The 2011 Report on the

IllinoisPolicy*survey*

Center for Governmental Studies
Northern Illinois University

The 2011 Report on the Illinois Policy Survey

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IllinoisPolicy*survey*

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Now in its twenty-seventh year, the *Illinois Policy Survey* is a continuing program in Northern Illinois University's Center for Governmental Studies. It is designed to provide citizens and state leaders with systematic and representative information on public attitudes, values and expectations with respect to the performance of elected officials and policy issues facing Illinois.

The *Illinois Policy Survey* is usually conducted in the Fall of every year. The sampling frame for this survey is all residences with telephones in Illinois. A disproportionate sampling strategy is used to achieve an approximately equal number of respondents in each of six geographical areas of Illinois. Telephone interviews with 1,223 men and women 18 years of age or older were conducted during November and early December 2010. Since surveys question only a small proportion of the population, estimates based on survey data have a confidence interval based on the sample size. The 95% confidence interval for a sample of 1,223 individual is plus or minus 3 percent. This means there is a 95 percent likelihood that the population value falls within 3 percentage points of the sample percentage. The confidence interval for subgroups will be larger, and will vary with the size of the subgroup. Surveys of this kind may be subject to sources of error besides sampling error. For example, survey results may be influenced by events taking place while the survey is in the field, by question wording, or question order. In addition, people who were willing to participate may not reflect the views of individuals who were not at home or refused to be interviewed.

The *Illinois Policy Survey* has been conducted annually since 1984. Core questions asked every year are supplemented by questions of topical interest. Researchers, media, public agencies, and public interest groups can sponsor questions on the survey. Further information regarding this study is available by writing the Center for Governmental Studies, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115, or by phoning 815-753-0942. This report can also be found on the web at www.cgsniu.org.

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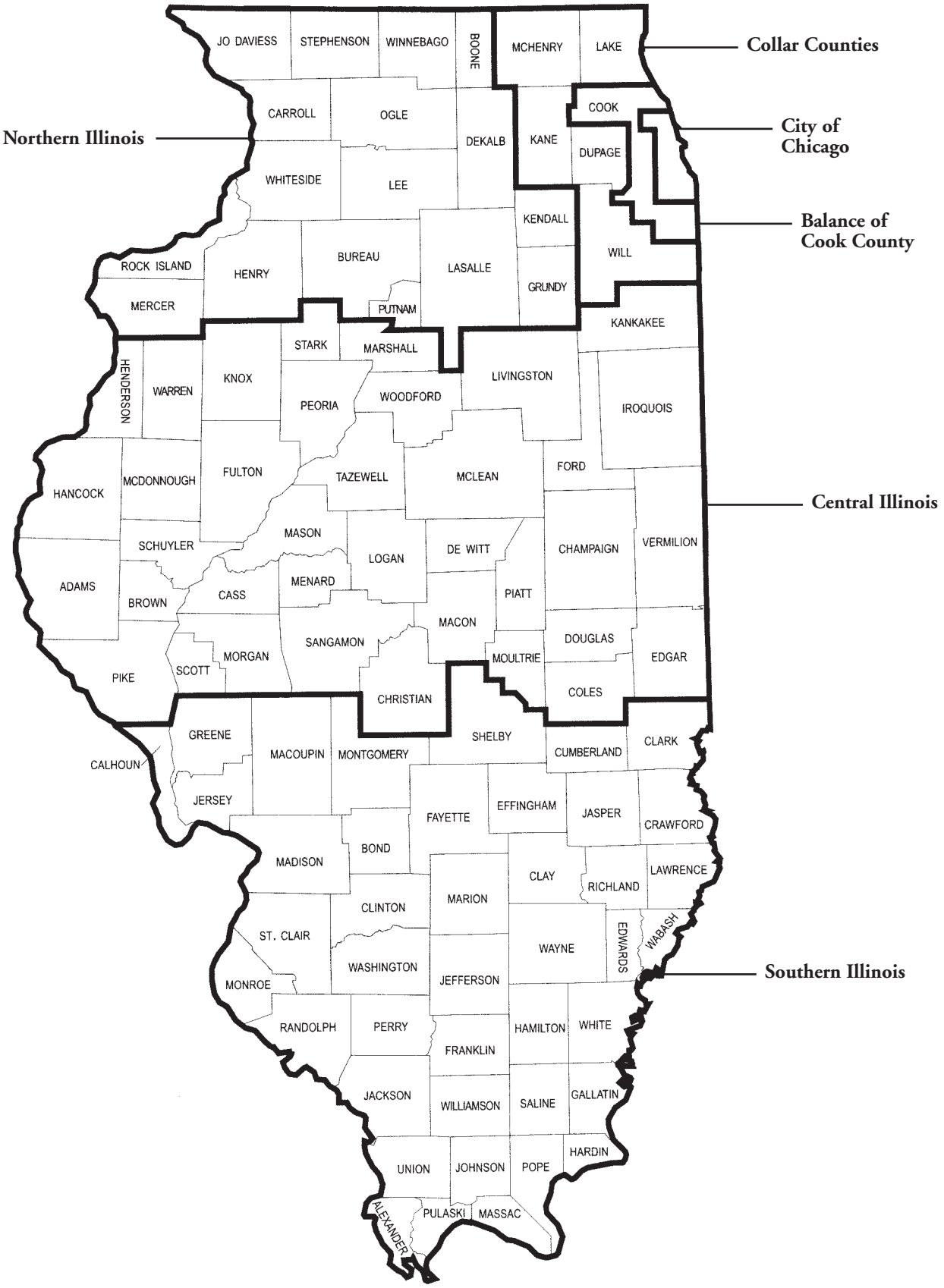
"The views expressed in this report are those of the contributing authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the officers and trustees of Northern Illinois University."

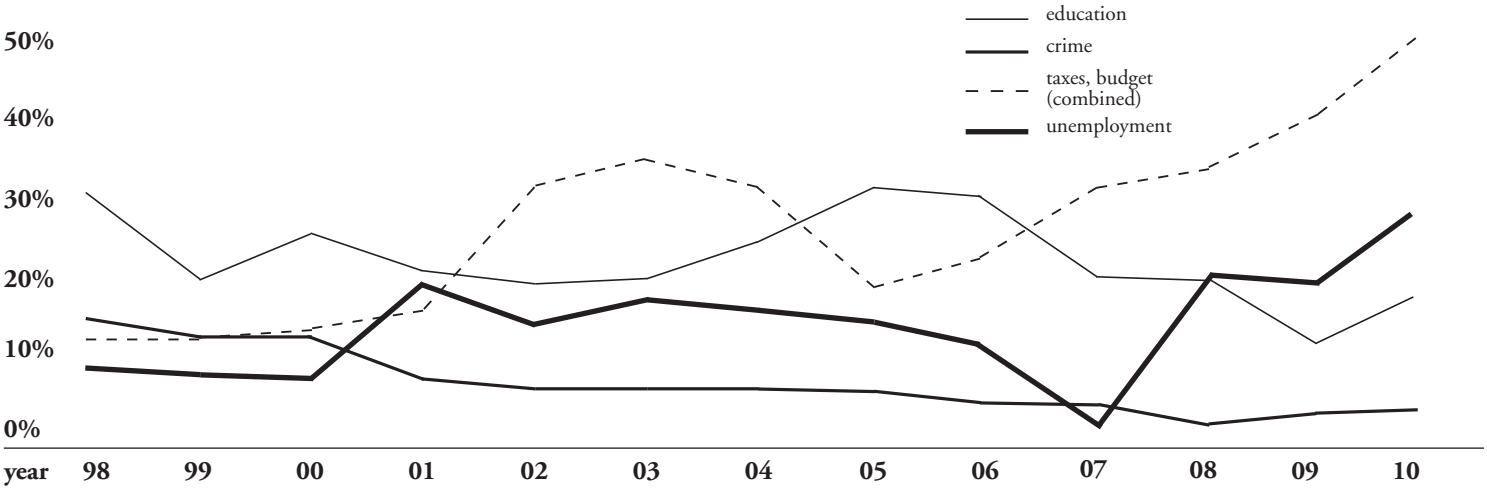
Regional*map*



Most Important Problem

Economic Concerns Continue to Dominate

figure 1 **The Most Important Problem Facing Illinois, 1998-2010**

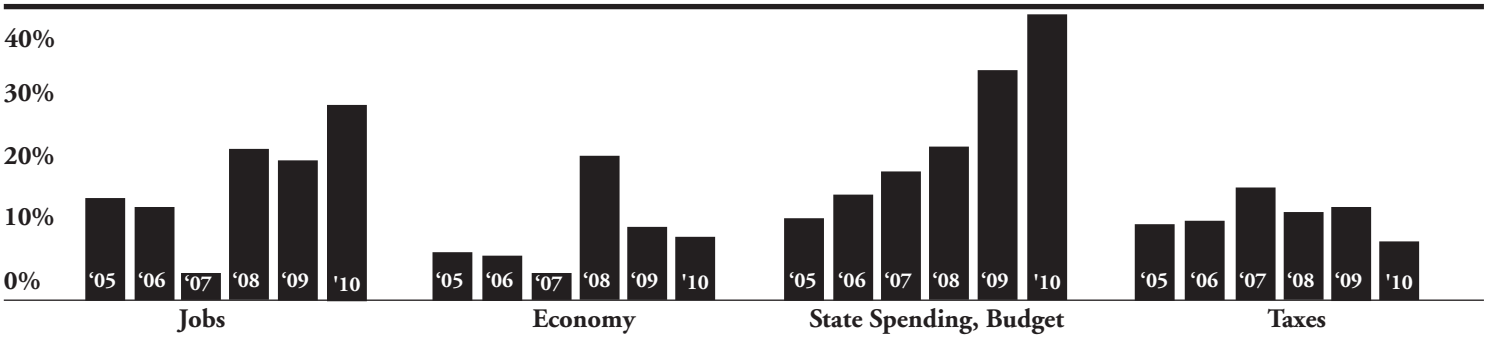


percentage of those citing a problem that cited one of these

table 1 **The Top Issues This Year vs. The Past Seven Years**

	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
State Budget	45 %	32 %	22 %	17 %	13 %	10 %	15 %
Corruption	10	19	5	3	13	4	2
Jobs/Unemployment	29	18	21	3	10	13	17
Taxes	7	13	12	15	10	9	11
Education	17	11	20	20	30	32	25
Health Care	2	11	9	14	17	11	11
Economy	8	8	19	2	3	4	4
Elected Leadership	4	4	17	9	4	N/A	N/A

