



The 2000 Report on the
Illinois Policy Survey

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Introduction

Now in its sixteenth year, the *Illinois Policy Survey* is a continuing program in the Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois University. 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 important policy issues facing Illinois.

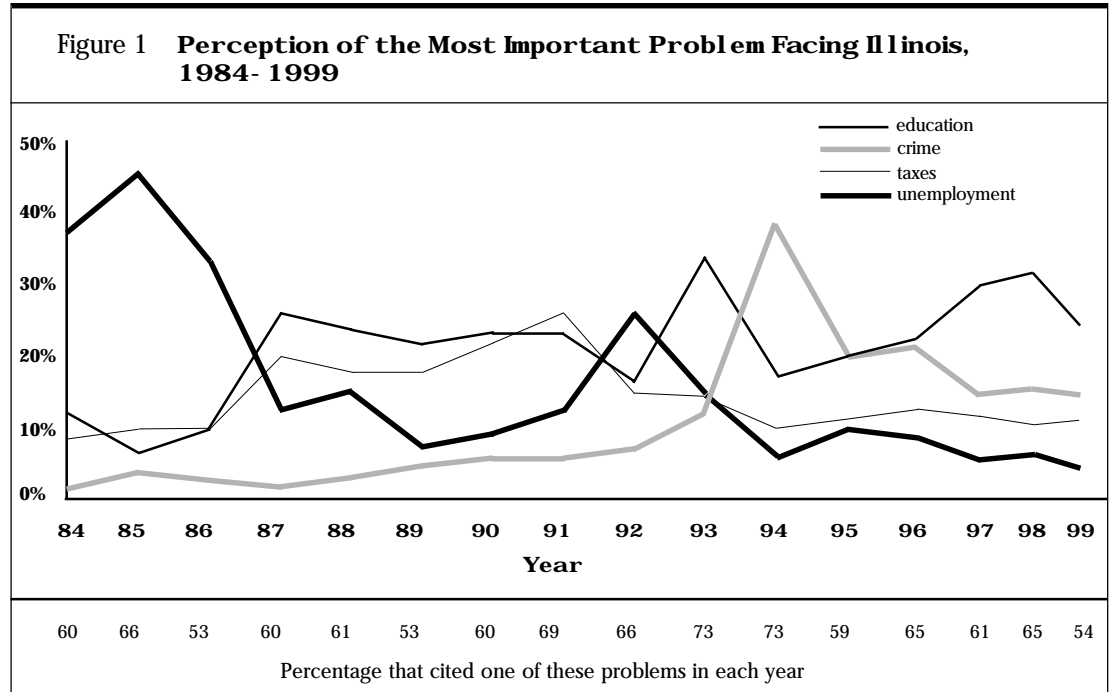
The *Illinois Policy Survey* has been conducted annually since 1984. Core questions asked every year are supplemented by questions of topical interest. The survey is open for researchers, media, public agencies, and public interest groups to sponsor questions or blocks of questions. Interested parties can contact the Center for Governmental Studies at 815-753-1918.

The result of survey and weighting procedures is a representative statewide sample of the English-speaking adult population of Illinois that is accessible by telephone. The conservative 95 percent confidence interval for a sample of 1179 individuals is plus or minus 2.9 percent. This means that 95 out of a 100 times the percentage in the population will fall within 2.9 percentage points of the sample percentage. Sampling error among subgroups (such as region) will exceed 2.9 percent and will vary with the size of each group. Non-sampling sources of error in this and other surveys include question wording, question order, respondent misunderstanding, and other problems inherent in measuring public opinion.

Education tops the list of concerns for Illinois residents (see **Figure 1**). Nearly one-fourth of respondents stated that education is the most important problem facing Illinois today. This is a small decrease from 1998, when about one-third cited education as the most important problem. Concern about crime remains at 1998 levels, with 14 percent of respondents considering crime to be the most important problem. The percentage citing taxes and spending is also stable at 11 percent. Although the percentage of Illinois residents who regard unemployment as the number one problem is close to the 1998 level at 5 percent, unemployment gives up fourth place to two other concerns. One in ten respondents cited ethics in government as the most important problem; another one in ten cited roads and highways.

Most Important Problem

Education Remains the Number One Problem in Illinois



In **Table 1** it can be seen that education is of more concern to women, those under 65 years of age, those at higher levels of income, and those with higher levels of education. Crime is more frequently cited by those living in Chicago and in suburban Cook, as well as by young adults. Worry about crime is higher at lower levels of income and education. Men are more likely than women to cite taxes as the most important problem. Individuals with some college or vocational training are more likely to be concerned about unemployment than college graduates. Concern about unemployment is highest in Southern Illinois.

Table 1 Most Important Problem in 1999

What do you consider the most important problem facing the state of Illinois today?

	Education	Crime	Taxes	Unemployment
Statewide	24 %	14 %	11 %	5 %
Region				
Chicago	22	23	6	4
Suburban Cook	23	23	12	4
Collar Counties	25	13	9	2
Northern Illinois	25	6	13	6
Central Illinois	26	9	16	3
Southern Illinois	26	8	15	14
Age				
18-24	20	34	5	3
25-44	26	12	10	4
45-64	29	11	14	6
65+	15	11	12	6
Sex				
Male	21	12	13	5
Female	28	16	9	5
Education				
High School or less	18	18	14	5
Some College	22	15	9	7
College Graduate	31	10	10	3
Income				
Under 35,000	15	18	9	6
35,000 - 56,000	22	15	12	6
56,000 +	36	10	12	4

*The collar counties are DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will.

For Illinois residents, public education from kindergarten to 12th grade is the first priority for state spending. Nearly three-fourths of respondents stated state spending for public schools should be increased. **Figure 2** shows the percentage support for increased spending for specific programs in 1999 compared to 1998. Increased positive responses to medical care puts this in second place as a spending priority. Support for spending on job training for the unemployed decreased, although at 58 percent this can still be seen as an important program area for the public. Support for spending on environmental efforts increased in 1999.

The ranking in **Figure 2** includes three questions asked for the first time in 1999. One of the new questions asks about training those who are employed in order to improve or upgrade their skills. This is an increasingly important issue because of technological change and the need for new skills in the workplace. Spending on roads, asked in previous years, is replaced with two questions: New construction of roads and highways, and repairs of existing roads and highways. It can be seen that support diverges for these efforts, with repairing roads and highways receiving more positive responses than spending for new construction.

