

The 2003 Report on the
ILLINOIS
Policy Survey





**THE 2003 REPORT ON THE
ILLINOIS POLICY SURVEY**

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INTRODUCTION

Now in its nineteenth 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 is used to achieve an approximately equal number of respondents in each of six geographical areas of Illinois. Telephone interviews with 1,206 men and women 18 years of age or older were conducted in December 2002 through February 2003. 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 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, 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

Concern about the State Budget

The state budget heads the list of concerns for Illinois residents. Nearly three in ten respondents cited the state budget in response to the open-ended question "What do you consider the most important problem facing the state today?" **Figure 1** shows the percentage of respondents naming four recurrent topics over the past 10 years of the survey: The state budget, education, unemployment, and crime. Over the history of the *Illinois Policy Survey* education has most often been the issue cited by respondents. Last year's survey, conducted during the winter of 2001-2002, showed economic worries coming to the forefront, with unemployment matching education as the predominant issue. In this year's survey 17 percent of the respondents named education as the most important problem; nearly half of these respondents mentioned funding of education as the issue. As seen in **Table 1**, over one in ten respondents considered government to be the most important problem facing Illinois. Over the past four years, about one in ten respondents have stated that government, politics, or corruption is the most important problem facing Illinois.

Over the history of the *Illinois Policy Survey*, taxes and the state budget have been collapsed into one category for presentation, as they are in **Figure 1**. Before 2001, concern about the state budget was generally expressed as dissatisfaction with state spending priorities, the level of spending, or the level of taxes in the state. For the past two years, respondents to this survey who mention the state budget in response to the open-ended question have overwhelmingly referred to the budget deficit as the problem. By the time of this year's survey a budget deficit of 5 billion dollars was predicted for the state fiscal year 2003 (July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003). As seen in **Figure 2**, respondents in the past two years were more likely to mention the state budget and less likely to complain about high taxes than in the previous two years.

According to the National Governor's Association, states across the nation are experiencing budget shortfalls. States have responded with efforts to increase revenues and plans to control spending. Some states have even cut spending for important and politically sensitive programs, such as education through twelve grade. Governor Blagojevich, who was inaugurated during the field period of the survey, has promised to protect preschool through twelve grade education.

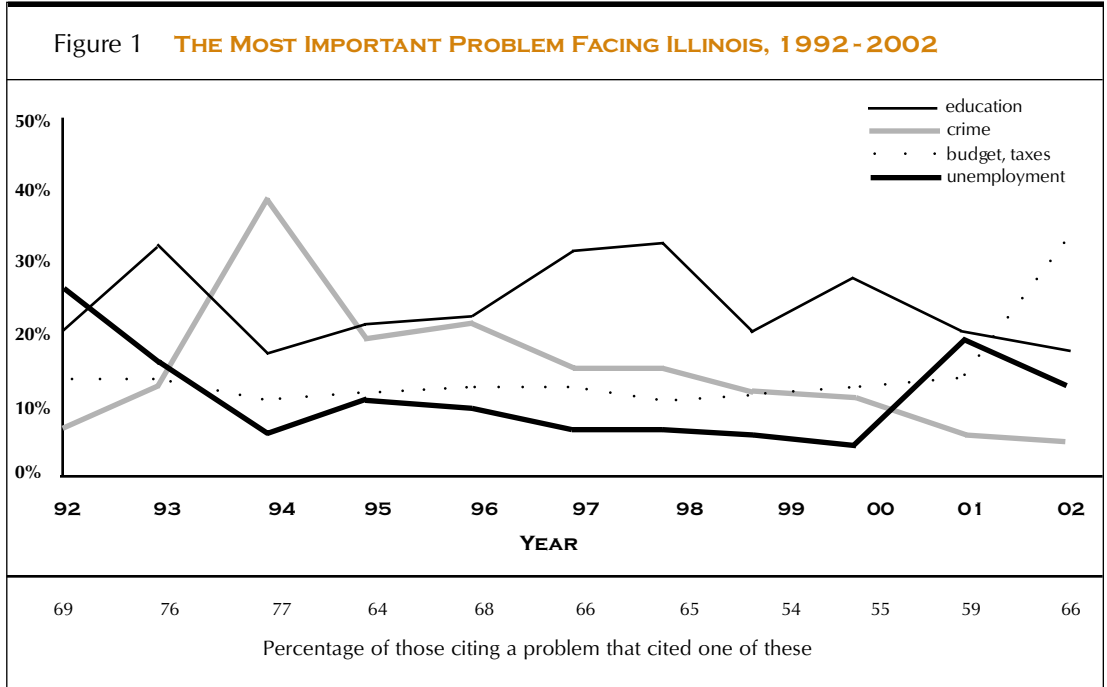
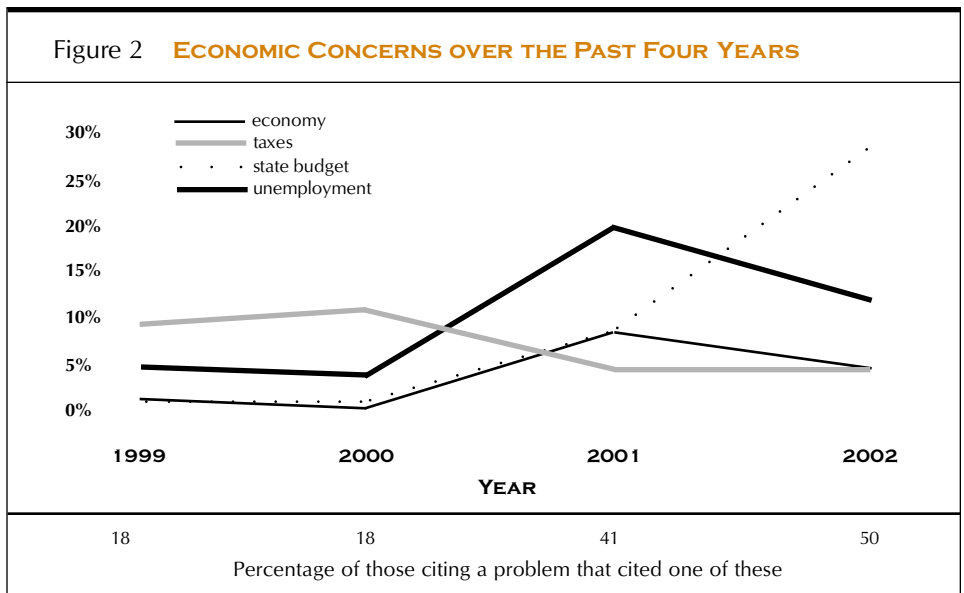


Table 1 THE TOP ISSUES THIS YEAR

State Budget	28%
Education	17
Government	13
Jobs, Unemployment	12
Other	11
Economy	5
Taxes	5
Crime, Gangs	4
Don't Know	4



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 kept 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 twelve grade should be increased; respondents to the most recent survey were no exception. As shown in **Figure 3**, other program areas receiving majority support for increased spending are medical care, job training for the unemployed, support for low income families, public health, and higher education.

Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents supporting increases in spending for the six most popular program areas with demographic breakdowns. Regionally, residents of Chicago show the highest support for spending in all six areas. Democrats are most likely to support increases in spending; the majority of Independents also supported increases in spending for these six areas. Public education through twelve grade and job training for the unemployed were the areas that received majority support for increases in spending from Democrats, Republicans and Independents. Although respondents under 35 years of age showed the highest level of support for spending on education through twelve grade, the majority of respondents in all age groups showed strong support for this area. Women are more likely to support increases in spending in all areas. Support for spending on job training is higher among those with more education. With the exception of public education, support for spending drops at higher income levels.

Figure 3 **SUPPORT FOR INCREASES IN STATE SPENDING: 2002 COMPARED TO 2001**

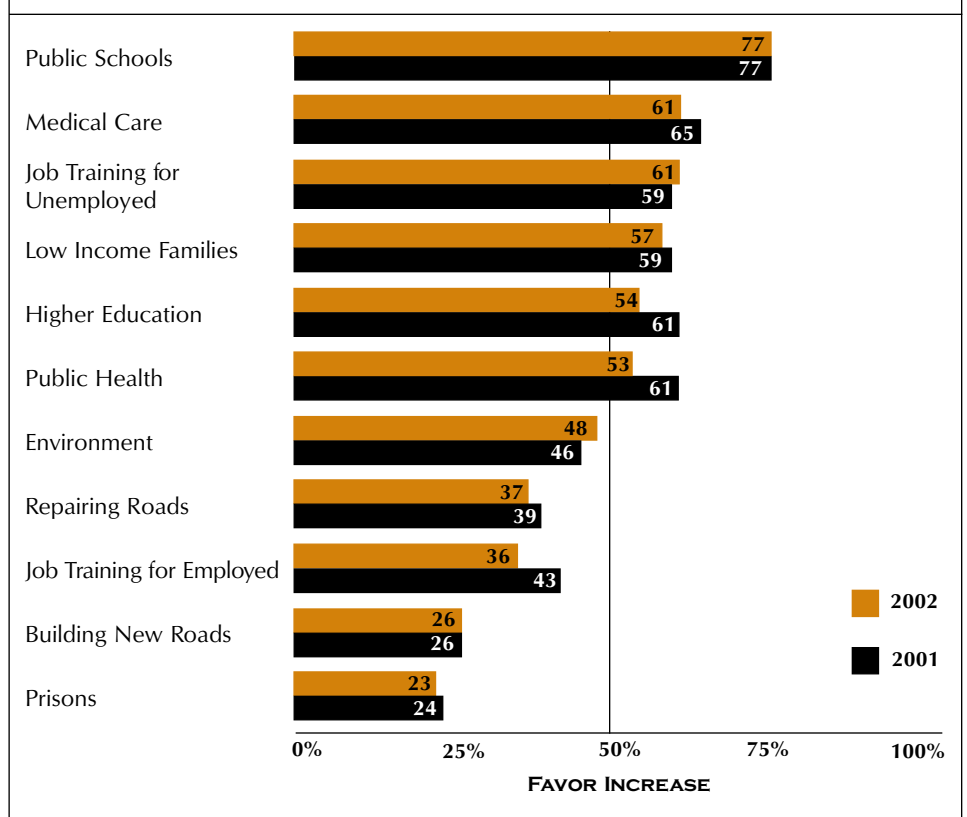


Table 2 **SUPPORT FOR INCREASES IN STATE SPENDING, 2003**

	Public Schools	Medical Care	Job Training	Low Income Families	Public Health	Higher Education
Statewide	77 %	61 %	61 %	57 %	54 %	53 %
Region						
Chicago	88	73	69	68	75	71
Suburban Cook	76	70	64	56	57	49
Collar Counties	71	49	58	53	39	44
Northern IL	73	65	61	56	50	48
Central IL	72	51	53	48	44	46
Southern IL	74	58	56	54	49	53
Party Identification						
Republican	63	46	51	38	40	38
Democrat	85	78	70	74	69	64
Independent	78	61	65	56	55	54
Age Group						
18-24	83	61	49	65	53	66
25-34	84	56	57	51	55	59
35-44	72	54	63	57	52	42
45-54	75	69	68	57	54	58
55-64	69	65	67	49	50	46
65 +	75	65	66	60	52	45
Sex						
Male	73	54	59	52	50	48
Female	80	69	63	61	57	58
Education						
High School or Less	77	60	55	56	50	54
Some College	77	68	63	59	56	55
College Graduate	76	58	63	55	54	51
Income						
Under \$35,000	76	68	70	63	62	58
\$35,000-55,999	80	68	64	60	57	53
\$56,000 +	76	53	56	51	43	47