figure 2 **Economic Concerns as the Most Important Problem the Last Six Years**



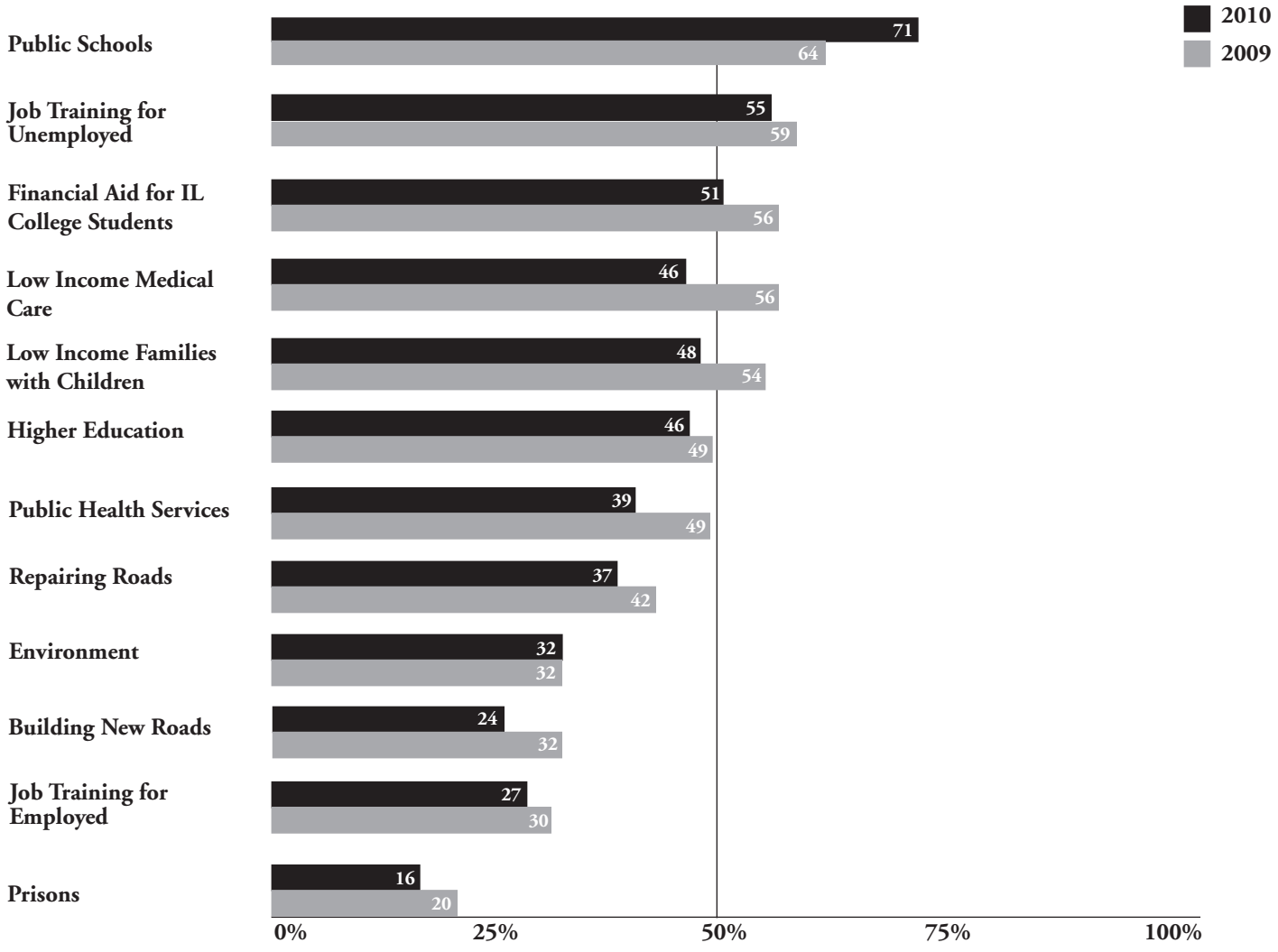
The economic problems of the state are reflected in respondents' assessments throughout the 2010 Illinois Policy Survey not only in terms of answers to questions directly querying about economic and budget issues but in respondents' answers to a host of questions about life in the state and evaluations of its political leadership.

Each year the Illinois Policy survey asks respondents what they consider to be the most important problem facing the state. In recent years, the state budget and jobs and unemployment were most on the minds of respondents whereas in the 1990s and early 2000s education had topped the list of problems respondents cited. In 2010, 45% of respondents mentioned some aspect of the state budget as being the most important problem; jobs and unemployment also climbed significantly. Taxes and health care as important problems dropped substantially in respondents' minds. Crime continued as a minimally mentioned problem. **Figure 1** and **Table 1** provide historical perspective on the most important problem responses over the years. **Figure 2** provides an historical look at the identification of economic concerns as the most important problem. The prominence of economic issues is evident in this figure and in respondents' description of the Illinois economy; 64% rated it as being poor or very poor, as did 61% in 2009 and 63% in 2008 as compared with 24% in 2007 and 23% in 2006. Only 4% of this year's respondents rated the Illinois economy as excellent or good, a sharp drop from 30% in 2007.

Priorities for State Spending

Support for Public Education Remains Highest

figure 3 **Support for Increases in State Spending 2010 Compared to 2009**



Budgetary and economic concerns are often better understood by asking respondents whether state spending for different major program areas should be increased, decreased, or remain the same. **Figure 3** presents the results from the two most recent surveys, identifying the proportion of respondents who said that state government should increase spending for that particular program area.

On 10 of the 12 program areas inquired about, respondents in 2010 were less supportive of spending increases than our respondents in 2009, most likely reflecting wide spread concern with the state economy and its budget. The decline was most pronounced regarding spending on public health and preventative medical care programs and medical care for low income families with children, each of which declined 10 points. In contrast, support for increasing public school spending increased substantially. Majorities also continued to support increases in job training for the unemployed, and financial aid for college students although the levels of support declined somewhat from 2009.

Support for increases in state spending differs not only by the program area, but also by the characteristics of the respondent. As one can see from **Table 2** on the next page, respondents from Chicago generally expressed greater support for increases in spending while support for increased spending tended to decline as one moved out of the Chicagoland area. Other differences by respondent characteristics are also notable. Party affiliation mattered, with Republicans much less likely to support spending increases than Democrats. Respondents under the age of 25 were generally the most likely to support state spending increases.

Men's and women's support for increased public school spending grew in 2010 compared with 2009. In most other areas women's support for increased spending declined leading to only modest differences between the sexes.

In general, support for increased state spending on each of the programs was highest among lower income respondents, but support for increased spending for public schools was higher than 70% in all income categories except the wealthiest Illinoisans.

table 2 **Support for Increases in State Spending, 2010**

	Public Schools	Medical Care	Job Training	Low Income Families	Public Health	Student Financial Aid	Higher Education
Statewide	71 %	46 %	55 %	48 %	39 %	51 %	46 %
Region							
Chicago	76	56	61	64	52	66	65
Suburban Cook	71	49	62	54	49	47	47
Collar Counties	72	43	58	46	27	50	41
Northern IL	59	36	49	35	35	48	45
Central IL	70	42	46	32	39	47	42
Southern IL	68	36	49	37	26	38	30
Party Identification							
Republican	56	23	43	22	25	44	35
Democrat	84	61	68	63	47	59	60
Independent	68	43	63	47	40	45	37
Age Group							
18-24	87	65	65	68	46	58	59
25-34	82	42	53	53	33	55	57
35-44	68	44	56	52	47	53	52
45-54	67	40	53	38	31	53	41
55-64	63	44	64	41	43	48	40
65 +	58	44	56	42	41	43	33
Sex							
Male	66	43	57	48	38	56	48
Female	77	50	58	51	42	49	48
Education							
High School or Less	77	64	66	62	53	51	45
Some College	76	53	68	54	44	67	57
College Graduate	64	34	47	40	30	43	43
Income < 21	75	70	64	72	70	61	46
$21,000-34,999	76	66	72	74	60	55	63
$35,000-55,999	72	53	64	50	48	57	52
$56,000-99,999	77	39	54	47	34	54	46
$100,000-149,999	72	36	51	30	27	56	44
$150,000+	59	36	44	36	28	31	43
Race							
White	69	41	52	42	36	48	41
Black/African American	87	63	85	84	65	80	83
Hispanic	77	72	66	66	48	71	69
Non Hispanic	71	44	47	47	38	50	45

