

**Penta** Policy Insiders

# Illinois Insights Review

# Executive summary

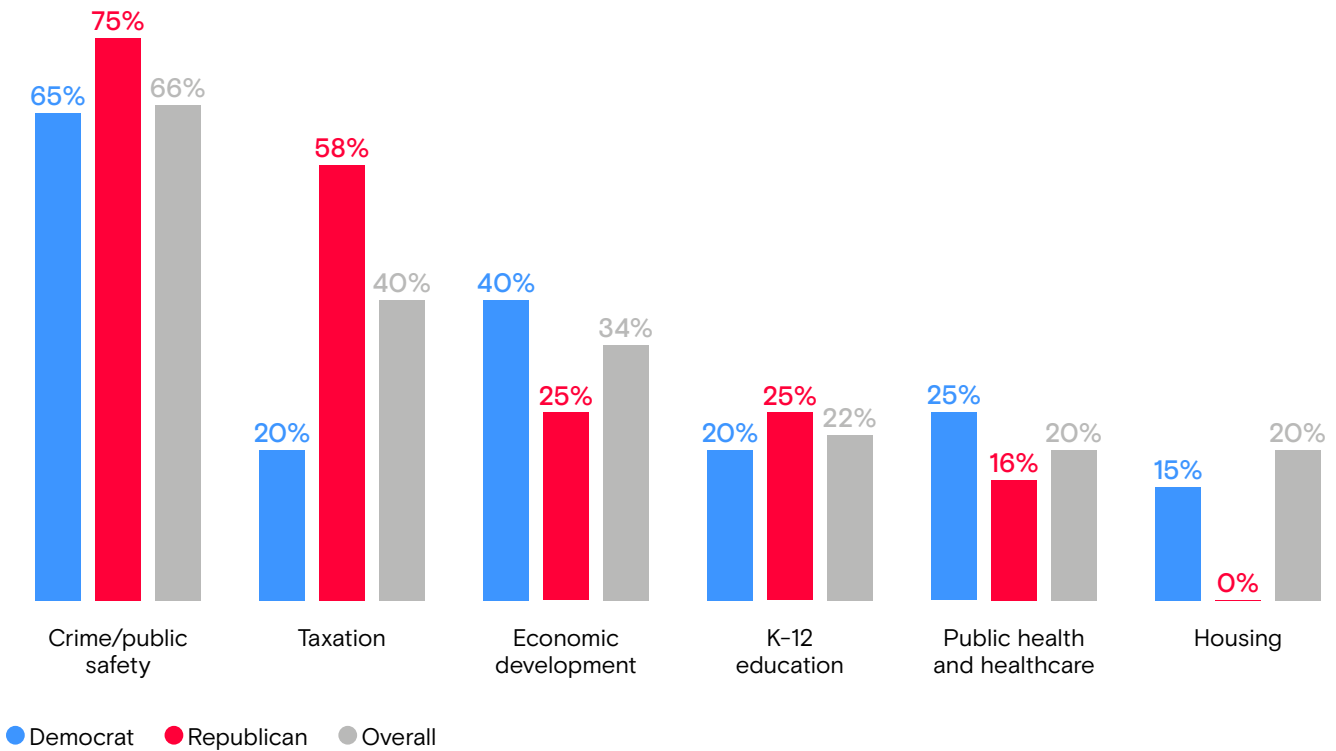
We are excited to share our findings from this year's Illinois Insights Review. From July to September 2022, we interviewed over 50 policymakers to understand their policy priorities and how private and public sectors can collaborate to improve communities across Illinois.

Centered around a crucial election year, our research in 2022 focused on key issues for Illinois policymakers. Crime and public safety are a top concern, with an overwhelming 66 percent of policy staff listing it as a top issue. This spotlight on public safety comes as Illinois struggles with a higher violent crime rate than the national average.<sup>1</sup> Both Democratic and Republican policymakers express concern particularly when it comes to gun violence; however, leaders differ on what the solution is to reduce violence in the state. Our findings also suggest that leaders are split on the role and efficacy of the private sector when it comes to making communities safer.