Table 2 presents the percentage of people supporting increased spending on public schools, medical care, and job training for the unemployed according to region and party affiliation. The last column shows the percentage of positive responses to the ten spending questions above. Support for increased spending is generally highest in Chicago, with suburban Cook and the Southern counties also showing high support in these three program areas. Support for increased spending varies with party affiliation. It can be seen, however, that a majority of people, whether self-described democrats, republicans, or independents support increased spending on education.

Priorities For State Spending

Support for Public Education Remains High

Figure 2 Support for Specific Increases in State Spending: 1999 compared to 1998

I'd like to ask you some questions about spending by the state government in Springfield. Please bear in mind that eventually all government spending comes out of the taxes that you and other Illinois residents pay. As I mention each program area, tell me whether you think the amount now being spent should be increased, kept at the present level, or decreased.

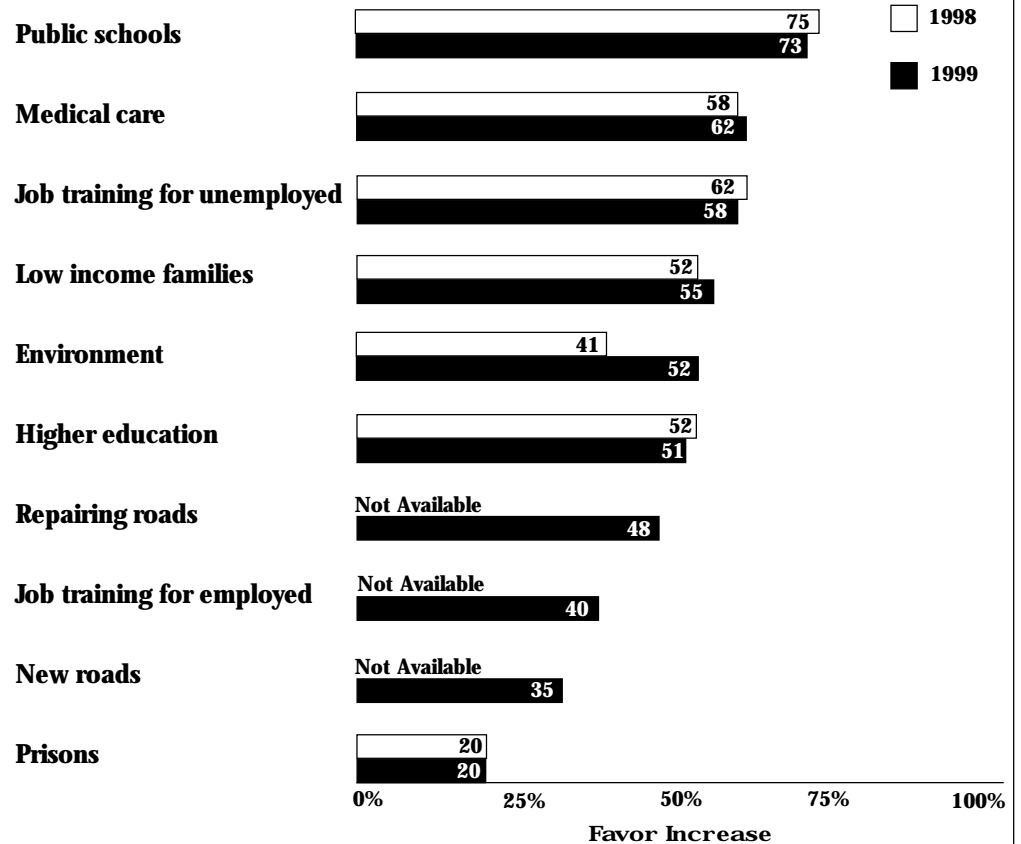


Table 2 Support for Increased State Spending in three Areas

	Public Schools	Medical Care	Job Training for Unemployed	Avg. Program Support
Statewide	73%	62%	58%	49%
Region				
Chicago	81	73	68	55
Suburban Cook	74	64	63	50
Collar Counties	67	48	49	43
Northern Illinois	67	54	54	43
Central Illinois	69	59	50	44
Southern Illinois	74	68	57	49
Party Affiliation				
Republican	62	44	47	41
Democrat	81	72	66	54
Independent	73	62	59	48

A majority of people interviewed for the 1999 *Illinois Policy Survey* reported being satisfied with the way things are going in Illinois. Satisfaction has risen since this question was first asked in 1992. The trend in satisfaction can be seen in **Figure 3**, which shows the percentage of people reporting satisfaction each year from 1992 to 1999.

At the same time, nearly 50 percent of people think the people of Illinois are better off financially than they were four years ago. The belief that people are better off financially has increased each year since 1992 as can be seen in **Figure 4**. A generally negative assessment of financial conditions was seen in 1992, when less than 10 percent thought the people of Illinois were better off than they had been before. At that time 62 percent thought the people of Illinois were worse off financially. By 1996 the percentage thinking the people of Illinois were better off financially matched the percentage thinking they were worse off. In 1997 for the first time a higher percentage of people thought financial conditions were better than they had been four years before. The 1999 percentage of people who think financial conditions in Illinois are better than they were four years ago is at its highest level in the 1990s.

Financial conditions are one of several factors that could lead people to being optimistic about the way things are going in Illinois. In the 1990s the general level of satisfaction has gone up at the same time as the perception that people are better off financially.

The Public Mood

Optimism for State and Self Continues

Figure 3 How Things Are Going in Illinois: 1992–1999
In general, how satisfied are you with the way things are going in Illinois?