How Things Are Going in Illinois

Unemployment Outlook a Continuing Problem

figure 4 **Satisfaction With the Way Things Are Going in Illinois 1997-2010**

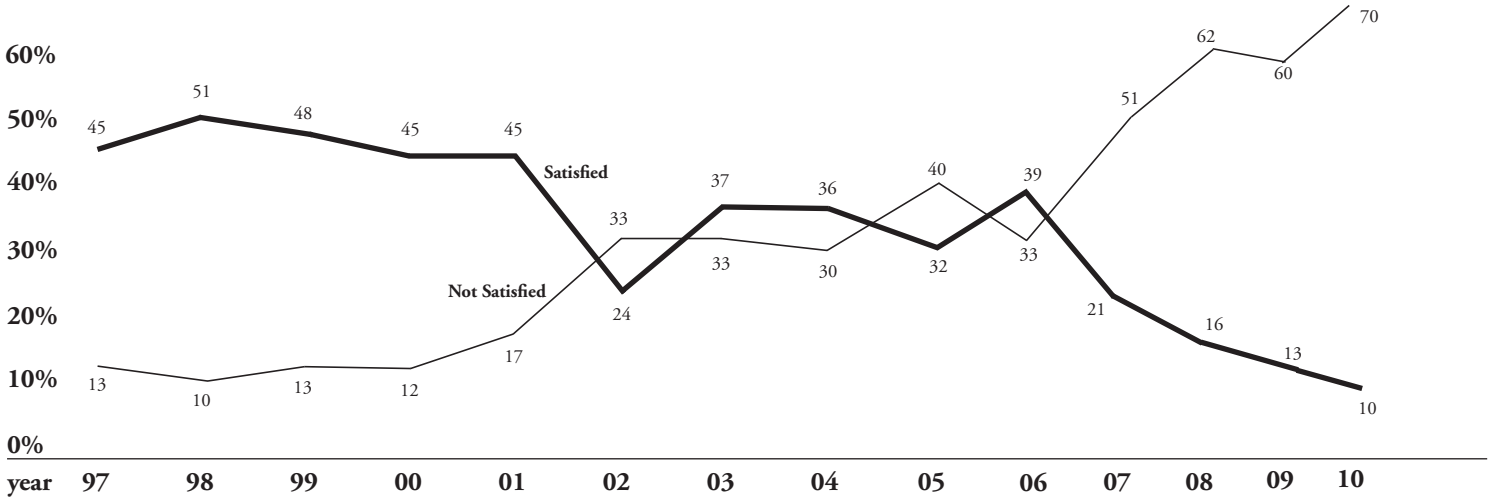


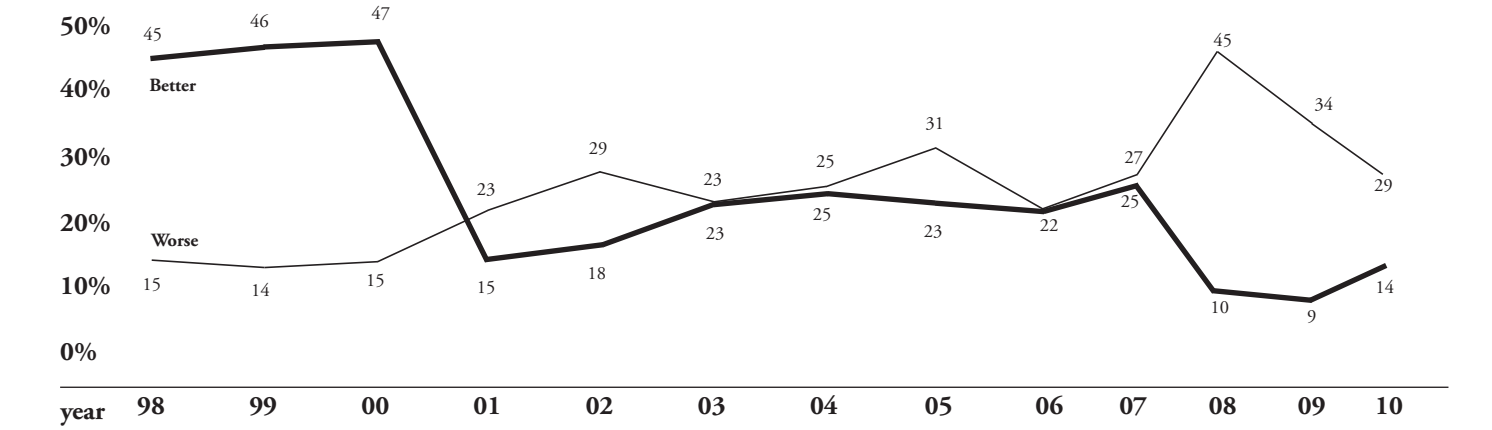
table 3 **Change in Financial Conditions in the Past Year**

	Better	Same	Worse	Don't Know
Financial Conditions of Illinois Residents	6.5	38.7	53.9	0.8
Personal Financial Condition	14.1	57.1	28.7	0.0

table 4 **Concerns About Unemployment**

	Important Problem			Problem			Not a Problem		
	'10	'09	'08	'10	'09	'08	'10	'09	'08
Illinois	89.0	83.9	72.8	15.3	15.8	23.8	0.6	0.3	1.9
Community	65.2	65.3	49.8	29.4	25.3	36.3	4.9	9.0	12.4

figure 5 **Personal Financial Condition Compared to Last Year, 1998-2010**

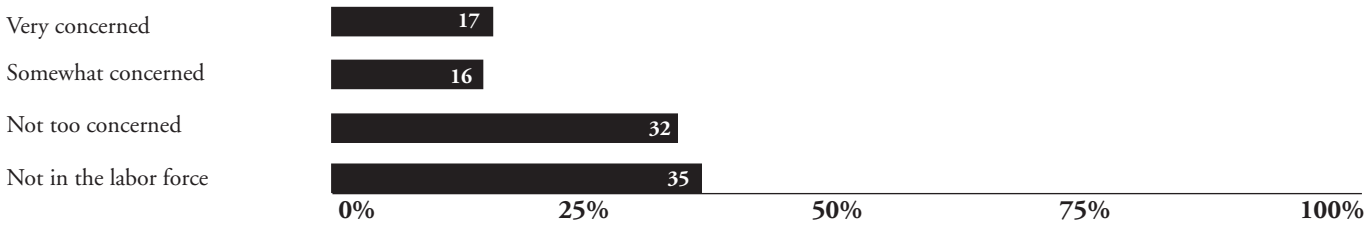


Satisfaction with the way things were going in Illinois continued the negative trend of the latter years of the decade. In 2010 only 10% of the respondents expressed satisfaction, the lowest level of satisfaction in 15 years while 70% said they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with the way things were going in the state. See **Figure 4**.

This decline in satisfaction continued even though the negative trend in views on the financial condition of Illinois residents in general and respondents' assessment of their own personal financial condition had reversed or at least stabilized compared with the previous year. Fifty-four percent in 2010 compared to 74% in 2009 rated the financial condition of Illinois residents as being worse than the previous year and 6.5% compared to 3.4% stated that they were better off. Personal financial conditions improved for 14% of the respondents. See **Table 3**. As the historical perspective in **Figure 5** shows, the percentage of respondents reporting that they and their family's financial condition had worsened continued to decline to 29% from a peak of 45% in 2008.

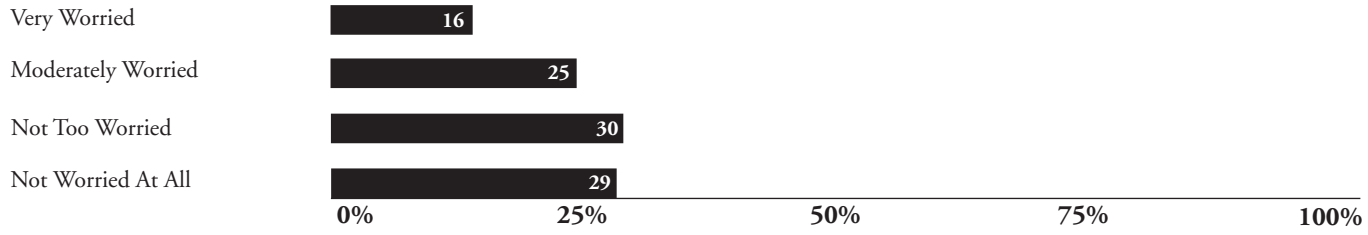
Concern over unemployment in the state and in their community that jumped to high levels in 2008 and 2009 continued to be problem for Illinois residents. Eighty-nine percent of respondents find unemployment to be an important problem in Illinois and 65% find it to be an important problem in their community. Few respondents found it not to be a problem either in the state as a whole or in their communities. See **Table 4**.

figure 6 **How concerned are you that you might become unemployed within the next year?**



Economic and financial conditions weighed on the respondents in this year's survey. More than 12% of respondents were unemployed or laid off at the time of the survey, and almost 23% of respondents had been out of work and looking for a job at some time during the past year. Even those who were employed at the time of the survey expressed concerns. Of respondents currently in the labor force, 51% were at least somewhat concerned about losing their jobs over the next year, with 26% very concerned about becoming unemployed. **Figure 6** shows the distribution for all respondents. Among respondents from Chicago, 66% were at least somewhat concerned and 34% were very concerned about losing their job over the next year.

figure 7 **How worried are you about being able to pay your rent, mortgage or other housing costs?**



Concerns about mortgage foreclosures, growing mortgage delinquencies, and housing affordability have also been prominent issues recently. When asked whether they were worried about paying their rent, mortgage payments, or other housing costs, about 41% of respondents indicated that they were either very worried (16%) or moderately worried (25%). This distribution of responses is very similar to that expressed in 2009. See **Figure 7**. When those respondents were asked the source of their worries, 8% said increased rent or mortgage payments, 51% said job or income concerns, 4% said increased energy costs, 10% cited medical bills, and 6% cited other bills.

Education

Public Perception of School Quality Declines Slightly

figure 8 **Quality of Public Schools**

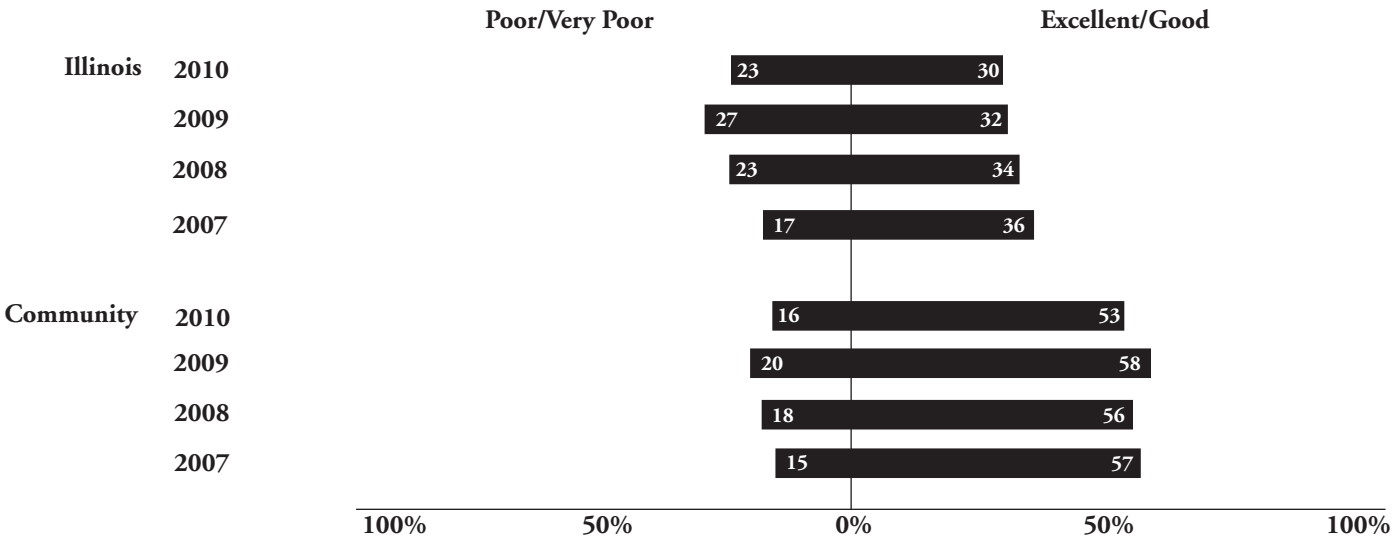


table 5 **Evaluation of Local Public Schools, Percent Rating Excellent/Good**

	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
Statewide	53%	58%	56 %	57 %	58 %	60%	49%	53%
Chicago	27	25	33	28	30	23	24	29
Suburban Cook	59	79	48	71	58	60	59	65
Collar Counties	70	69	75	78	76	75	60	66
Northern Illinois	55	51	59	50	61	60	61	54
Central Illinois	62	73	71	45	66	69	54	53
Southern Illinois	56	64	63	50	66	69	63	57

The quality of and funding for the public education system is a major public policy concern of both lawmakers and citizens of the state. However, the state's economic situation and high unemployment in 2010 overshadowed identification of education as a major problem in the state in this year's policy survey. However this did not mean that respondents rated the quality of public schools in the state and in their community more highly than in previous years. This year, 30% of respondents rated the quality of Illinois public schools as excellent or good, a modest decline. At the same time rating it as poor or very poor also declined slightly compared to 2009. Local schools are given higher ratings than schools statewide with 53% of respondents rating them as excellent or good, a decline from previous years, while 16% rated them as poor or very poor. See **Figure 8**. (Respondents are also given the option of rating public schools at both levels as fair.) The evaluation of local schools varied widely by region. See **Table 5**.

