

The 2001 Report on the  
**Illinois**  
Policy Survey



Center for Governmental Studies  
Northern Illinois University

# **The 2001 Report on the Illinois Policy Survey**

**Cynthia Nelson**  
Center for Governmental Studies  
Northern Illinois University

## Contents

4	Most Important Problem
5	Priorities for State Spending
6	The Quality of Life in Illinois
8	Education
12	Evaluation of Public Officials
14	Regional Map of Illinois
15	Methodology and Acknowledgments

## Introduction

Now in its seventeenth 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 policy issues facing Illinois.

The sampling frame for this survey is all residences with telephones in Illinois. A disproportionate sampling strategy was used to achieve an approximately equal number of respondents in each of six geographical areas of Illinois. One thousand two hundred six men and women 18 years of age or older were interviewed by telephone in the Fall of 2000. 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 1206 individuals is plus or minus 2.9. This means there is a 95 percent likelihood the population percentage will fall within 2.9 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.

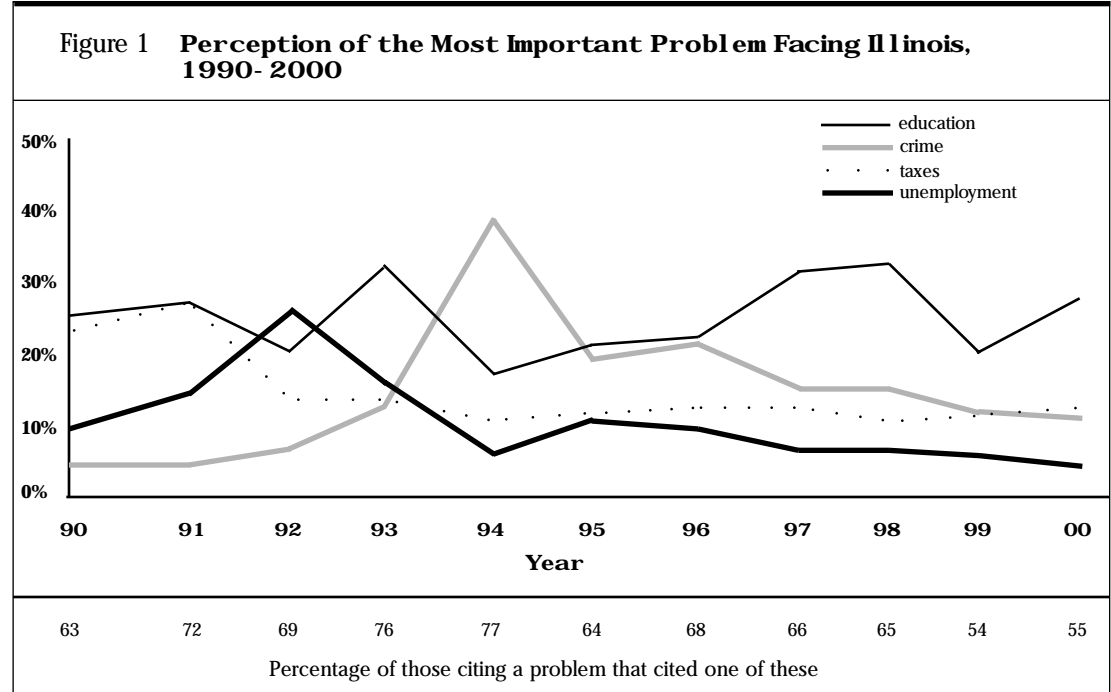
The Illinois Policy Survey has been conducted annually since 1984. Core questions asked every year are supplemented by questions of topical interest. The survey is open for researchers, media, public agencies, and public interest groups to sponsor questions on the survey. Further information regarding this study is available by writing the Center for Governmental Studies, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115, or by phoning 815 753-1918. This report can also be found on the World Wide Web. Visit us at <http://www.cgsniu.org>.

# Most Important Problem

## Education Remains the Number One Problem in Illinois

Education leads the list of concerns of Illinois residents for the sixth year in a row. When asked the most important problem facing the state today, just over one in four respondents cited education. **Figure 1** shows the percentage naming education, crime, taxes and state spending, and unemployment as the number one problem since 1990. Concern for crime was mentioned by slightly more than one in ten respondents. About the same number mentioned taxes or state spending, either stating taxes are too high or they disagree in the manner in which their taxes are spent. Less than one in twenty respondents stated unemployment is the most important problem facing the state today. For the second year in a row one in ten respondents named government or public officials as the most important problem facing Illinois.

**Table 1** presents the concerns of respondents in 2000. Although education heads the list in most of the state, concern about economic issues is high in Southern Illinois, where taxes and unemployment collectively account for 28 percent of respondent concerns. Women are more likely to mention education, as are those with higher levels of education and higher levels of income. Concern for crime is higher in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs than in the rest of the state. Concern for crime is less prevalent at higher levels of income and education. Self-identified Republicans and Independents are more likely to mention taxes as the most important problem facing 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
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>28 %</b>	<b>11 %</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>4 %</b>
<b>Region</b>				
Chicago	26	18	8	7
Suburban Cook	31	13	11	3
Collar Counties*	31	10	11	1
Northern Illinois	32	6	19	2
Central Illinois	31	7	9	2
Southern Illinois	18	7	21	7
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	25	13	13	3
Female	32	9	11	4
<b>Education</b>				
High School or less	20	12	14	3
Some College	28	13	13	5
College Graduate	37	8	9	2
<b>Income</b>				
Under 30,000	20	16	11	5
30,000 - 60,000	26	8	14	3
60,000 +	37	11	12	2
<b>Party Identification</b>				
Republican	26	8	16	3
Democrat	29	11	9	4
Independent	31	14	14	4

