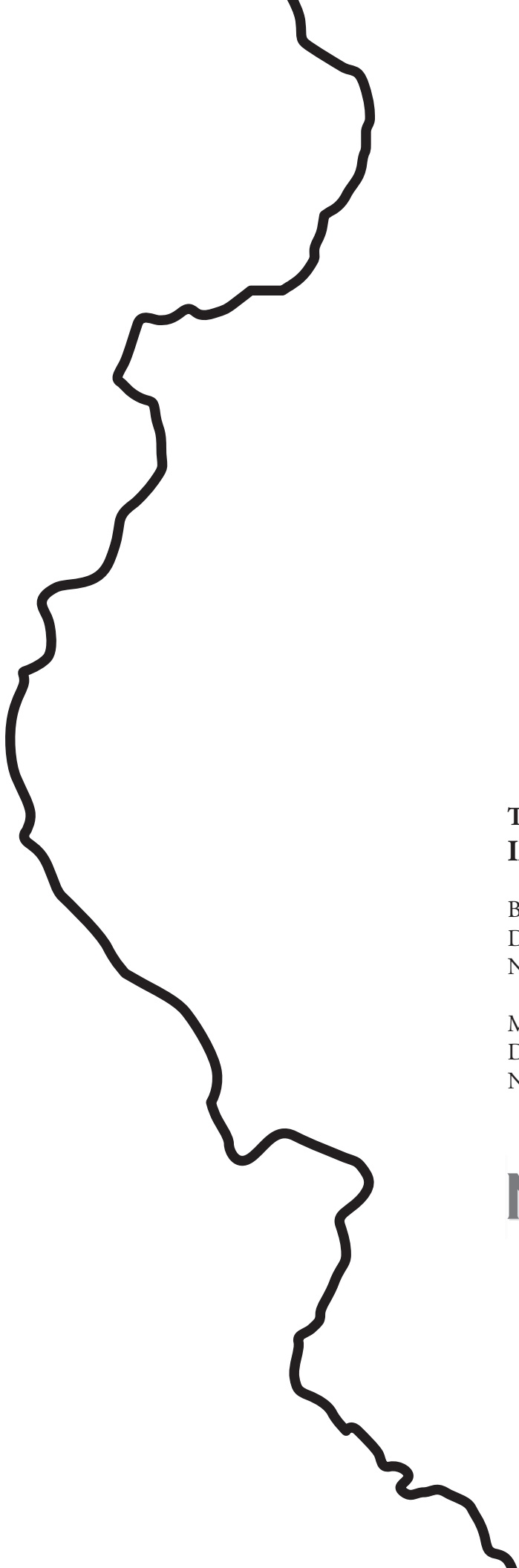




The 2012 Report on the
Illinois *Policysurvey*

Center for Governmental Studies
Northern Illinois University



**The 2012 Report on the
Illinois Policy Survey**

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Illinois Policy survey

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Now in its 28th 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.

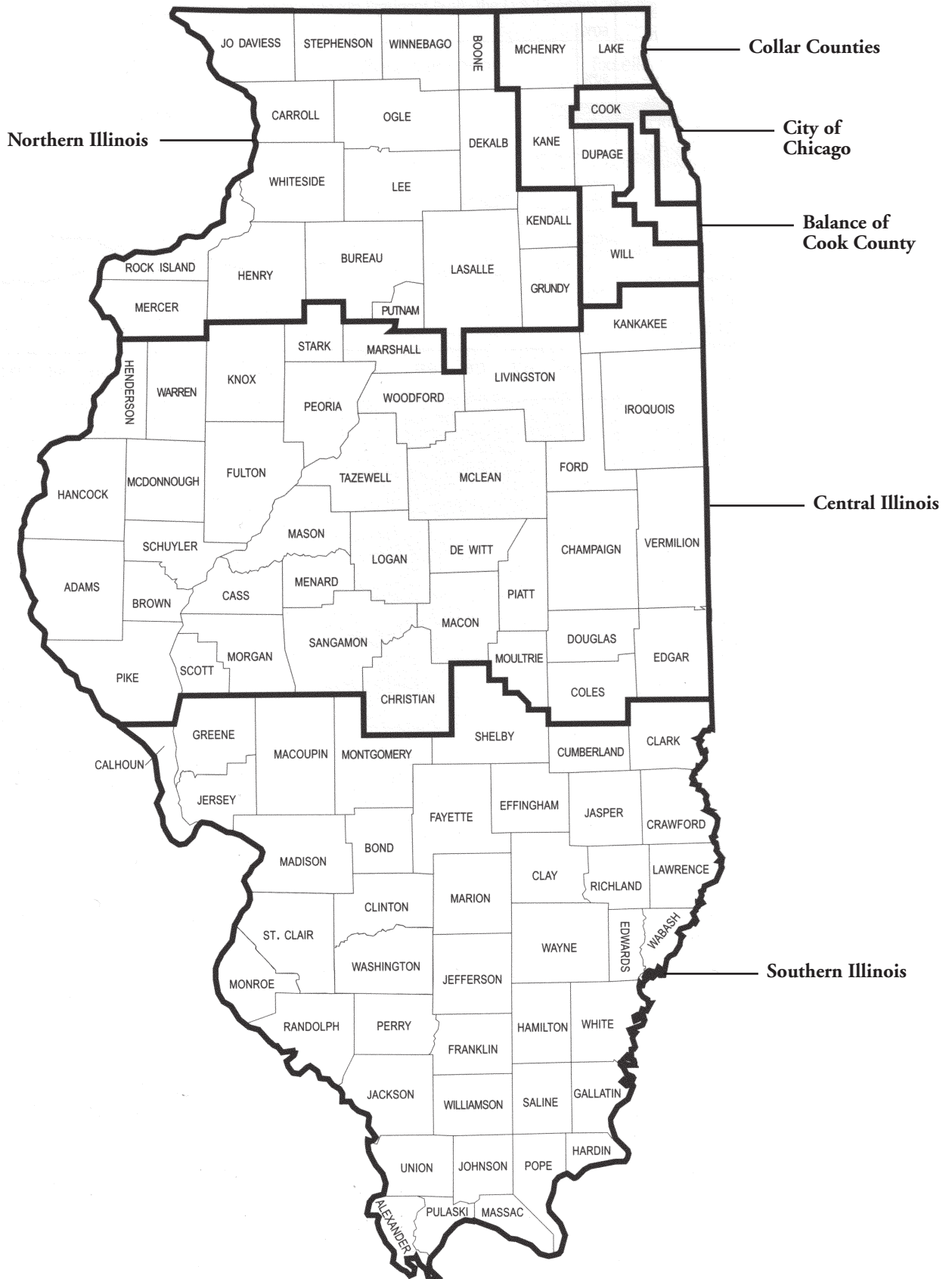
The *Illinois Policy Survey* is usually conducted in the Fall of every year. The sampling frame for this survey is all residences with telephones in Illinois. A disproportionate sampling strategy is used to achieve an approximately equal number of respondents in each of six geographical areas of Illinois. Telephone interviews with 1,221 men and women 18 years of age or older were conducted during November and December 2011. 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 1,221 individuals 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, 1999-2011

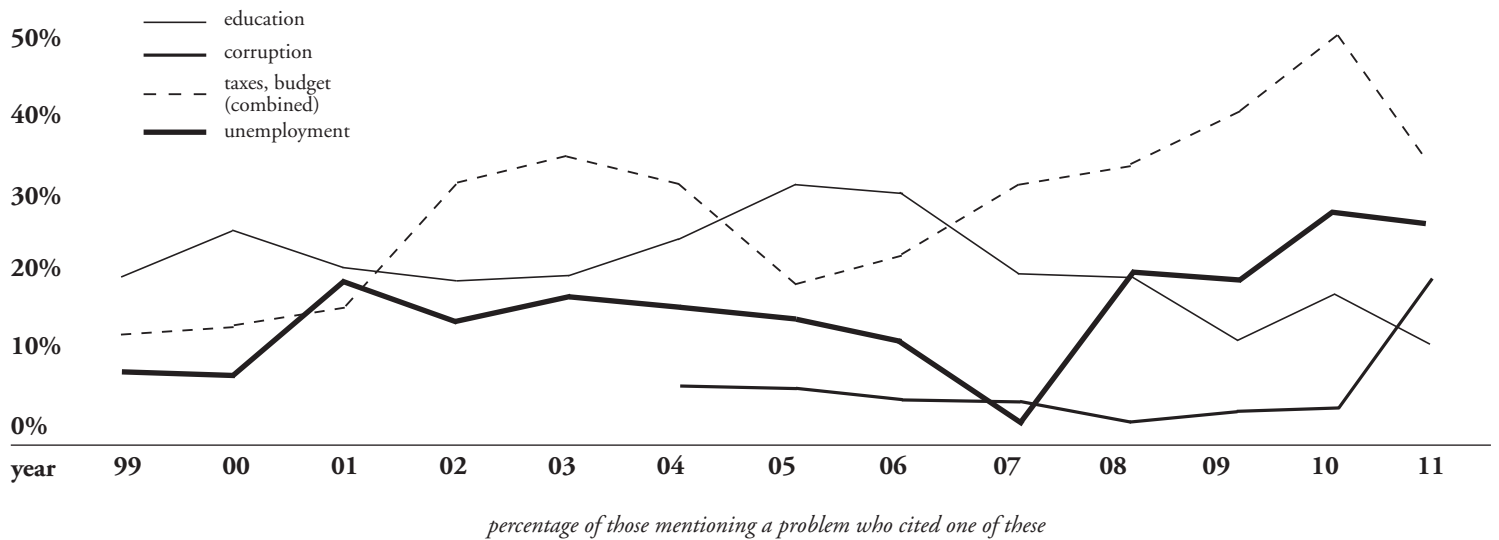
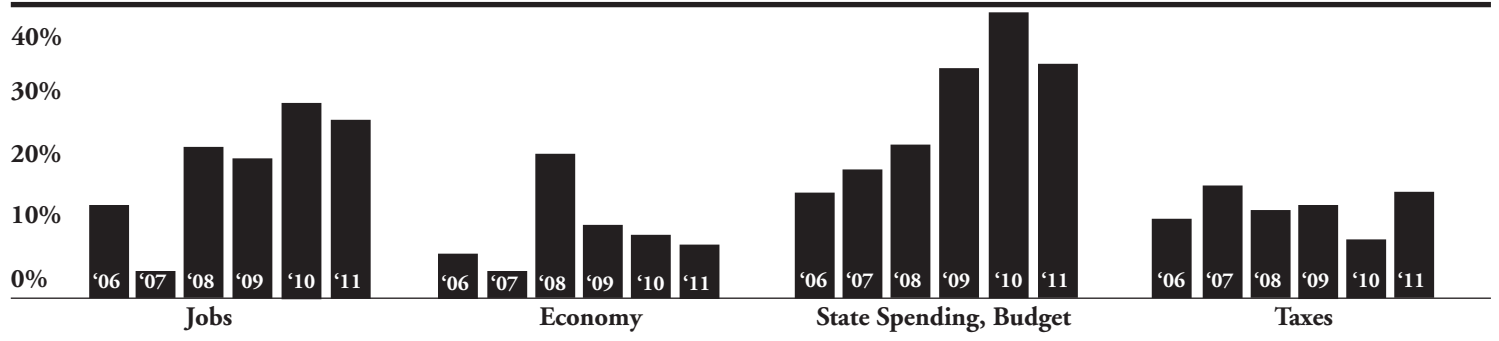


table 1 The Top Issues this Year vs. the Past Six Years

	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
State Budget	34 %	45 %	32 %	22 %	17 %	13 %	10 %
Corruption	19	10	19	5	3	13	4
Jobs/Unemployment	26	29	18	21	3	10	13
Taxes	13	7	13	12	15	10	9
Education	10	17	11	20	20	30	32
Health Care	4	2	11	9	14	17	11
Economy	5	8	8	19	2	3	4
Pensions	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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