Illinois' decision-makers also cite the state's economy and taxes as top priorities. There is a bipartisan consensus that taxes in the state are too high and that private-sector collaboration is important in helping bolster the state's economy. Our findings also highlight an emphasis on infrastructure, with Democratic and Republican policymakers in Illinois agreeing that strengthening the state's infrastructure on various fronts is vital.

## Policymaker views on the most pressing issues facing the state

Multiple selections permitted



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## Illinois policy priorities

# Top issues in 2022

### Crime and public safety

Crime and public safety in Illinois is a top issue, with 66 percent of policymakers across party lines saying it is a priority.



Public safety is one of the most important things. As legislators, that should be one of our top priorities because if we don't have public safety within our communities, what do we have?

Senator, Illinois State Senate, R

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If the police department is called to a domestic dispute, you can probably bet that there's mental health issues and substance abuse issues in that situation. And so just arresting somebody, putting them in jail overnight doesn't solve the problem.

Representative, Alabama House of Representatives, D

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### Economic development

Over a third of Illinois policymakers say the economy is a top concern. Within the broader context of economic issues, 40 percent of policy leaders also cite the state's tax rates as a priority. Additionally, policymakers express that they want to see improvements in the state's workforce and business environment, where they see a role for the private sector to help strengthen the state's economy.



We tax people exorbitantly. You turn on the news, you read the news, and there's people leaving the state of Illinois for more business-friendly states. We as state legislatures, we need to look at that, recognize that, and do what we can to reverse that trend.

Representative, Alabama House of Representatives, D

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I would say inflation [is a priority], just the state of the economy. One of the other priorities is growing and maintaining businesses in the state.

Director, Alabama Executive Branch, R

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## Strengthening Illinois infrastructure

Over a quarter of Republican and Democratic policymakers agree that revamping Illinois' infrastructure is crucial for strengthening communities and bolstering economic growth. Policy leaders cite the need for expanding broadband access to rural communities, investing in roads and bridges, and improving education to be priorities when it comes to improving the state's infrastructure.



**We need public investment that goes into infrastructure.** I mean our bridges, our schools have infrastructure that is decades old and needs improvement urgently.

Representative, Illinois House of Representatives, R



We need to focus on what students want to do with their life. They may want to go to trade school or they may want to go to college, but they may also want to go and have a trade. **We have to make sure to provide them with the resources that they need to be who they want to be.**

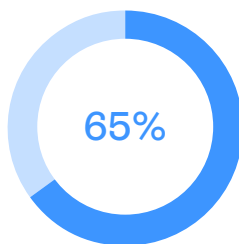
Representative, Alabama House of Representatives, D

## Illinois deep dive

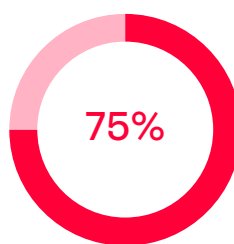
# Crime and public safety

Crime and public safety are top-of-mind concerns for Illinois policymakers across party lines, with 66 percent of decision-makers listing crime as a significant challenge. Many believe a shortage of law enforcement and a lack of investment in local communities, particularly for communities of color, are exacerbating the problem. To help reduce crime, leaders cite the need for increased investment in police departments and social programs.

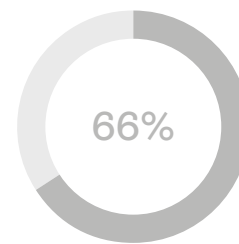
**Percentage of respondents who included crime and public safety in their top three issues facing the state of Illinois by political affiliation.**



Democrat



Republican



Overall



We have a crime epidemic that's been going on since 2020 that's causing a lot of needless crimes, and causing many people to leave the city and the state.

**Councilmember, Illinois Municipality, R**

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There's a lot of crime happening... look, you can't ignore a sector of society for years... and expect a certain percentage of them to know how to make a living, because we didn't supply them with opportunity.