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

# Priorities For State Spending

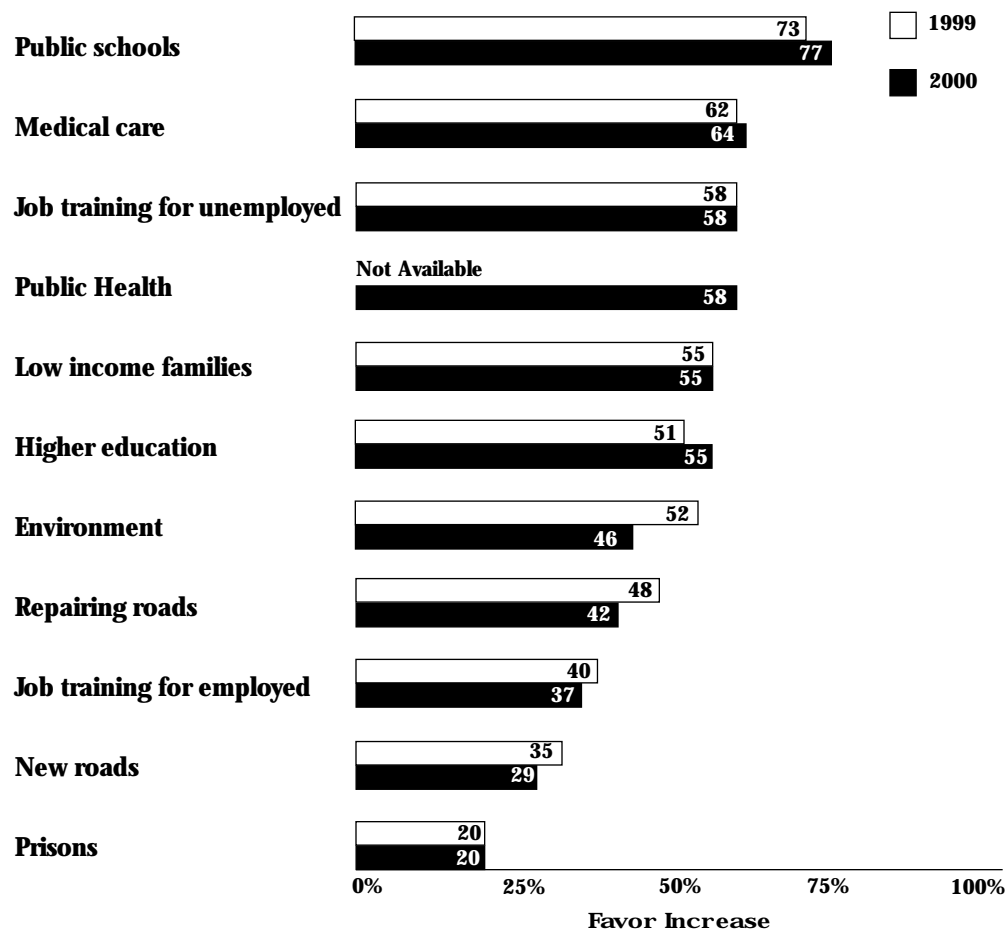
## Support for Public Education Remains High

Each year, the *Illinois Policy Survey* asks residents of Illinois whether state spending for selected programs and activities should be increased, decreased, or remain the same. Public education has consistently been the top priority for increased spending; generally about three-fourths of respondents say state spending for education through 12<sup>th</sup> grade should be increased. Spending on medical care is in second place. Spending on public health tied with spending on job training for the unemployed, with 58 percent of respondents stating state spending should be increased in these areas. Other program areas receiving majority support for increased spending are low income families, and higher education. In last year's survey spending on roads was replaced with two questions: Spending on new construction of roads and highways, and spending to repair existing roads. Neither received majority support for increased spending, and both received less support in 2000 than in 1999. Repairing roads continues to be a higher priority than construction of new roads. **Figure 2** shows the percentage of support for increased spending over the past two years of the survey, ranked according to the level of support.

**Table 2** presents the percentage of people supporting increased spending on seven program areas according to region and party identification. Respondents from Chicago generally showed the highest support for increased spending. Support for spending on the environment dropped below 50 percent outside of Cook County, and was the lowest in Southern Illinois. Education is the highest priority among self-described Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Support diverged according to party identification for other program areas, with self-described Democrats and Independents maintaining majority support for the other six program areas.

**Figure 2 Support for Increases in State Spending: 1999 and 2000**

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 Increases State Spending**

	Schools	Medical	Training for Unemployed	Public Health	Low Income Families	Higher Education	Environ.
<b>Statewide</b>	77%	64%	58%	58%	55%	55%	46%
<b>Region</b>							
Chicago	85	81	78	67	69	67	63
Suburban Cook	75	64	63	61	53	61	53
Collar Counties	76	58	46	60	48	54	41
Northern Illinois	72	62	51	57	58	51	44
Central Illinois	73	55	52	44	48	44	38
Southern Illinois	73	62	53	50	52	44	30
<b>Party Affiliation</b>							
Republican	65	45	42	44	37	42	26
Democrat	85	78	72	65	67	64	56
Independent	77	69	57	58	56	55	52

# Quality of Life in Illinois

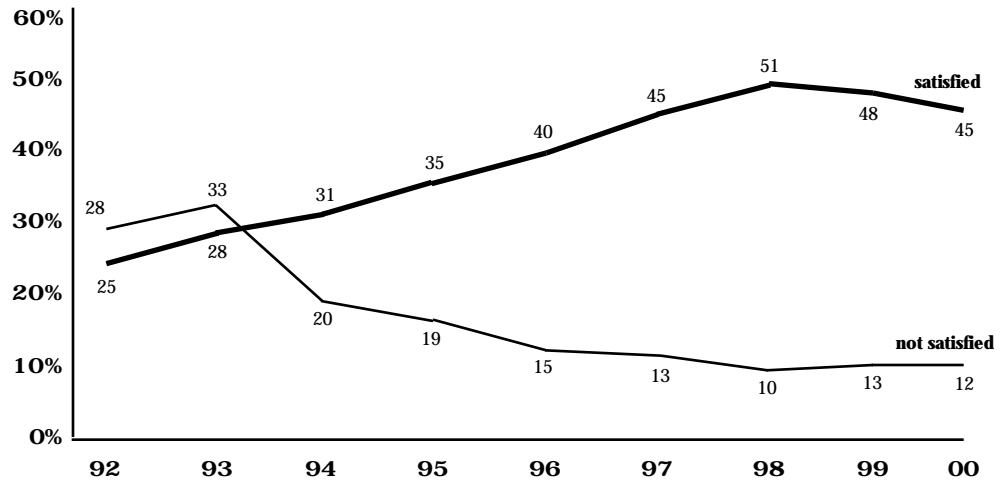
## Satisfaction With Living in Illinois

Satisfaction with the way things are going in Illinois, which had been on the rise in the 1990s, has taken a small decline since 1998. **Figure 3** shows two lines: The percentage of people reporting being satisfied and the percentage reporting not being satisfied from 1992 through 2000.