Positive ratings of public schools in Chicago continue to substantially lag behind the ratings in other regions. Positive evaluations of the public schools in suburban Cook County fell substantially this year compared to 2009 but evaluations by residents in this region have varied quite a bit throughout recent years of the policy survey. The collar counties continue to receive the most favorable ratings while ratings in central and southern Illinois fell.

Funding Schools

How to pay for public education has long been a difficult issue. For a number of years of the policy survey, respondents have been asked whether they would favor increasing the state income tax and reducing property taxes to fund schools. Consistently over the years a bare majority have indicated support for such a shift. Respondents in 2010 continued in this mode; 51% favor increasing the state income tax while 43% oppose such a change. Support for such a change varied by region of the state. A majority of respondents from Chicago, suburban Cook County and the collar counties favored a shift to the state income tax while residents of the rest of the state were less supportive ranging from 44% in northern and central Illinois to only 42% in southern Illinois.

Those individuals who favored this change were asked whether they would still favor it even if it meant that their local schools were to get less money as a result; 63% of these respondents still favored such a change. A majority of supporters of the change across the state said they would still support the swap even if it meant their district would have less state money. Continued support ranged from 56% in suburban Cook County to 74% in northern Illinois.

At the same time, 71% of our respondents indicated that they would favor providing more state aid to school districts with less ability to fund their own education programs while 26% opposed the idea. This level of support paralleled that of respondents in 2009.

table 6 **Evaluation of U.S. Health Care System**

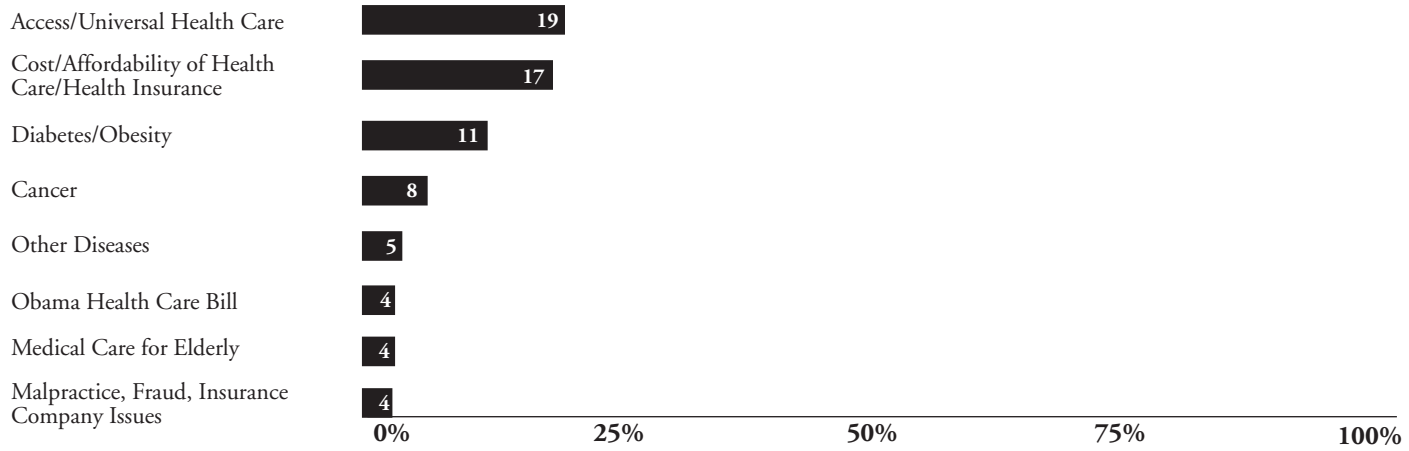
	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
State of Crisis	12 %	15 %	15 %	22 %	20 %	18 %	17 %	14 %
Major Problems	59	58	56	49	56	52	55	51
Minor Problems	27	25	28	27	23	28	23	33
No Problems	2	2	1	1	1	2	3	1

table 7 **Health Care Coverage**

	Federal		State	
	2010	2009	2010	2009
Yes, Government Responsibility	57 %	58 %	49 %	49 %
No, Not Government Responsibility	41	41	49	50
Don't Know	2	2	1	1

The *Illinois Policy Survey* has queried Illinoisans on health care issues in a number of its polls. Health care has been the center of national political debate during the first two years of the Obama administration, yet little movement has occurred in the perspectives of our respondents from recent years regarding their evaluation of the state of the U.S. health care system and the extent to which it is the responsibility of the federal government to provide health care coverage. Regarding the state of the U.S. health care system, a majority of our respondents have consistently said they believe it has major problems, 59% in 2010. This year another 12% indicated it was in a "state of crisis," the smallest percentage with such a pessimistic perception since the *Policy Survey* has been asking the question in the early years of this decade. See **Table 6**. A majority of respondents also continues to believe it is the responsibility of the federal government to provide health care coverage (57%) while a substantial minority (41%) believes it is not the responsibility of the federal government. See **Table 7**. Women (63%) were more likely to see such coverage as a federal government responsibility than men (54%); 76% of people with incomes under $35,000 compared to 55% of those with higher incomes and 76% of those between the ages of 18 and 24 compared with only 43% of those 65 or over saw health care coverage as a federal government responsibility. Where respondents resided in the state marked a major division of opinion on whether it was the federal government's responsibility to provide health care coverage. A majority of Chicagoland residents believed it was the federal government's responsibility, but only a minority of northern, central and southern Illinois residents believed it was the federal government's responsibility. We also asked respondents whether it was the state government's responsibility to provide health care coverage. They were evenly split between those who felt it was the state's responsibility (49%) and those who did not (49%), findings similar to that of the 2009 poll.

figure 9 **Most Urgent Health Problem**



Respondents were also asked to identify what they think is the most urgent health problem currently faced in the United States. A variety of problems were identified. The largest percentages focus on access or cost. A second domain centers on health ailments. In 2009, 36% of respondents mentioned access as the most urgent health care problem and 28% mentioned cost and affordability issues. Those percentages declined markedly in 2010 to 19% and 17% respectively. See **Figure 9**. This year 4% of respondents mentioned problems with the Obama health care bill. Also, this year the percentage of respondents saying they could not say what the most urgent problem was rose to 15% from 4% in 2009 perhaps representing frustration with the rancor and complexity of national debate on health care issues.

Illinois Financial Crisis

Taxing vs. Cutting Spending

table 8 **The State of Illinois, like the rest of the country, is struggling through an economic recession and having a hard time paying its bills. How much have you read or heard about the State's budget problems?**

	A Great Deal	Moderate Amount	A Little	Very Little
Statewide	31%	48%	13%	9%
Chicago	32	45	17	6
Suburban Cook	34	44	10	12
Collar Counties	29	53	11	7
Northern Illinois	36	43	8	13
Central Illinois	24	55	16	6
Southern Illinois	34	44	11	10

This year's Illinois Policy Survey introduced several new questions about the State's ongoing budget crisis. Illinois' budget woes have received considerable attention in the news media, so it was not surprising to find that this topic was salient in the minds of most of our respondents. When asked how much they have read or heard about the state's budget problems, 79% reported that they had consumed at least "a moderate amount" of information while 31% indicated that they had read or heard "a great deal" of information. (see **Table 8**) Moreover, moderate to high levels of attention to the government's financial problems were observed across all regions of the state and across most demographic groups. Older respondents and better educated respondents were slightly more aware of the budget crisis than younger respondents and those with less education.

At the heart of the debate surrounding the financial crisis lies the question of whether it is more useful and appropriate to cut back on state spending or to increase state tax revenues as a means of moving towards a balanced budget. After noting that Illinois currently has a budget deficit of about 13 billion dollars, and after raising the dilemma of spending cuts versus tax hikes, we asked our respondents to indicate how they would prefer to deal with the State's financial problems. Their options included tackling the deficit through spending cuts alone, through tax increases alone, or through various mixes of spending cuts and tax hikes. As one can see from **Table 9** (on the next page), most Illinois residents (74%) believe that the budget crisis will require a mix of tax increases and spending cuts. Indeed, a plurality of our respondents (39%), felt that an equal mix of the two policies was in order. However, among respondents who fell outside this modal category, those who wished to rely primarily on tax increases (14%) were clearly outnumbered by those who preferred to rely more heavily on spending cuts (47%).

Looking at different regions of the state, we see that persons living in Northern Illinois (but west of the Collar Counties), and in Southern Illinois were somewhat more supportive of spending cuts than other respondents. In contrast, Chicagoans and residents of Central Illinois tended to be relatively more supportive of an equal mix of spending cuts and tax hikes, or a strategy that favors tax increases over spending cuts.

One of the strongest predictors of preferences for balancing the budget was party identification. In sharp contrast with other partisan groups, 72% of Republican respondents preferred to rely entirely or predominantly on spending cuts to achieve greater financial health, while only 3% of Republicans preferred to rely primarily on tax hikes. Just 38% of Democrats preferred to emphasize spending cuts, and the remainder favored either a balanced approach (41%) or a plan that emphasized tax increases (21%). Independents were noticeably closer in outlook to Democrats on the issue of budget balancing. Among Independents, a plurality of 44% preferred an evenly balanced approach and 16% favored a strategy that emphasized tax increases.