**District Director, Illinois House of Representatives, D**

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Public safety [is a top priority for Illinois in 2022]. We can no longer continue to put funding in reactionary policies that continue to deprive residents of actual safety policies, funding for violence prevention programs, funding for programming in schools, districts, you name it. I think that the lack of investment in our communities has created a situation that is very volatile and, quite frankly, tragic because it can be prevented.

**Alderman, Illinois Municipality, I**

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## Gun violence and its effects on business

When it comes to crime in the state, both Democrat and Republican policymakers express concern about rising gun violence. Firearm violence in Illinois increased by 43 percent between 2015 and 2020, marking one of the largest jumps in gun-related crime in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

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It's very important to ban assault weapons. We're trying very hard to push some issues that will help in reducing the targeting of minorities because that's still a nationwide issue... We're still just seeing a lot of people, a lot of black and brown people just not getting a fair shake.

**District Aide, Illinois State Senate, D**

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[We've seen a rise in] violent crimes, especially involving firearms.

**Councilmember, Illinois Municipality, R**

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This rise in firearm violence has raised concerns about how it will impact business in the state, particularly from Republican leaders.

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Gun violence has compounded the effect of people not wanting to locate here, people not wanting to move here, businesses not wanting to stay here... it costs our state bottom line. And that's less money for schools. And it's a snowball effect because you have a situation where if people leave, you have less money to try to solve the problems that you're trying to solve in the first place.

**Representative, Illinois House of Representatives, R**

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It's not good at all when companies leave. They're taking a lot of these jobs with them. They're putting more people on the unemployment line or forcing people to leave the state of Illinois to seek employment elsewhere if they can't find employment to fill the gap of these jobs. So these are big companies with millions of dollars of revenue sources and not to mention the hundreds of jobs that go with it, so it's devastating....

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**

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## Solutions: Law enforcement and social programs

Illinois policymakers have varying ideas on how to solve rising crime amidst a shortage in law enforcement.<sup>3</sup> Both Democrats and Republicans express the need for increased investment in law enforcement, while Democrats emphasize the importance of investing in social and community programs, with the goal of tackling the root causes of the issue.

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I've been working with organizations to get them on board with restorative justice. There are a lot of groups that understand it, but it costs money to get the issues out there. There are a lot of groups that talk about criminal justice reform, but there's a need to really talk about prison reform and making sure that we have restorative justice models in the prisons.

**Representative, Illinois House of Representatives, D**

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The answer continues to be, "Well, we need more programs." If programs were the solution then communities like Chicago and Rockford and Aurora would be the safest in the state because they have more programs than other communities do. **So, unfortunately, we continue to have programs that excuse the actions of individuals and there's never any accountability.**

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**

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Our residents have to have the assurance that the streets are going to be safe. **We have to have our first responders; we have to have their backs.** Because we also see the shortage that we're having with first responders leaving that sector just like we have with a teacher shortage.

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**



It's a top conversation within the entire General Assembly that we need to increase our law enforcement opportunities. **We need more officers on the streets. And by the same token, we have to give them the support and the tools that they deserve to have.**

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**



**We're trying to equip our police forces with better training, better equipment, better collaboration with other community groups.** We have funded communities and police departments around my area in central Illinois to not only be able to buy body cameras, which are now mandated or will be mandated but also to look at reaching out to caseworkers in mental health or social work so there can be better follow-through.

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, D**

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## Private sector collaboration to curb crime

Policymakers are split on whether or not help from the private sector will effectively reduce crime rates in Illinois. Some decision-makers express concerns about the outcomes of programs that are aimed at making communities safer, while others say private-sector involvement could be a solution, especially amidst a shortage of law enforcement staff.



I feel bad for those private organizations that are sincere and they try to help. But it's virtually impossible when these young kids have all these gang members and others that are encouraging them to be part of that...**The results aren't there. And that's the problem. We don't do any outcomes of social programs. We fund them because they sound good. But we don't ever ask for the outcomes of those programs.** And when we do ask for outcomes, they'll say, "Well, our program is doing good. It's just the other programs aren't doing their job.

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**



I wouldn't mind some outsourcing to the private sector to help with rising crime. I think that we could use the help. I think we have had a lot of police that have retired... and replacing them is not easy.