Each year the *Illinois Policy Survey* asks respondents what they consider to be the most important problem facing the state. They are asked to respond in their own words. In recent years economic concerns—the state budget, jobs and unemployment—have dominated their perspectives. In earlier years, education had topped the list respondents cited but has fallen from over 30% to 10% as the most important problem facing the state. Crime, too, has nearly disappeared as the most important problem cited by Illinois residents. In 2011, 34% of respondents mentioned some aspect of the state budget and government debt and an additional 26% named jobs and unemployment as the most important problem. The third most widely cited problem was corruption mentioned by 19% of the respondents. The

rise is most likely related to the Blagojevich trial and sentencing. **Figure 1** and **Table 1** provide historical perspectives on the most important problem on the minds of Illinois residents. **Figure 2** provides an historical look at the identification of economic concerns as the most important problem. The continued prominence of economic concerns is evident in this figure and in respondents' description of the Illinois economy; 66% rated the economy as being poor or very poor. Since 2008, over 60% have given it a poor rating compared to 24% in 2007 before the economic downturn. Only 2% of this year's respondents rated the Illinois economy; as excellent or good, a sharp drop from 30% in 2007.

Priorities for State Spending

Trends in Support for Spending Increases

figure 3a Support for Increases in Spending for Job Training for Employed and Unemployed Workers

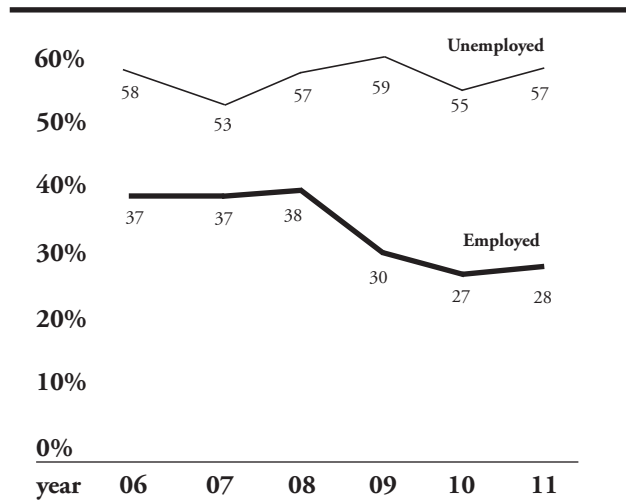


figure 3b Support for Increases in State Spending for Repairing Roads and Building New Roads

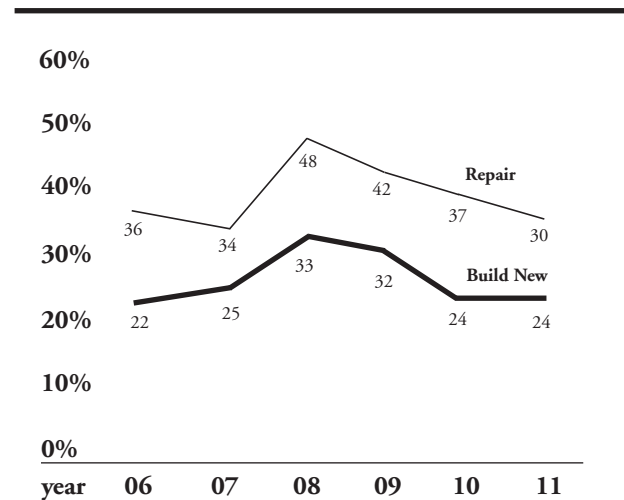


figure 3c Support for Increases in State Spending on Public Health Services and Low Income Medical Care

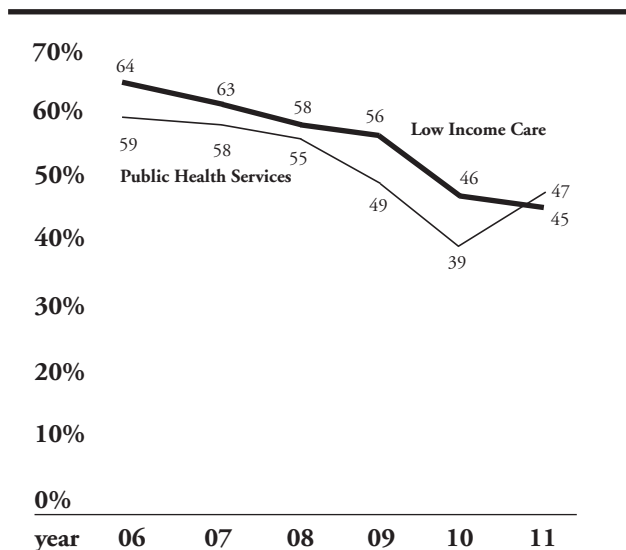
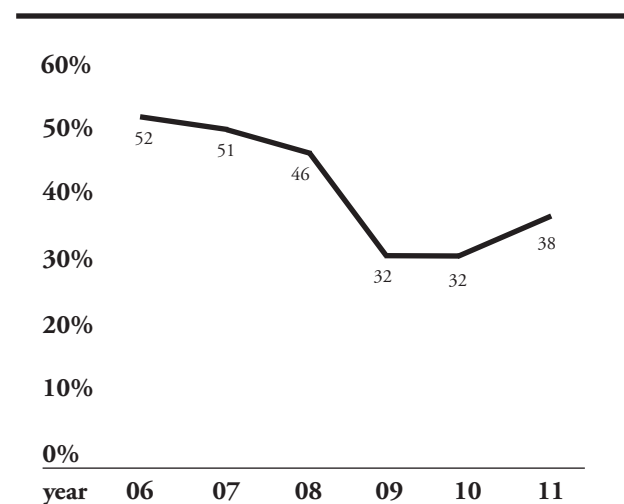


figure 3d Support for Increases in State Spending on the Environment



To obtain a sense of budgetary and economic concerns of Illinois residents, the *Policy Survey* has asked respondents each year whether state spending for 12 different major program areas should be increased, decreased or remain the same. **Figure 3a to 3g** show the percent of respondents who supported increased state government spending for each of the 12 program areas over the past six years, a time period that encompasses the years immediately preceding the economic downturn and the years of the downturn. Of importance in tracking the trends is the variation in the level of support across the areas and changes over time in level of support within individual areas as

the economy changed. Support for increased spending for public schools has been consistently high although the level of support is somewhat lower in 2011. Also a majority has consistently supported increased spending on job training for the unemployed. Support for increased spending has declined in other areas. Support for increased spending for low income medical care and for low income families with children has substantially declined but public health spending started to rebound in 2011. Other areas have fairly low levels of support for increased spending throughout this time period.

Priorities for State Spending

figure 3e Support for Increases in State Spending on Prisons

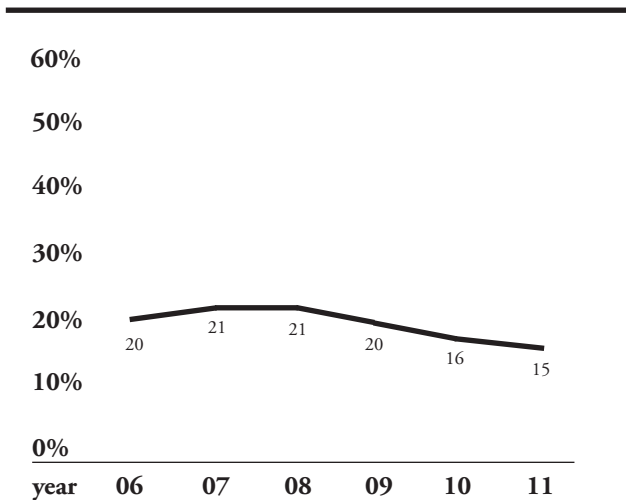


figure 3f Support for Increases in State Spending on Low Income Families with Children

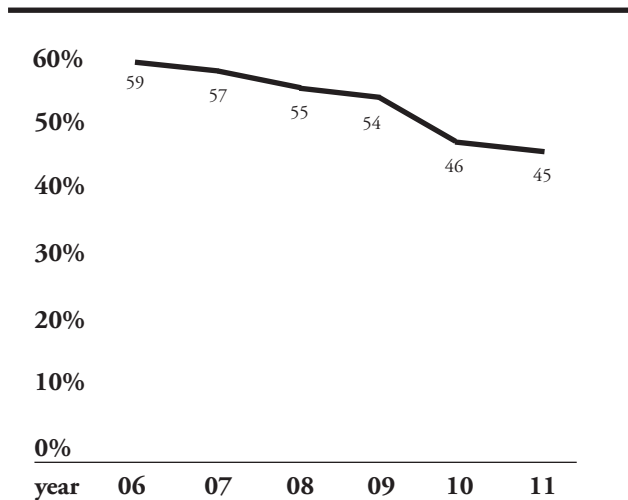
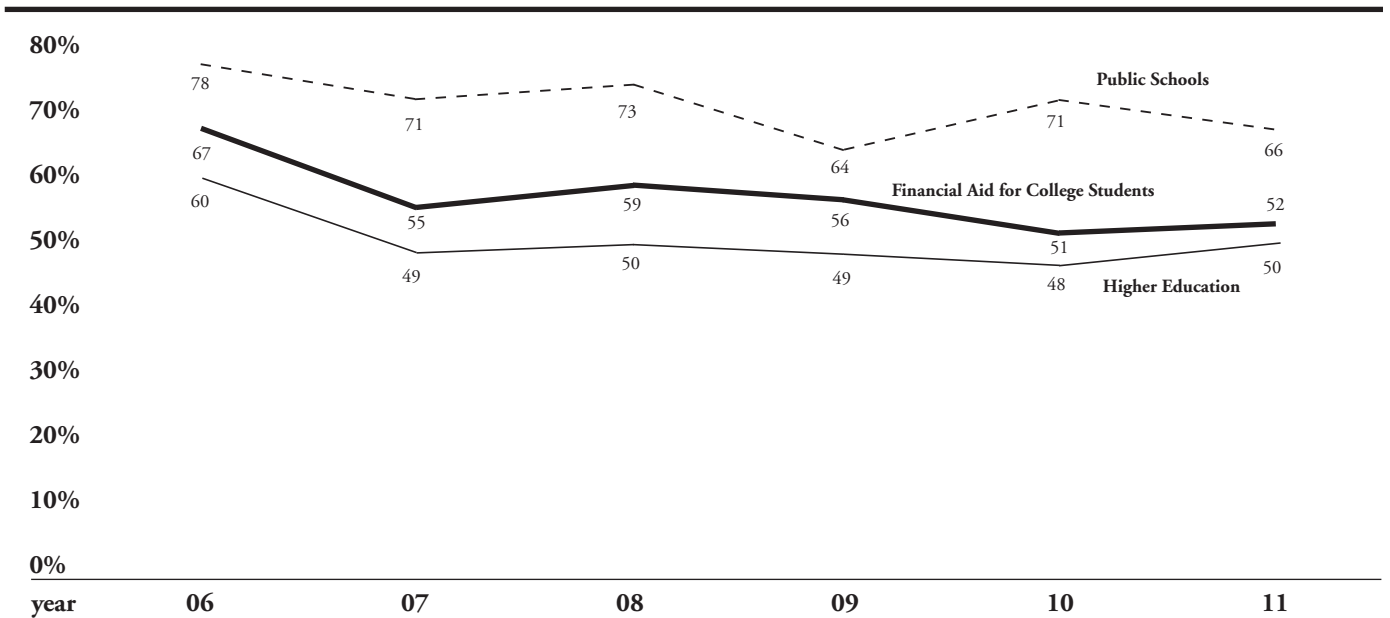


figure 3g Support for Increases in State Spending for Higher Education, Financial Aid for Illinois College Students, and Public Schools