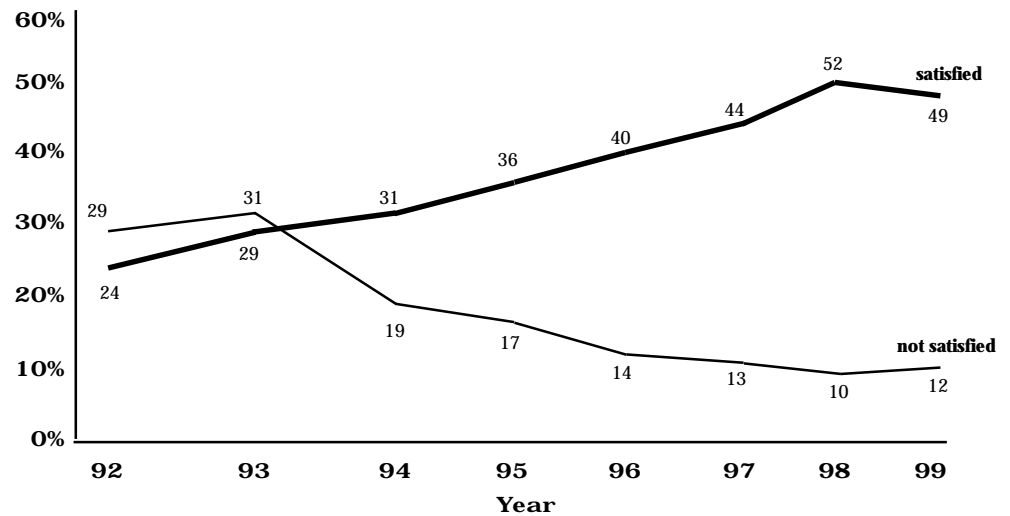
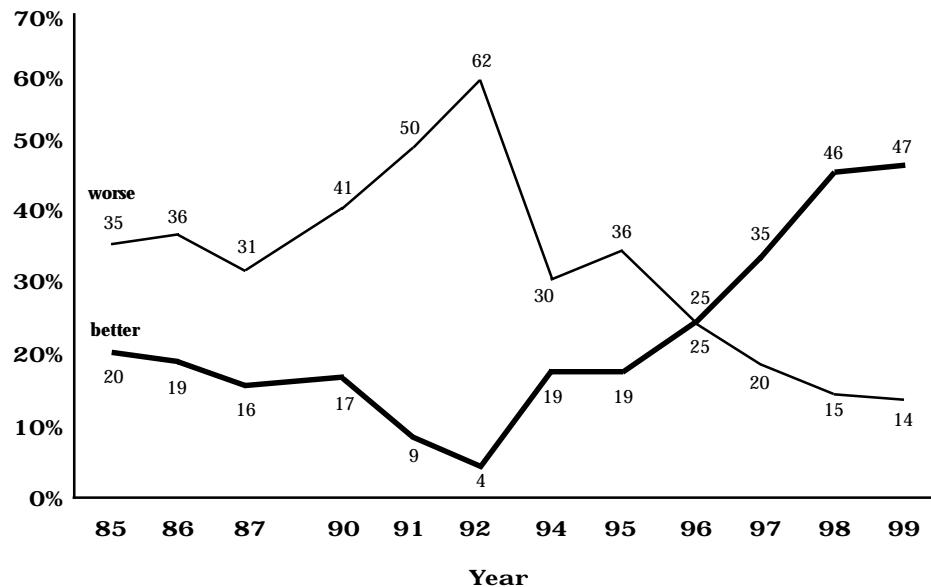


Figure 4 Financial Conditions in Illinois, 1985–1999
Would you say that at the present time the people of Illinois are better off financially, worse off, or just about the same as they were four years ago?



The Public Mood, continued

In the 1999 survey, nearly half the people in Illinois reported being personally better off financially than they were four years ago. **Figure 5** shows the percentage reporting being better off and the percentage reporting being worse off in the years this question was asked. Personal financial conditions, like financial conditions in Illinois, were at a low in 1992 and have been on the increase since then.

Regional differences in reporting personal financial conditions were not evident in 1999. This is a change from 1998, when residents of both the Southern counties and the Northern counties were less likely than others in the state to be optimistic about their personal financial situation. **Table 3** shows the percentage of people in different groups reporting being better off financially in 1998 and 1999. Except for the absence of regional differences, the 1999 findings maintain the same pattern as 1998, with males, individuals in younger age groups, and individuals at higher levels of income and education being more likely to report being better off financially than they were four years ago.

Figure 5 Personal Financial Condition, 1984–1999

How about you and your family, compared to four years ago? Are you better off financially, just about the same, or worse off?

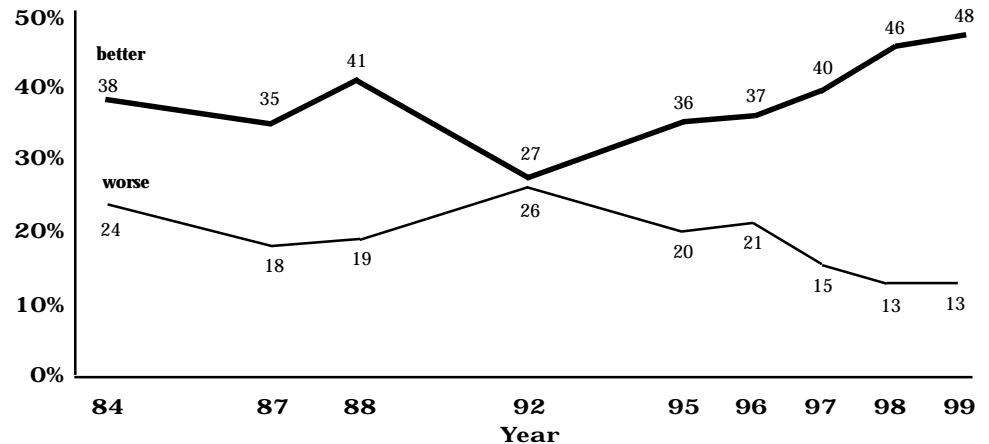


Table 3 Who Reports Being Better off Financially

	1998	1999
Statewide	46 %	48 %
Region		
Chicago	48	48
Suburban Cook	49	50
Collar Counties	50	46
Northern Illinois	38	49
Central Illinois	46	47
Southern Illinois	35	44
Age		
18-24	55	69
25-44	54	59
45-64	42	39
65+	25	22
Sex		
Male	52	53
Female	40	42
Education		
High School or less	30	40
Vocational or Some College	47	50
College Graduate	59	53
Income		
Under 35,000	31	37
35,000 - 56,000	44	48
56,000 +	63	61

The state educational system has been an important issue interest area throughout the history of the *Illinois Policy Survey*. Illinois residents consistently cite education as one of the top problems facing the state, as well as one of the top priorities for increased state spending. People are asked in most years to rate the quality of public education in Illinois and in their own community. In the last two years people also rated the quality of non-public education in their community.

The quality of local public schools received higher ratings overall than did the quality of public schools in Illinois, as can be seen in **Figure 6**. Illinois residents traditionally rate their local public schools higher than they rate public education in Illinois. This figure also shows that non-public schools in the community received very high ratings, with 83 percent of the people stating they were excellent or good, and only 2 percent stating they were poor or very poor.