District Director, Illinois State Senate, D

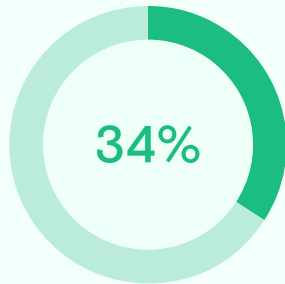
## Conclusion

Reducing crime is a primary objective for Illinois decision-makers. State policymakers are concerned about gun violence, with Republicans especially apprehensive about how rising crime will affect business activity. While policymakers on both sides of the aisle agree that increased funding to police departments is critical, Democrats specifically call for increased investment in social programs in order to create safer communities.



## Illinois deep dive

# Economy and taxation



of Illinois policymakers say economic development is a top priority

When asked to select the top policy priorities in Illinois, 34 percent of respondents selected economic development, but even more—40 percent—selected the specific issue of taxation. A main concern for policymakers is that the tax burden is causing residents and businesses to move to other states with better economic conditions. Policymakers are working to evaluate different solutions, but lessening the tax burden is difficult since it is being used to pay off Illinois' pension debt. Policymakers worry that these conditions are creating a difficult environment for consumers and businesses alike, and remain at the forefront of policy conversations in Illinois.

## Taxation: Leading the nation

Illinois leads the country with the highest state and local tax rates. The state also ranked second highest in the nation for property taxes for the fourth consecutive year.<sup>4</sup>

## Desperate for tax relief



**We tax people exorbitantly.** You turn on the news, you read the news, and **there's people leaving the state of Illinois for more business-friendly states.** We as state legislatures, we need to look at that, recognize that, and **do what we can to reverse that trend.**

**Representative, Illinois House of Representatives, R**



That deficit from the state has to be made up through property taxes across the state...I think **we have the second highest property tax rates in the country right now.**

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**

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## Pension problems

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I think being perceived as having high taxes, I think that's an ongoing battle and also our looming pension debt. I'm looking at it broadly at the state level. But then obviously a lot of that does trickle down to the local level as well.

**Councilmember, Illinois Municipality, D**

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## Labor and workforce

Another significant challenge is a shortage of skilled labor in the workforce and policymakers feel that low wages and unfair working conditions need to be addressed in order to make improvements.



I would say [the priorities are] the labor pool, competition from other states, and the unfortunate overall economic climate that we're in right now... Employers are just having a difficult time finding skilled labor to want to come work for them.

**Councilmember, Illinois Municipality, R**

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Fair labor and competitive wages [are priorities]... keeping minimum wage, minimum wage is one metric, but giving folks the ability to thrive versus just survive, right? So **what are we doing to ensure safe working conditions and fair wages?** So just labor practices in general.

**Chief of Staff, Illinois Municipality, D**

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We have a highly skilled workforce that traditionally over the years has performed very well. I think that **we have a labor shortage right now.** So it means a lot of companies are scrambling just to find people to fill the jobs that they have.

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, D**

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Policymakers also want to see more educational opportunities for individuals who aren't interested in traditional four-year degrees but want to further develop their skills and contribute to the workforce.

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There's always been an issue with finding skilled, qualified labor...**We need to make sure that we are building those vocational programs in our high schools** and showing them that working with your hands and **finding a trade is not subpar as far as a profession.**

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**

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There's a need to find the workforce. There's a need to have skilled labor. And that's what I [hear] mostly about from the industry, that there's a shortage in the workforce. We need to focus on what students want to do with their life.... they may want to go to college, but they may also want to go and have a trade. **We have to make sure to provide them with the resources that they need to be who they want to be.**

**Representative, Illinois House of Representatives, D**

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## Business environment

Despite concerns about high taxes and losing manufacturers, policymakers remain optimistic that they can attract businesses to the area and create a healthy economic environment.



## Combating inflation

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**We're obviously dealing with record-high inflation** like the rest of the country, so finding ways that we can mitigate that as much as possible for our business community as well as our residential communities.

