

**Penta** Policy Insiders

# Michigan Insights Review Series

Environment and Climate

August 2023  
[policyinsiders.pentagroup.co](https://policyinsiders.pentagroup.co)

# Executive summary

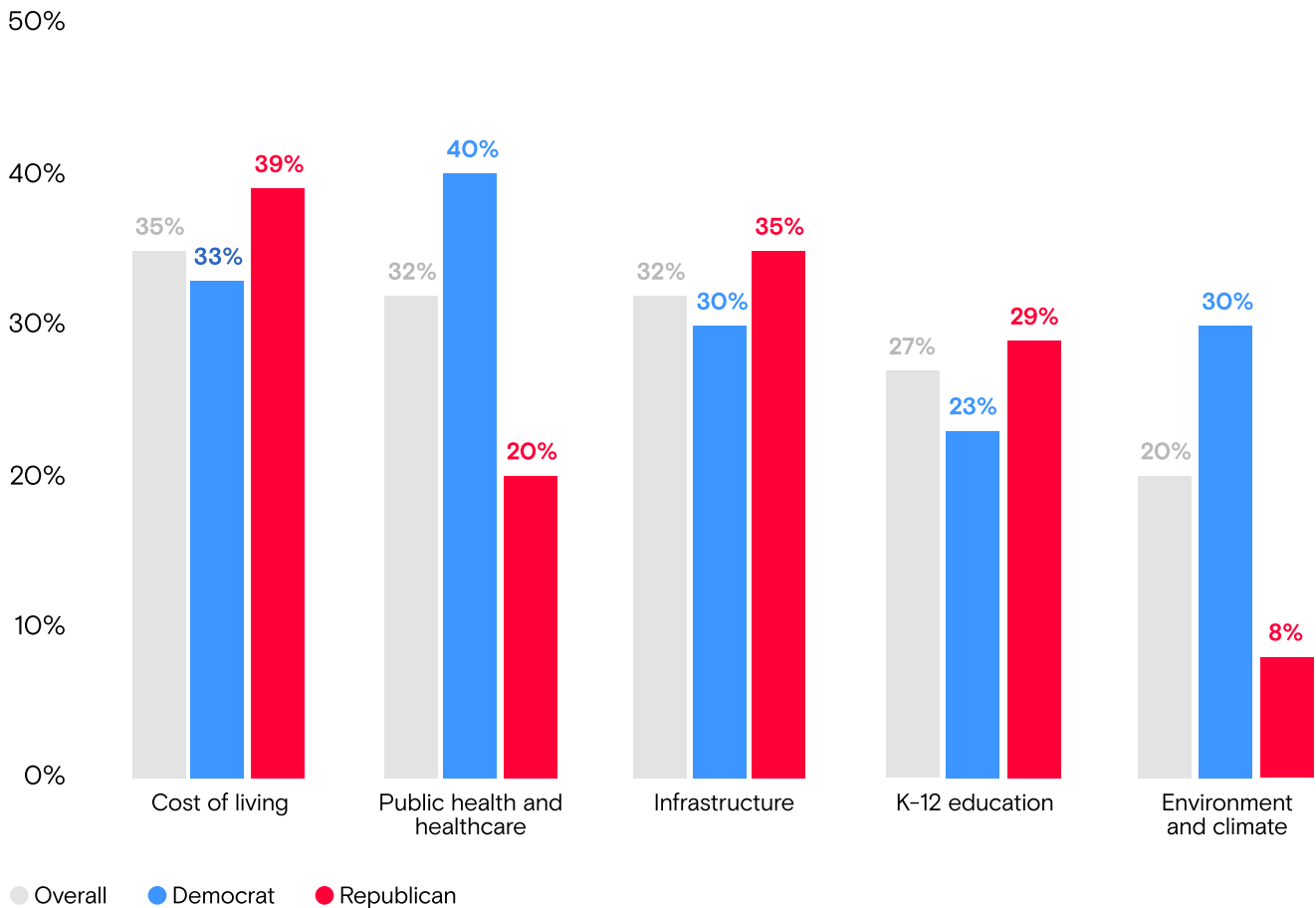
We are pleased to share our findings from this year's Michigan Insights Review. From January to May 2023, we interviewed 237 policymakers in the state to learn about their top policy priorities, as well as the most pressing challenges for policy leaders across the political spectrum.

Michigan policymakers we spoke to detail a variety of priorities for their communities, including improving K-12 education, healthcare, infrastructure, and more. At the top of policymakers' minds is the rising cost of living, with 35 percent of leaders citing it as a top issue. This focus on cost of living comes at a time when nearly 40 percent of Michiganders say they struggle to afford basic needs.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to rising living expenses, policy leaders also convey concerns about housing prices and rising income inequality. The second highest-ranked priority for policy staff is infrastructure, with 32 percent of policy leaders saying it's a top-of-mind challenge. In fact, when asked about infrastructure objectives, a notable 89 percent of policymakers say improving the state's roads and bridges is vital.

