

Penta Policy Insiders

Michigan Insights Review Series

Top Issues

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Executive summary

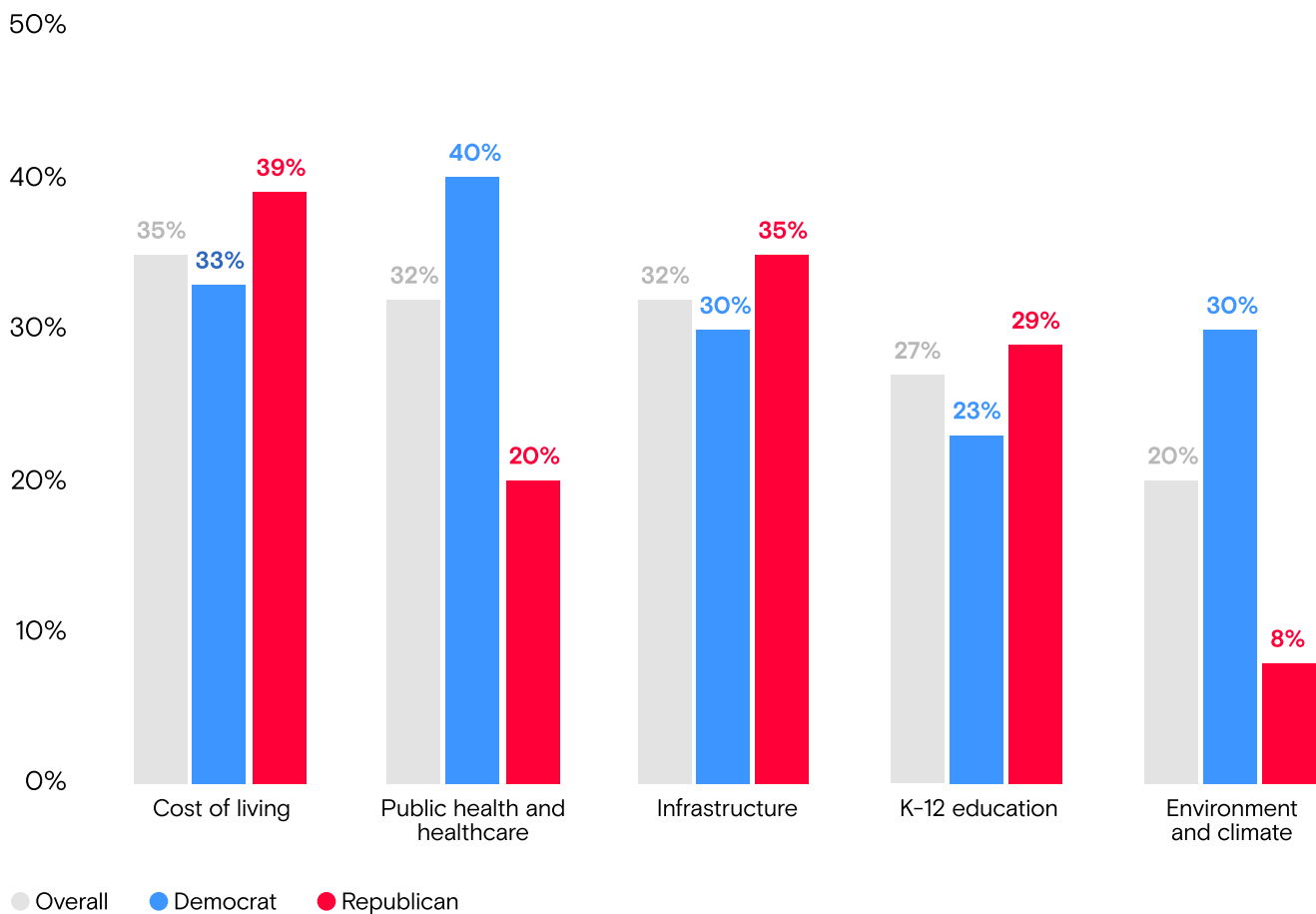
We are pleased to share our findings from this year's Michigan Insights Review. From January to May 2023, we interviewed 237 policymakers in the state to learn about their top policy priorities, as well as the most pressing challenges for policy leaders across the political spectrum.

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.¹ 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 first in a series that examines five of Michigan policymakers' top policy priorities, which include (i) cost of living (ii) infrastructure (iii) healthcare (iv) K-12 education and (v) environment.

Top policy priorities in Michigan

Multiple selections permitted



Cost of living

Cost-of-living is the top overall priority on both sides of the aisle, with policymakers in Michigan noting the lack of affordable housing and healthcare as particular areas of focus. Policy staff have also expressed a desire to make Michigan's economy more competitive on the national scale, as part of efforts to help ease concerns about quality of life.