**Councilmember, Illinois Municipality, D**

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## Retaining manufacturers

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The biggest problems facing manufacturers, whether they're small manufacturers or large manufacturers, is ultimately the cost of producing an item. **If it costs more to produce it in Illinois than it does in another state, then they have no choice but to go to another state.**

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**

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## Improving the job market

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Having more companies come in and establish themselves in our county, or in our state, gives people jobs. It tends to make a community more healthy because you have more people having jobs, and it can help with the property tax burden, which is another thing in Illinois that's an issue. **So that's another thing we're trying to do, is attract businesses to the area.**

**Board Member, Illinois Municipality, D**

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## The silver lining

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I think logistics is probably the biggest [appeal]. I mean we have the biggest interstates. We have the Mississippi River. We have the major railroads run through the state of Illinois... I would say **logistics and infrastructure is probably the biggest draw to Illinois.**

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**

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## Public and private sector solutions

Policymakers believe the public sector needs to provide strategic assistance to developers and other businesses to keep them in the state and strengthen the economy. In addition, involving more public sector stakeholders will help support more systemic solutions.



The state is working on **improving our low-income tax credits so more developers take advantage**. You're not going to get for-profit developers to build affordable housing without low-income tax credits.

**District Director, Illinois House of Representatives, D**



What we need is **coordination and intergovernmental coordination with state, city, federal, and the economic development departments**. They have to be planning with local offices, with opportunities that are coming, again, federal, state, or city wide and identifying the best way where we can execute this plan. When there's no planning—what we've seen is all these opportunities are finding other places and states to go and invest.

**Alderman, Illinois Municipality, I**

## Conclusion

Policymakers in Illinois are working to improve the economy and keep residents and businesses from moving to states with lower tax rates and more desirable economic landscapes. While the state is also experiencing widespread economic issues with inflation and manufacturing, many of their challenges connect back to their high tax rates. Looking forward, policymakers want to see the coordination amongst the public and private sectors to promote a healthier economic environment and attract individuals to the state.



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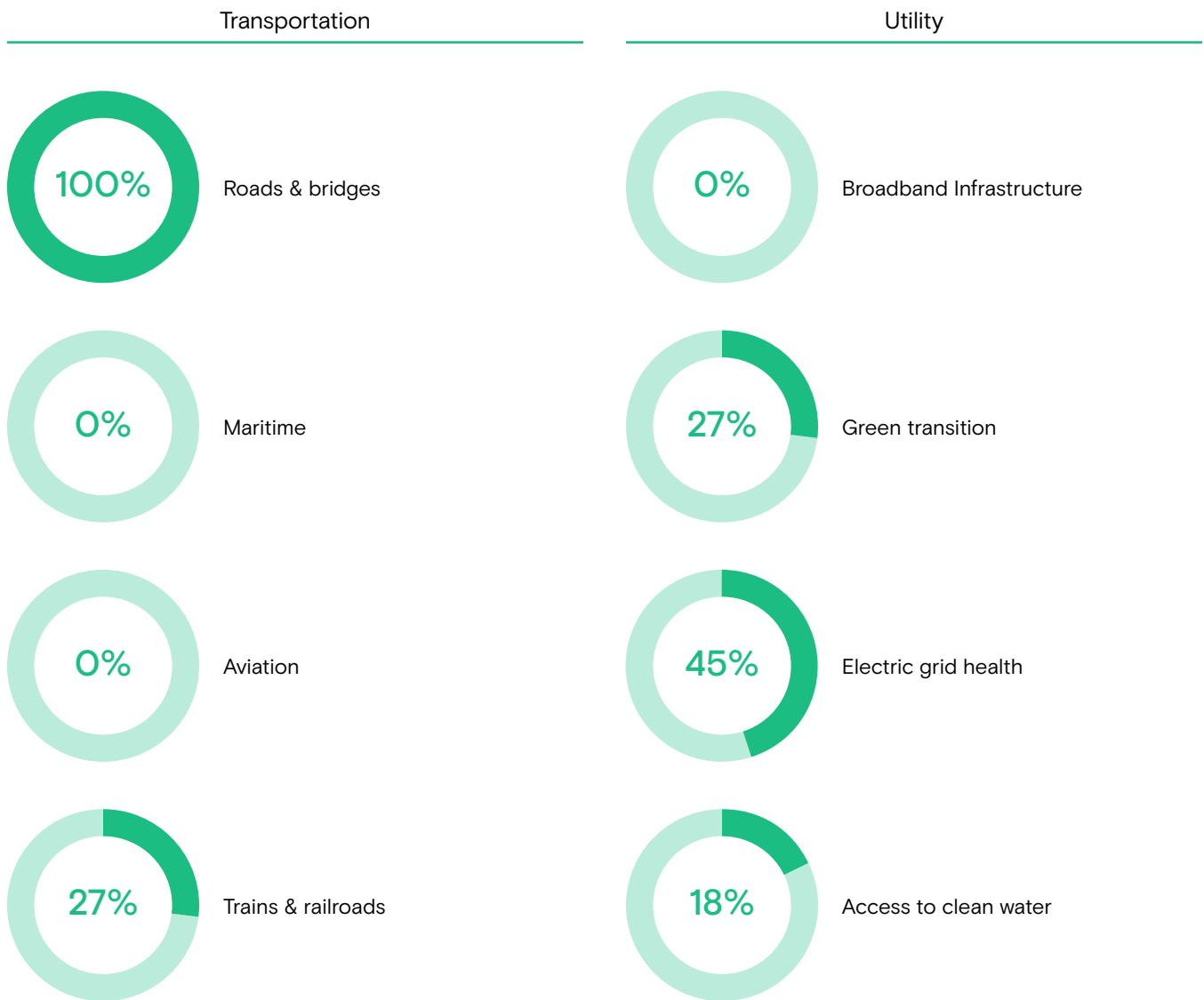
# Illinois deep dive