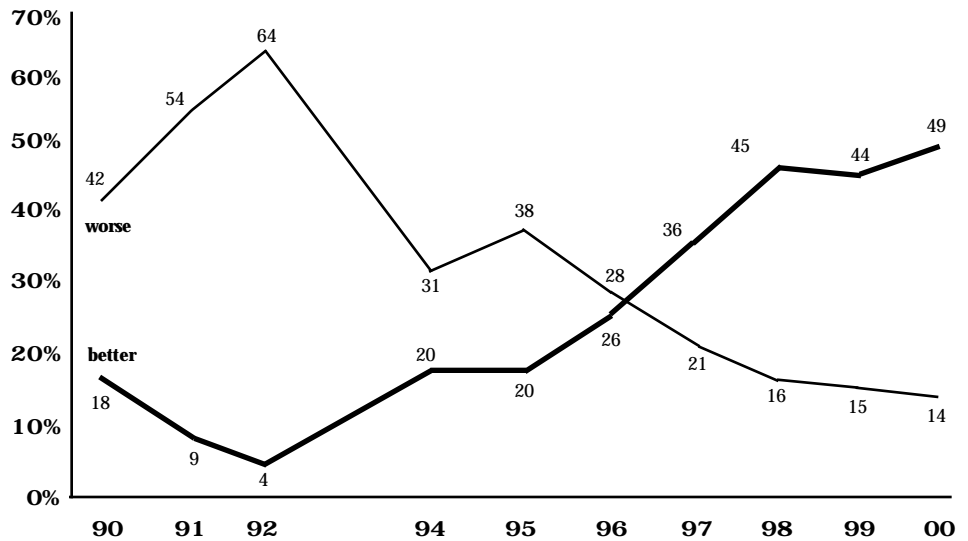
Nearly 50 percent of people think the people of Illinois are better off financially than they were 4 years ago. **Figure 4** shows a positive trend in this indicator since 1992. The percentage of respondents thinking the people of Illinois were better off financially matched the number thinking they were worse off in 1996 and exceeded it in 1997. Nearly 50 percent also state they are personally better off financially than they were four years ago. **Figure 5** shows the positive trend in this indicator since 1992, the first year in the 1990s the question was asked. This year *The Illinois Policy Survey* asked people to look ahead to the next year. Four out of ten respondents believe they will be better off next year than they are at present.

When asked to rate Illinois, overall, as a place to live 17 percent of respondents gave Illinois an “excellent” rating, and 61 percent gave it a “good” rating (see **Figure 6**). This was one of a series of questions about living in Illinois. Illinois was rated highly as a place to find a job, with 72 percent of respondents giving either an excellent or good rating. The majority of respondents also gave positive ratings to Illinois on recreational opportunities, being a place to get a good education, being a place to take a vacation, and having clean water quality. Less than half of respondents gave Illinois high ratings as a place to retire, a place with clean air quality, or a place with reasonably priced housing.

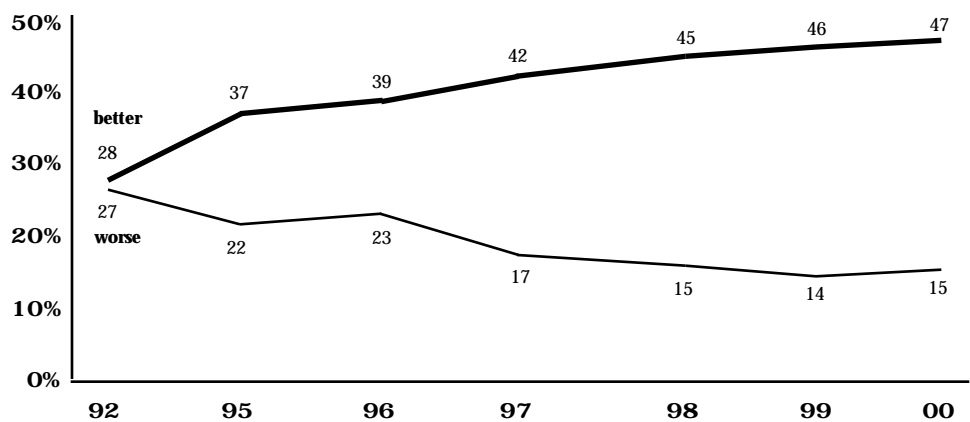
**Figure 3 How Things Are Going in Illinois: 1992–2000**  
In general, how satisfied are you with the way things are going in Illinois?



**Figure 4 Financial Conditions in Illinois, 1990- 2000**  
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?



**Figure 5 Personal Financial Condition, 1992- 2000**  
How about you and your family, compared to four years ago?



# Quality of Life in Illinois, continued

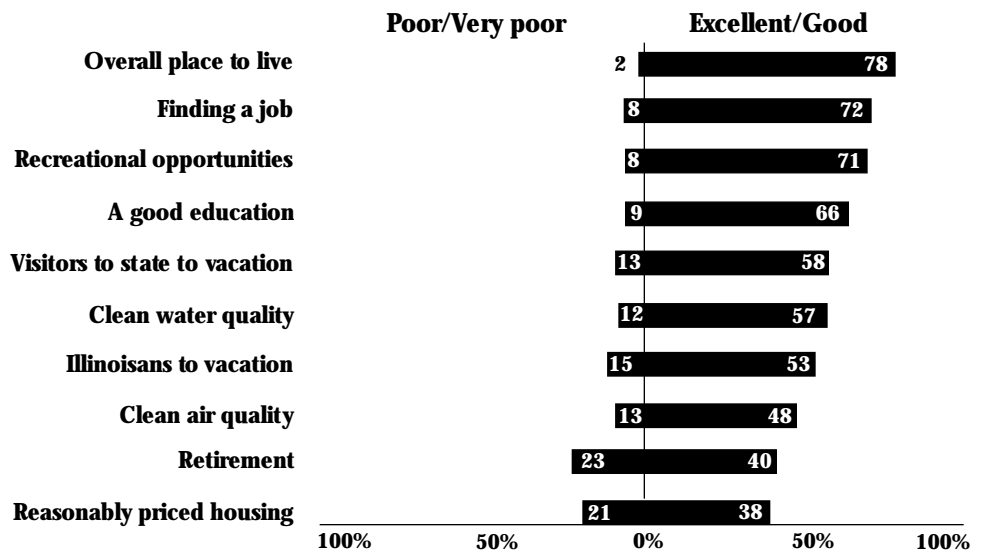
When considering a community to live in, 98 percent of respondents said safe neighborhoods are important (see **Figure 7**). The second most often cited consideration is affordable housing. Public schools tied with the property tax rate for third most often cited consideration. The majority of respondents gave positive responses to all of these questions. The format for asking about what is important in choosing a community to live in did not force explicit trade-offs, although of course these trade-offs do occur when deciding where to live.

Since there is a consensus that safe neighborhoods are important in deciding what community to live in, people's perception of safety in their own neighborhood is of interest. Over nine out of ten respondents stated they feel either "very safe" or "safe" in their neighborhood. Perception of safety did vary according to geographic area as can be seen in **Table 3**. People living in Chicago are less likely to feel safe in their neighborhoods.

