis the global sentiments expressed in citizen comments for each of the open-ended questions reported in this study. Table 15 reports our analysis of citizen sentiments on a binary scale ranging from positive to negative. This analysis assesses only citizen responses to the open-ended requests for follow-up statements/explanations as reported in Tables 2 through 14. Please note: although 697 citizens responded to the city survey, far fewer provided comments to the follow-up requests. For instance, Table 15 reports the number of follow-up statements that were provided for the multiple-choice question, "Please rate the City of Modesto as a Place to Live?" Table 15 indicates that 414 citizens provided comments following this question. Table 15 reveals that the extent, by which citizens provided comments to the follow-up questions reported in this study, had varied substantially.

Table 15 shows that citizen's comments reflected negative sentiments to a far greater extent that positive sentiments. Negative sentiments outweighed positive sentiments for most questions reported in this survey, with the exception to questions that were reported in Tables 10, 11, and 14. In Table 10 positive sentiments are equal to negative sentiments. In Tables 11, and 14, positive sentiments outweigh negative sentiments.

Table 15: Modesto Citizen Sentiment Results from Open-ended Statements		
	Positive Sentiment	Negative Sentiment
Table 2	103	311
Table 3	58	223
Table 4	33	123
Table 5	62	314
Table 6	52	268
Table 7	58	88
Table 8	52	180
Table 9	33	98
Table 10	28	28
Table 11	28	12
Table 12	35	110
Table 13	36	141
Table 14	18	13

The following Figure 1 reports our qualitative analysis of key words that were most frequently provided in citizen comments. This word cloud demonstrates important trends. For instance, citizens used the word homeless or homelessness a total of 1054 times within their comments to the follow-up questions reported in Tables 2 through 14. Furthermore, citizens used the term parks 499 times, crime(s) 404 times, police 367 times, safe or safety 349 times, and drug(s) 251 times. Please note: this illustration only reports words that were used more than 50 times. Also, this analysis omits all irrelevant terms (i.e., it, and, the etc…).

Figure 1

Demographics

It is important to acknowledge that the demographics of residents whom participated in this survey differ substantially from the demographics of residents in the City of Modesto as reported by the United States Census Bureau (USCB). According to USCB estimates, the median household income for residents in the year of 2018 was $54,024. Survey results reveal that 80.5% of the respondents from this survey had a household income of $50,000 or more a year, whereas according to the USCB far fewer citizens actually constitute this socio-economic bracket. On the other hand, only 19.5% of respondents to this survey reported having an income of less than $50,000 a year. Moreover, 87.1% of respondents to this survey reported owning their home, whereas according to the USCB 2018 estimates only 54.6% of residences in the City of Modesto are owner occupied. Furthermore, self-selection biases in responses to this survey are evident in the fact that 77.6% of respondents reported being White and only 11.6% identified themselves as being Hispanic. According to the USCB 2018 estimates 72.7% of residents in the city of Modesto are identified as being White and 37.9% are identified as being Hispanic.

Limitations of Study

Survey results reflect a degree of self-selection bias among residents whom overwhelmingly own their home, whom are white and non-Hispanic, and whom are of higher than average socio-

economic status. Although, it is typical for the results of social scientific surveys to reflect such skewness, results from this study are more skewed than expected.

The self-selection bias within this study is likely due to a number of factors. First, this study was fielded using a non-probability sampling design and a web-based solicitation methodology, which typically yields results that are non-representative of the general population. This is a common challenge with the design and implementation of citizen surveys in the social sciences. Second, media attention concerning the City of Modesto's implementation of this survey, may have contributed to a self-selection bias among residents whom represent higher socio-economic status. Future citizen survey efforts can be improved by using a stratified random sampling design consisting of mail-in surveys, as well as inducements to encourage a broader diversity of citizen respondents.