Figure 7 shows the ratings of local schools statewide and according to regions, comparing the 1999 ratings to those in 1998. The statewide rating remains stable over the two years. Breaking the public school ratings down by regions reveals differences among the regions. The most notable is the relatively low rating by Chicago residents of their local schools. Suburban Cook County has the highest percentage rating local schools as excellent or good.

Since the state's educational system is a dominant topic of concern for Illinois residents, questions about education appear every year on the *Illinois Policy Survey*. In 1999 respondents were asked for their opinions on a series of proposals about the funding of education. Two questions related to the current debate on increased choice of schools were repeated from the 1998 poll. One proposal is to allow parents to choose among public schools, with state funding going to the school the student attends.

Education

Perception of School Quality

Figure 6 Evaluation of Public Schools in Illinois and in One's Own Community

In general, how would you rate the overall quality of public schools in Illinois...in your own community or neighborhood...the nonpublic schools in your community?

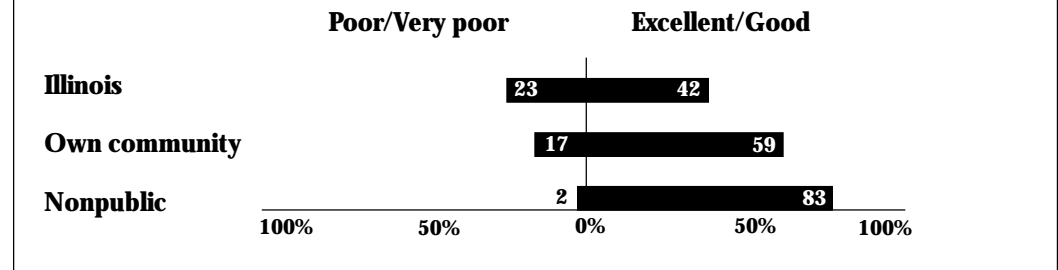
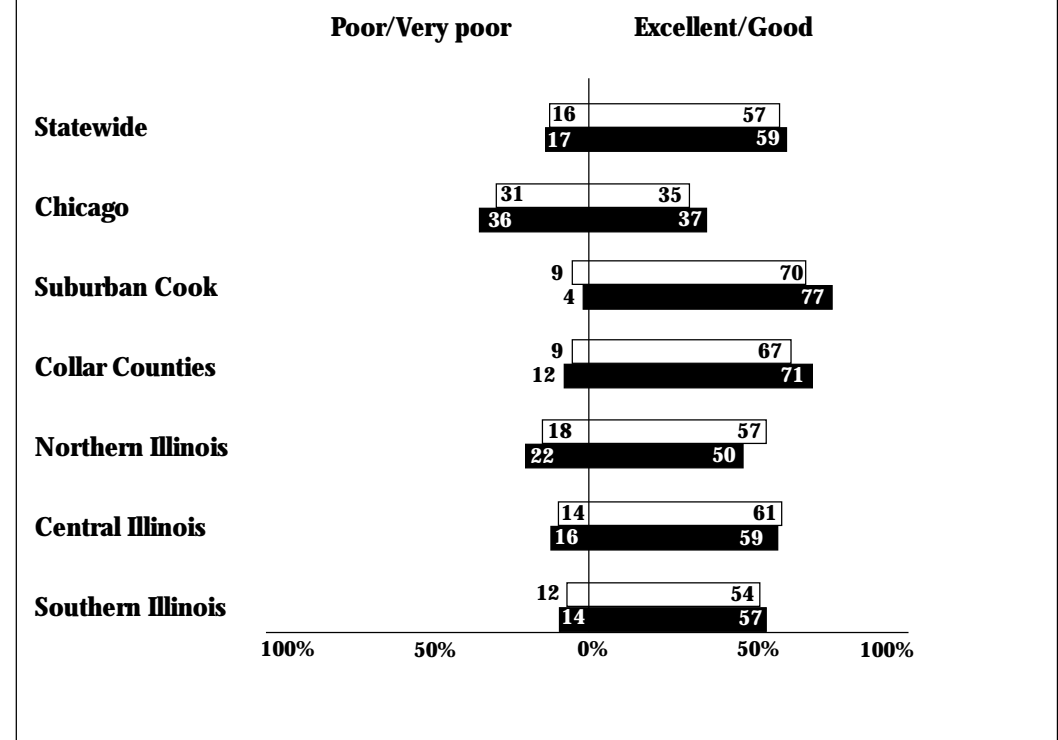


Figure 7 Evaluation of One's Own Community Schools, 1998 and 1999



The other proposal is to extend this choice to private schools, and to provide state funding through vouchers for students attending private schools. **Figure 8** shows stability in support for both proposals, with about half the respondents favoring each proposal in both 1998 and 1999.

Respondents were asked whether they favored providing more state aid to districts in greater need. While 59 percent stated they would favor this provision, this was down from the 64 percent in favor in 1998. **Figure 9** shows these results along with those for two other proposals for funding education.

The current system for funding public education relies heavily on local property taxes. Although 55 percent of people initially stated they would favor shifting to an income tax method of funding, this percentage dropped dramatically when people were asked if they would favor this proposal even if it would result in less money coming into their own school district.

The other proposal that people responded to was to distribute property taxes from businesses throughout the state, rather than to keep these taxes in the district. Over 60 percent of respondents said they would favor this proposal. Again the percentage in favor dropped when people were reminded this might mean their own district would receive less money than under the current system.

Education, continued

Figure 8 Support for Choice in Education, 1998 and 1999

Please tell me whether you favor or oppose the following ways to change public education in Illinois (or do you have no opinion) . . .

. . . allowing parents to choose which public school their children will attend, regardless of where they live. State funding would go to the school a student attends.

. . . extending this type of school choice to include private schools as well, with the state providing vouchers to cover its share of the cost.