Respondents to the 1996 *Illinois Policy Survey* were asked whether they thought crime had increased, stayed about the same, or decreased in the past few years. At that time 60 percent of respondents stated they thought crime had increased in Illinois and 45 percent that it had increased in their community. The responses to the same questions asked in the Fall of 2000 show a much more positive outlook, with 26 percent of respondents stating crime in Illinois has increased over the past few years and 29 percent stating it has increased in their community.

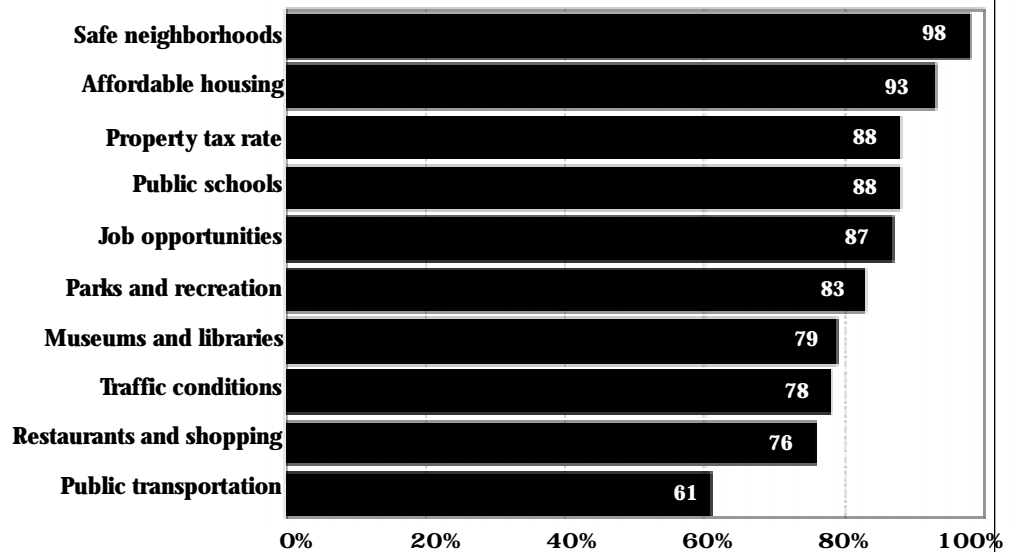
**Figure 6 Rating Illinois**

The next few questions are about Illinois as a place to live. How would you rate Illinois as a place for...



**Figure 7 Deciding Where to Live**

I'm going to read you a list of things people may consider when deciding what community to live in. Please tell me for each one if it is an important consideration for you.



**Table 3 Safety in Ones Own Neighborhood**

	Very Safe	Safe	Not Very Safe
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Region</b>			
Chicago	24	51	25
Suburban Cook	46	49	5
Collar Counties	59	39	2
Northern Illinois	54	43	3
Central Illinois	59	38	3
Southern Illinois	53	43	4

The state educational system has been one of the top four concerns of Illinois residents throughout the history of the *Illinois Policy Survey*. Public education through 12<sup>th</sup> grade has consistently been the program area receiving the most support for state spending among respondents to the survey. Responses to questions about the quality of public schools asked over the past three years show increasingly positive ratings. **Figure 8** presents the percentage of people giving excellent or good ratings to public schools in Illinois and public schools in their own community. Although most respondents have consistently given high ratings to their own community schools, this is the first time in three years the majority has given Illinois schools high marks.

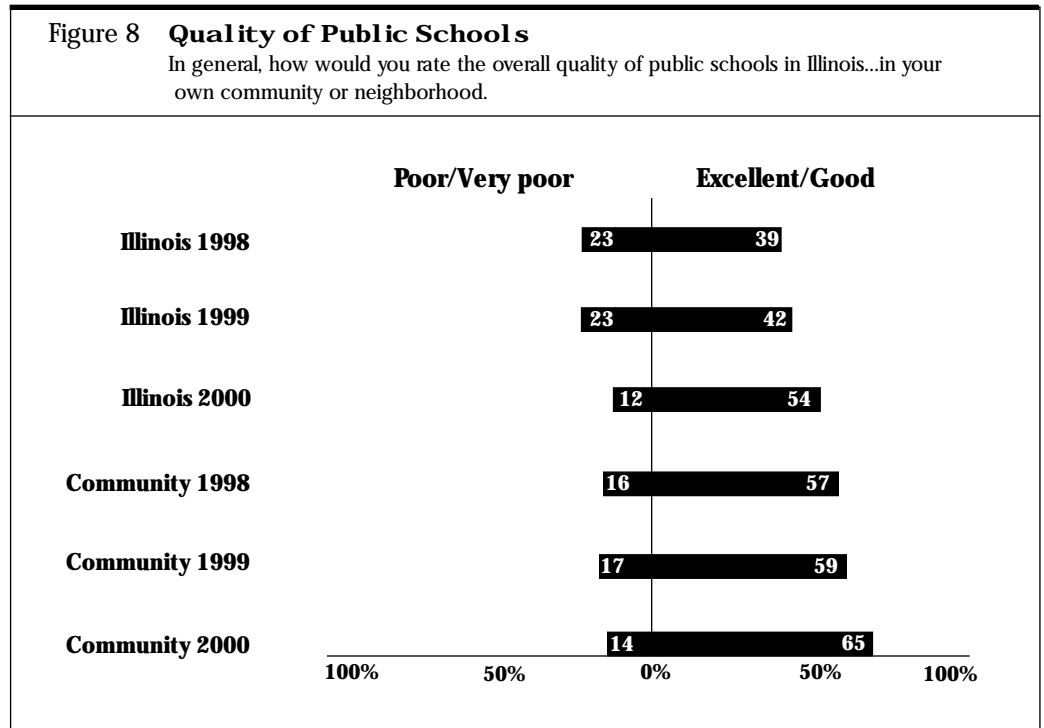
**Table 4** shows the percentage of people giving public schools in their community high ratings in the last three years according to geographic area. The trend for more positive evaluations of local public schools is seen in all areas except Chicago. Suburban Cook, which already had high ratings, showed stability over the past year; there was increase in positive ratings in all areas outside of Cook County.

Since the state's educational system is a dominant topic of concern for Illinois residents, questions about education appear every year in the *Illinois Policy Survey*. This year's report includes public response to recent proposals for improving education. One proposal which has received national attention is for parents of school children to be provided with vouchers, or tuition scholarships, which they could use for private or religious schools. Programs that provide vouchers have been called school choice or parental choice programs, since parents' choices about where to send their child to school could be expanded by this support. Most current programs are targeted at lower income families; many are financed through private sources. The current policy debate is whether public tax dollars should be used to subsidize tuition for private or religious schools. One of the questions that will be raised about any plan is what families would qualify for public subsidies to support private elementary and secondary school.