Support for increases in state spending differs not only by the program area and across time but also by the respondent characteristics. **Table 2** displays the level of support for increases in state spending across a number of areas for a variety of demographic groupings in 2011. Respondents from Chicago generally expressed greater support for increases in spending while support tended to be lower outside the greater Chicagoland area. Other differences by respondent characteristics are also notable. Party affiliation especially matters with Republicans much less likely to support spending

increases than Democrats while independents tended to be in the middle. Support for increases in spending in the various areas of education tended to decline with age but did not differ as much across levels of education. Residents with the lowest levels of income were not surprisingly most in favor of spending increases across the areas. Across the board women were more supportive of spending increases than men.

State Spending Increases

Differences Among Groups

table 2 Support for Increases in State Spending, 2011

	Public Schools	Medical Care	Job Training	Low Income Families	Public Health	Student Financial Aid	Higher Education
Statewide	66 %	45 %	57 %	42 %	47 %	52 %	50 %
Region							
Chicago	81	75	77	72	72	71	69
Suburban Cook	57	35	60	30	40	54	46
Collar Counties	66	34	55	40	42	48	47
Northern IL	65	32	48	30	34	45	42
Central IL	57	41	32	24	28	28	27
Southern IL	63	28	43	25	38	42	41
Party Identification							
Republican	41	18	43	24	25	31	32
Democrat	82	66	65	62	59	66	58
Independent	71	45	61	43	49	56	52
Age Group							
18-24	69	54	57	56	62	62	69
25-34	82	48	63	53	66	65	59
35-44	73	41	58	37	29	58	52
45-54	59	39	55	37	40	44	39
55-64	52	47	49	37	43	39	37
65 +	59	44	69	40	44	41	39
Sex							
Male	64	42	54	41	45	47	44
Female	70	48	62	46	49	58	56
Education							
High School or Less	65	48	56	46	47	50	43
Some College	66	46	70	45	51	66	60
College Graduate	68	42	52	41	44	45	47
Income < 21	90	88	87	81	73	68	64
\$21,000-34,999	64	56	60	49	57	52	58
\$35,000-55,999	72	50	71	55	55	65	57
\$56,000-99,999	65	38	57	36	40	57	51
\$100,000-149,999	62	30	44	23	41	37	41
\$150,000+	56	26	41	37	32	40	33
Race							
White	61	34	50	34	39	45	42
Black/African American	90	89	93	75	77	80	80
Hispanic	67	56	48	50	59	53	47

How Things Are Going in Illinois

Personal Financial Situations Remain Problematic

figure 4 Satisfaction with the Way Things Are Going in Illinois 1998-2011

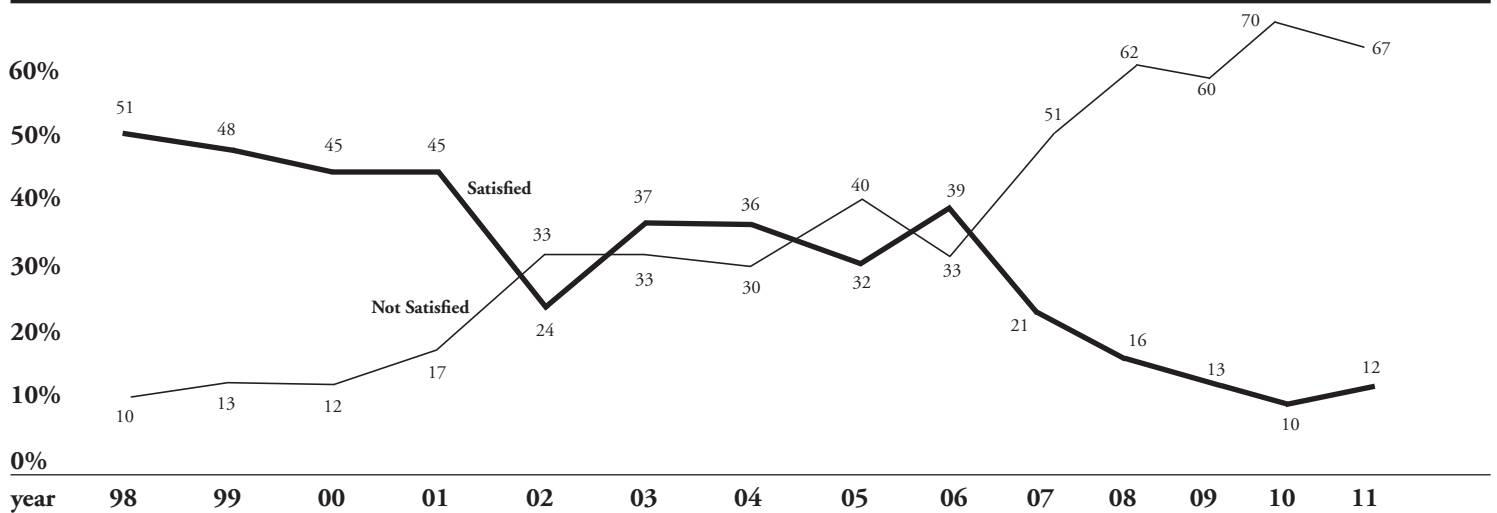


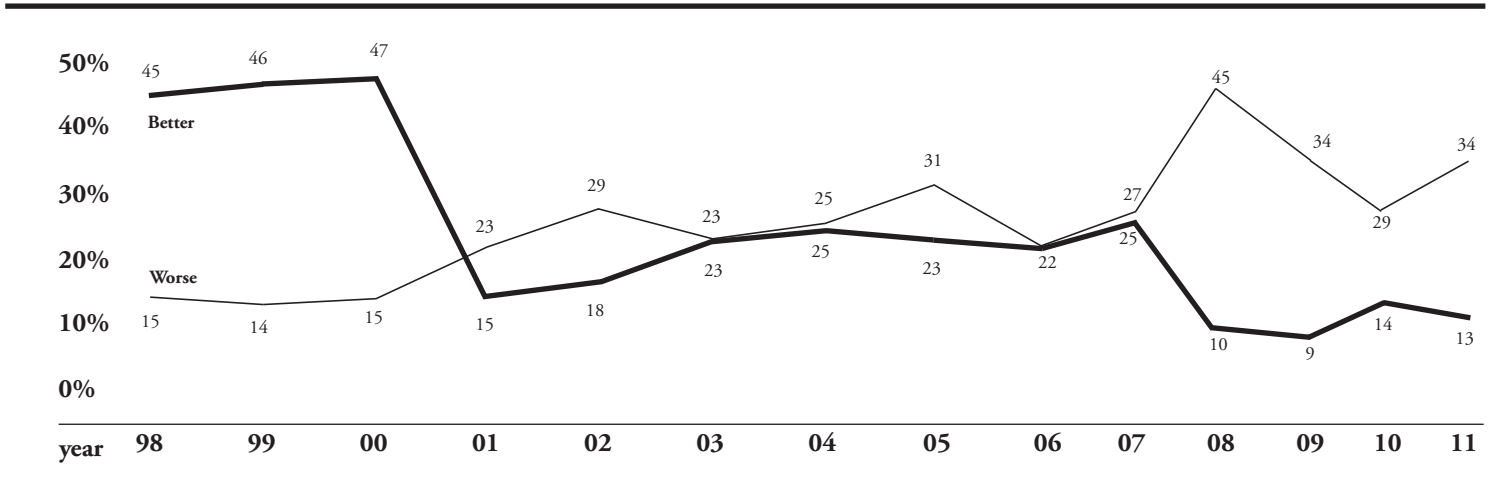
table 3 Change in Financial Conditions in the Past Year

	Better	Same	Worse	Don't Know
Financial Conditions of Illinois Residents	3.3	43.2	52.7	0.7
Personal Financial Condition	12.6	53.2	34.2	0.0

table 4 Concerns About Unemployment

	Important Problem			Problem			Not a Problem		
	'11	'10	'09	'11	'11	'09	'11	'10	'09
Illinois	86.2	89.0	83.9	12.9	15.3	15.8	0.5	0.6	0.3
Community	64.8	65.2	65.3	30.6	29.4	25.3	4.4	4.9	9.0

figure 5 Personal Financial Condition Compared to Last Year, 1998-2011



Satisfaction with the way things were going in Illinois continued the negative trend of recent years. In 2011 only 12% of the respondents expressed satisfaction, only marginally better than the 10% figure of 2010. The trend line of **Figure 4** shows a dramatic decline since the start of the economic downturn in the latter half of the first decade of the 21st century.

The negative view of the financial condition of Illinois residents in general and respondents' assessment of their own personal financial condition found in recent years continued. Fifty-three percent in 2011 rated the financial condition of Illinois residents as being worse than the previous year while only 3.3% believed that Illinois residents' financial conditions were better. The comparative figures for 2010 were 54% and 6.5%. See **Table 3**. **Table**

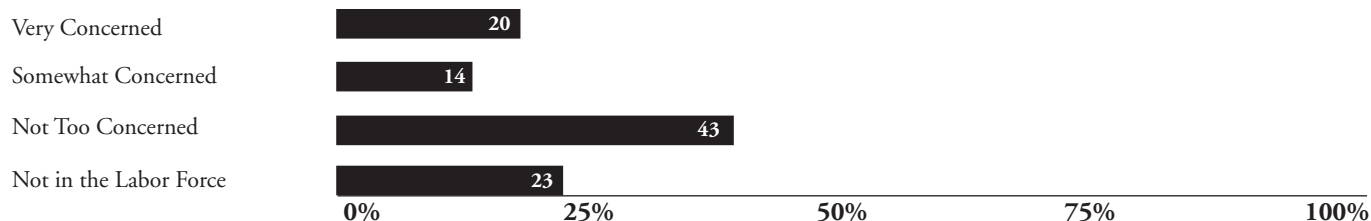
3 also shows lack of a sense of improvement regarding personal financial conditions. The percent saying they were worse off increased from 29% in 2010 to 34% in 2011. **Figure 5** provides a more longitudinal perspective on perceptions of Illinois residents' about their personal financial situation.