This report is the sixth in a series that examines Michigan policymakers' top policy priorities for 2022. This review examines environment and climate in the state.

## Top policy priorities in Michigan

Multiple selections permitted



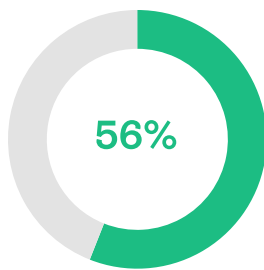
## Michigan deep dive

# Environment

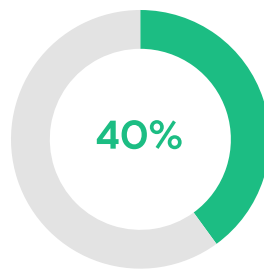
The environment is a top policy priority for Democratic policymakers in Michigan, with 30 percent of Democrats citing it as a challenge. Policy staff are primarily concerned with protecting the water and limiting pollution, but are also paying attention to the impacts of extreme climate shifts.

### Top policy priorities in Michigan

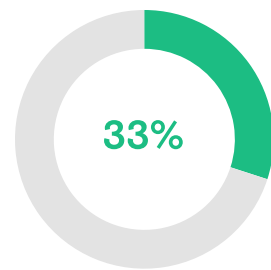
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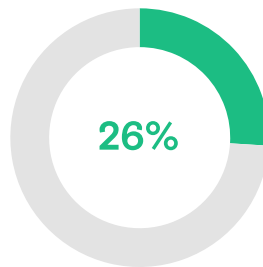
Water pollution



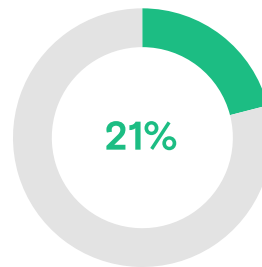
Access to clean water



Waste disposal



Air pollution



Extreme climate shifts



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## Water woes

A majority of policymakers - 56 percent - identify water pollution to be a leading environmental issue in the state, followed by access to clean water. Concerns regarding water safety and access have been top of mind in Michigan for some time, particularly given the lingering impacts of the high-profile water system crisis in the city of Flint and other communities across the state. In fact, this issue is so prevalent that in addition to being an environmental priority for policy leaders, access to clean water is also identified as a top infrastructure need.



The state has mandated that lead service lines be removed. You don't want your children and population exposed to lead, but it costs \$75 million or more to finish replacing all the lead lines. Our community can't pass a bond or take out loans to complete that project... You can't pass that cost off. So **you have to rely on the charity of the state and federal government and grants and whatnot to just do that one specific task.**

**Councilman, Michigan State Municipality, D**

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## Climate concerns

In order to address challenges caused by climate shifts and inclement weather, policymakers across the aisle highlight the need to update the electric grid and explore more reliable sources of power.



As far as climate change is concerned, **we are doing some major damage to our atmosphere**, and we're being told that over and over again by scientists, and **we still don't seem to be moving in the right direction**, to me, as far as trying to slow down what we're doing to our environment.

**State Manager, Michigan Executive Branch, D**



I believe there was a storm that came through and knocked power out for sometimes 5, 6 days at a time. **So if our grid is not reliable, our energy production is not at a large enough capacity. And then we have to look at the grid sustainability...** some of the poles and wires were installed in the 1950s and can not carry the burden that is needed now.

**Representative, Michigan House of Representatives, r**



I think that the other parts of it are addressing the issues with climate change and recognizing that **we really need to make some significant shifts in what we're using for power. Looking at more sustainable ecological friendly ways to do that.**

**Section Chief, Michigan Executive Branch, I**

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Many policymakers support developing sustainable energy resources, but want to consider the long term impacts and costs of such advancements.

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Unless you have renewables that are powering the grid, and we, of course, have base load issues with that... it's going to be a discussion of a natural gas base supplemented by battery storage and wind and solar for peak hours... **a lot of these green technologies are still very new. What do you do with the waste that eventually comes with them** when you're wind turbines, and your solar fields and your batteries start giving way

**Councilman, Michigan State Municipality, D**

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I think it's good to be good stewards of our environment, but **we have to make sure we're also providing low-cost alternatives to everyone.**

**Representative, Michigan House of Representatives, R**

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## Conclusion

Even though Republicans and Democrats disagree on the importance of the environment as an overall state priority, there is bipartisan agreement that water pollution and access to clean water are top environmental challenges facing the state of Michigan. Republican policymakers view waste disposal as another top concern, while Democrats consider extreme climate shifts to be a more important area of focus. Both agree, however, that the costs and long term effects of addressing these issues should be taken into consideration as decisions are made.

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## About Penta Policy Insiders

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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Qualitative n: 32 | Quantitative n: 205

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