Race was also an important correlate of opinions regarding how to balance the Illinois budget. As in the sample overall, pluralities in all three major racial groups favored an even mix of budget cuts and tax increases. However, Blacks and Hispanics were noticeably more willing to accept policy solutions in which revenue enhancements are key components while White respondents tilted in favor of spending cuts.

Age is another demographic factor that seems to matter in the debate over how to resolve our financial crisis. The data in **Table 9** show that older voters are markedly more likely to favor spending cuts than younger voters. Among those between the ages of 18 and 24, a slim majority (50.2%) favors an evenly balanced approach to balancing the budget. With increasing age, support for the balanced approach drops off consistently before reaching 29% among those 65 and older. In that group, 60 percent prefer to rely primarily on spending cuts.

Noticeable patterns of opinion for other demographic factors are less discernible. Minimal differences are apparent for men and women in our sample, and no regular patterns are evident for income and education.

table 9 **How would you prefer to deal with the State's financial problems?**

	Only Through Spending Cuts	Mostly Spending Cuts and Some Tax Increases	Equal Mix	Mostly Tax Increases and Some Spending Cuts	Only Through Tax Increases
Statewide	22%	25 %	39 %	10 %	4 %
Chicago	18	22	43	10	8
Suburban Cook	23	26	39	8	3
Collar Counties	22	29	32	16	1
Northern Illinois	26	32	34	6	2
Central Illinois	22	21	50	5	1
Southern Illinois	29	25	35	4	6
Party Identification					
Republican	36	36	24	1	2
Democrat	13	25	41	16	5
Independent	18	22	44	12	4
Race					
White	24	28	36	10	2
Black	15	12	53	7	13
Hispanic	7	27	40	22	4
Education					
High School or Less	26	23	40	4	7
Some College	18	25	40	13	3
College Degree	25	29	36	8	2
Graduate Degree	19	26	39	14	2
Age					
18-24	12	23	50	13	2
25-34	22	25	42	6	5
35-44	19	23	38	13	7
45-54	26	28	37	8	1
55-64	25	27	30	12	6
65+	31	29	29	9	3
Gender					
Male	24	20	40	12	4
Female	20	31	38	8	3
Income					
<$21,000	16	27	34	11	11
$21,000-34,999	25	31	35	2	7
$35,000-55,999	24	20	47	7	2
$56,000-99,999	15	38	28	14	5
$100,000-149,999	20	21	47	11	2
$150,000+	34	18	32	16	0

Attitudes on Tax Rates

Taxing Income

table 10 **Attitude toward individual income tax rates and whether to shift to a progressive income tax**

	Income Tax Rates			Flat Tax vs. Progressive Rates	
	Increase	Keep Where They Are Now	Decrease	Keep Flat Tax Rate	Shift to Progressivity
Party Identification	23 %	44 %	33 %	43 %	57 %
Republican	8	58	34	65	35
Democrat	37	37	25	30	70
Independent	28	49	23	47	53
Income					
<$21,000	17	39	44	33	67
$21,000-34,999	13	35	53	39	61
$35,000-55,999	18	40	41	35	65
$56,000-99,999	36	36	28	43	57
$100,000-149,999	28	52	20	36	64
$150,000+	24	49	27	67	33

In survey research, question wording can make a big difference in views expressed by respondents. When respondents in our sample considered broad policy options presented in the context of a severe financial crisis, over half seemed willing to put up with at least some tax increases. The results presented in **Table 10** show, however, that when focusing more narrowly on their own personal income tax rates, the same people were less likely to advise lawmakers to raise taxes. Overall, a plurality of 44% preferred to keep personal income tax rates where they are now and 33% recommended lowering income taxes. Only 23% approved of raising their own taxes.

Once again, strong partisan differences were observed. Fifty-eight percent of Republicans preferred the status quo, while only 8% favored raising taxes. In contrast, only 37% of Democrats wanted to keep rates where they are now, while an equal percentage supported raising taxes. Independents were in between, but closer to the Democrats with 28% favoring a tax hike.

We also asked our respondents whether they preferred to maintain the current flat rate tax system or to move to a progressive income tax. Although Illinois residents were somewhat divided on this issue, a clear majority of 57% preferred to move to a more progressive tax code. Again, sharp partisan differences were evident. While 70% of Democrats favored a progressive tax, 65% of Republicans favored the existing flat tax. Independents were more evenly divided but displayed a slight preference for a progressive income tax (53% versus 47%).

Attitudes toward the state's income tax policies were not strongly correlated with most demographic factors, but economic class indicators (like education and income), did correlate moderately with income tax preferences. **Table 10** reveals, for example, that the greatest support for income tax cuts came from residents with lower incomes. Survey respondents with higher incomes, in turn, were least likely to favor tax cuts. Since people of low income and education are somewhat more likely to identify with the Democratic Party, this finding may seem counterintuitive. However, since income taxes in Illinois are governed by a flat rate, it perhaps makes sense that residents with the smallest disposable incomes feel the greatest tax burden and the greatest need for tax relief.

This interpretation receives additional support in those columns of **Table 10** which break down attitudes toward a progressive income tax by income levels. Here we see that lower income residents of Illinois generally prefer a progressive income tax by a ratio of nearly 2:1. Somewhat irregular results are observed among the higher income categories, but the wealthiest respondents in our sample, those making $150,000 or more, show a marked preference for maintaining the current flat tax system. Thus, lower income residents expressed a need for tax cuts in the form of lower rates and/or a switch to a progressive income tax system.

table 11 **Attitude toward Corporate Tax Rates**

	Increase	Keep As Is	Decrease
Statewide	27%	49%	34%
Party Identification			
Republican	11	52	36
Democrat	45	46	9
Independent	20	48	32

For the most part, attitudes regarding corporate tax rates were fairly similar to those observed for personal income tax rates. See **Table 11.** Results for the state as a whole reveal slightly greater support for the status quo when it comes to corporate rates (49%, as opposed to 44% for personal income tax rates), and noticeably less support for tax cuts (24% versus 33% for personal income tax rates).

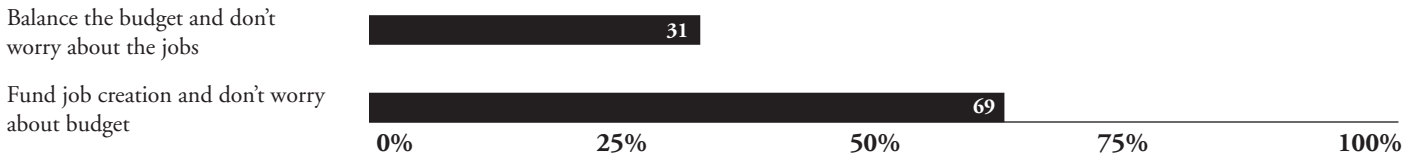
To a considerable degree, these differences are due to lower income residents who lean toward tax cuts at the personal level (44%) but who are more receptive to tax increases for corporations (42%; table not reported). Overall, however, income level did not correlate strongly with attitudes toward corporate taxes. Nor did most of our other background variables.

On the other hand, partisanship does correlate well with corporate tax preferences. Only 11% of Republicans suggested the need for a corporate tax increase, while 45% of Democrats voiced a preference for corporate tax hikes. Independents more closely resembled Republicans in this case, with only 20% preferring corporate tax increases.

Balancing the Budget on Funding Programs

Spending Decisions

figure 10 **Would you prefer to balance the budget or fund programs that create jobs?**



Just as they found it difficult to cut their own personal income taxes, our survey respondents found it difficult to cut back on policies and programs they viewed as important or valuable. When faced with the dilemma of cutting the deficit at any cost, or spending money to fund programs that create jobs, 69% said they preferred to promote job growth. Only 31% encouraged lawmakers to balance the budget and not worry about creating jobs. See **Figure 10**.

Democrats and Independents overwhelmingly supported additional spending to promote job growth (78% and 69%, respectively), while a slim majority of Republicans (51%) favored cutting the budget and not worrying about jobs.

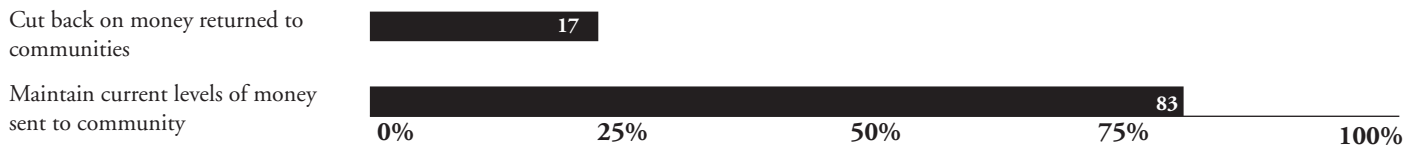
In most income groups, 70% or more of our respondents favored job growth over balancing the budget. In the highest income groups, however, support for job growth dipped as low as 55%. Other demographic variables that are related to income (including education and race), also helped explain preferences for job growth versus budget balancing.

figure 11 **Should lawmakers cut Medicaid or try to maintain current spending levels?**

Participants in our survey also found it difficult to cut back on health care services for the poor. Only 18% said that lawmakers should cut state spending for Medicaid, while 82% indicated that current services should be maintained. See **Figure 11**.

Majorities in almost all social groups favored continuing support for the Medicaid program, but relative differences emerged for some groups. As with many of our policy attitudes, partisanship was the strongest correlate. Almost all Democrats (93%) wanted current Medicaid services to be maintained, while over one-third of Republicans (35%) were willing to reduce state spending for Medicaid. Similarly, about one-third (32%) of the state's wealthiest residents were willing to cut spending (table not reported).

figure 12 **Should lawmakers cut tax payments normally returned to local communities?**



Certain monies collected through the state tax system are earmarked for return to local government units across the state of Illinois. An overwhelming majority of our survey participants (83%) favored the continuation of this policy. Only 17% favored cutting back on tax payments to local governments in an effort to balance the state budget. See **Figure 12**.