Respondents also did not see any improvement in the level of unemployment in their community and in the state in 2011. Eighty-six percent see unemployment as an important problem in Illinois and 65% see it as an important problem in their community. Only 4% do not believe it is a problem in their community and less than 1% in the state. **Table 4** shows the constancy over time in this negative perception.

Economic and Financial Issues

The Weight of Financial Concerns

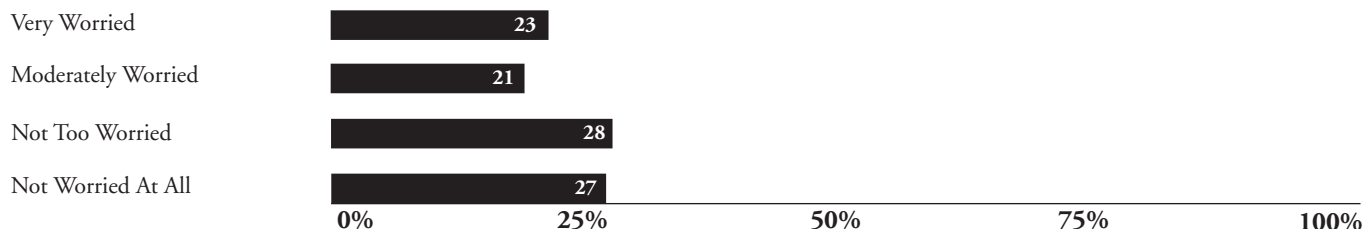
figure 6 "How concerned are you that you might become unemployed within the next year?"



Respondents were asked several other questions about the continuing impact of the economic downturn on their own economic position. More than 11% of respondents reported being unemployed or laid off at the time of the survey and 25.2% 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, 44%

were either very (26%) or somewhat (18%) concerned about losing their job over the next year. See **Figure 6**. In 2010, 51% expressed concern. Over 50% of employed Chicago and suburban Cook County residents expressed concern about losing their job over the next year. Employed residents in the other regions of the state indicated less concern.

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



Related to high unemployment levels has been the housing crisis with large percentages of people losing their homes and having their houses foreclosed by banks with whom they have mortgages. The *Illinois Policy Survey* has been tracking Illinois' residents' concern with keeping up with their housing costs. In 2011, 44% of our respondents said they were either very worried or moderately worried about being able to pay their rent, mortgage or other housing costs. (**Figure 7**). This figure is a slight uptick from the 41%

reporting such worries in 2010. Those who said they were moderately or very worried were asked which one of four concerns best described the source of their worries. Uncertainty about their job or income was the modal response named by 30% of this subgroup of respondents, followed by medical bills which 19% cited. Another 14% said the increased cost of their mortgage or rent best described their worry and 6% named increased energy bills.

table 5 Looking Ahead Four Years from Now

	Better	Same	Worse	Don't Know
Illinois Economy	53.7	21.3	23.8	1.1
Family Finances	55.4	33.0	10.4	1.1

In addition to asking about perspectives on the current state of the Illinois economy and the financial condition of respondents and their families, this year's policy survey sought to look ahead especially as the economic climate is ever so slightly improving. Thus, respondents were asked to look ahead four years from now and to tell us whether they expected the Illinois' economy and their own family's finances to have gotten better, worse or would have stayed the same. A majority of respondents were hopeful about both conditions. They were more optimistic about the future of their family's financial situation than that of the state of Illinois. See **Table 5**.

Illinois Financial Crisis Continues

Causes of the Problem

Policy making in Springfield heavily focused on ways to address the continued economic downturn and the state budget deficit in 2011. Thus, we devoted a portion of our policy survey questions to obtaining residents' responses to the efforts and decisions of our law makers regarding the state's economic problems. Survey participants were asked their opinions about the causes of the fiscal crisis, the effectiveness of enacted policies in solving the crisis, and what further should be done. First, we asked respondents to

assess the impact of four factors often mentioned in the news as contributing to the problem. The response categories were "a great deal," "a moderate amount," "only a little," and "very little." **Table 6** reports the percentage of respondents who judged each factor to have contributed "a great deal" to the state's financial problems.

table 6 Percent of residents responding "a great deal" to how much each factor has contributed to the state's current financial crisis.

	Excessive Government Spending	Declining Revenues/Bad Economy	Borrowing Money	State Employee Retirement Benefits
Statewide	74%	57%	46%	27%
Chicago	66	67	36	21
Suburban Cook	79	53	44	26
Collar Counties	76	50	52	31
Northern Illinois	84	65	53	28
Central Illinois	76	51	53	32
Southern Illinois	74	67	45	32
Ideology				
Liberal	54	53	46	25
Middle of Road	75	58	42	22
Conservative	90	57	59	47
Party Identification				
Democrat	65	65	45	19
Independent	78	50	47	28
Republican	85	53	48	41
Race				
White	76	58	49	33
Black	67	63	35	17
Hispanic	69	33	42	11
Age				
18-24	81	45	27	11
25-34	71	54	38	24
35-44	71	56	51	22
45-54	77	59	49	33
55-64	76	66	61	42
65+	71	67	51	37
Education				
High School or Less	71	57	45	25
Some College	79	56	39	24
College Degree	73	58	48	29
Graduate Degree	74	57	53	35
Income				
<\$21,000	76	72	19	12
\$21,000-34,999	82	67	42	25
\$35,000-55,999	69	65	53	22
\$56,000-99,999	72	48	41	27
\$100,000-149,999	81	53	47	35
\$150,000+	75	62	55	34

Illinois Financial Crisis Continues

Causes of the Problem, Continued

Given the commonsensical proposition that debt is a product of too much spending, it is perhaps to be expected that excessive spending emerged as the most widely perceived contributing factor (74% selected the response option "a great deal" when asked how much it had contributed to the current financial crisis). At the same time, it's clear that political ideology (and to a lesser extent, party identification) plays a very strong role in such assessments. As the data indicate, 90% of conservatives take it as a matter of faith that excessive government spending is at the heart of the problem, while only 54% of liberals do so. Indeed, for liberals, declining revenues in a bad economy are viewed as an equally important factor. Geographically speaking, residents of Chicago were least likely to emphasize excessive spending (66%) and residents of Northern Illinois outside the collar counties were mostly likely to do so (84%), with downstate residents falling somewhere in between. Elsewhere, white respondents were slightly more likely to put the blame on government spending than members of minority groups, as were very young adults.

It is perhaps more surprising to discover that only a little over half (57%) of our respondents viewed the nation's ongoing economic recession to have contributed "a great deal" to the state's revenue shortage. However, another 35% judged the economy to have contributed "a moderate amount" to the crisis, so more than 9 respondents in 10 Illinoisans do see some link between the broader economic recession and the health of the state's budget. Democrats (65%) in our sample and residents of Chicago (67%) were noticeably more likely to blame the economy for the state's fiscal woes than Republicans (53%) and residents of several downstate areas. However, the geographic distribution of this attitude is somewhat unpredictable, with residents of southern Illinois (67%) and northern Illinois (65%) also assigning a large role to economic recession as a cause of the state's problems. Older respondents (66% and 67%) were also much more likely to perceive a connection between the broader economy and state revenues than younger respondents.

That large numbers of our respondents would characterize paying interest on borrowed money as having contributed either "a great deal" (46%)

or "a moderate amount" (39%) to the State's financial crisis is consistent with the frequently negative treatment this topic has received in the press in recent years. As it did with attitudes toward government spending in general, political ideology plays an important role in structuring attitudes toward government borrowing. Fifty-nine percent of conservatives in our sample placed heavy blame on borrowing while only 46% of liberals did so. Curiously, party identification appears not to be related to this attitude, though residents of heavily Democratic Chicago (36%) were clearly less concerned about borrowing than residents of more Republican dominated areas such as the collar counties (52%), other parts of northern Illinois (53%) and central Illinois (53%). Other groups revealing relatively low levels of concern about borrowing money included people under the age of 35 (27% to 38%, depending on the particular age group) and people at the lowest level of income (19%).

Given their relative weight in the State's budget outlays, and given the decidedly negative coverage that such issues have received recently in Chicago and other parts of the state, we were surprised that only 27% of our respondents felt that state employment retirement benefits had contributed "a great deal" to the financial crisis. Moreover, an additional 33% reported that retirement benefits had contributed "a moderate amount," leaving nearly 40% of Illinoisans relatively unconcerned about the retirement benefits issue. Even conservatives (47%) and Republicans (41%) could not muster majorities behind the point of view that retirement benefits were a very significant contributor to the state's financial ills, though the effects of ideology and party identification are clearly present in the data. Among others relatively more concerned about the burdens of retirement benefits were whites (33%), older residents (from 33% to 43%, depending on the particular age group, those with graduate degrees (35%), and those with incomes above \$100,000 (34% to 35%). These results are quite striking given the extent of the actual problem involved, and given the amount of resources the business community and conservative ideological groups in Illinois have brought to bear to convince the public that dramatic reforms to the existing pension system must be enacted in order to balance the state's budget.

Illinois Financial Crisis Continues

Evaluation of 2011 State Action

Setting aside the question of what brought about the state's budget imbalances, how do Illinoisans assess the government's handling of the fiscal crisis? To this end, we asked respondents to rate the State's job performance as excellent, good, fair, poor or very poor. Results are presented in **Table 7**.

table 7 "Overall how would you rate the job the state of Illinois has done handling its budget problems during the past year?"

	Excellent or Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Statewide	24%	43%	26%	8%
Chicago	23	40	33	4
Suburban Cook	26	41	27	6
Collar Counties	29	42	19	10
Northern Illinois	26	39	24	11
Central Illinois	10	53	26	12
Southern Illinois	18	51	20	11
Party Identification				
Democrat	33	46	16	5
Independent	19	42	33	6
Republican	24	44	20	12
Race				
White	22	45	23	10
Black	18	38	41	3
Hispanic	50	31	17	2
Age				
18-24	20	37	38	6
25-34	25	40	32	3
35-44	28	50	19	4
45-54	26	44	20	10
55-64	21	42	20	16
65+	19	46	24	11
Education				
High School or Less	23	45	24	9
Some College	23	35	38	4
College Degree	26	45	20	9
Graduate Degree	22	51	16	11
Income				
<\$21,000	16	36	44	4
\$21,000-34,999	25	40	25	10
\$35,000-55,999	26	43	20	6
\$56,000-99,999	24	43	29	4
\$100,000-149,999	23	41	27	9
\$150,000+	21	52	11	17

Illinois Financial Crisis Continues

Evaluation of 2011 State Action

Because so few people (less than 2%) evaluated the government's performance as "excellent," we have combined both "excellent" and "good" evaluations in column one. Even so, only 24% of our respondents offered such positive appraisals. In turn, a plurality (43%) rated the government's management of its financial affairs as only "fair," while nearly a third (34%) characterized government performance as "poor" or "very poor." If this were a report card, the entry on that report card would be a C-. Clearly, most Illinoisans do not believe the State has done a very good job managing its budget issues.

It is noteworthy that this appraisal is distributed fairly consistently across the various regions of the state. Even in the Democratic stronghold of Chicago, only 26% evaluated the state's performance as "good or excellent," while fully 37% (a figure as high or higher than anywhere else in the state) labeled government performance as "poor or very poor." Residents of central and southern Illinois were least likely to characterize government performance as "good or excellent," preferring instead the label "fair" (53% and 51%, respectively).