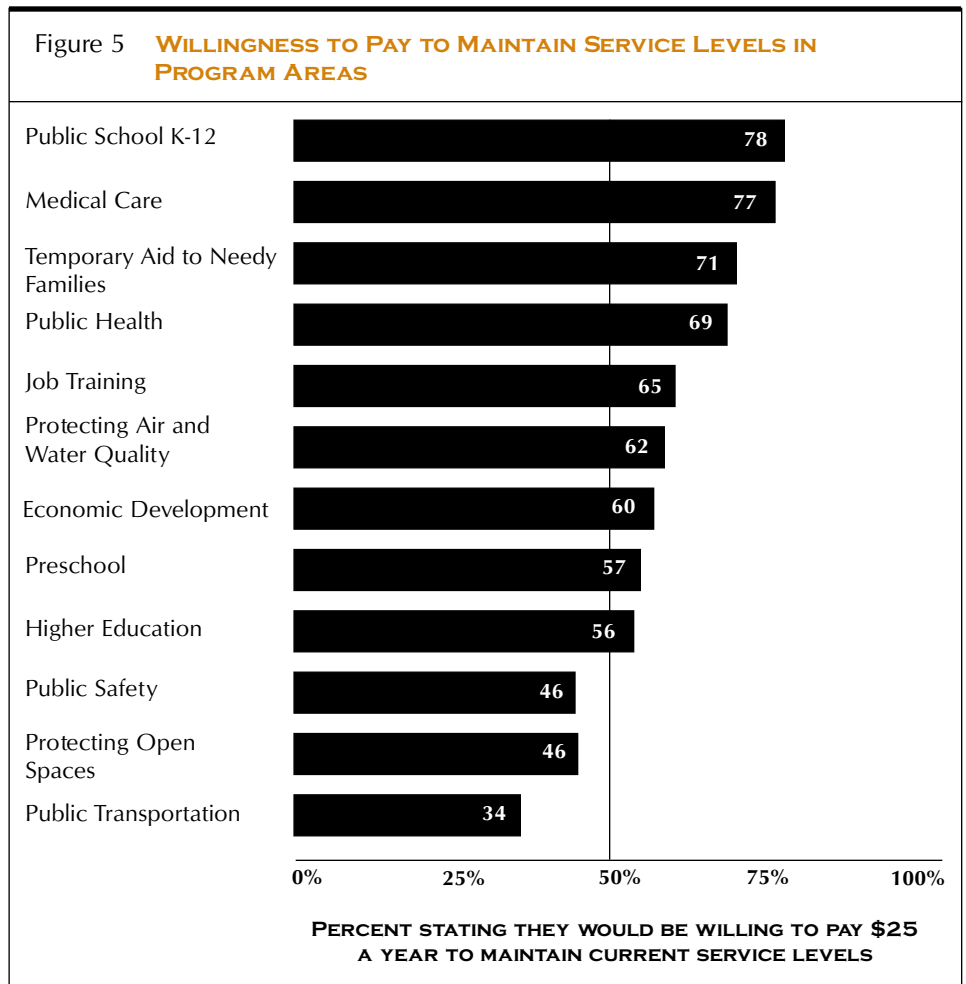
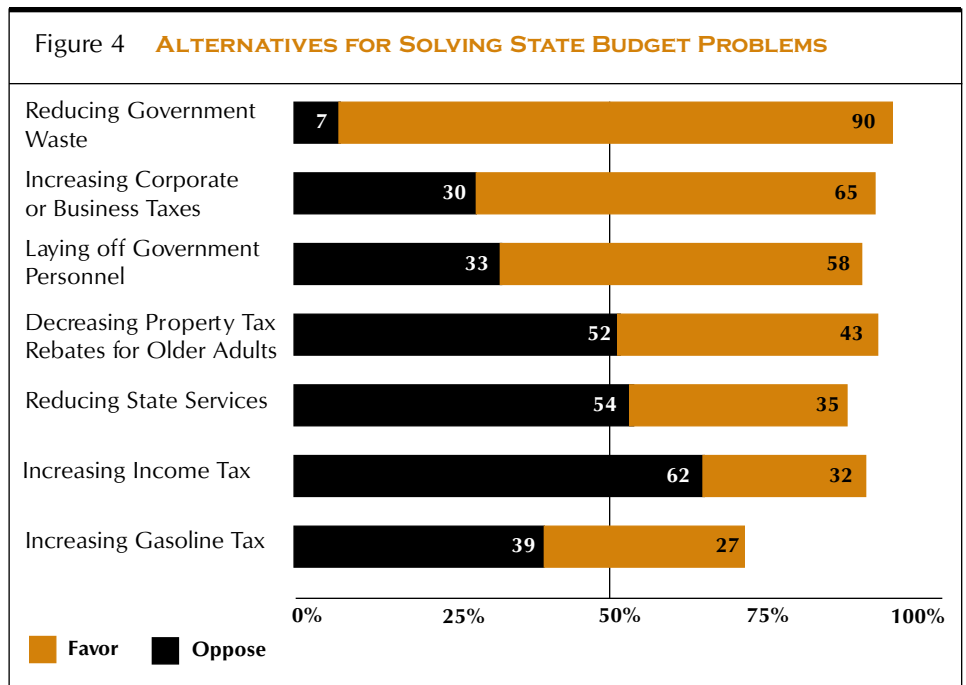
THE BUDGET

Respondents View the Budget Problems as Serious

Over 95 percent of respondents to the survey said the budget problems in Illinois are serious, including 61 percent who called them “very serious.” Less than 5 percent said the budget problems are either “not very” or “not at all” serious. Alternatives for solving the state budget problems most favored by respondents were those that did not require self-sacrifice. As seen in **Figure 4**, when respondents were presented with several alternatives for solving the state’s budget problems, reducing government waste was the most popular alternative, with nine out of ten respondents stating they favored this idea. Another popular alternative was laying off government personnel, with nearly six in ten respondents in favor of this. The majority of respondents favored increasing corporate or business taxes. Alternatives receiving less than majority support were decreasing property tax rebates for older adults, reducing state services, increasing income tax, and increasing gasoline tax, with the last two receiving less than 30 percent support.

The idea of raising taxes is generally unpopular; and the notion of reducing government spending could hardly fail to be popular, at least in the abstract. Increasing taxes seemed somewhat more acceptable to respondents when presented as a forced choice, with the choices being reducing spending for government services or increasing taxes to maintain government services at current levels. In this choice situation, 56 percent of the respondents preferred reducing government and 38 percent preferred increasing taxes.