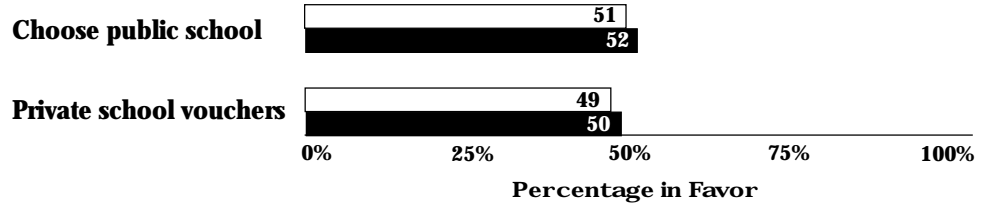


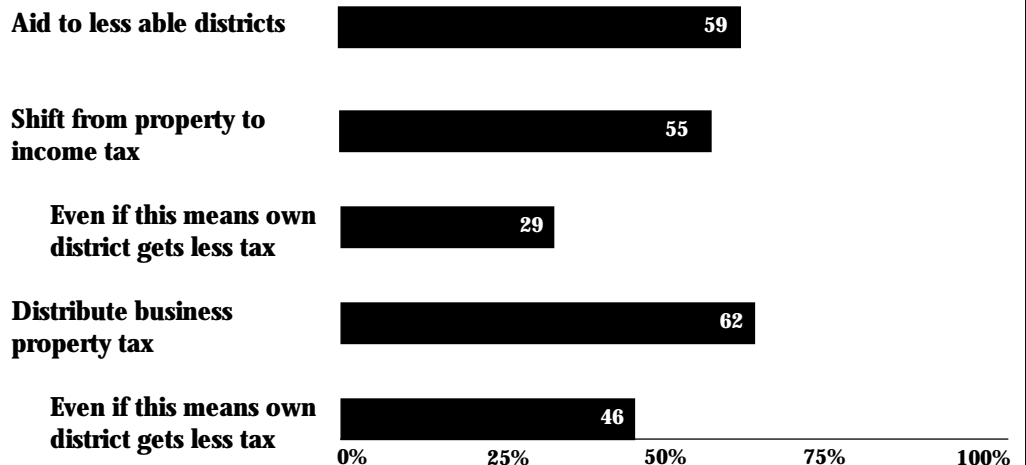
Figure 9 Support for Changes in Funding of Education

Please tell me whether you favor or oppose . . .

. . . providing more state aid to school districts with less ability to fund their own education programs.

. . . the proposal that elementary and high school education should be paid for by increasing the state income taxes and reducing local property taxes.

Should school property taxes paid by industry and business go to local school districts where the businesses are located, or should they be divided among all school districts in the state?



People mentioned funding issues most often when asked the most important problem facing schools. Lack of funding, overcrowding, deteriorating facilities, lack of resources including books and computers, and cutbacks in programs collectively account for about one-third of the responses. People are worried about school security, crime, violence, drugs and gangs; over 17 percent mentioned one of these problems. About 12 percent mentioned problems with the quality of teaching. One in ten respondents cited discipline problems; one in twenty mentioned lack of academic standards; nearly the same number mentioned lack of parental involvement (see **Table 4**).

Respondents answered a series of questions about changes in public education that would require additional tax dollars. **Figure 10** shows the percentage of people who would favor the suggested changes. The highest percentage of “strongly favor” responses went to reducing class sizes; over 80 percent stated they either favored or strongly favored this change. Fixing run down school buildings received the highest supportive consensus, with 88 percent either in favor or strongly in favor of this. Putting more computers in the classroom, increasing security at schools, and paying teachers more were each supported by about three-fourths of the respondents.

Survey respondents reported at least a modest willingness to pay for changes in schools. Seven out of ten respondents stated they would be willing to have their taxes increased by \$100 a year to pay for the changes they supported. One-third said they would be willing to have \$200 a year added to their tax bill, and one-tenth would accept a \$500 increase.

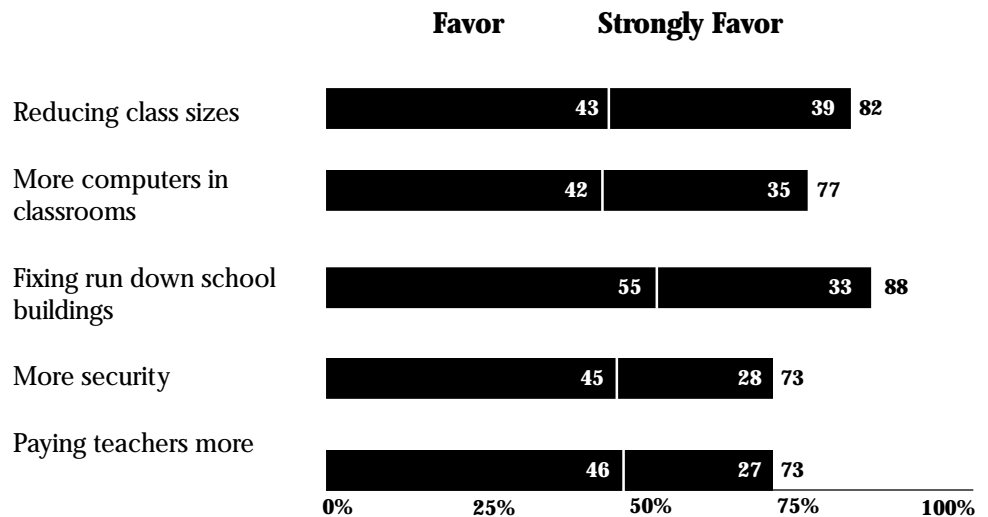
Education, continued

Table 4 What is the Most Important Problem Facing Schools Today?
This was an open ended question, with no suggested response.

Funding issues	35%
Drugs, gangs, violence	17%
Teaching quality	12%
Discipline	10%
Lack of academic standards	5%
Parental involvement	4%
Other problems	17%

Figure 10 Support For Changes in Public Schools

I am going to read a list of possible changes in public schools that would cost more money and require additional tax dollars. Please tell me if you would favor or oppose making each of the following changes in your community to improve your public schools.



The 1999 *Illinois Policy Survey* introduced questions aimed at assessing public perceptions about managed care. Many health care coverage plans include some provisions intended to control costs. Some plans have incentives for people to use doctors and hospitals who have joined a network of providers. Others require individual enrollees to receive all of their covered care within the plan's network; these kind of plans generally require individuals to have a designated primary care physician.

In the current survey, 63 percent of respondents with health care coverage stated their health insurance plan requires them to consult with a primary care physician before seeing another physician or a specialist.

The description of managed care provided for the questions in the current survey is seen in **Figure 11**, which presents the responses to questions about managed care. The managed care group includes respondents who stated their insurance requires them to see a primary care physician before seeing another physician. The other group consists of those with health care coverage who stated their plan did not require a primary physician referral in order to cover visits to other physicians. People in the managed care group appear to have a more positive perception of managed care. They are more likely to agree that managed care plans maintain quality, and less likely to agree that these plans limit choices. More people in the managed care group thought managed care can limit the growth of medical care costs, and more were in favor of both Medicare and Medicaid using managed care. The managed care group is less likely, however, to report satisfaction with their health care coverage (see **Figure 12**).