Party identification, and to a lesser extent, ideology, did modestly color our respondents' appraisals of government performance. Given the dominance of the Democratic Party in Springfield, it is not surprising that 33% of Democrats in our sample gave positive evaluations of government performance. However, the more interesting finding in this portion of **Table 7** (on the previous page) is that Independent voters, not Republicans, offered the most negative assessments. Among Independents, 39% rated the government's management of budget issues as "poor or very poor," compared with 32% of Republicans and only 21% of Democrats. Were this situation to persist into the next electoral cycle, Republicans might be expected to make significant electoral gains.

Other surprises emerge in the demographic rows of **Table 7**. We see, for example, that black respondents (44%) were more likely to characterize the state's performance as "poor or very poor" than either whites (33%) or Hispanics (19%), and this may help explain why Chicago residents were just as negative in their ratings as residents of most other regions of the state. Also among those most likely to assign ratings of "poor or very poor" were young adults in their late teens or early twenties (44%), persons who found themselves in between a high school and college degree (42%), and persons of very low income (48%). The group we discovered to be most critical of the government in fact consisted of persons drawn from the latter three groups who labeled themselves as neither homeowners nor renters. One might infer that many of those fitting this description are living at home with their parents while trying to locate a job or pursue a college degree while waiting for an economic recovery. Among this group of respondents, which constituted about 8% of our sample, 54% characterized the government's performance on budget issues as either "poor or very poor."

Findings of this nature remind us that people across the state are unhappy with the government for different reasons. Conservatives presumably are dissatisfied that the government is spending too much on programs of all kinds, including those addressed to issues of health, education and welfare. But persons in the categories noted above – minorities, young adults looking for jobs and educational opportunities, young adults still living at home because of the economic downturn – may be angry at the government for spending too little on social programs.

Maintain or Repeal Tax Increases?

The state legislature enacted two increases to tax rates in 2011 to raise state revenues to deal with the deficit. The personal income tax rate was increased from 3% to 5% and the corporate tax rate was increased from 5% to 7%. Respondents were asked whether these actions should be maintained or repealed (**Figure 8**) and how much the increased income tax rate has helped grow revenues and run a smaller deficit (**Figure 9** on the next page).

figure 8 Maintain or Repeal Tax Increases

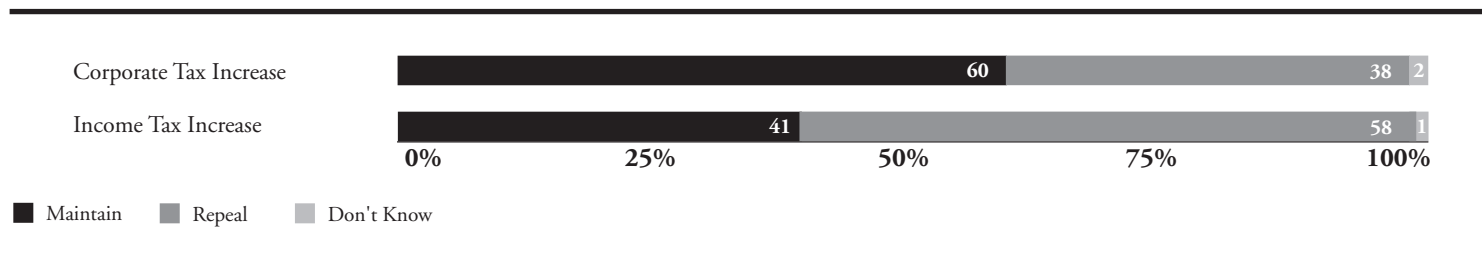
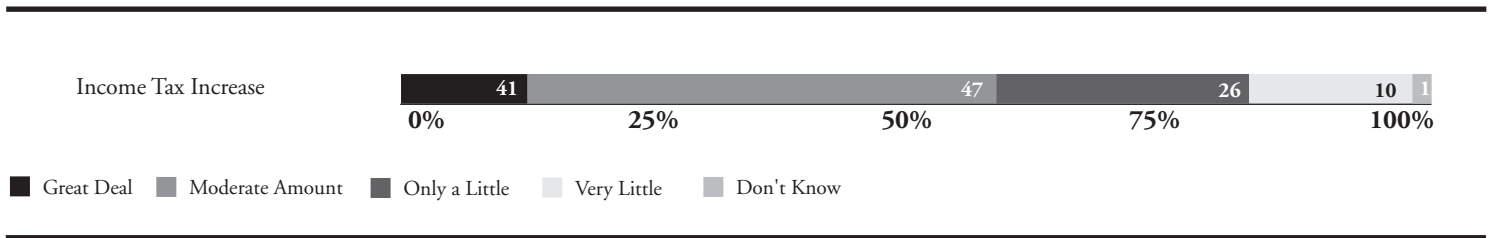


figure 9 "How much would you say the increased personal income tax rate from 3 percent to 5 percent enacted this year is helping the state grow revenues and run a smaller deficit?"



Four out of ten residents favored maintaining the income tax increase (41%) while 58% supported repeal. There was more support for maintaining the corporate tax increase; 60% supported keeping it at the higher rate while 38% favored its repeal. Residents of central Illinois were most supportive of maintaining the income tax increase (53%) while suburban Cook County residents were least supportive (36%). Interestingly the lowest income respondents—those with incomes of less than \$21,000—were very much opposed to its maintenance; 85% supported its repeal. All other income categories varied from 51% to 62% in favor of its repeal.

A majority of residents in all regions of the state favored the retention of the corporate tax rate increase. Support was highest in the collar counties with 68% in favor of maintaining it, while residents in southern Illinois with 52% had the lowest level of support. No linear trend was present in

residents' support or opposition based on their personal income although only 48% of the highest income group supported maintaining the increased corporate tax rate, the only group that did not have a majority in favor of its retention.

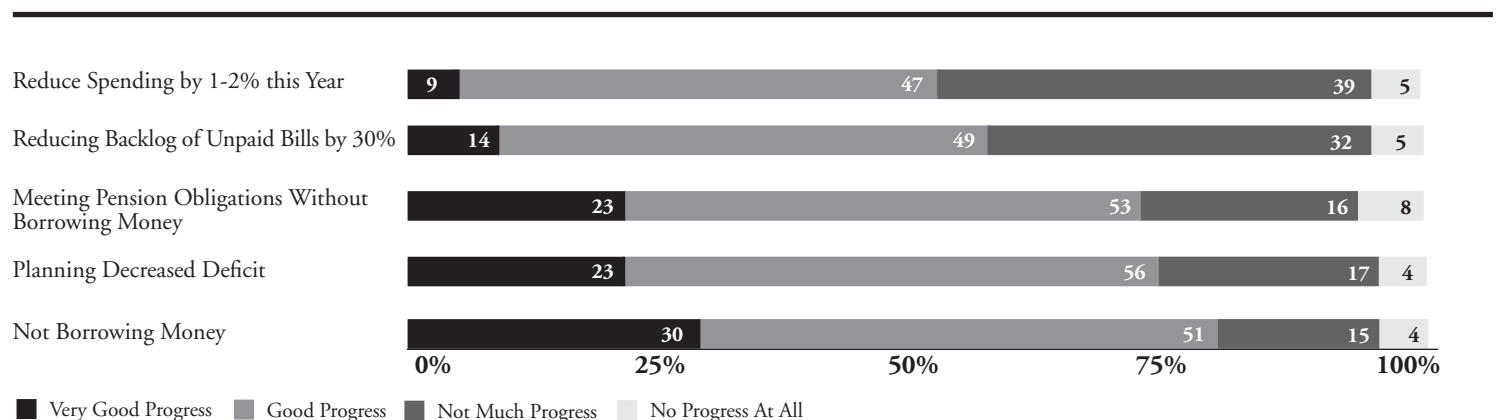
Respondents were also asked how much they thought the increased personal income tax rate from 3% to 5% that had been enacted in 2011 was helping the state grow revenues and run a smaller deficit. A substantial majority (61%) believed it helped a great deal or a moderate amount while 36% believed this action had only a little or very little impact on running a smaller deficit. (Figure 9). Needless to say, support for maintaining the income tax increase was related to belief about whether it was helping or not. Eighty percent of those who believed it should be maintained felt it was helping either a moderate amount or a great deal. At the same time, 50% of those who thought it should be repealed still believed it was helping.

Progress the State Has Made

As Governor Quinn's State of the State address in February 2012 demonstrated, the war to gain control over Illinois's budget problems is far from over, and many painful decisions remain to be made. However, the state has taken specific steps to improve cash flows, pay down its backlog of bills, and make its pension system more fiscally sound. For example, Governor Quinn and his fellow Democrats in the legislature recently took the bold but risky step of enacting a tax increase, and by most accounts base revenues grew by about \$4 billion dollars in Fiscal Year 2011. This money was used, in large part, to make the State's annual pension payment without having to borrow—an outcome which some may view as a positive development. Furthermore, the FY 2012 budget did not rely on additional borrowing to pay for the State's operating expenses for that year, and it called for a decrease

(albeit a very small one) of 1-2% in total expenditures and appropriations, and an overall deficit of less than one billion dollars. Finally, while stressing that the data represented a mere snapshot in time and that the situation could grow worse, in November of 2011 the State Comptroller reported that the backlog of unpaid bills had declined to \$3.8 billion from \$5.5 billion a year earlier. Regardless of the adequacy of these measures and outcomes, we wondered whether Illinoisans felt such developments were indicative of good or bad progress on the part of the State. For each of five areas of state action to deal with its financial problems we asked our respondents whether it represented very good progress, good progress, not much progress, or no progress at all? Our results are presented in Figure 10.

figure 10 Evaluation of Progress



Illinois Financial Crisis Continues

Progress the State Has Made

Our respondents were most impressed by the State's decision to forego additional borrowing to meet its ongoing operating expenses in FY 2012, with 29% reporting this policy decision as "very good progress" and another 51% calling it "good" progress. Similar results are observed regarding steps taken to keep the FY 2012 budget deficit within a billion dollars and the decision to meet the State's pension obligations this year without borrowing money. In both cases, approximately three quarters of our respondents (78% and 76%) viewed these developments as either "good" or "very good" progress.

The Illinoisans in our sample were slightly less impressed with steps taken thus far to reduce the State's backlog of unpaid bills and with the State's rather modest efforts to reduce spending in FY 2012 by just a couple of percentage points. However, **Figure 10** (on the previous page) shows that a solid majority of 63% characterized the reduction of backlogged bills

as "good" or "very good" progress, and a smaller majority of 56% said the same about a spending reduction of 1-2 percent.

These results suggest that Democrats might profit by working harder to take credit for at least some of these improvements in the State's financial condition. On the other hand, having devoted most of the State's new revenues to meeting this year's pension obligations, the Governor now indicates that larger cuts in state spending will be required this year in order to continue making progress toward balancing the budget. While the data in **Table 8** indicate that some Illinoisans will look favorably on such cuts, other Illinoisans – for example, young Illinoisans struggling to achieve college degrees and find good jobs, and others in need of social services – may well react negatively. Policymakers face a difficult balancing act.