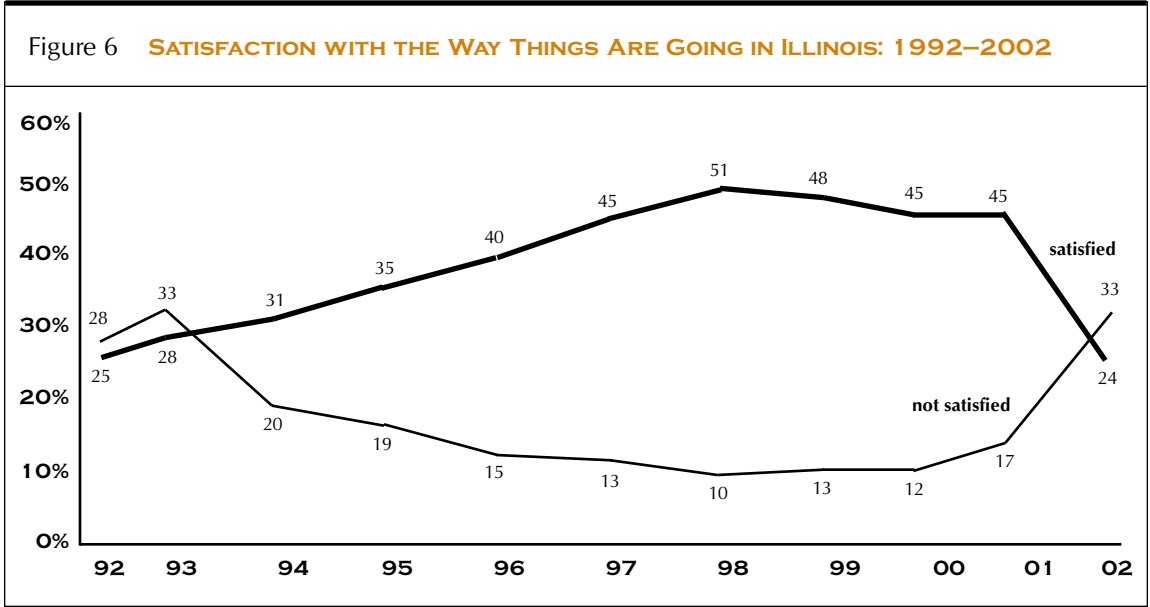
One obvious response to a budget deficit is to increase revenues by raising taxes and fees; the other, of course, is to cut spending. Although the questions about state spending reported in the previous section include the introductory statement “eventually all government spending comes out of taxes,” constrained budgets can put questions about program priorities into sharper focus. Consequently, we asked respondents whether they would be willing to pay \$25 more a year in taxes to maintain the current level of services in twelve areas, adding a couple of areas to the previous series. In nine out of twelve of the areas, the majority of respondents stated they would be willing to pay to maintain the current level of service (**Figure 5**). As shown in **Figure 6**, on the next page, the overwhelming majority of respondents stated a willingness to pay for at least one service area. Sixty percent of the respondents selected seven or more service areas. That is, the majority expressed a willingness to pay at least \$175 a year in tax increases in order to maintain current levels of service.



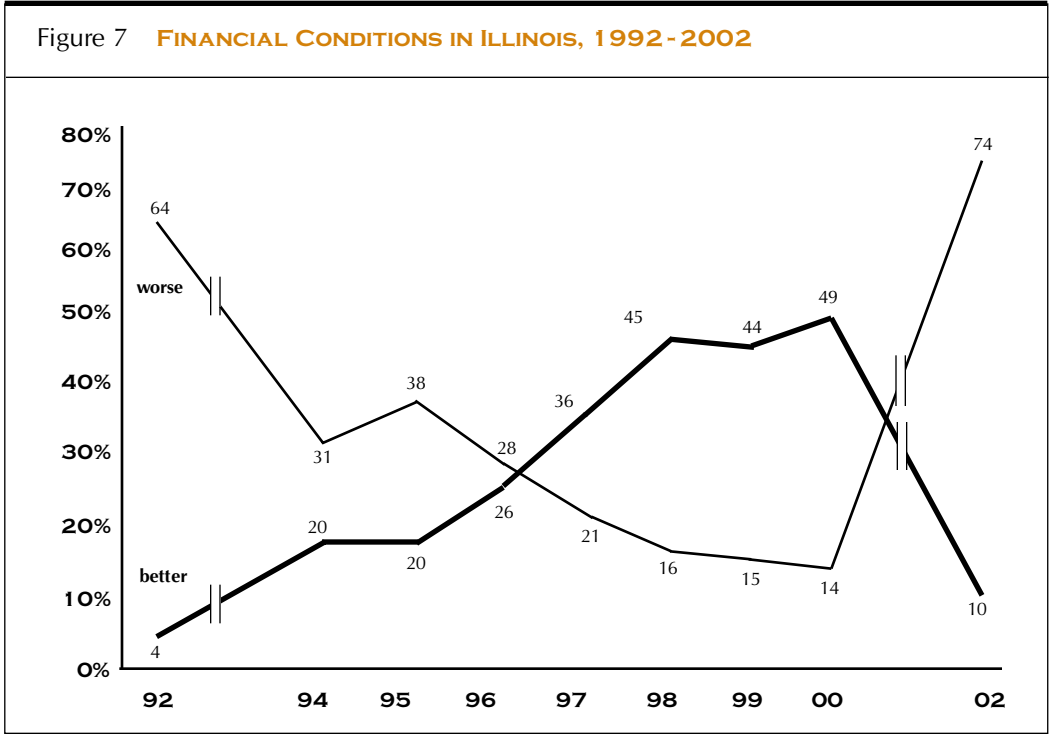
HOW THINGS ARE GOING IN ILLINOIS

Concern about Financial Conditions

The percentage of respondents who stated they were satisfied with the way things are going in Illinois dropped to its lowest point since 1992, the first year this question was asked (Figure 6). Respondent perceptions of financial conditions in Illinois were also negative as seen in Figure 7, with nearly three out of four people stating the belief that people in Illinois were worse off financially than they had been four years ago. Respondent reports of their personal financial situation were less negative, although Figure 8 (on the next page) shows that one in three respondents stated they were worse off now than they were four years ago.



Prior to 2001 there was a ten-year trend of increasingly positive perceptions about financial conditions in Illinois. In the winter of 2001 - 2002 respondents compared conditions in Illinois as well as their own financial situation with the previous year. At that time, about one in two thought financial conditions in Illinois were worse than the previous year; nearly one in four reported their own circumstances as worse. Table 3 (on the next page) shows responses to the questions asking respondents to compare financial conditions with the previous year, for 2001 and 2002. It can be seen that in the most recent survey over six in ten respondents thought financial conditions had worsened in Illinois when compared with the previous year; one in three reported that their personal financial situation was worse.



