

Penta Policy Insiders

Florida Insights Review Series

Top Issues

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Executive summary

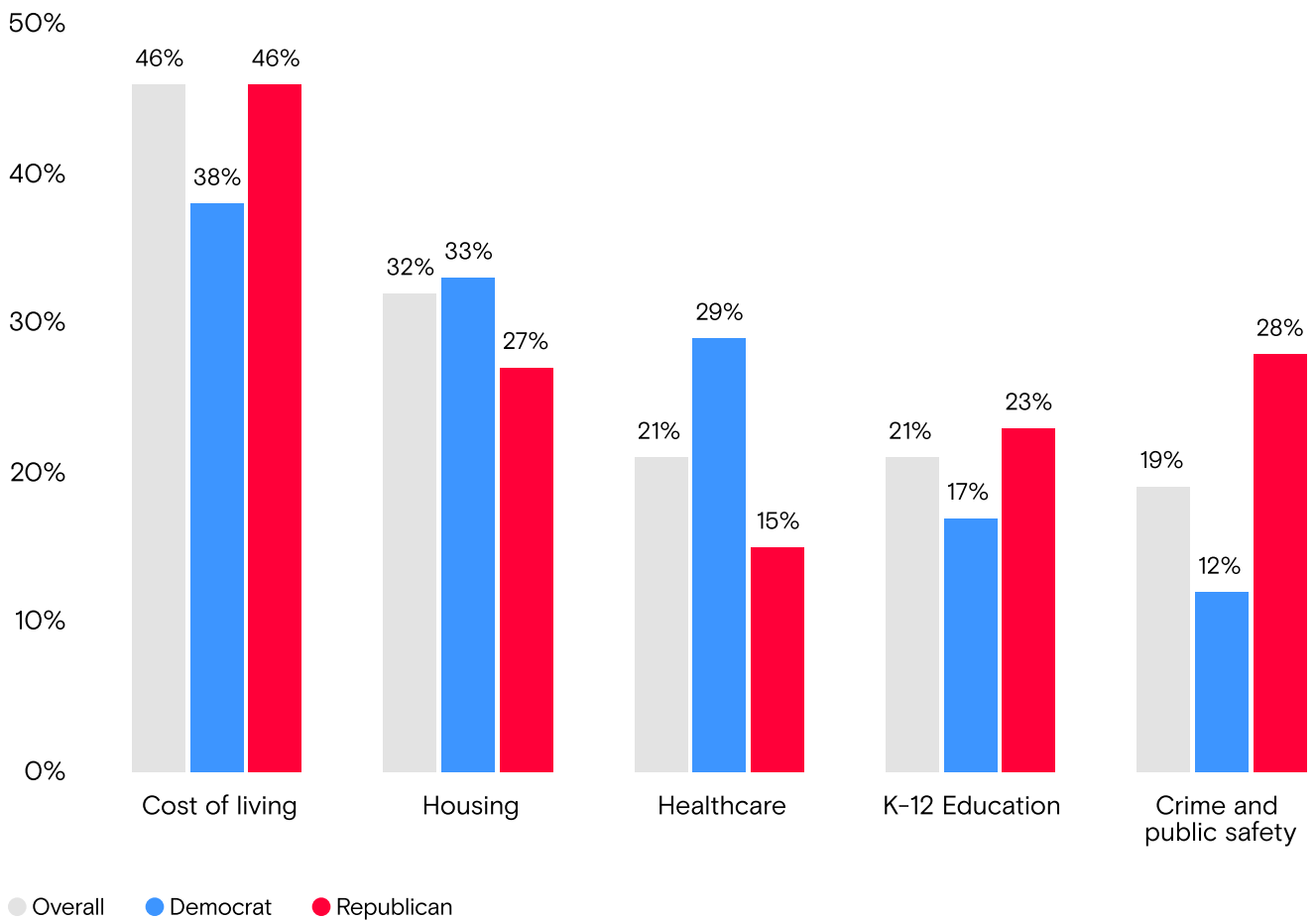
We are pleased to share our findings from this year's Florida Insights Review. From March to July 2023, we interviewed 292 policymakers in the state to learn about their policy priorities and top issues faced by communities across the state.

Cost of living is the top concern among Florida policymakers, with 46 percent of policymakers selecting it as leading priority. Additionally, 32 percent of policymakers cite housing to be a significant issue in the sunshine state, with policy staff on both sides of the aisle identifying challenges around affordable housing, homelessness, and high rental costs. Additionally, our research revealed healthcare and K-12 education as the other top priorities for policymakers and key influencers in Tallahassee and around Florida.