As we look at inflation and the cost of living, just maintaining a home is challenging at this point. Paying for utilities, insurance, cars, all of that stuff. And it requires a job that clearly makes more than 10 or 15 dollars an hour.

Councilman, Michigan State Municipality, D



I think the big thing this year we're seeing across the nation, especially here in Michigan, is the affordable housing crisis... our big focus this year is increasing... the stock of housing across the state... So that's kind of a broad-level our main policy priority this year. And kind of connected to that and leading into the healthcare area is being able to access the services that you need within your community.

Policy Analyst, Private, I



Michigan is still kind of lagging behind other states when it comes to sort of our economy. We're still kind of focused in this old manufacturing and we need to enter kind of this new economy. So trying to figure out other areas of our economy that workers can go to work in, like healthcare and computers, and kind of diversifying our economy some more... That's a particular interest to help us attract more corporations and more people to move into Michigan... Housing is a big issue as well.

District Director, Michigan State Senate, R



I would just say that all of the prescription drugs need to be reformed. It's just really expensive... people are making choices between getting their prescriptions filled or paying their rent.

Director, Michigan Executive Branch, D

Public health and healthcare

Policymakers want to see improvements to public health, particularly when it comes to the high cost of healthcare. Democrats are especially focused on this issue, and highlight prescription prices as a notable pressure point.



Well, I think when you look at the cost of some things, when you look at prescription medications and how much some of these prescription medications cost, and for those who have no insurance or limited insurance, I think they need to get together and figure out how to put some type of cap on that. It's not fair that some of these pharmaceutical companies can charge whatever they want to charge with no type of regulation.

Manager, Michigan Executive Branch, D



I think there's probably some significant needs to it, especially when we live right next to Canada. And you have people who have gone over — I mean, clearly if people are willing to risk and maybe even do something illegal to get it because of the cost of their medication, then something should be done.

Section Chief, Michigan Executive Branch, I



Equal access, affordability, making sure that those who need services are able to get them and that they're able to do that in a way that does not put an undue and unreasonable burden on them that might result in them opting out of pursuing their health because it's more work and than the gain is they'll get from it, which is bad, but a reality.

Advocacy Director, Private, N/A



Infrastructure

Infrastructure is also top of mind for Michigan policymakers, with 32 percent of policy staff expressing concerns about this sector. Policymakers specifically want to see improvements when it comes to roads and bridges in the near future.



Michigan is definitely having an infrastructure problem right now. We have a lot of bridges and disrepair. Our roads are horrible compared to many other states... I don't necessarily think we're seeing much improvement. That's probably going to be a thing that is going to have a lot of focus, infrastructure with roads and tunnels and bridges probably in the near future.

District Director, Michigan State Senate, R



The things that I've seen from my constituents have been around infrastructure as well as they're looking for more direction on energy independence.

Councilman, Michigan State Municipality, R



I think each person gets a block of money and I'm hoping that they can use some of the funds that's allowed in their package to be able to help their local communities when needed. I see [certain cities still have] lead piping and need to get their drinking water corrected.

Supervisor, Michigan State Municipality, D

K-12 education

Almost 30 percent of the policymakers we surveyed on both sides of the aisle agree that K-12 Education is a pressing issue for the state of Michigan, and cite ongoing teacher shortages and student achievement as areas of particular concern.



So definitely a shortage of teachers right now, needing more teachers, needing more funds being spent...

Supervisor, Michigan State Municipality, D



I would just like to see us challenge tomorrow students to a higher degree. We should always be challenging — we should always be challenging more because we should expect more.

Supervisor, Michigan State Municipality, D



I think we need to look at the individual performance of the children. Are they performing to acceptable levels within key areas? And then from there, we need to evaluate the kids at an individual level from a teacher or administration standpoint. That gives some folks some latitude to work on the individual child's strengths.

Councilman, Michigan State Municipality, R



It has become a less desirable job to be a teacher. [We're] trying to put back some of the investments that have been taken away over the years so that teachers can be paid more... we're trying to do [two] things at the same time - make larger, longer-term investments into education and then also put back some of the rights of teachers in particular...

Representative, Michigan House of Representatives, D

Crime and public safety

Crime and public safety is an overall priority for Michigan policymakers. However, Republicans are more focused on this issue area, particularly when it comes to gun policies.



We're having a strong debate in Michigan right now around gun access and gun policies with the recent shooting at Michigan State University in February.

District Director, Michigan State Senate, R



I know for my community, there's kind of a disconnect with the interaction with police and minority groups. So yeah, I think that would be something that needs to be addressed.