In the winter of 2002-2003 the plurality of respondents (44 percent) described the economy in Illinois as "fair," with 36 percent saying the economy was poor or very poor. Six out of ten respondents considered unemployment to be an important problem in Illinois, with somewhat fewer (five in ten) considering it an important problem in their own community. One in five respondents stated that he or she had been out of work and looking for a job during the past 12 months. About half of those reported that they

HOW THINGS ARE GOING IN ILLINOIS

Concern about Financial Conditions, Continued

had found a job. Four out of ten employed respondents said they were concerned about the possibility of losing their job.

The National Bureau of Economic Research, a private non-profit research organization that tracks business activity, has reported that the economic recession they identified as beginning in March of 2001 ended in November of that year. As explained in its report, which can be found at <http://www.nber.org/cycles/july2003.html>, the bureau uses gross domestic product as the best measure of economic activity. This is why the economic recovery they have described in the period since November 2001 can be accompanied by falling employment. Their report notes that this doesn't mean economic conditions are good, only that business activity entered a period of expansion in November 2001 after an eight-month recession.

At least some people experienced an improvement in their personal financial condition in 2002. **Table 4** presents the percentage of people who reported being better off, as well as the percentage who are worse off according to region of the state, sex, age, education, and income. In most groups, with the exception of the 35 through 44 age group, the percentage who reported being worse off was higher than the percentage who were better off. Regionally, respondents who live in Chicago, one of the Central counties, or one of the Southern counties of the state were more likely than people in the other areas to report being better off financially. Men were more likely than women to report being better off financially. People aged 25 through 54 were more likely than older or younger respondents to report being better off. Those with a family income of at least \$35,000 were more likely to report being better off than those whose income was below \$35,000; and those with a college degree were more likely to report being better off than those without one.

Figure 8 **PERSONAL FINANCIAL CONDITION, 1992-2002**

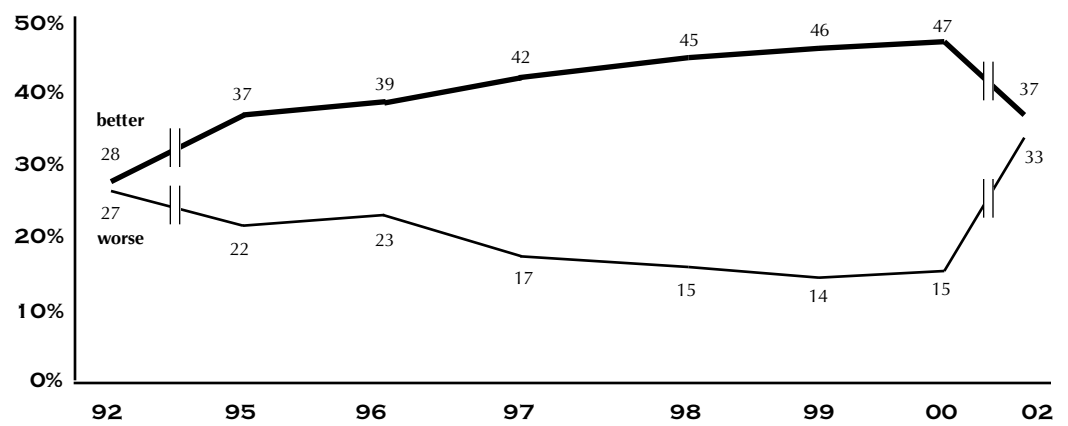


Table 3 **CHANGE IN FINANCIAL CONDITIONS IN THE PAST YEAR**

	Financial Conditions in Illinois		Personal Financial Condition	
	2001	2002	2001	2002
Better off	3%	4%	15%	17%
Same	40	32	61	51
Worse off	54	63	23	32
Don't Know/Refused	3	1	<1	<1

Table 4 **WHO IS BETTER OFF FINANCIALLY AND WHO IS WORSE OFF**

	Percentage Better Off	Percentage Worse Off
All Respondents	17%	32%
Region		
Chicago	21	32
Suburban Cook	12	34
Collar Counties	16	33
Northern IL	10	31
Central IL	20	28
Southern IL	24	30
Sex		
Male	20	28
Female	15	35
Age Group		
18-24	11	34
25-34	27	31
35-44	25	25
45-54	21	34
55-64	8	26
65+	8	34
Income		
Under \$35,000	13	37
\$35,000-55,999	20	27
\$56,000+	20	29
Education		
High School or Less	13	30
Some College	12	41
College Graduate	23	26

EDUCATION

Public Perception of School Quality

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 twelve grade has consistently been the program area receiving the most support for state spending among respondents to the survey. Respondents tend to give higher ratings to their local community schools than to schools in the state as a whole. **Figure 9** presents the percentage of people giving “excellent” or “good” ratings to public schools in Illinois and public schools in their own community over the past five surveys. Although the percentage of respondents who gave high marks to public schools in Illinois has fallen short of a majority in four out of the last five surveys, the majority of respondents have given high ratings to public schools in their own community. **Table 5** shows the percentage of people giving public schools in their community high ratings in the last five years according to geographic area. Over the past five surveys, fewer than 50 percent of respondents in Chicago have given their local public schools high ratings.

Although people outside of Chicago believe their local public schools are better than other districts in Illinois, there is also a perception the private schools are better than public schools. Over eight in ten respondents gave “excellent” or “good” ratings to private and church affiliated schools in their community. In June of 2002 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld voucher aid to private schools, including religious schools. Respondents to the survey answered several questions about school choice and school vouchers. One in two respondents stated they would favor allowing parents to choose which public school their child attends; slightly fewer said they would favor extending this choice to private schools