This report is the first in a series that examines four of Florida Policymakers' top priorities, which include (i) Cost of Living (ii), Housing (iii), Healthcare, and (iv) K-12 Education.

Top policy priorities in Florida

Multiple selections permitted



Cost of Living

Cost of living is the top issue for both Democrats and Republicans in Florida, with almost 50 percent of policymakers identifying this as the most pressing concern in the state. Policy staff are particularly aware of the impact the increase in cost-of-living is having on Florida's housing market, which is reportedly driving lower-income populations out of their communities.¹



We just see people struggle to make ends meet. Even though folks have a job, it's not enough to survive. There continue to be serious struggles when it comes to paying your bills on time, making sure that you are not rent burdened... And of course, the affordability challenges also impacts the ability for someone to have any type of economic mobility because they can't really progress in society... if they're just constantly struggling to make ends meet. So it also just impacts our ability to end cycles of poverty and to help build a talented workforce, diversify our economy for long-term sustainability, and growth as a state.

Representative, Florida House of Representatives, D



We've got a strong economy here in Florida right now, with all the people who have come here. But that has driven up the cost of inflation and the cost of living. And I guess, with that, housing is an issue, and then, I guess, the other one that I mentioned to you, issues related to societal culture.

Associate Vice President, Private, R



Housing

Concerns about the lack of affordable housing in Florida persist and are, in part, attributed to a spike in demand for homes and apartments from new people moving into the state.²



I think the top issue that we're dealing with this year is probably affordable housing in Florida.

Deputy Chief of Staff, Florida State Senate, R



I mean, I think the most important priority is to continue addressing housing affordability through property insurance reforms and trying to help stabilize the rent market. That's number one.

Staff Director, Florida Executive Branch, D

Healthcare

Issues around healthcare access and affordability are top of mind for policy staff. Healthcare is an overall priority for policymakers, and particularly for Democrats.



I would say healthcare - specifically, trying to find ways that at the state level to increase access and transparency in the healthcare sphere is a little bit difficult because that very much is involved with the federal side.

Director of External Affairs, Florida House of Representatives, R



Access to healthcare is important and should not be restricted. And providers should be ample. Access to healthcare is important. Knowledge is important, and getting that awareness to communities who are most in need.

District Aide, Florida House of Representatives, D

K-12 Education

K-12 education in Florida has been at the center of policymaker conversations this year. Policymakers are particularly focused on government involvement in the classroom and how to make school systems in the state more accommodating and beneficial for students. However, while both parties identify education as a priority broadly, there is significant misalignment on what topics within the issue deserves immediate attention. Republicans and Democrats seem to be talking past each other; and absent a galvanizing event, this disconnect will likely stymie bipartisan legislative action.



I believe that right now, there's a concerted effort to control what kids learn in schools and to mold their minds in a certain way. And it's extremely concerning to me.

Director, Florida Executive Branch, D



I've often felt that public education has become a volleyball being used by either side, left or right, to put forth the policy agendas, and in the meantime, kids can't read.

Specialist, Florida Executive Branch, R



Not every kid is a one size fits all solution for how they're going to deal with their education. So opening up more non-traditional educational paths. Maybe getting them involved in things like the trades or agriculture or things like that. It's definitely something that you'd have a conversation on.

Legislative Aide, Legislative, R



[A]t this point, [it's a priority] just trying to maintain the public education system against all the attacks that it's had and ensuring that we're meeting the obligation in our state constitution to provide free, uniform, high quality public education.

Staff Director, Legislative, D



Crime and Public Safety

Crime and public safety saw a marginal increase in prioritization by policymakers this year, with almost 20 percent of Florida policy staff reporting it to be a top concern compared with 17 percent in 2022. Republicans in the state are particularly focused on issues related to crime and public safety this year – about 30 percent indicate this policy area to be top of mind.



I'm in the prevention area, so we have a lot of conversations talking about upcoming changes and things that may be considering to be added to code. So we try to address a lot of things for public safety in that regard.

Specialist, Florida Executive Branch, D



We try to get that full spectrum view to understand, really, what is the issue, and then what are the reality of impacts and are we vulnerable to any of those? And if we are, how are we going to address it? And if we're not, then we just don't worry about it and move on.

Manager, Florida Municipality, R



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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Citations

1. <https://thecapitolist.com/census-data-shows-high-cost-of-living-driving-lower-income-population-out-of-south-florida/>
2. <https://www.wesh.com/article/cost-of-living-florida/43030786#>

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