## Infrastructure

Almost a quarter of Illinois policymakers—22 percent—view infrastructure as a top policy priority. Policy leaders detail the need for increased infrastructure investment in education, transportation, roads, healthcare, and broadband access in order to bolster the state’s economic growth.

### Most pressing infrastructure issues in Illinois

Multiple selections permitted



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## Public investment into Illinois' infrastructure

Both Republican and Democrat policymakers agree that revamping Illinois' infrastructure is crucial to strengthening communities and aiding economic growth. Policy staff cite the need for increased support for underserved communities and expanding broadband access to rural communities.

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I would say [a priority is] helping underserved communities. What that means is appropriate access to health care, support for small businesses, especially minority small businesses, and economic development and resources to underserved communities, making dollars a little bit more accessible to help underserved communities that need to do major infrastructure repairs, say, like water and sewer, if you will.

Senator, Illinois State Senate, D

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We need public investment that goes into infrastructure. I mean our bridges, our schools have infrastructure that is decades old and needs improvement urgently.

Representative, Illinois House of Representatives, R

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Broadband internet access has become such a need. It probably should be treated like a utility, like electricity and gas, in my mind. And because in rural areas, it's not economical for a company to invest... unfortunately, you'll have to get some assistance from the state, I think, or the federal government.

Representative, Illinois House of Representatives, R

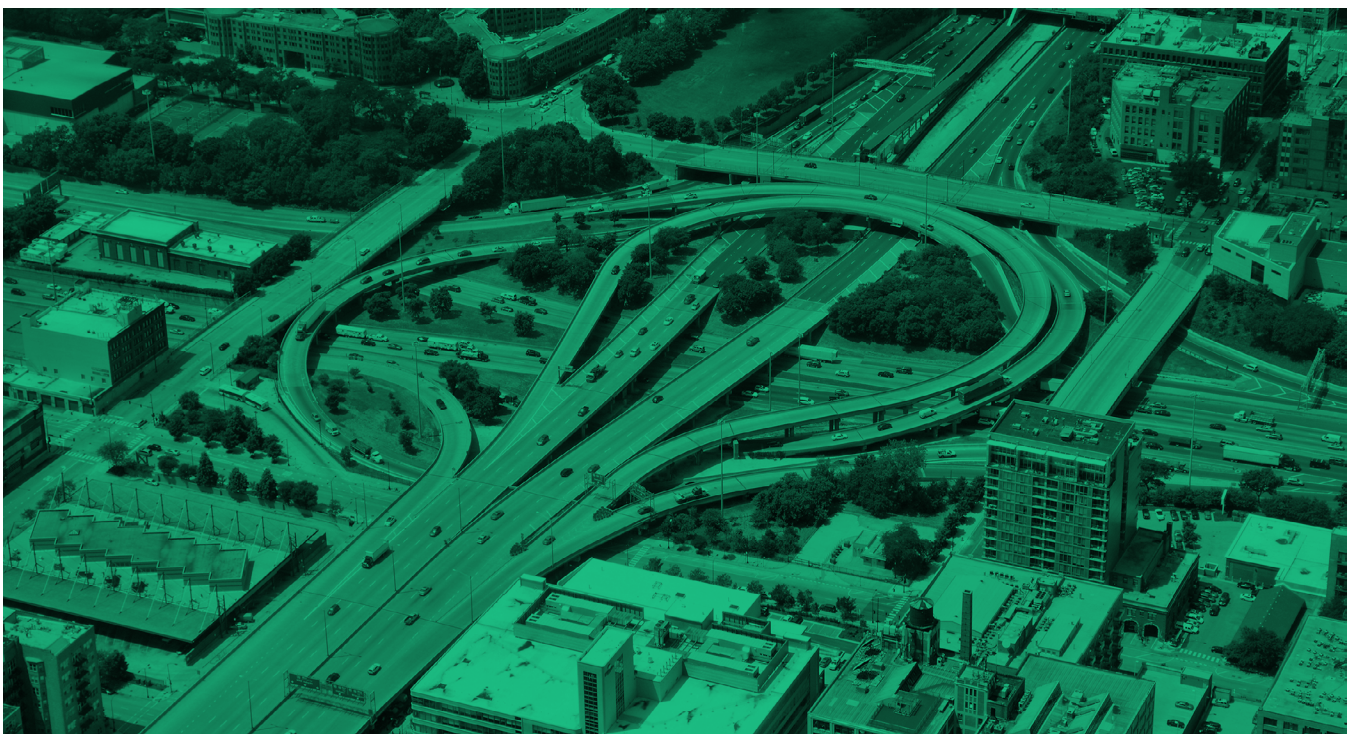
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Another big infrastructure need is just continuing to maintain streets. There's nothing like repaving and reconstructing the street in front of somebody's house. That goes a long way towards [keeping people happy].

Councilmember, Illinois Municipality, D

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## Infrastructure and education