Figure 9 **QUALITY OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

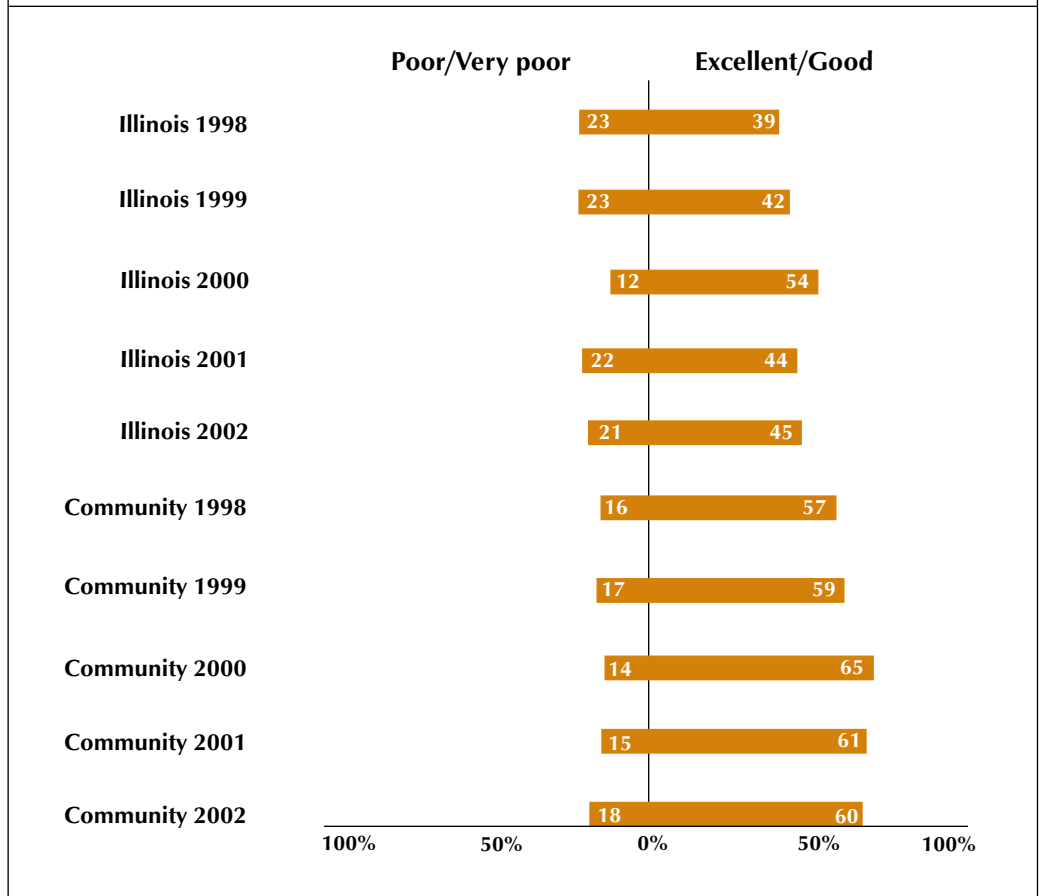


Table 5 **EVALUATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1998-2002**
PERCENT RATING EXCELLENT/GOOD

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Statewide	57%	59%	65%	63%	60%
Region					
Chicago	35	37	36	31	27
Suburban Cook	70	77	77	71	80
Collar Counties	67	71	81	75	74
Northern Illinois	57	50	62	65	50
Central Illinois	61	59	70	67	60
Southern Illinois	54	57	67	65	67

EDUCATION

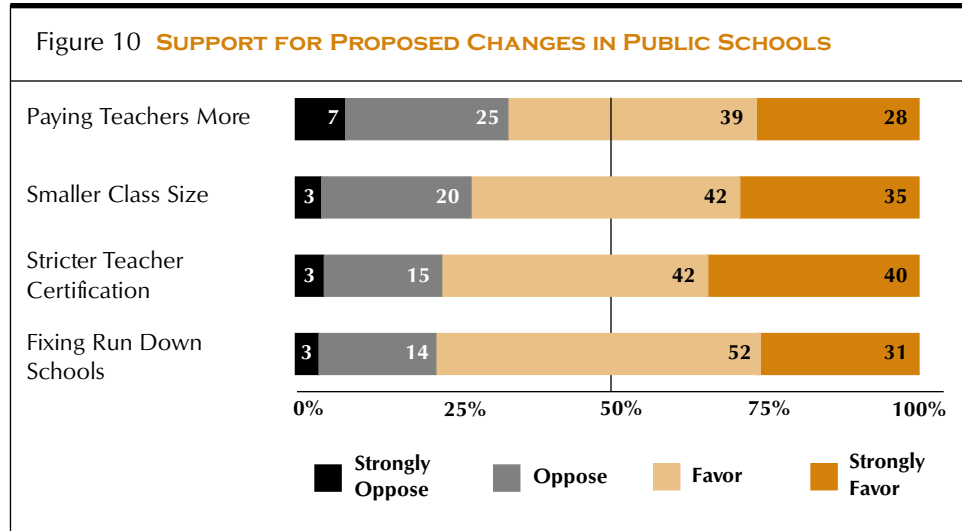
Public Perception of School Quality, Continued

(Table 6). About two in ten respondents stated that using public money for private and religious schools would help public school education. The rest of the respondents were about evenly split between thinking this would harm public education, or that it would make no difference.

The majority of respondents favored each of four changes in local schools, as can be seen in Figure 10, fixing run down schools, implementing higher teacher certification standards, decreasing the size of classes, and paying teachers more. We asked respondents if they would be willing to pay for desired improvements in public education. Table 7 shows that the majority of respondents support the idea of paying for improvements in public schools through tax increases. Over seven in ten said they would be willing to pay at least \$100 a year in order to pay for desired changes in education. The percentage willing to pay \$200 stating a willingness to support education through increased taxes drops to 32 percent at a suggested tax increase of \$200 a year.

One of the questions survey watchers ask is whether responses on a survey can accurately predict outcomes at the polls. The question is whether people are more likely to say they would support education than they are to vote for a tax increase for education. Although aggregate data cannot directly answer this question it can give us an idea of how supportive, in general, voters in Illinois are of school tax referenda. The Illinois Association of School Administrators tracks the results of school referenda in the state. Table 8 summarizes the results of tax referenda by year since 1998 and shows that, statewide, about four in ten school tax referenda have passed in the last five years.