Nearly one out of two survey respondents state they would favor school choice for private schools, with the state providing vouchers to cover its share of the cost. The percentage stating they are in favor of school choice has remained stable over the

## Education

### Public Perception of School Quality



**Table 4 Evaluation of Local Public Schools, 1998- 2000**

	1998	1999	2000
<b>Statewide</b>	57%	59%	65%
<b>Region</b>			
Chicago	35	37	36
Suburban Cook	70	77	77
Collar Counties	67	71	81
Northern Illinois	57	50	62
Central Illinois	61	59	70
Southern Illinois	54	57	67

## Education, continued

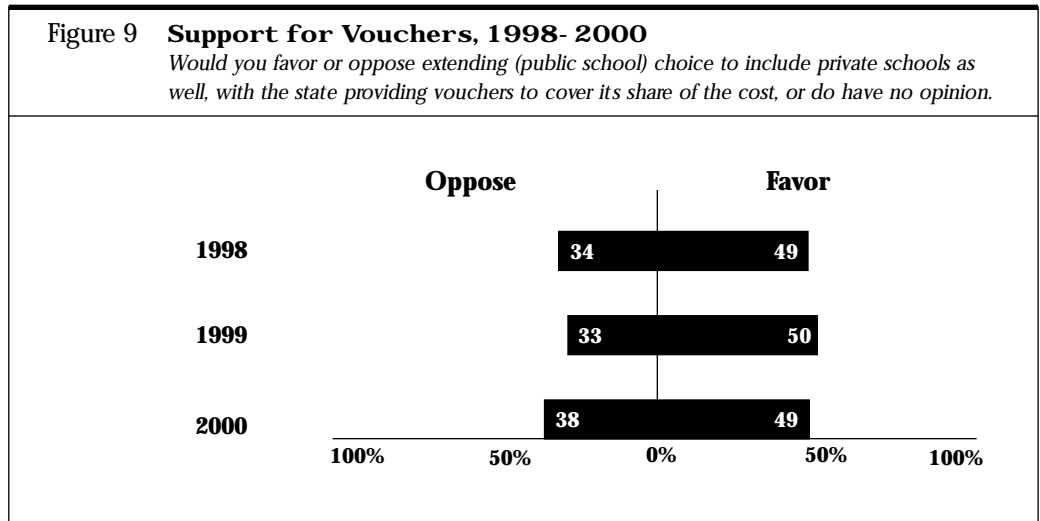
past three years, although the percentage stating they oppose this rose slightly in 2000 (see **Figure 9**). Opinion about school choice programs varies with respondent perceptions and interests. While 61 percent giving poor ratings to their community school state they favor vouchers, only 44 percent of those giving high ratings favor vouchers. Among those with a child attending a private or religious school 74 percent favor vouchers; among those with a child in public school 49 percent were in favor.

This year another question about school choice was asked as one in a series of questions about whether some possible changes would improve public schools in Illinois. This question was whether allowing parents to choose a private or religious school for their child to attend at public expense would improve public schools. A substantially smaller percentage of respondents, 31 percent, thought voucher programs would improve public schools. The two questions probe for different dimensions of opinion about voucher programs. It is consistent to be in favor of school choice, while believing public schools would not be improved by such programs. There were also differences in the wording of the two questions that could have influenced how respondents thought about the questions. For example, the first question referred to private schools and the state providing vouchers while the second referred to attending private or religious schools at public expense. People's opinions about school choice or voucher programs will probably stabilize as the specifics of proposals and their potential costs and benefits are articulated. President Bush's plan for educational reform includes a provision for financial support for tuition for lower income children who are attending persistently failing schools. The plan also includes a proposal to allow parents of children not eligible for the financial support to deduct up to \$5,000 of their yearly income for educational expenses of children attending private or religious elementary and secondary schools.

In last year's *Illinois Policy Survey*, respondents listed what they saw as the most important problem facing schools. School funding and associated problems (overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating buildings, lack of resources and cutbacks in programs) accounted for 35 percent of the responses, with gangs, drugs and violence running second at 17 percent. The percentage of respondents in favor of each of the possible changes was high: Fixing run down school buildings (88 percent), reducing class sizes (82

**Figure 9 Support for Vouchers, 1998-2000**

*Would you favor or oppose extending (public school) choice to include private schools as well, with the state providing vouchers to cover its share of the cost, or do have no opinion.*



# Education, continued

percent), adding computers to the classroom (77 percent), increasing security (73 percent) and paying teachers more (73 percent). This year's report includes the public response to proposals made during the 2000 national election for improving education. Public support is high for most of the proposals. Tuition support for private or religious schools is the only proposal the majority of respondents did not believe would improve public school education in Illinois.

The most popular proposal was providing yearly reading tests for children through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to see who needs help, with 91 percent saying this would improve education. Three out of four respondents thought yearly standardized tests in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and High School exit exams would improve education. The other question which mentioned testing was whether federal funding should be based on school test results. Fifty three percent of respondents thought this would improve education.

The second most popular proposal was passing a child on to the next grade in school only if warranted by achievement. Ending social promotion seems to make good common sense, and several public school systems, including Chicago, have incorporated the principle as part of their educational plan. There are problems, however, since it has been found that children who are retained often do not do well and are more likely to later drop out of school. School districts may decide to end social promotion because it is a visible and clearly popular means of expressing a commitment to raising academic standards. Those schools instituting a policy to end social promotion as part of a

plan for improving instruction that addresses the needs of children who are not doing well may be able to take advantage of public support while helping children in danger of failing.