Current Issues

Managed Care

Figure 11 **Managed Care**

Now I want to ask your opinion about medical insurance programs called "managed care," some of which are called Health Maintenance Organizations, or HMOs. This kind of health care coverage is intended to manage access to and provision of care, and typically requires patients to get permission from a primary care physician before seeing a specialist. I am going to ask you if you agree or disagree with the following statements about managed care.

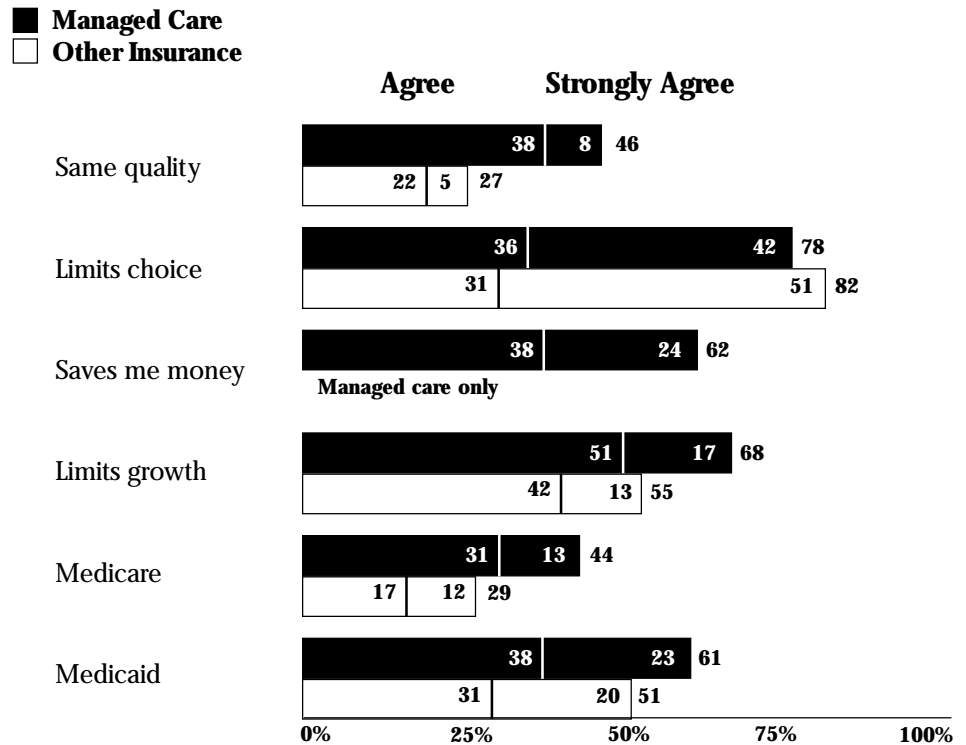
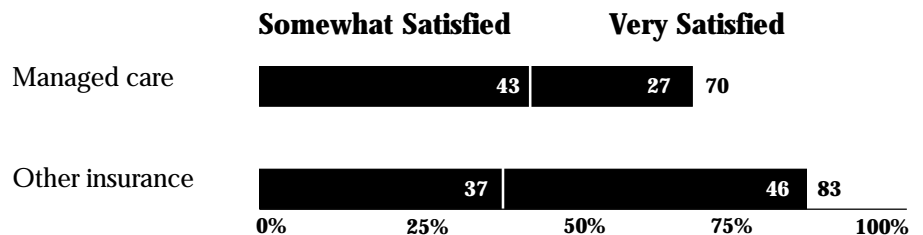


Figure 12 **Satisfaction with Health Care Coverage**

All things considered, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your current health care coverage plan.



For the fourth year in a row, general contentment with public conditions was reflected in high evaluations of public officials. President Clinton was rated as excellent or good by 51 percent of the public (see **Figure 13**). This is a decrease from 1998, when 59 percent gave Clinton either excellent or good ratings. The percentage who state that the President was doing a poor or very poor job remained at the 1998 level at 20 percent (see **Figure 14**).

The US Congress received excellent or good ratings from 29 percent of the public. Throughout the 1980s, Congress usually received an evaluation of excellent or good from well over a fourth of Illinois residents and poor/very poor ratings by about 13 percent (See **Figure 15**). In the 1990s, however, positive ratings dropped to a low of 9 percent in 1992, while negatives rose to almost 50 percent in that year. Continuing an upward trend since 1995, high ratings for Congress were back up to 30 percent in 1998, and held at 29 percent in 1999.

This is the first time for ratings of Governor Ryan to appear in this report. A plurality of respondents gave Governor Ryan a favorable rating in fall 1999.

Evaluation of Public Officials

Public Officials See High Ratings for the Third Year in a Row

Figure 13 Ratings of National and Illinois Government, 1999

How would you rate the job President Clinton...the U.S. Congress...the governor...the Illinois legislature is doing?