State Employee Pension and Health Care Reforms

Pension and health care benefits for retired and current state employees continue to make heavy demands on state revenues, and Illinois lawmakers continue to debate alternative strategies for reducing those demands to manageable levels. In April of 2010, the Governor and General Assembly passed a pension reform act which raised the retirement age for younger state employees and consequently reduced pension benefits for future retirees. Since then, critics of the current pension system have campaigned for additional reforms, and they have also urged lawmakers to change existing laws so that current and former employees pay a greater share of the cost of their health care benefits. To gauge public opinion in this regard, we asked our respondents about both of these issues. Results are presented in **Table 8**.

The results observed for pension reform are identical to those we reported a year ago. The state continues to be equally split on pension reform, with 51% saying that additional reforms are needed and 49% saying that the 2010 reforms are sufficient for now. Furthermore, the geographic distribution of pension reform attitudes is approximately the same as we observed last year, with Chicago residents most likely to favor additional reforms (60%). The relatively high level of support for reform among residents of Chicago probably helps explain why attitudes toward pension reform are minimally correlated with party identification. Overall, Democrats (47%) are only slightly less supportive of additional reforms than Independents (53%) and Republicans (54%). On the other hand, supporters and opponents of pension reform do sort themselves out ideologically. Among self-identified conservatives, 69% support additional pension reform, compared with only 41% of self-identified liberals.

While one might assume that members of the public would hold similar attitudes toward pension and health care benefits for state employees, **Table 8** reveals that this is not always the case. Though equally split on the need for additional pension reform, two-thirds (66%) of our respondents agreed that government workers ought to be required to pay more for their health insurance benefits. In addition, attitudes toward raising employee health plan contributions displayed more predictable patterns of partisan and geographic divisions. Here we observe, for example, that Chicago residents are least likely to ask state workers to pay more for their health insurance (52%), while most downstate regions (and particularly northern and central Illinois, both at 78%) strongly favor raising employee contributions and reducing the burden on taxpayers. Consistent with these more traditional geographic differences, we also find that Republicans (74%) were noticeably more likely to favor health care benefit reforms than Democrats (57%), though on balance both groups favored reform.

table 8 Attitudes Toward Reforms for Health and Retirement Benefits for Government Employees

	Additional Pension Reforms Needed	Government Employees Should Pay More for Health Benefits
Statewide	51%	66%
Chicago	60	52
Suburban Cook	51	65
Collar Counties	48	71
Northern Illinois	44	78
Central Illinois	51	78
Southern Illinois	41	69
Ideology		
Liberal	41	56
Middle of Road	48	66
Conservative	69	75
Party Identification		
Democrat	47	57
Independent	53	68
Republican	54	74
Race		
White	48	71
Black	63	54
Hispanic	48	51
Gender		
Male	56	72
Female	46	59
Income		
<\$21,000	70	71
\$21,000-34,999	57	60
\$35,000-55,999	42	64
\$56,000-99,999	47	63
\$100,000-149,999	61	70
\$150,000+	56	65

figure 11 Quality of Public Schools

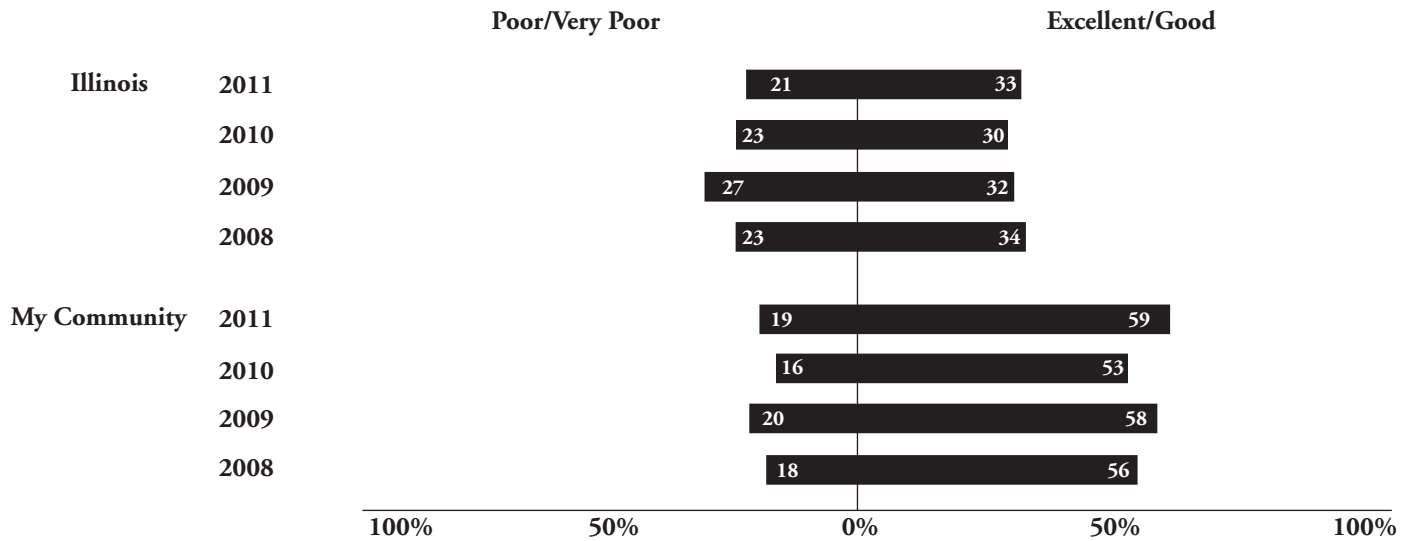


table 9 Evaluation of Local Public Schools, Percent Rating Excellent/Good

	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
Statewide	59 %	53 %	58 %	56 %	57 %	58 %	60 %	49 %
Chicago	27	27	25	33	28	30	23	24
Suburban Cook	76	59	79	48	71	58	60	59
Collar Counties	76	70	69	75	78	76	75	60
Northern Illinois	55	55	51	59	50	61	60	61
Central Illinois	60	62	73	71	45	66	69	54
Southern Illinois	62	56	64	63	50	66	69	63

In this year's survey, 10% of the respondents cited some aspect of education as the most important problem of the state. In the years before the economic downturn, education was much more likely to have been cited as the most important problem. The public education system continues to be a major public policy concern of both lawmakers and citizens of the state and its quality and funding being prime areas of discussion and debate. This year, 33% of respondents rated the quality of Illinois public schools as excellent or good while 21% rated it as poor or very poor; 43% rated it as fair. These levels of evaluation have been quite stable in recent years. Respondents continued to give local schools higher ratings than schools statewide with 59% of respondents in 2011 rating them as excellent or good. See **Figure 11**.

Evaluation of local schools varied widely by region. Positive ratings of public schools in Chicago continued to lag substantially behind ratings in other regions. Respondents in suburban Cook County and in the collar counties were particularly positive about the schools in their communities. Community schools in the other regions of the state also were rated positively by a majority of their respondents.

Funding Schools

How to pay for public education has long been a difficult issue. For a number years policy survey participants have been asked whether they would favor increasing the state income tax and reducing property taxes to fund schools.

A bare majority has consistently over the years indicated support for such a shift, but in 2011 that percentage slipped to 46% while 49% expressed opposition to such change. Residents of Cook County outside of Chicago were most in favor of increasing the state income tax and reducing property taxes to fund schools (55% support) while central Illinois residents expressed the lowest level of support (40%).

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; 58% of these respondents still favored such a change. Levels of continued support for the swap remained even when presented in terms of it possibly meaning that their district would have less state money for its schools. Support fell dramatically in northern Illinois to 33% while strong majorities of original supporters in suburban Cook, the collar counties, central and southern Illinois residents maintained their support; 45% of Chicago supporters continued to favor the swap.

At the same time respondents continued to favor providing more state aid to school districts with less ability to fund their own education programs; 71% expressed support while 27% were opposed. This level of support paralleled that of respondents in 2010 and 2009.

Education

Most Important Problem

table 10 Most Important Problem for Local Schools

	2011	2009	2007
Funding/Resources	34%	37%	40%
Teachers	9	14	16
Crime/Safety/Discipline	7	11	18
Quality and Performance	11	9	7
Overcrowding	10	6	11
Parents	5	5	3
Administration	7	1	4
Social and Moral Issues	.5	2	4
No problem	3	6	N/A
Don't know	6	6	7

Every other year respondents are asked to identify the most important problem facing their local schools. The open-ended responses are widely varied each year but can be grouped into broad thematic categories. See **Table 10**. School funding and lack of resources have headed the list of concerns in this year's and in the two preceding reports which have asked survey participants about this problem. Overcrowding is also a problem cited by 10% of respondents which is very much related to funding issues. Crime, safety and discipline and concerns about teachers fell in 2011 as local school problems mentioned by respondents.

The State of the Health Care System

Attitudes Stable

table 11 Evaluation of U.S. Health Care System

	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
State of Crisis	16%	12%	15%	15%	22%	20%	18%	17%
Major Problems	59	59	58	56	49	56	52	55
Minor Problems	24	27	25	28	27	23	28	23
No Problems	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	3

table 12 Health Care Coverage

	Federal		State	
	2011	2010	2011	2010
Yes, Government Responsibility	53 %	57 %	50 %	49 %
No, Not Government Responsibility	45	41	50	49
Don't Know	2	2	0	1

As health care has become a major national and state policy issue in recent years, the *Illinois Policy Survey* has queried Illinoisans about the state of the U.S. health care system and the role of the federal and state governments in providing health care coverage. Regarding the state of the U.S. health care system, a majority of our respondents, 59% in 2011, have consistently said they believe it has major problems. An additional 16% in 2011 indicated it was in a "state of crisis." See **Table 11**. Illinoisans have consistently had a negative opinion about the state of the U.S. health care system.

A majority of respondents also continued to believe it is the responsibility of the federal government to provide health care coverage (53%) while a substantial minority (45%) believes it is not the responsibility of the federal government. See **Table 12**. Residents with incomes less than \$21,000

were particularly apt to see health care coverage as the responsibility of the federal government at 80%. Individuals in all other income groups were much less likely to see it as the federal government's responsibility. Women were slightly more likely than men, 57% to 52%, to believe it is the federal government's responsibility. Not surprisingly, partisan identification made a big difference; Seventy percent of self-identified Democrats, 59% of independents and 21% of Republicans 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. Residents continue to be evenly split between those who felt it was the state's responsibility (50%) and those who did not believe it was the state's responsibility (50%). See **Table 12**.

Additional Current State Political Issues

Gay Rights, Electric Grid, Casino Gambling

Table 13 presents public opinion regarding three controversial policy issues that have been addressed recently by Illinois lawmakers, two of which have resulted in the passage of new laws (civil unions and modernization of the power grid) and one which remains on the agenda of government (the potential expansion of casino gambling).

table 13 Support for or Agreement with Three Recent Proposals

	Recent Civil Union Legislation	Expanding Casino Gambling	Allowing Rate Hikes to Fund New Electric Grid
Statewide	62%	62%	25%
Chicago	68	65	18
Suburban Cook	60	59	25
Collar Counties	68	67	23
Northern Illinois	54	55	15
Central Illinois	42	58	48
Southern Illinois	50	53	26
Ideology			
Liberal	88	57	29
Middle of Road	66	64	20
Conservative	26	59	34
Party Identification			
Democrat	74	61	20
Independent	67	62	20
Republican	32	66	42

Question Wordings:

1. In January, 2011, the Governor and the Legislature passed legislation that allows gay and lesbian couples to form civil unions that give them many of the legal rights married couples have. How much do you agree or disagree with this policy change?
2. Another proposal to increase revenues involves expanding the number of casinos in the state, including a new casino in Chicago. How supportive or opposed are you to increasing the number of gambling casinos in Illinois?
3. Recently the legislature passed a bill allowing utility companies to raise rates on electric bills to pay for modernizing the grid or network they use to deliver electricity to their customers. The governor tried to prevent a rate hike by vetoing the bill, but the legislature overrode his veto. Do you believe the legislature did the right thing by allowing the utility companies to raise their rates, or was the governor right when he tried to veto the bill?