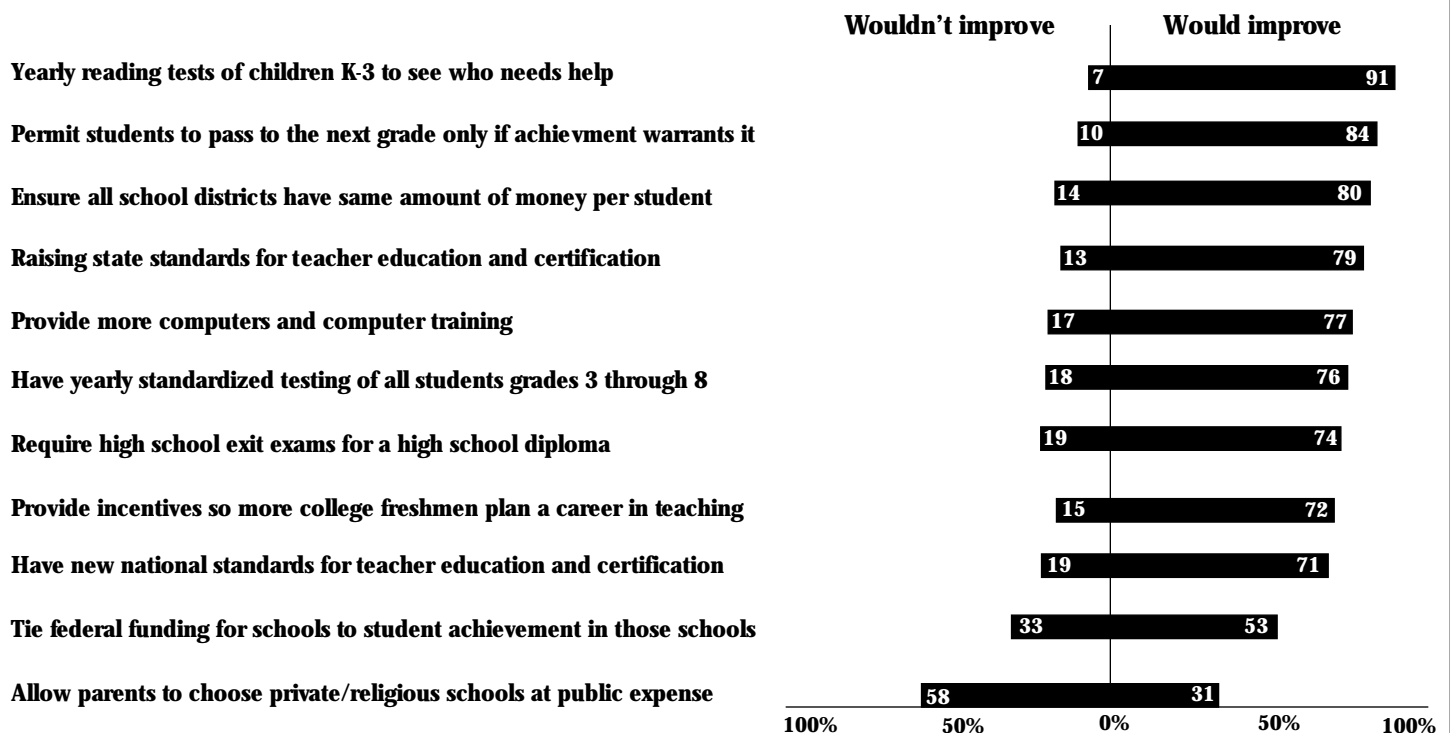
Eight in ten respondents stated that assuring all school districts had the same amount of funding per pupil would improve public education. In previous years the *Illinois Policy Survey* has shown majority support for specific proposals to make school funding equitable (including distributing the property tax from businesses throughout the state); but this support drops dramatically with the suggestion this could mean less money to ones own district.

Nearly eight in ten respondents stated increasing state standards for teacher education and certification would improve education; fewer (about seven in ten) stated new national standards for teachers would be beneficial. The level of positive responses to nearly all of the proposed changes in education indicates, at least, a desire for something to be done; at most it indicates a consensus for educational reform.

Accountability has become a byword of educational reform. Most, if not all, of the proposed changes in this year's survey, presented in **Figure 10**, have been advanced as components of educational accountability. The call for accountability raises questions of who is accountable, what are the standards and means for assessing performance, and where are these questions addressed? Evaluation is an ever present component of plans for increasing accountability, with an often-mentioned means for evaluation being standardized testing of

**Figure 10 Possible Changes in Public Education**

I'm going to read you a list of possible changes in public education. Please tell me if you think the change would improve public schools in Illinois or not, or if you have no opinion.



students. The three contexts for testing appearing in this year's report met with different levels of approval. There was strong support for using testing on younger children to improve instruction (91 percent); somewhat less support for yearly achievement testing in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades (76 percent) and for testing as a criterion for High School graduation (74 percent). The weakest support (53 percent) was for using test scores to evaluate public schools for federal funding. In response to a question about whether decisions about standardized testing should be made at the local, state or national level, 40 percent of respondents preferred decisions about standardized testing be made at the local level, 31 percent at the state level and 29 percent at the national level.

Further indication of the public preference for decisions about local schools being made closer to home is seen in **Table 5**. The responses to questions about who should make decisions about public schools in the community show 40 percent of respondents stating the federal government has too much say in decisions about local schools, with 36 percent thinking it has the right amount of say. One in four respondents think the state government has too much decision-making authority; nearly one in two think it has the right amount of say. Respondents tended to favor decision-making by local school officials over federal and state government. The majority of respondents stated teachers and parents have too little say in decisions about local public schools.

**Table 5 Decision Making About Local Schools**

As I name a specific group or individual, please tell me whether you think they have too much, too little, or the right amount of say in decisions that affect the local public schools.

	<b>Too much</b>	<b>Too little</b>	<b>Right amount</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Federal government	40 %	17 %	36 %	7 %
State government	25	21	49	6
Local school board	18	33	45	5
School superintendent	19	26	48	5
Teacher's unions	22	37	33	9
School principals	10	40	45	5
Students	12	48	35	5
Parents	7	60	28	4
Teachers	6	63	28	4

# Evaluation of Public Officials

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

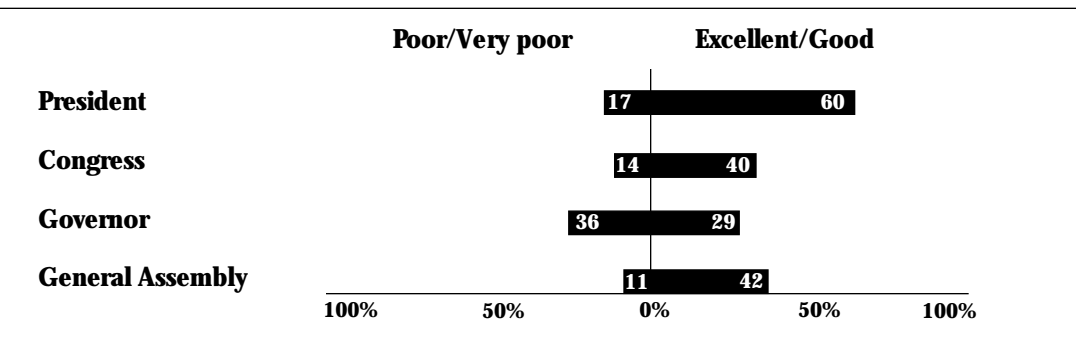
Job approval ratings of public officials have generally been on an upward trend since 1992. In fact, there is a striking consistency between the trends in general satisfaction and financial conditions seen earlier in this report and the evaluation of public officials.