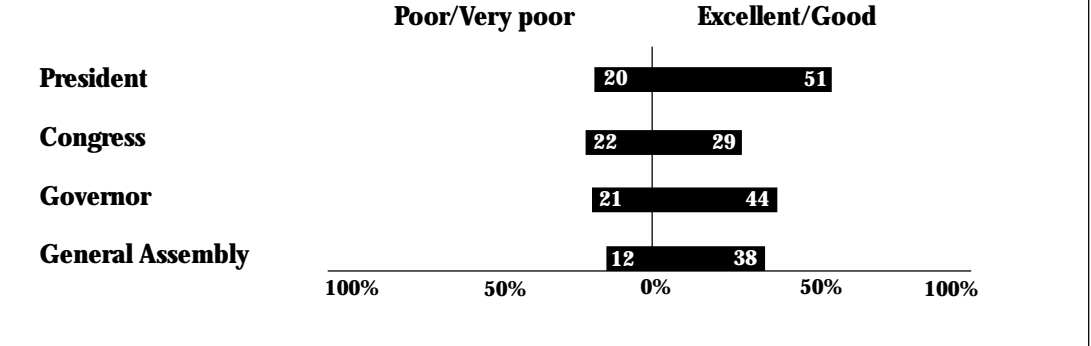


Figure 14 Ratings of the President, 1984- 1999

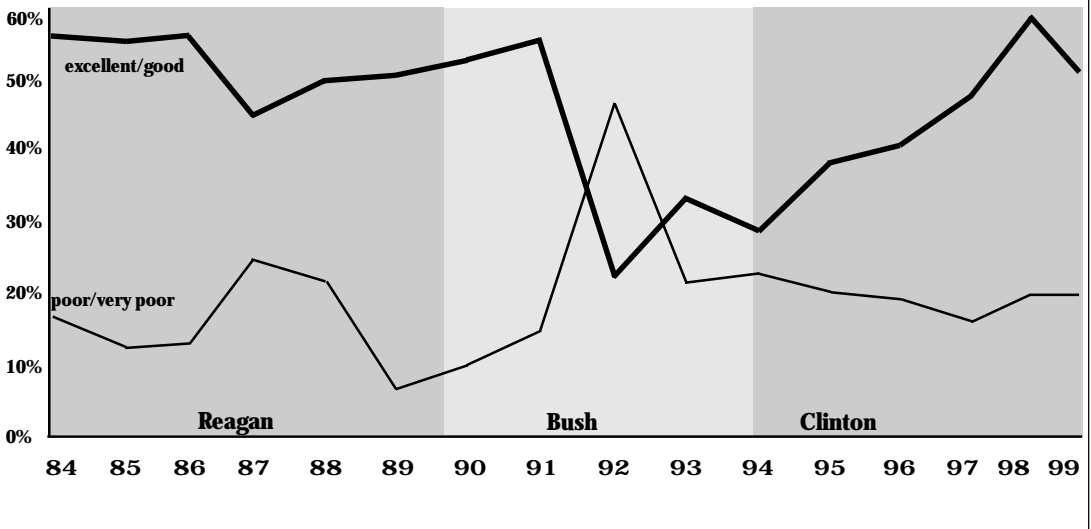
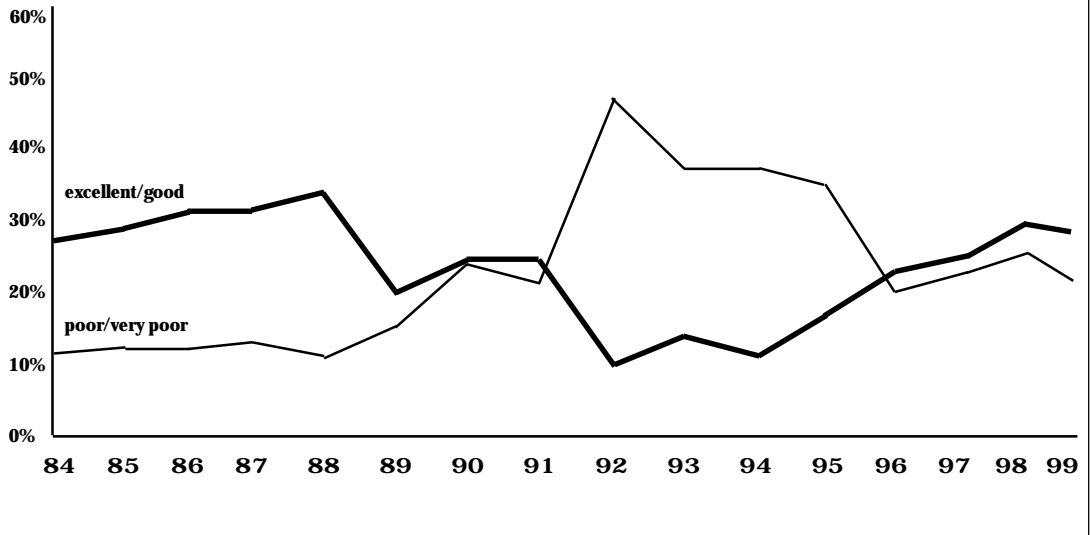


Figure 15 Ratings of Congress, 1984- 1999



Evaluation of Public Officials

During the early 1990s all political institutions saw a decrease in positive assessments, and the Illinois General Assembly was no exception. However, the second half of the decade has seen an increase in positive ratings, with the highest for the 1990s in 1998 (see **Figure 16**).

A summary of the evaluation of public officials in Illinois for the past several years can be seen in **Table 5**. It shows difference scores for each political office from 1993 to 1999. A difference score is created by subtracting the percentage of negative ratings from the percentage of positives. A positive score indicates there are more excellent/good than poor/very poor evaluations. A negative score indicates the opposite - there are more people who gave the poor/very poor evaluation than the excellent or good evaluation.

In the four years since 1995 difference scores have been positive for the public offices on the survey.

Overall, 1999 saw a continuation of the more positive assessment of public officials and public institutions that has been evident since 1996, seen in both the public mood and the evaluations of major public elective offices.