	Favor	Oppose	No Opinion
Public School Choice	50 %	37 %	13 %
Private School Choice	44	44	13



Willing to Pay \$100/year	72 %
Willing to Pay \$200/year	32
Willing to Pay \$500/year	10

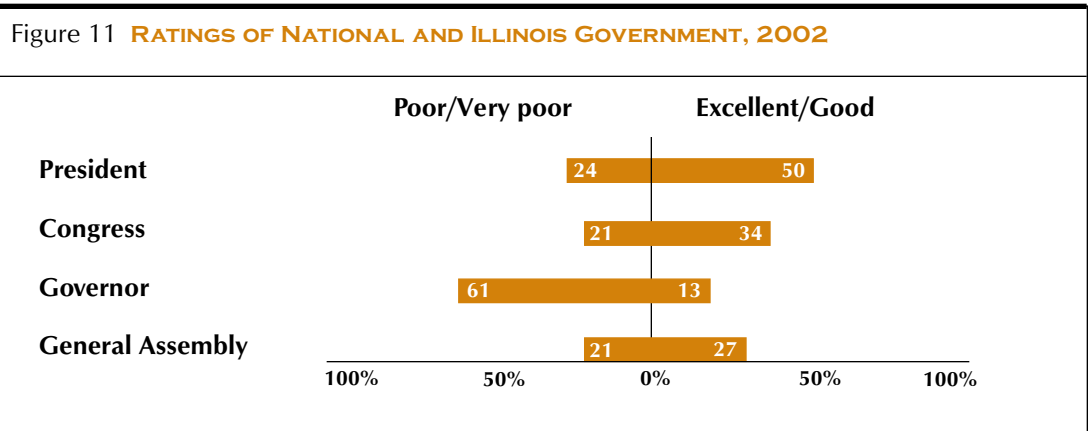
	Won	Lost	Percentage Won
1998	15	19	44 %
1999	12	13	48
2000	19	22	46
2001	17	22	44
2002	39	73	35
2003	40	53	43
Totals	142	202	41

Source: Illinois Association of School Administrators, Springfield, IL

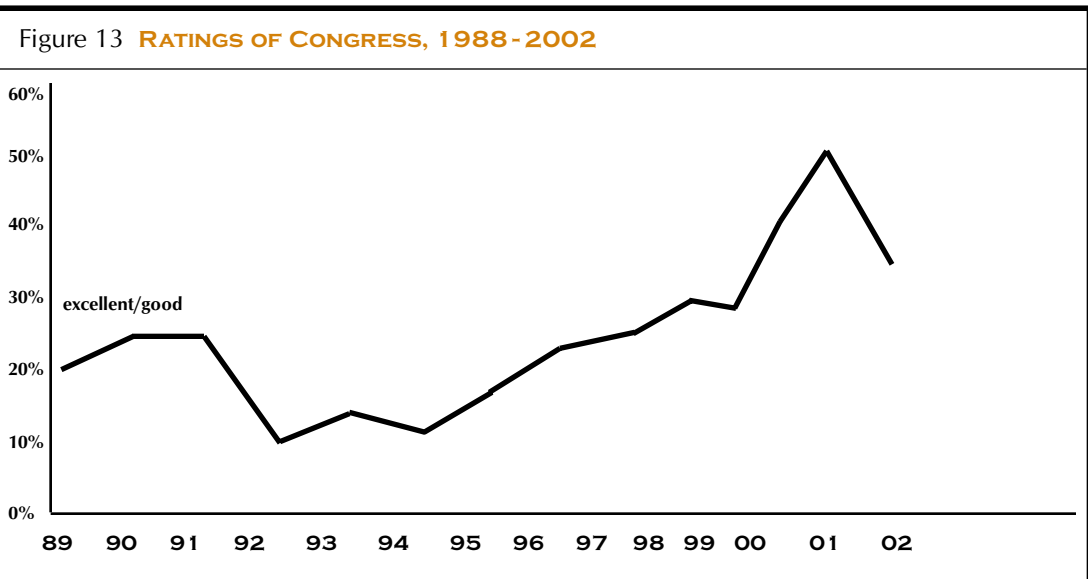
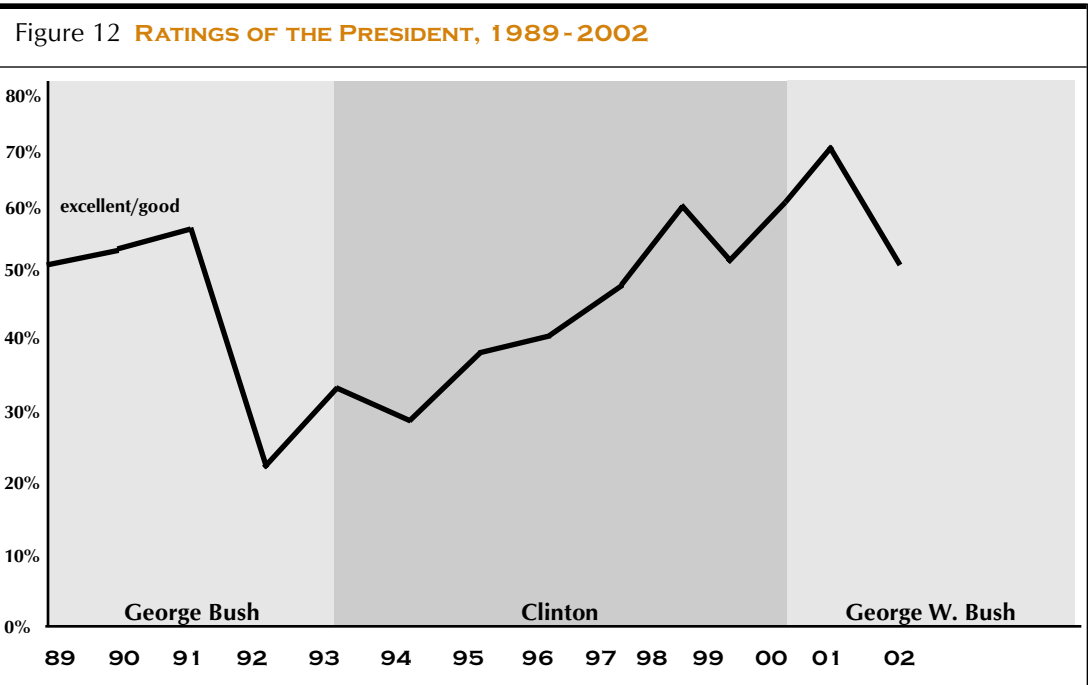
EVALUATION OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Job Approval Ratings at 10 Year Low

Job approval ratings of elected officials, which had generally been on an upward trend since 1992, dropped in the winter of 2002-2003. President Bush had a job approval rating of 50 percent. The US Congress got high ratings from about one in three respondents. Thirteen percent of the respondents gave outgoing Governor Ryan a rating of “excellent” or “good.” Slightly over one in four respondents gave the Illinois Legislature high marks (see Figure 11).