Sixty percent of respondents gave President Clinton high job approval ratings (See **Figure 11**). The 2000 election occurred during the field period for the *Illinois Policy Survey*, with about half the interviews occurring before the election. Clinton's ratings by Illinois residents are up over 1999, when 51 percent gave him excellent or good marks. At 60 percent approval, his ratings for the last year of his presidency are the highest for his presidency seen in this survey. **Figure 12** presents job approval ratings for the presidents from 1985 to 2000.

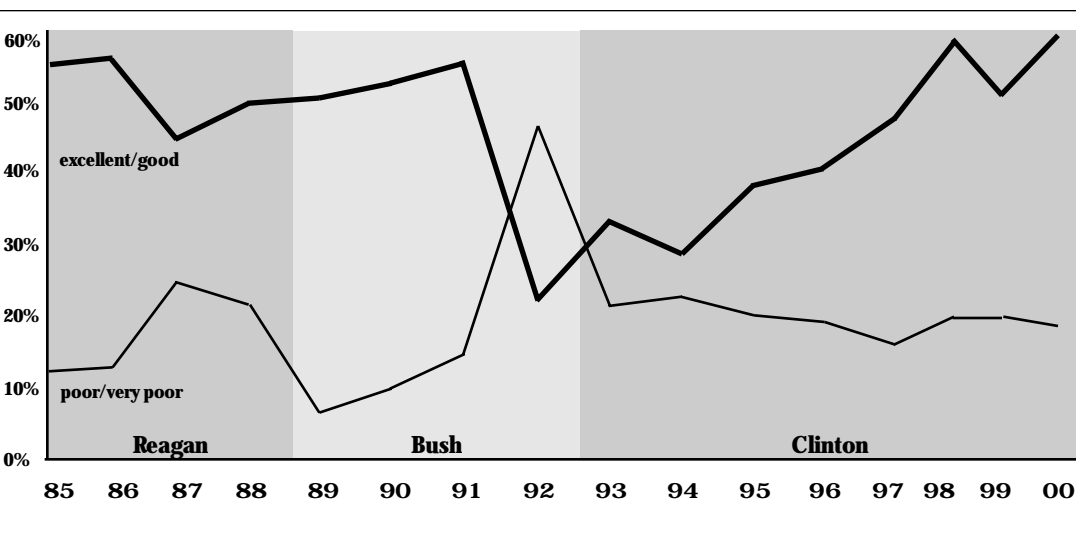
The US Congress received excellent or good ratings from 40 percent of respondents, which is a substantial increase over the previous year's 29 percent approval rating. Job approval ratings for Congress rose in the 1990s after hitting their lowest point in the history of this survey in 1992; this year's report has the highest approval ratings for the US Congress in the history of the *Illinois Policy Survey* (see **Figure 13**).

**Figure 11 Ratings of National and Illinois Government, 2000**

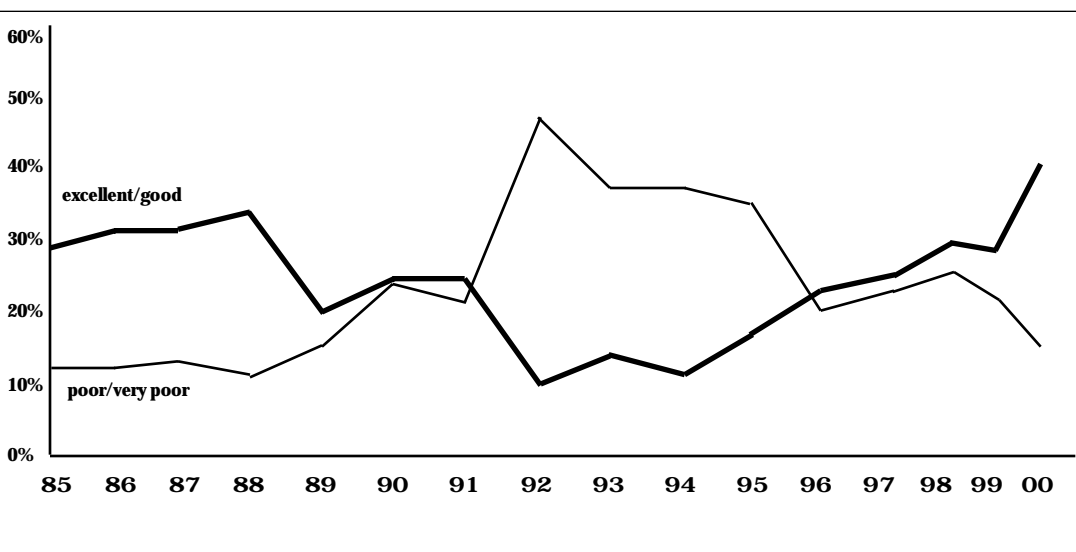
How would you rate the job President Clinton...the U.S. Congress...the governor...the Illinois legislature is doing?



**Figure 12 Ratings of the President, 1985- 2000**



**Figure 13 Ratings of Congress, 1985- 2000**



# Evaluation of Public Officials

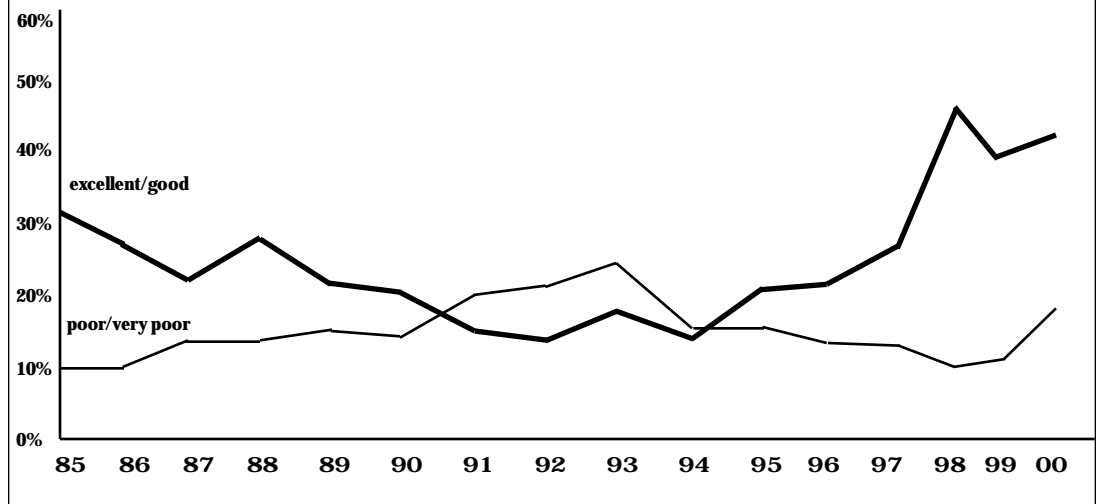
The Illinois General Assembly also received high marks, with 42 percent of respondents giving excellent or good ratings. In the early 1990s respondents gave low marks to the Illinois General Assembly as well as to other political institutions. Respondents have been giving increasingly high ratings to this body in the second half of the 1990s. **Figure 14** shows an upward trend in job approval ratings for the general assembly since 1994.