Support for returning earmarked tax monies to local governments was widespread across almost all social and demographic groups.

figure 13 **Should the state borrow to pay its bills or sell off valuable financial assets?**

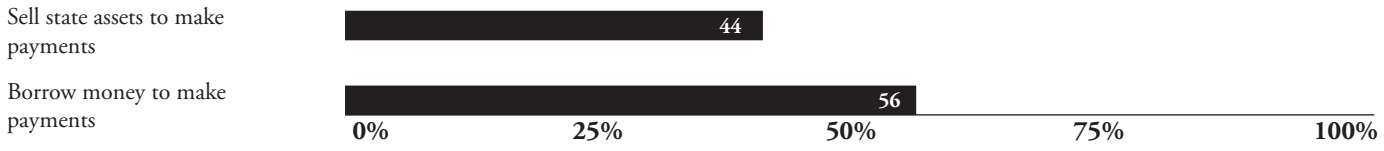


Figure 13 examines a more controversial issue. At times, Governor Quinn and others have argued that it makes more sense to borrow money to pay off certain financial obligations (such as state contributions to the pension system), even in the middle of a budget crisis, because the alternative is to sell off valuable financial assets owned by the state. In the end, proponents argue, selling off financial assets at an inopportune time may cost more than borrowing additional money.

While a complex issue to comprehend, a modest majority of our respondents (56%) seemed persuaded by the argument that borrowing money could, at times, save money for the taxpayers.

Republicans were evenly split on this issue, while most Democrats and Independents (65% and 61%, respectively) favored borrowing over selling state assets (table not reported).

We found it interesting that respondents with higher levels of education, and particularly those with graduate degrees (72%), were most likely to accept the argument that additional borrowing can sometimes save money. Given the complexity of the underlying rationale for borrowing, this perhaps makes sense and suggests that state officials who favor this approach may need to work hard to explain their rationale to the public.

Pension Reform

Has Enough Been Done?

figure 14 **Were last year's pension reforms adequate or are additional pension reforms needed?**

Another very controversial issue in Illinois politics concerns the ability of the State to live up to its obligation to properly fund, on an ongoing basis, its pension programs for retired state employees. Critics of existing pension programs, including the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Civic Federation, have worked hard to generate public support for the adoption of significant pension system reforms. Faced with rising budget deficits, in 2010 the Governor and General Assembly passed a pension reform act that raises the retirement age for younger state employees and otherwise reduces pension benefits for future retirees.

We asked our respondents whether they believed that the new pension reform law will be adequate to deal with the state's financial problems or whether additional pension reforms might be needed. **Figure 14** shows that Illinoisans are evenly split on this issue. Fifty-one percent told us that additional pension reforms are needed while 49% said that last year's reform law will probably be good enough.

We were somewhat surprised that partisanship does little to explain respondent attitudes toward pension reform. Republicans and Independents were about evenly split on the issue, and even 46% of Democrats favored additional reforms (table not reported).

table 12 **Attitude toward Pension Reform by Region**

	Chicago	Suburban Cook	Collar Counties	Northern Illinois	Central Illinois	Southern Illinois
Additional Pension Reform Needed	56%	51%	57%	33%	45%	33%
Last Year's Reform Law is Adequate	44	49	43	67	55	67

One factor that did help explain attitudes toward pension reform was proximity to the Chicago metropolitan area. **Table 12** shows that most respondents who lived beyond the collar counties felt that last year's reform law was probably adequate. In those downstate regions of Illinois, support for last year's reform effort ranged from 55% to 67%. In contrast, in Chicago, Suburban Cook County, and the Collar Counties, more than half of all residents (51% to 57%) favored additional pension reforms. These geographical patterns cannot be explained by traditional partisan forces operating in the state. Are they instead reflective of substantial attacks on the pension system by Chicago news and civics organizations?

table 13 **Attitude toward Pension Reform by Age**

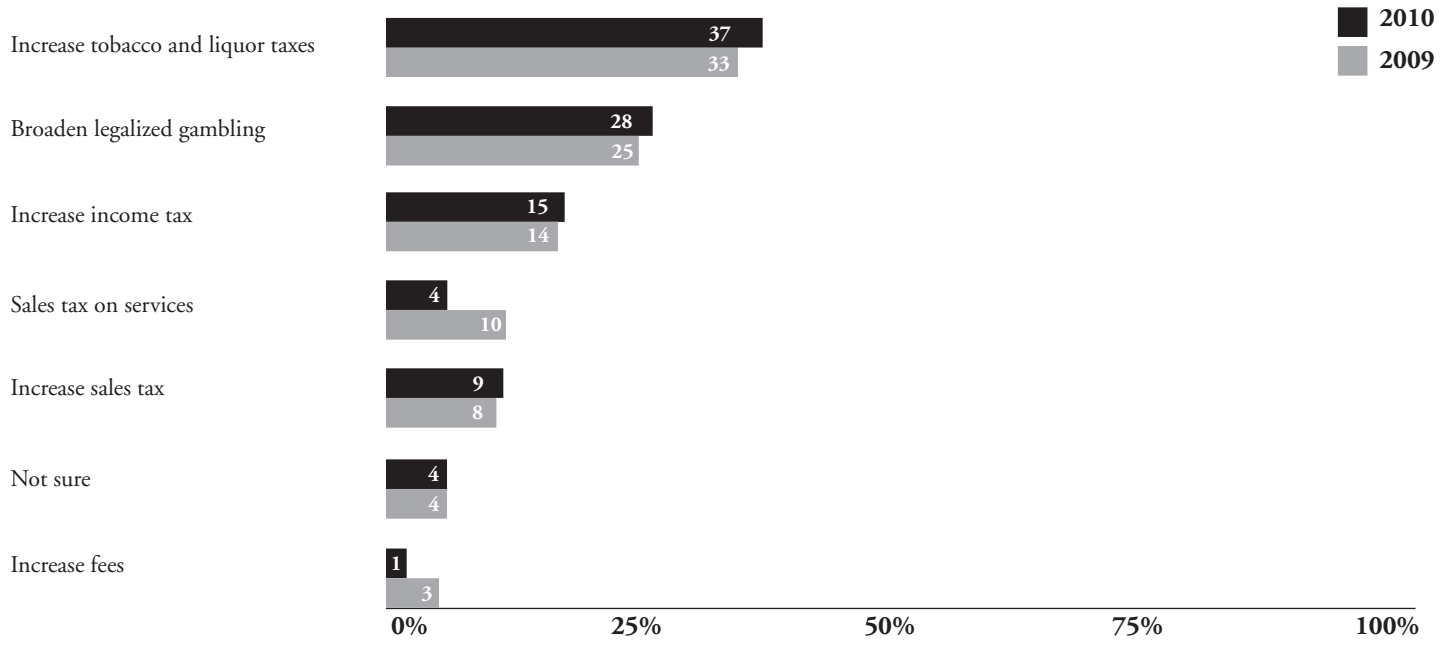
	18-24 Years	25-34 Years	35-44 Years	45-54 Years	55-64 Years	65 and Older
Additional Pension Reform Needed	44%	67%	57%	45%	43%	48%
Last Year's Reform Law is Adequate	56	33	43	55	57	52

We also noted an interesting pattern in the relationship between age and support for pension reform in our sample. The findings reported in **Table 13** do not reflect a simple split between younger and older Illinois residents. Rather, they indicate that younger workers between the ages of 25 and 44 voiced the strongest preferences for additional pension reform. Indeed, fully 67% of those aged 25-34, and 57% of those aged 35-44 asked for additional reforms. In the other age groups (including 18-24 year olds), most respondents said that last year's reforms were probably adequate. We cannot say with certainty why this pattern emerged in our data. But it seems plausible to suggest that younger workers, who face the burden of supporting the pensions of older workers through their yearly tax contributions, would be most willing to entertain the notion of additional reforms.

Increasing State Revenue

Illinoisans Weigh In

figure 15 **Increasing State Revenue**



In 2009 and 2010, respondents were asked "If you were convinced that the State of Illinois had to increase taxes or fees to fund needed or essential services, which of the following would you be most supportive of, assuming that each option will be implemented so that the same amount of revenue is raised?" Responses help give guidance to policy makers who must choose between difficult options for increasing the revenue streams necessary to pay for services. **Figure 15** lists the options presented to respondents and the distribution of responses for both years. The distribution of responses was quite similar in both years. Increasing taxes on tobacco and liquor were favored by respondents more than any of the other means of raising revenue. Approximately one quarter of respondents each year favored expanding legalized gambling. Only small proportions of respondents favored broader based tax increases on income, sales and services.