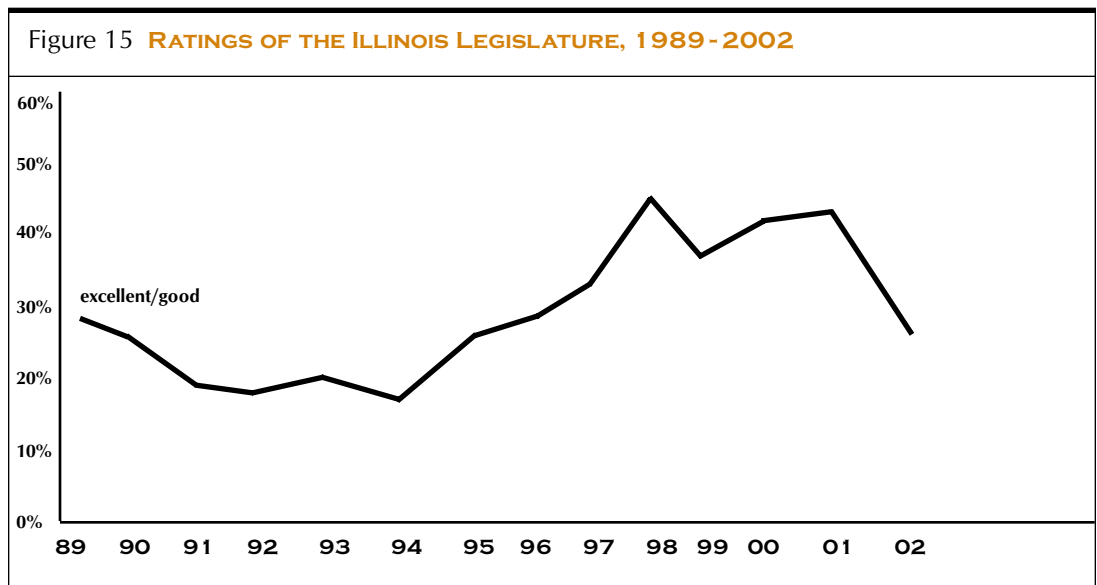
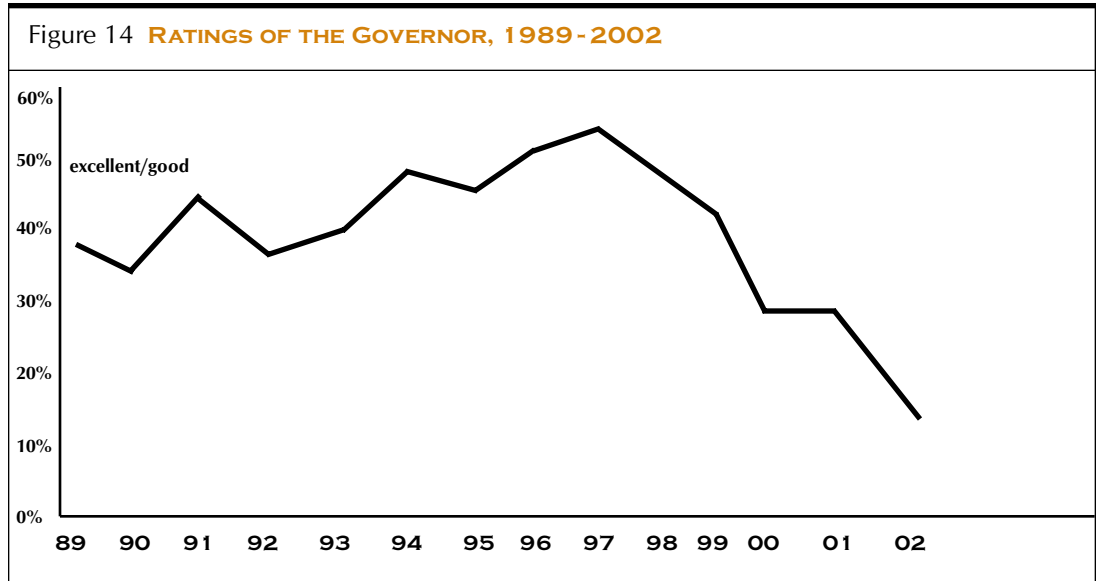
During the course of the Illinois Policy Survey, job approval ratings of elected officials have tended to drop when people are concerned about the economy. As seen in a previous section of this report, satisfaction with the way things are in Illinois has mirrored, over the years, peoples’ evaluations of financial conditions. Job approval ratings of public officials have generally followed a similar trend. President Bush’s ratings, which rose in the days after September 11, 2001, and remained high in the following months, dropped 15 percent in the most recent survey to values lower than those he had before 9/11 (see Figure 12). The drop in ratings of the U.S. Congress was also about 15 percent (see Figure 13), as was the drop in ratings for Governor Ryan (See Figure 14 on the next page) and for the Illinois legislature (see Figure 15 on the next page).



EVALUATION OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Job Approval Ratings at 10 Year Low, Continued

Although this report contains some bad news, including concern about the state budget, relatively low satisfaction levels, and relatively low job approval ratings for public officials it also has some good news. The people of Illinois are strongly supportive of programs and services of the government. The majority give high ratings to schools in Illinois, and three out of four give high ratings to their local schools. Support for funding of public education through twelve grade remains strong, and the majority of respondents also supported increases in state spending for medical care, job training, supporting lower income families, and higher education. Perhaps the most striking result in this year's report is that, even at a time when job approval ratings are at a ten-year low, 96 percent of the respondents were willing to pay higher taxes for at least one activity of state government. Although respondents to the survey reflected their concerns about government in this survey, they also showed their willingness to support the activities of government.



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 December of 2002 through February of 2003. 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 199 to 204.

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 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 using a six by two grouping of age group by sex for the strata. Stratum weights for the state were constructed using 2002 current population estimates obtained from Claritas, Inc.

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 3 percent. This means there is a 95 percent likelihood the population percentages will fall within 3 percentage points of estimates 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 (POL) 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. Wendy Tritt of Trittenhaus Design produced the layout and graphics for this report.