State policymakers emphasize the value of investing into K-12 education to further education outcomes, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic made it more challenging for teachers and students alike in the classroom.

Decision-makers also emphasize the importance of creating more post-secondary education pathways, so that students have more options available to them.

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**I think education has to be a top priority.** We've seen that the two and a half years that we've had the COVID crisis, that education has suffered greatly all the way from K through 12, and at higher ed levels as well. That has to be a number one priority.

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, D**

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**I think that it's a nice move away from just everybody has to go to college to the fact that everybody needs to have a post-secondary credential.** It doesn't have to be a college degree. It can be a certificate in welding. It can be a truck driving certificate. It can be whatever. There's a whole range of jobs where that's very important.

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, D**

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**There's always been an issue with finding skilled, qualified labor. And in my opinion, it's because we've lied to our young kids saying, the only way you can be successful in life is if you have a four-year liberal arts degree, and it's nonsense.** We need to make sure that we are building those vocational programs in our high schools and showing them that working with your hands and finding a trade is not subpar as far as a profession.

**Senator, Illinois State Senate, R**

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## Conclusion

Illinois policymakers agree that investing in the state's infrastructure is crucial for uplifting local communities and cite a growing need for better transportation, broadband, and education. When it comes to education, policy leaders say they want to see more post-secondary options for Illinois students, including access to vocational programs and certifications.

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Penta Policy Insiders provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

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### Citations

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