This is the second year respondents rated Governor Ryan on this survey, since he was elected during the Fall of 1998. Twenty nine percent of respondents gave the Governor excellent or good ratings.

A summary of the evaluation of public officials for the past several years is presented in **Table 6**. 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 ratings. A negative score indicates the opposite—there are more people who gave the poor or very poor rating than the excellent or good rating. Difference scores this year are positive for the President, Congress and the General Assembly; the difference score is negative for Governor Ryan.

Overall, 2000 saw a continuation of a generally positive assessment of conditions in Illinois and of public officials that has been evident in the second half of the 1990s.

**Figure 14 Ratings of the Illinois General Assembly, 1985- 1998**

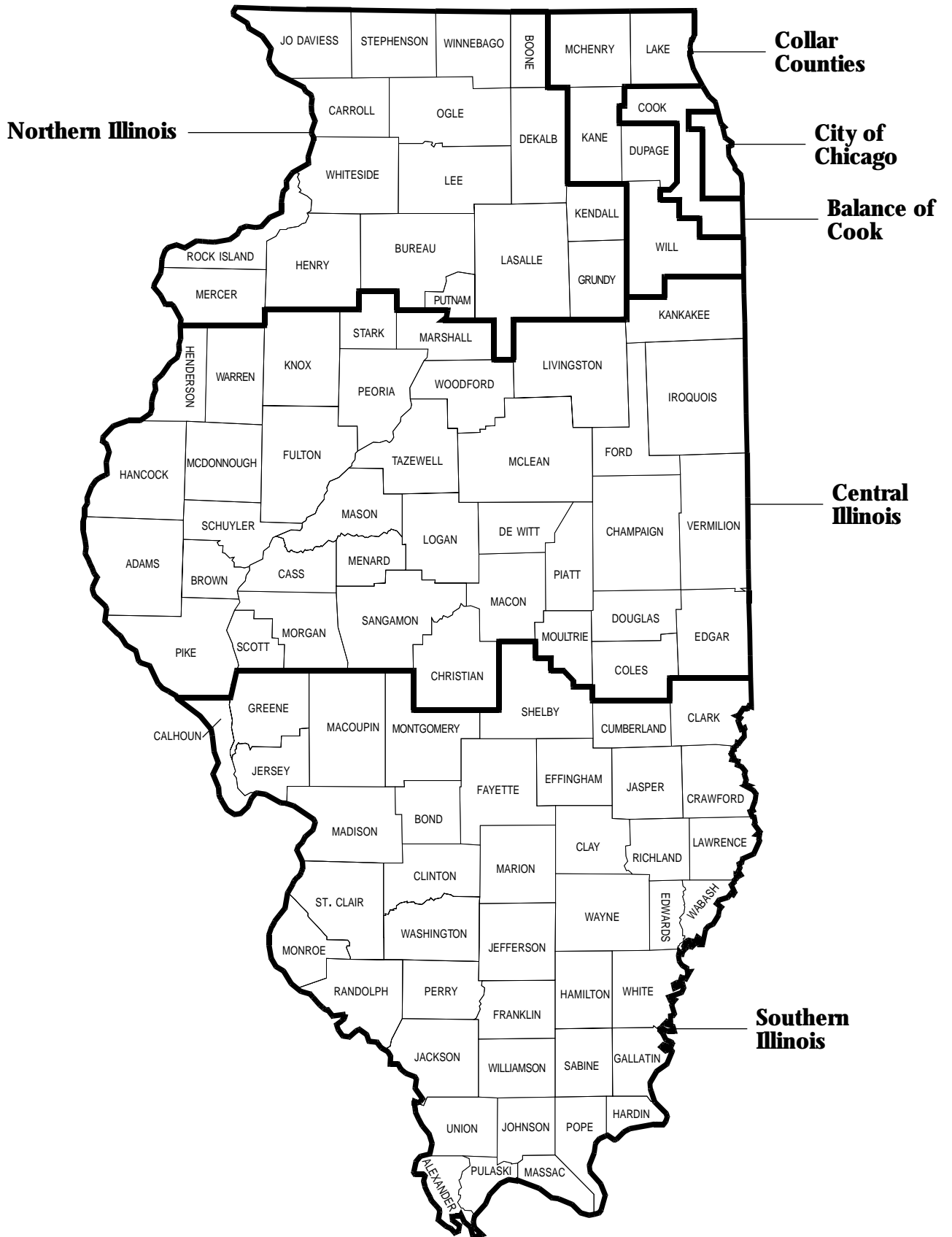


**Table 6 Difference Scores for Public Offices, 1992- 2000**  
(Excellent/good minus poor/very poor)

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
President	-24	14	7	18	26	32	39	31	43
Congress	-36	-23	-26	-16	4	3	5	7	26
Governor	16	19	33	33	39	42	NA	23	-7
General Assembly	-7	-5	-1	5	9	14	36	26	31

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 at Northern Illinois University completed 1206 Interviews in October and November of 2000. 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 196 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 a 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 probability of selection at each stage of sampling were accounted for in the initial weight. A post-stratification adjustment to the initial weight was calculated using a six by two grouping of age group by sex for the strata. Stratum weights for the state were constructed using 2000 current population estimates obtained from Claritas, Inc. 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 English-speaking adult population of Illinois that is accessible by telephone. The conservative 95 percent confidence interval for a sample of 1206 individuals is plus or minus 2.9 percent. This means there is a 95 percent likelihood the population percentage will fall within 2.9 percentage points of the estimate based on the sample percentage. Confidence intervals for subgroups of the sample will be larger, and will vary with the size of the subgroup.

## Acknowledgments

Telephone interviewing was carried out at the Public Opinion Laboratory under the direction of Robin Bebel, the Director of Field Services. Many thanks to the POL interviewers who spent over 400 hours talking to the people of Illinois and recording their conversations. Trittenhaus Design produced the layout and graphics for this report. Several individuals offered their expertise developing survey topics and questions, including the Center's Policy Survey Steering Committee, John Baj, Mandy Davis and Rima Roy. Pete Trott, the Director of the Center for Governmental Studies, provides the vision and leadership for this program.