Specialist, Michigan State Municipality, N/A



There's mass shootings happening at schools and parks and grocery stores. We're not addressing the root cause of the issue, and we haven't for quite some time. So I think it is just a foundational step of starting to build a culture where there's justice for people and we are modeling what responsible gun ownership should be because I don't think that has been modeled in the past

Representative, Michigan House of Representatives, D

Environment and climate

Environmental and climate issues are pressing topics for Michigan policymakers, and particularly for Democrats. Policymakers on both sides of the aisle, however, express concerns about the toll climate change is taking on the environment and also highlight the need for discussions about the economic practicalities of addressing such concerns.



I think that kind of philosophy or strategy should be something that more businesses embrace. **You don't have to be a client or a climate change advocate to do the right thing.**

Councilman, Michigan State Municipality, R



I want to be more conscious of my carbon footprint, and my family wants an electric vehicle, and we want solar panels. **It's like there's an economic reality that accompanies [these goals] that may not make it feasible even if it's desirable.**

Councilman, Michigan State Municipality, D



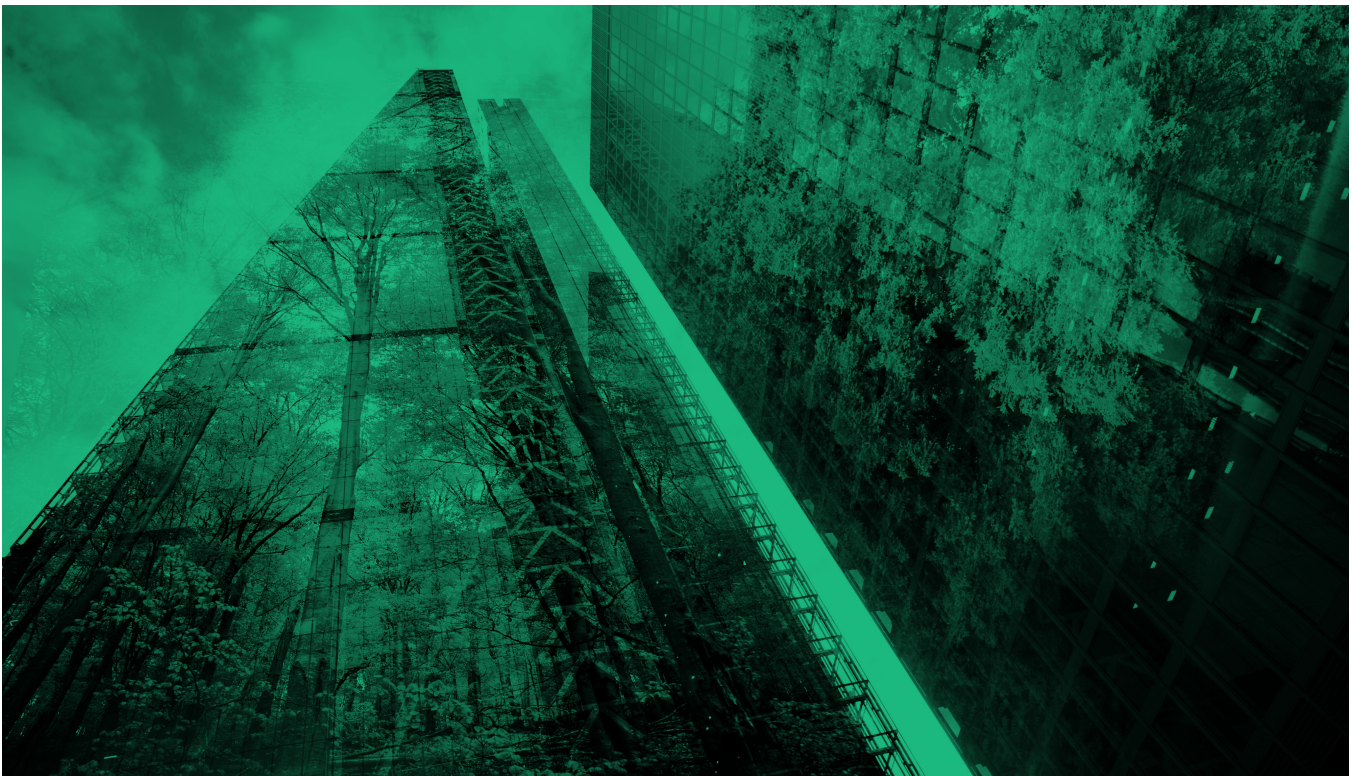
As far as climate change is concerned, we are doing some major damage to our atmosphere, and we're being told that over and over again by scientists, and we still don't seem to be moving in the right direction as far as trying to slow down what we're doing to our environment.

Manager, Michigan Executive Branch, D



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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1. <https://www.uwmich.org/alice-report>

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