figure 16 **Ratings of National and Illinois Government, 2008-2010**

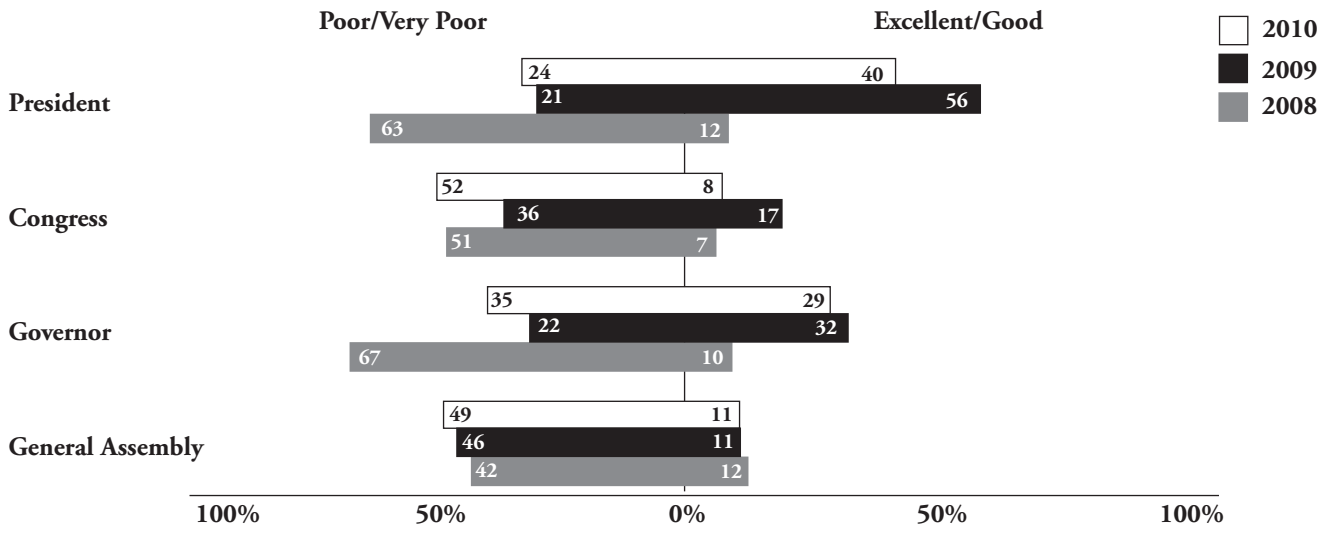
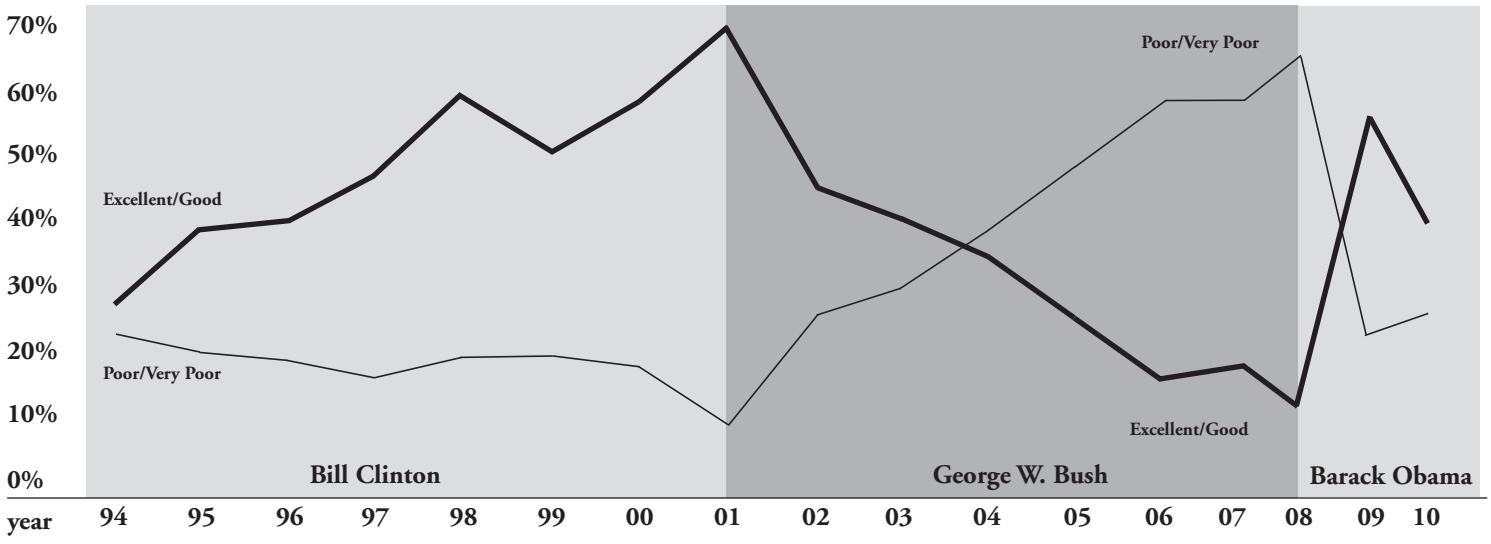


figure 17 **Ratings of the President, 1994-2010**



In keeping with national sentiment, and as one might expect given the state's budget problems and high unemployment, dissatisfaction among the Illinois public with the job that all public officials were doing increased in 2010 compared with 2009. Illinoisans' rating of the job President Obama was doing as excellent or good fell from 56% at the end of the first year of his administration to 40% near the end of his second year. Positive ratings for the job Congress was doing fell dramatically to only eight percent while a majority (52%) rated its job performance as poor or very poor. See **Figures 16 and 17**.

Within the state of Illinois, Governor Quinn's positive rating fell slightly from 32% to 29% while his negative rating increased rather sharply from 22% to 35% and the General Assembly continued to get very low ratings. Only 11% said it was doing a good or excellent job while 49% gave it a poor or very poor rating. **Figures 18, 19 and 20** on the next page, provide a longitudinal perspective on Illinoisans' ratings of their public officials.

Evaluation of Public Officials

figure 18 Ratings of Congress, 1994-2010

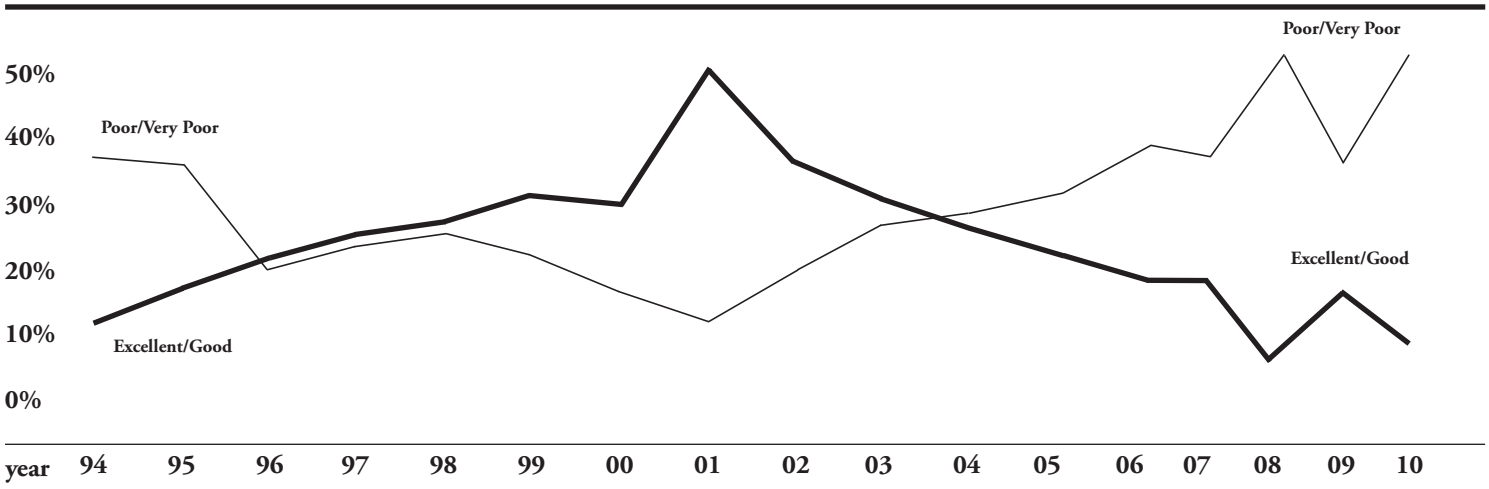


figure 19 Ratings of the Illinois General Assembly, 1994-2010

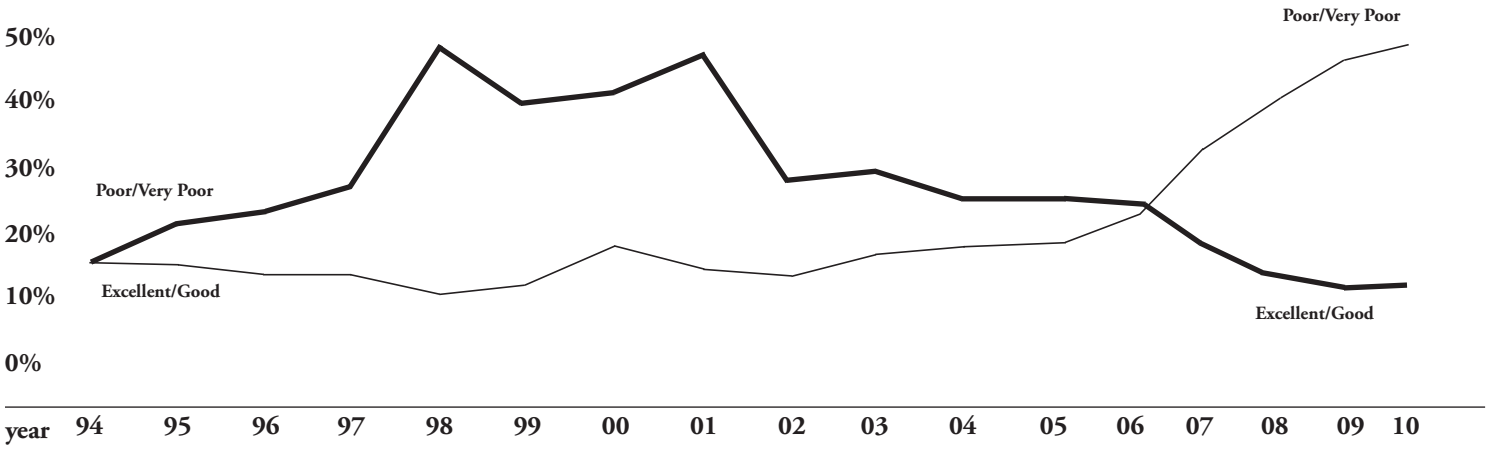
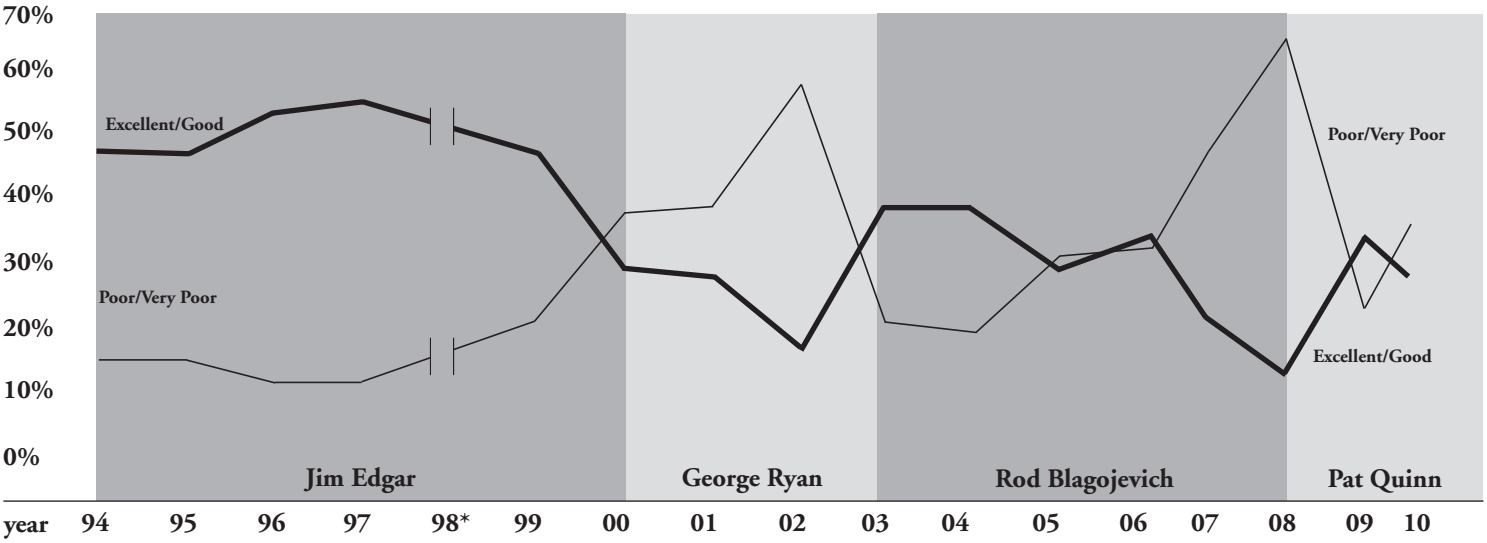


figure 20 Ratings of the Governor, 1994-2010



*results not available

figure 21 **How would you rate the job Richard Daley has done as mayor of Chicago?**