Our findings show that the recent enactment of a law providing for civil unions between same sex couples had the support of a large majority of the public—62%. However, the data also reveal that some segments of the population remained strongly opposed to civil unions. While liberals and moderates strongly supported civil unions (at rates of 88% and 66%, respectively), 74% of self-identified conservatives opposed the new law. The divide between Republicans, on the one hand, and Independents and Democrats on the other, is almost as great. In fact, no policy issue in our survey produced a stronger correlation with the political ideology and party identifications of our respondents. The partisan and ideological leanings of the citizens of Illinois appeared to have strong underpinnings in traditional values and are not driven exclusively by matters of economic philosophy. Our demographic breakdowns further illustrate this point. The analysis by

region shows rather clearly, for example, that civil unions are much more acceptable to people living in diverse, fast paced urban and suburban areas (Chicago, suburban Cook County, and even the collar counties) than people living in rural, downstate regions that presumably support more traditional cultures. Support for civil unions also was strongest among those who reported no religious affiliation (78%) and among those with the highest levels of education (77%). Conversely, support for civil unions was lowest among those whose formal education stopped at high school (49%) and among self-identified Protestants (49%). It is interesting to note, however, that Catholics revealed themselves to be significantly more supportive of this aspect of gay rights than Protestants (65% to 49%).

Additional Current State Political Issues

Gay Rights, Electric Grid, Casino Gambling, Continued

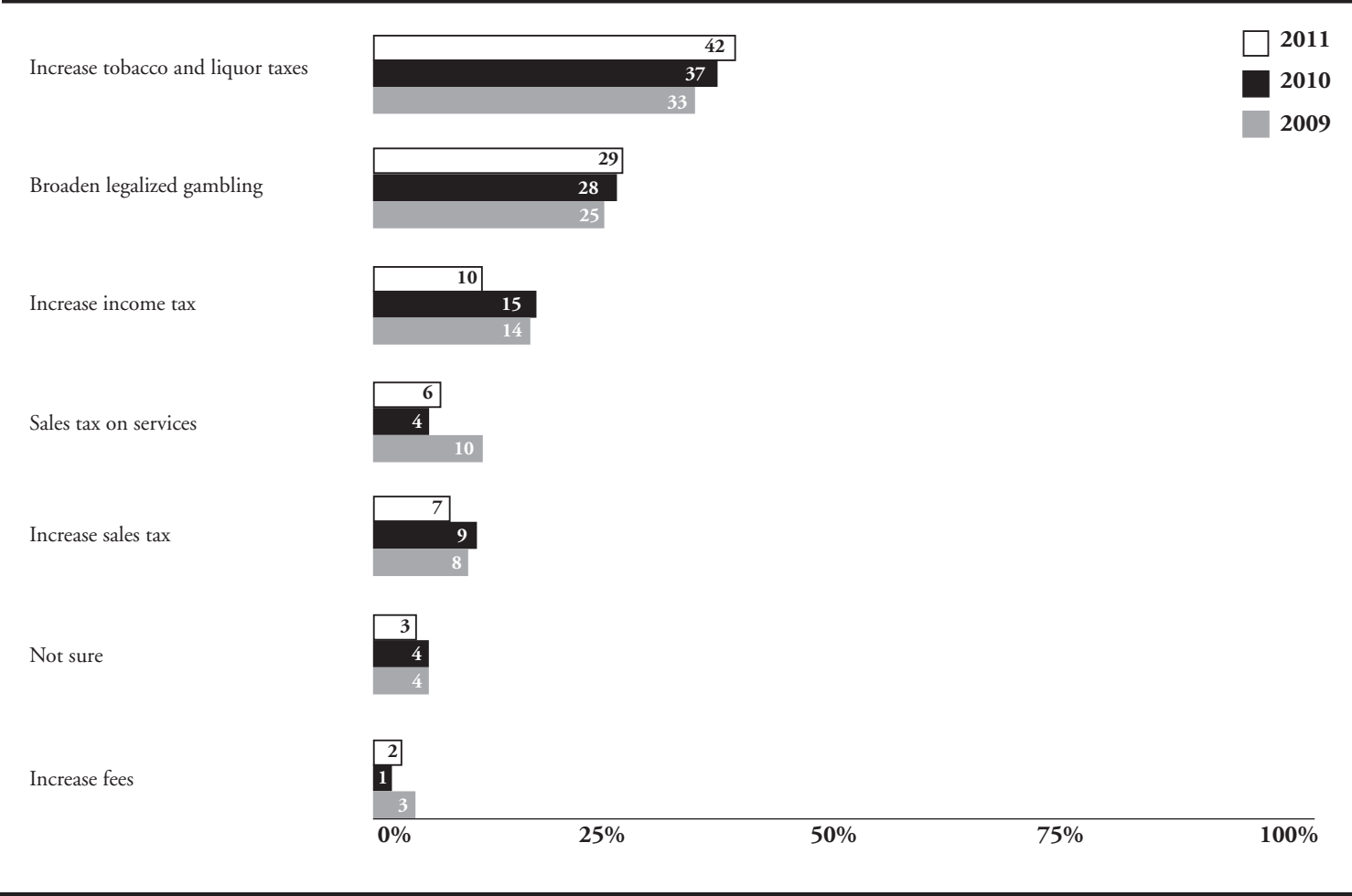
Turning to the second issue in **Table 13** (on the previous page), our data suggest that the expansion of casino gambling was popular among Illinoisans with 62% of the public giving their support for expansion. Unlike civil unions, however, support for new gambling facilities appeared more evenly distributed across various social groups within the state. Thus, liberals (57%) and conservatives (59%) displayed similar levels of support, as do Democrats (61%) and Republicans (66%). This is somewhat surprising since for some people gambling, like gay rights, touches upon issues of morality. For example, as a group, Protestants in our study were markedly less supportive of civil unions than those with no religious preference (49% versus 78%), and Protestants were also less supportive of new casinos (52% versus 69%). As in the case of civil unions, support for expanding casino gambling does vary by region, with the greatest support again observed in urban and suburban areas and the least observed in more traditional downstate regions.

By far and away, the least popular policy initiative examined in **Table 13** is lawmakers' recent decision to allow power companies to charge more for electricity as a means of financing the modernization of Illinois's electrical grid. Only 25% of the respondents in our sample approved of this measure while a large majority supported Governor Quinn's veto of the "smart grid"

legislation. Curiously, conservatives were only slightly more supportive of the legislation than liberals, but Republicans (42%) were visibly more supportive than Democrats (20%). Even so, the regional conflicts that normally accompany such partisan divisions by and large did not occur, as most downstate residents joined with residents of Chicago in opposition to hikes in their monthly electric bills. An exception to the rule is observed among residents of Central Illinois who approved the smart grid legislation at the rate of 48%. The existence of this outlier may be explained in part by the fact that Illinois' second largest provider of electricity, Ameren, has its headquarters in Peoria and is a major provider of jobs in the region.

The strongest predictor of attitudes toward the smart grid legislation was household income. Support for the bill increased systematically from a low of 6% among those in the lowest income bracket, to a high of 47% among those with family incomes of \$150,000 and above. Simply put, those who could afford the rate hikes were more likely to approve of them. Higher levels of support for grid modernization were also observed among those with college and graduate degrees, perhaps reflecting the higher incomes of people in who fall into those categories and possibly their greater awareness of the issues surrounding grid modernization.

figure 12 Increasing State Revenue



In the three most recent surveys, Illinois residents have been 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 provide guidance to policy makers who must choose between difficult options for increasing the revenue streams necessary to pay for services. **Figure 12** lists the options presented to respondents and the distribution of responses across the three years. Residents have been fairly consistent in their level of support

and opposition to the presented tax increase options. Respondents voted for increasing tobacco and liquor taxes more than any of the other means of raising revenue in each of the years followed by broadening legalized gambling. We remind readers here of the broad support expressed for more gambling casinos in the preceding section. Little support existed for any of the other options. Support for increasing tobacco and liquor taxes increased five points to 42% in 2011 while increasing the income tax decreased five points, the primary differences in this year’s survey compared with that of 2010 and 2009.

Evaluation of Public Officials

figure 13 Ratings of National and Illinois Government, 2009-2011

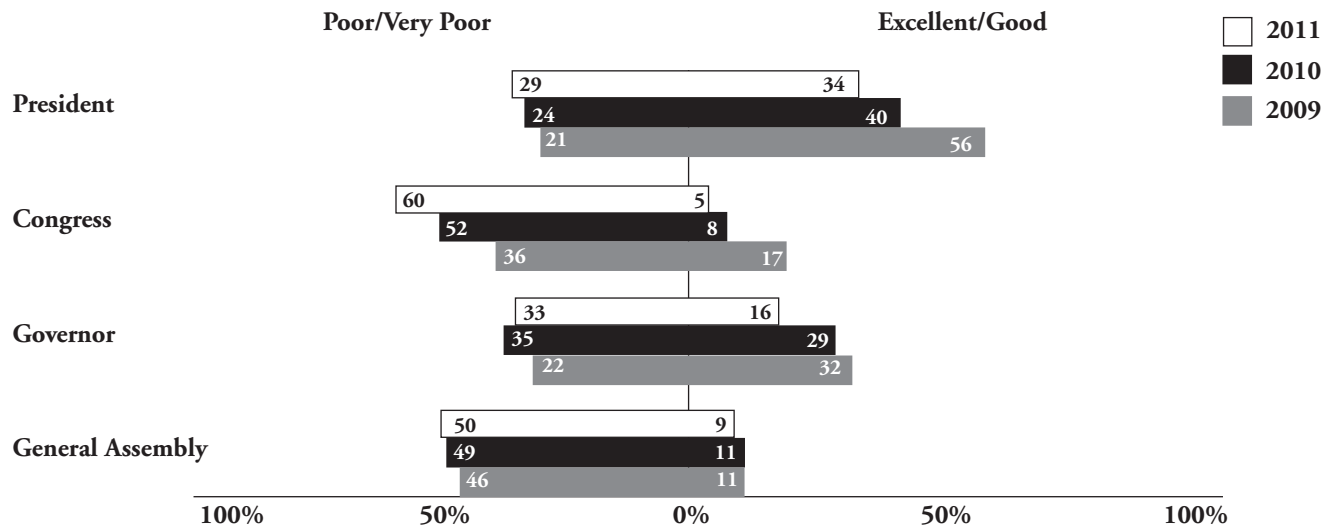
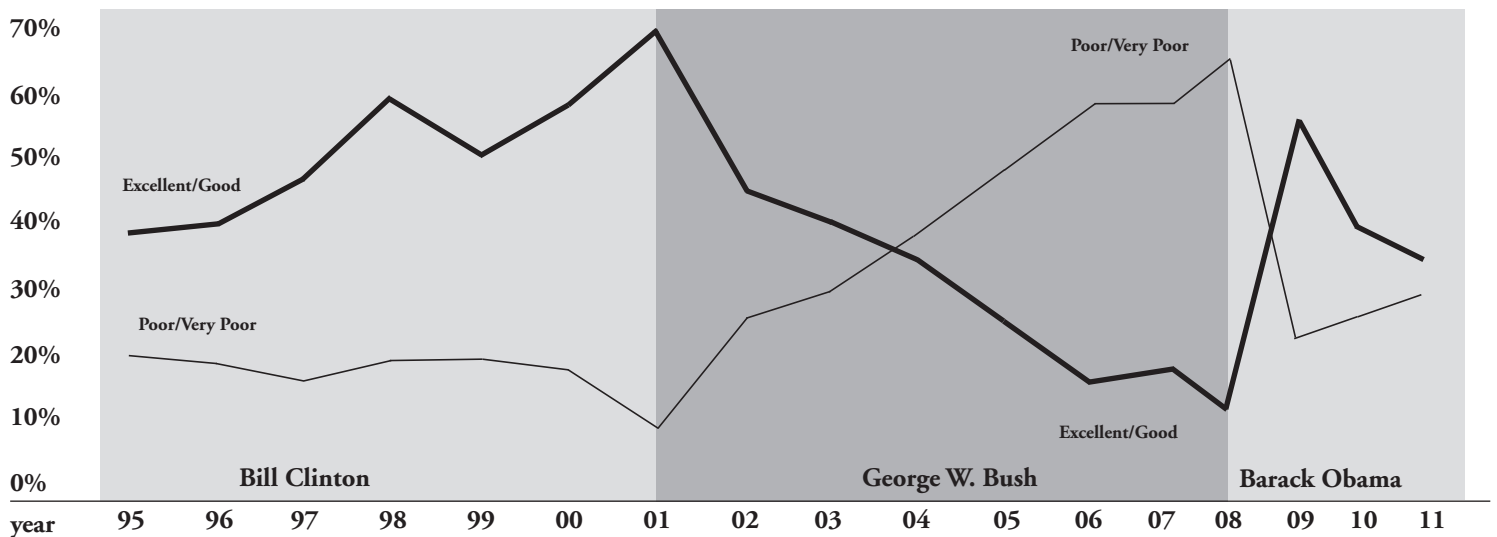