Figure 16 Ratings of the Illinois General Assembly, 1984- 1998

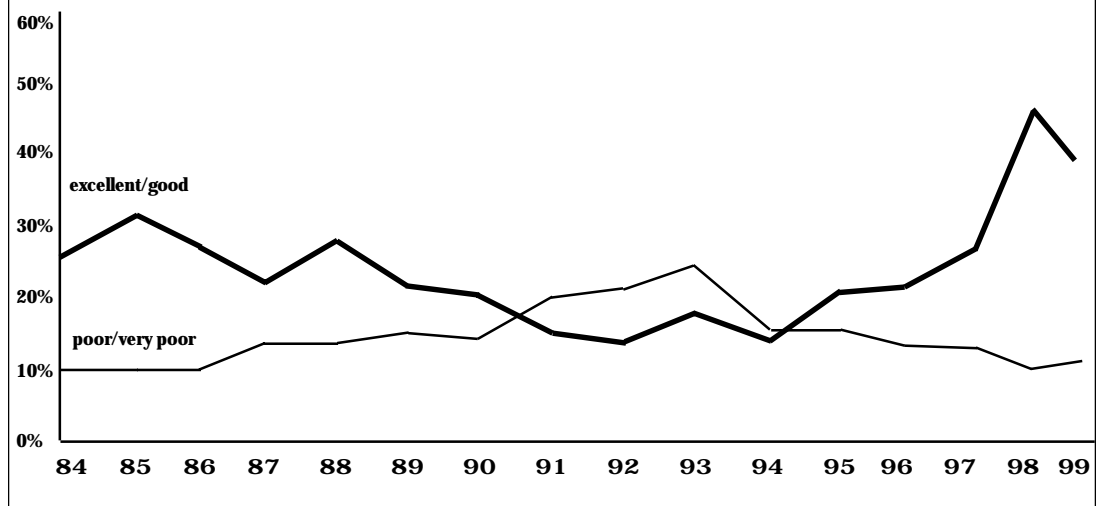
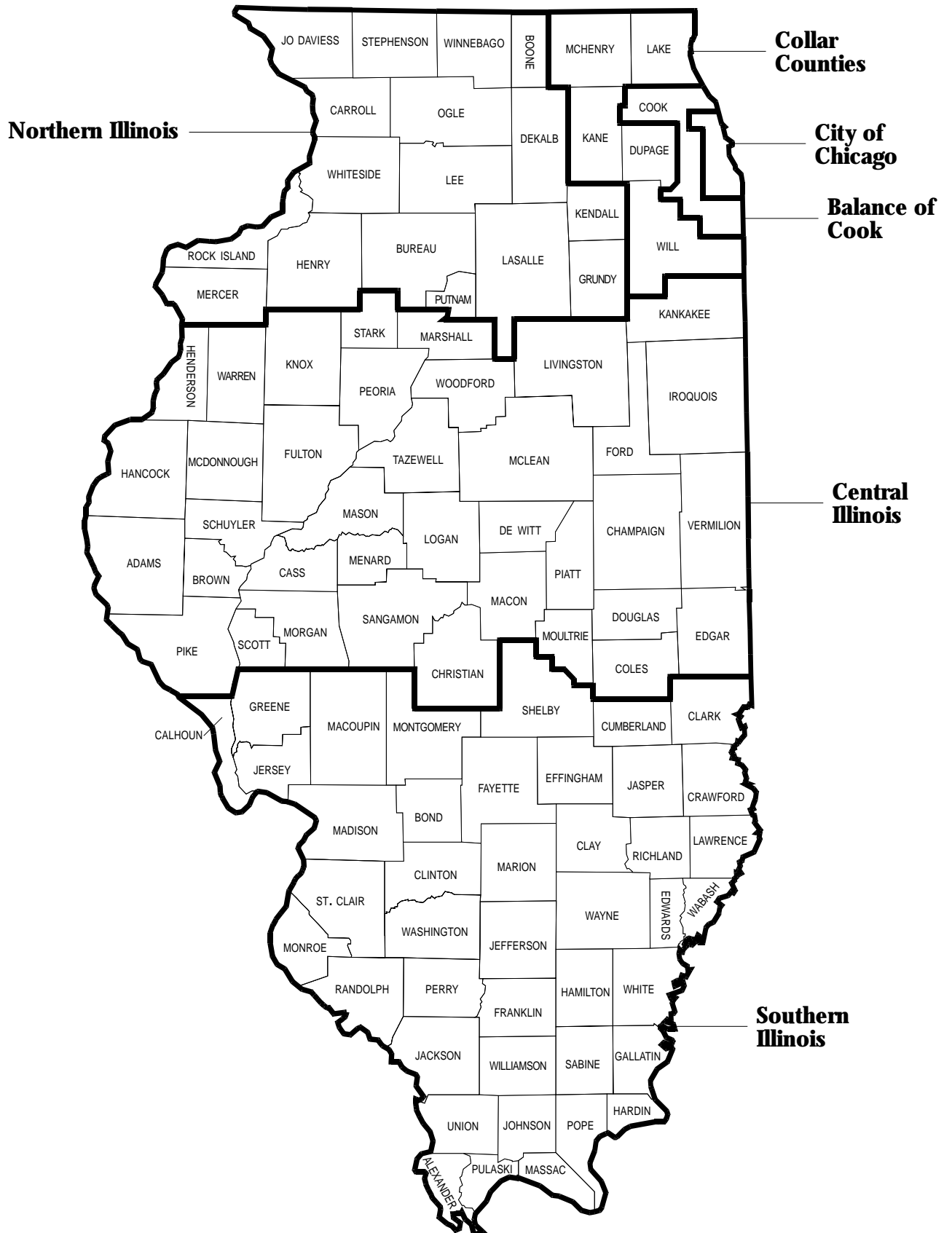


Table 5 Difference Scores for Public Offices
(Excellent/good minus poor/very poor)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
President	14	7	18	26	32	39	31
Congress	-23	-26	-16	4	3	5	7
Governor	19	33	33	39	42	NA	23
General Assembly	-5	-1	5	9	14	36	26

A positive score indicates more excellent/good than poor/very poor.
A negative score indicates more poor/very poor than excellent/good.

Regional Map of Illinois



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) of Northern Illinois University completed 1179 interviews of Illinois residents from October through November of 1999. Interviews were conducted and responses recorded using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system.

The *Illinois Policy Survey* uses a disproportionately stratified sample, divided into six regions: Chicago, the balance of Cook County, five collar counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will), northern Illinois, central Illinois, and southern Illinois. Sample sizes in the regions varied from 192 to 205.

A two-stage sampling strategy was used. For the first stage of sampling, GENESYS Sampling Systems provided a sample of telephone numbers in each of the regions drawn according to random-digit-dialing (RDD) methodology. 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 old 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 living in the household.

Data were weighted to restore equal probability of selection at each of the two stages of sampling. Unequal probability of selection from the different regions, and unequal probability of selection at the household level were both accounted for in the initial weight. A post-stratification adjustment to the initial weight was calculated using a 4 by 2 grouping of sex and age group for the strata. Stratum weights for the state were constructed using 1999 current population for Illinois obtained from Claritas, Inc. The weighted sample was adjusted back to the original sample size.

The result of survey and weighting procedures is a representative statewide sample of the English-speaking adult population of Illinois that is accessible by telephone. The conservative 95 percent confidence interval for a sample of 1179 individuals is plus or minus 2.9 percent. This means that 95 out of a 100 times the percentage in the population will fall within 2.9 percentage points of the sample percentage. Sampling error among subgroups (such as region) will exceed 2.9 percent and will vary with the size of each group. Non-sampling sources of error in this and other surveys include question wording, question order, respondent misunderstanding, and other problems inherent in measuring public opinion.

Acknowledgments

Telephone interviewing was carried out at the Public Opinion Laboratory under the direction of Robin Bebel, Operations Manager. Many thanks to the POL interviewers who spent nearly 400 hours talking to the people of Illinois and recording their conversations. Wendy Tritt, graphic designer for the Center for Governmental Studies, produced the layout and graphics for this report.