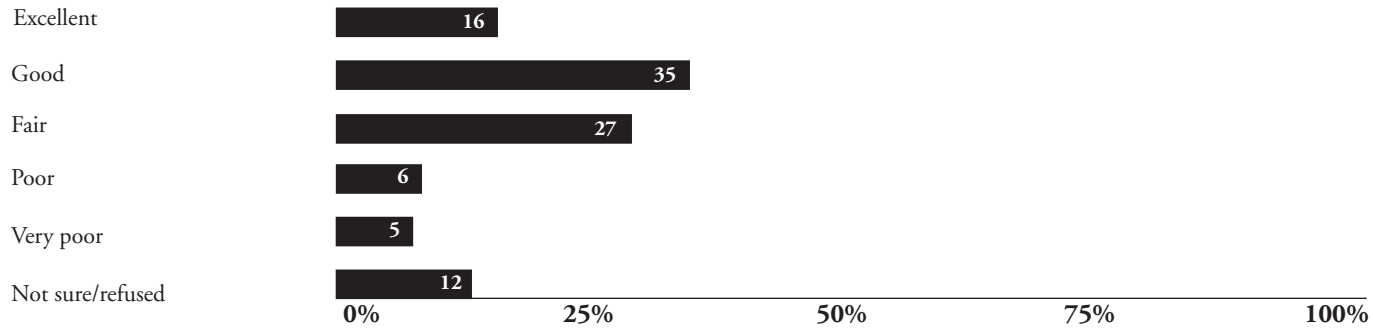
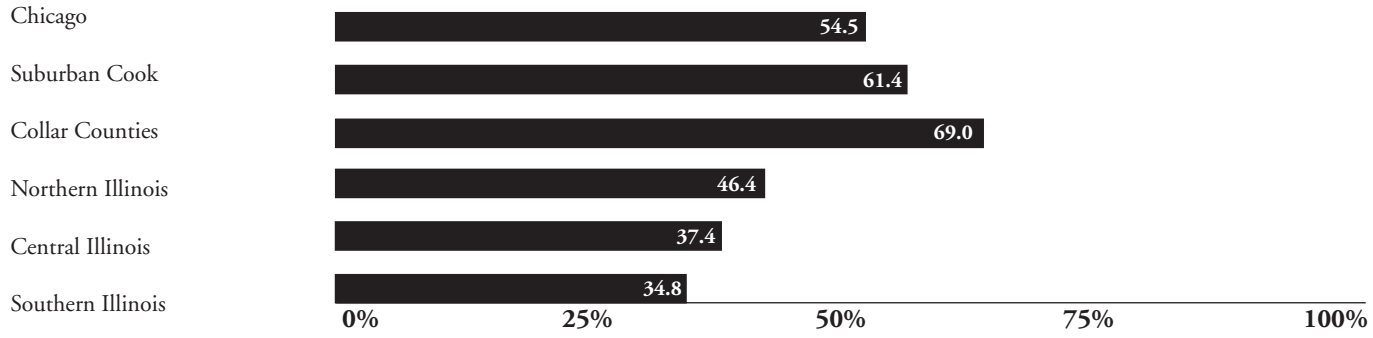


figure 22 **Excellent/Good Ratings for Richard Daly by Region**



Given the end of Mayor Richard Daley's long tenure as mayor of the city of Chicago and the importance of Chicago within the state of Illinois in this year's survey we asked respondents across the state to rate the job he has done as mayor. Considering only the subgroup of respondents providing an opinion, he was rated as having done either an excellent or good job by 58%, much higher than the ratings for all of the other public officials inquired about in the survey. Among the subgroup rating the mayor, a big difference emerged across the regions of the state. He received much more positive ratings from respondents living in areas closest to his jurisdiction.

As one moved away from Chicago the greater the percent of respondents who did not give an opinion increased. A majority of Democrats, Republicans and independents who rated Mayor Daley all gave him positive ratings. Democrats, not surprisingly were most positive; 64% rated him as having done a good or excellent job. Independents followed closely behind with 61% rating him positively and 52% of Republicans were also positive in their evaluation. See **Figures 21 and 22.**

The 2010 Election

table 14 **Who did you vote for in the Election for Governor and U.S. Senator?**

	Quinn	Brady	Giannoulias	Kirk
Statewide	55%	45%	49%	51%
Party Identification				
Republican	9	91	1	99
Democrat	94	6	92	8
Independent	41	59	39	61
Region				
Chicago	78	22	73	27
Suburban Cook	65	35	52	48
Collar Counties	42	58	43	57
Northern Illinois	33	67	31	69
Central Illinois	39	61	33	67
Southern Illinois	29	71	25	76

In addition to ascertaining their policy preferences, we asked our respondents whether they voted in the 2010 races for Governor and U.S. Senator, and for whom they voted. Our data provide a quick look at some of the factors that contributed to victories for the Democrats in the gubernatorial race but a loss in the race for U.S. Senate.

We were not surprised that 9 out of 10 Democrats voted for Quinn and Giannoulias, and that 9 out of 10 Republicans voted for Brady and Kirk (**Table 14**). However, Republicans in our sample showed overwhelming loyalty to Kirk. Only 1% of Republicans voted for Giannoulias while 9% reported voting for Quinn. Independents displayed a clear preference for the Republican candidates in both races.

In the regional data we again see fairly predictable results with the two Democratic candidates producing winning numbers in Chicago and Suburban Cook County, and Republican candidates winning downstate. However, Suburban Cook County voters were much more supportive of Quinn than Giannoulias (65% versus 52%), and a smaller but noticeable discrepancy is also evident for Chicago voters (78% for Quinn versus 73% for Giannoulias). Furthermore, 85% of Chicago respondents said they had voted in the Governor's race, but only 73% reported having voted in the race for U.S. Senator (table not reported).

In an open-ended question those voters were asked to give their reasons for voting for the person they had selected for governor and senator. The reasons were categorized into subgroups focusing on positive and negative responses. Pat Quinn was advantaged by being a Democrat; 27% of his supporters indicated that they voted for him because of his party. "Cause he is a Democrat" and "I vote Democrat" are examples of the partisan reasons people gave for voting for Gov. Quinn. He also benefited from individuals giving him a positive assessment for his qualities and platform (24% of his voters). Only 9% of Bill Brady's supporters said they voted for him because he was a Republican. Sen. Brady benefited from voters' dislike of Gov. Quinn's qualities and platform; 38% of his voters gave that reason. "Pat Quinn is incompetent" and "I have listened to our governor and he doesn't get anything done" Brady voters told us; 18% of his supporters cited his qualities and platform as reasons for their vote. Overall, 18% of the voters giving reasons indicated they voted the party line while another 31% cast a positive vote for the candidate whose qualities and platform they liked. At the same time 24% cast a negative ballot against a candidate whose qualities, platform or specific issue promotion they did not like. 7% reported that they voted for the "lesser of two evils" and 7% voted for a change.

A total of 67% of the respondents reported voting in the U.S. Senate contest to take President Obama's senate seat. In this contest, 30% of the respondents who gave a reason for their ballot said they cast a party line vote while another 30% cast a positive vote for a candidate whose qualities and platform they liked while only 21% cast a negative ballot while 6% voted for the "lesser of two evils." The Democratic candidate Alexi Giannoulias benefited from the party line vote; 44% of his voters gave this reason compared to only 20% of Mark Kirk's supporters. Among Giannoulias' voters 29% cast a positive ballot for the candidate because of his qualities, platform or a specific issue stance; 33% of Mark Kirk's voters fell into this category. Mark Kirk was advantaged by voters' dislike of his opponent; 15% who voted for Alexi Giannoulias did so because of a negative impression of Mark Kirk.

IllinoisPolicysurvey

Methodology

This study is based on a telephone survey of the Illinois adult population, aged 18 and older. Interviewers at the Public Opinion Laboratory (POL) at Northern Illinois University completed 1,223 interviews in November and December 2010. Interviews were conducted and responses recorded using a computer assisted telephone interview system.

The *Illinois Policy Survey* uses a disproportionately stratified sample, divided into six geographical areas: Chicago, the balance of Cook County, five collar counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will), the rest of Northern Illinois, Central Illinois and Southern Illinois. Sample sizes in the geographical areas ranged from 200 to 207.

A two-stage sampling strategy was used. For the first stage, telephone numbers were drawn with a known probability of selection within regions. Both listed and unlisted numbers were included in the sample at this stage. The second stage of sampling was carried out when an interviewer reached an eligible household. An eligible household was a non-institutional residence in Illinois which was the home of at least one adult 18 years of age or older. After reaching an adult informant in the household, interviewers gave a brief explanation of the survey and the purpose of the selection process. The household member to be interviewed was randomly selected from among the adults who were at home.

Data were weighted to adjust for disproportionality in the sampling. Unequal probabilities of selection at each stage of sampling were accounted for in the initial weight. A post-stratification adjustment to the initial weight was calculated by using a six by two by six grouping of age groups by sex by region using current population estimates from EASI data. The weighted sample was adjusted back to the original sample size for analysis.

The sampling and weighting procedures were designed to provide a representative sample of the adult population of Illinois that is accessible by telephone. This year's survey was conducted in both English and Spanish. Seventeen of the final interviews were conduced in Spanish. The conservative 95% confidence interval for a sample of 1,219 individuals is plus or minus 3%. This means there is a 95 percent likelihood that the population value falls within 3 percentage points of the sample percentage. The confidence interval for subgroups will be larger, and will vary with the size of the subgroup.

Acknowledgments

The Public Opinion Laboratory of Northern Illinois University conducted the telephone interviews under the direction of Kate Little, manager of the telephone center, while Wayne Wilkinson managed the survey. Many thanks to the POL interviewers who spent over 1100 hours talking to the people of Illinois and recording their conversations. Thanks also to Bob Gleeson, Michael Peddle, Ken Zehnder and Diana Robinson for advice on this year's survey topics.