figure 14 Ratings of the President, 1995-2011



Illinois residents continued to be dissatisfied with the job state and national officials are doing. Illinoisans' rating of the job President Obama was doing as excellent or good fell to a low of 34% from 56% at the end of his first year in office and 29% rated his job performance as poor or very poor; 35% said he was doing a fair job. Almost no one, only 5%, rated the job Congress was doing as excellent or good, while 60% said it was doing a poor or very poor job. Governor Quinn also received low ratings. Only 16% felt he was doing an excellent or good job while 33% said he was doing a poor or very poor job and 48% gave him a fair rating. The Illinois General Assembly ranked little better than Congress with only 9% saying it was

doing an excellent or good job, the worse rating in 18 years of surveying. Not surprisingly, partisanship was a factor in the ratings. Among Democratic self-identifiers, 63% gave President Obama an excellent or good rating, compared with 35% among independents and only 4% of Republicans. Governor Quinn received an excellent or good rating from only 24% of Democrats, 15% of independents and 6% of Republicans. Women were considerably more positive about the job the president was doing than men; 41% of female respondents compared with 28% of male respondents gave the president an excellent or good rating. Women were also slightly more likely to consider themselves Democrats than men (32% to 26%).

Evaluation of Public Officials

figure 15 Ratings of Congress, 1995-2011

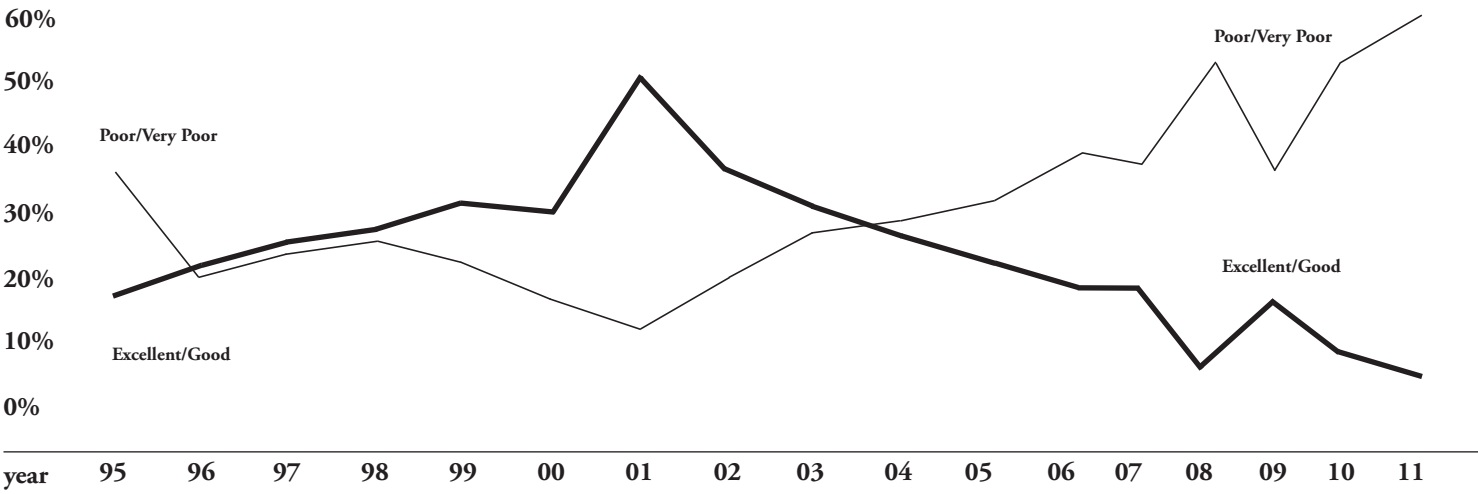


figure 16 Ratings of the Illinois General Assembly, 1995-2011

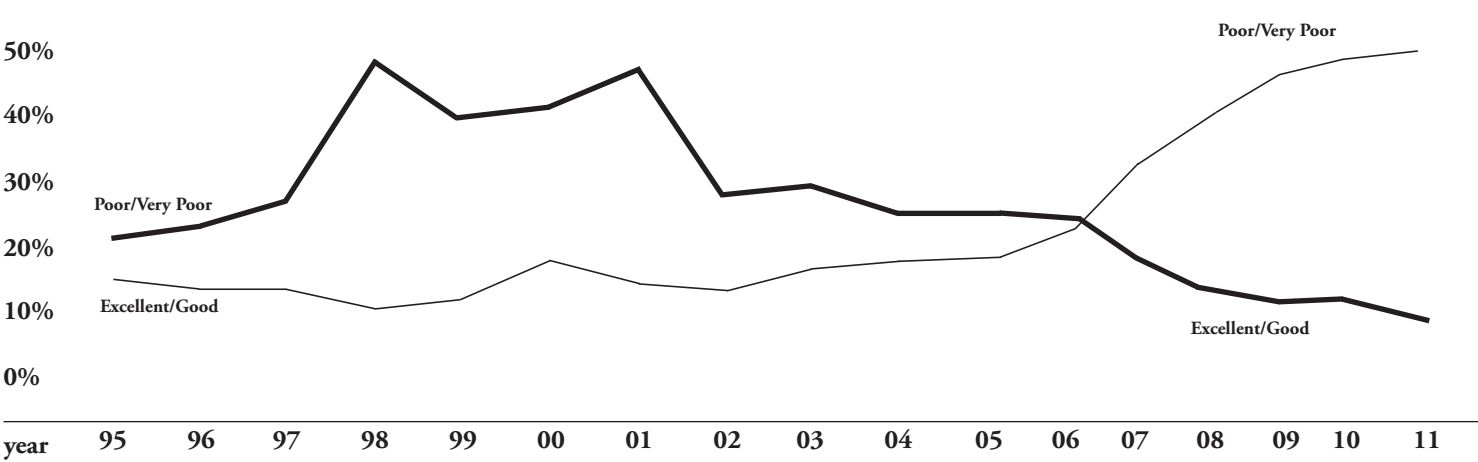
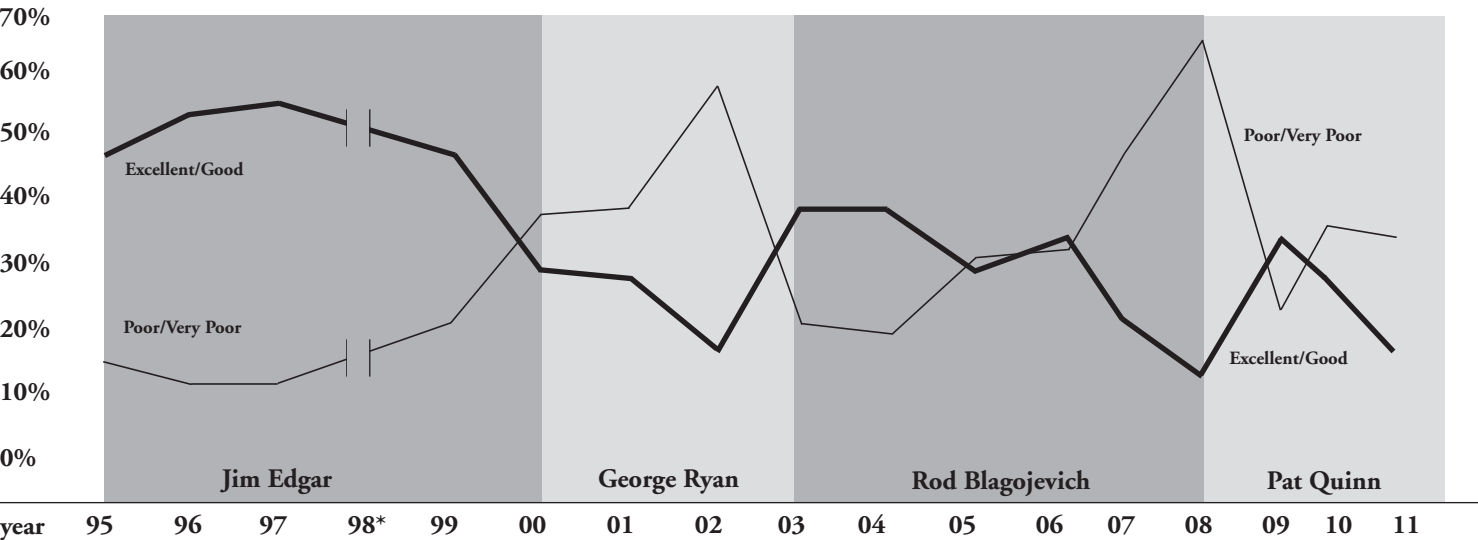


figure 17 Ratings of the Governor, 1995-2011



*results not available

Illinois *Policy* survey

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 1,221 interviews in November and December 2011. 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 202 to 205.

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 conducted 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 Julia Gommel 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 Diana Robinson, Acting Director of the Center for Governmental Studies for advice on this year's survey topics.

