

## ISSUE BRIEF

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# DETROITERS HIGHLIGHT SAFETY, NEIGHBORHOOD MAINTENANCE, AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AS TOP LOCAL ISSUES

SEPTEMBER 2024

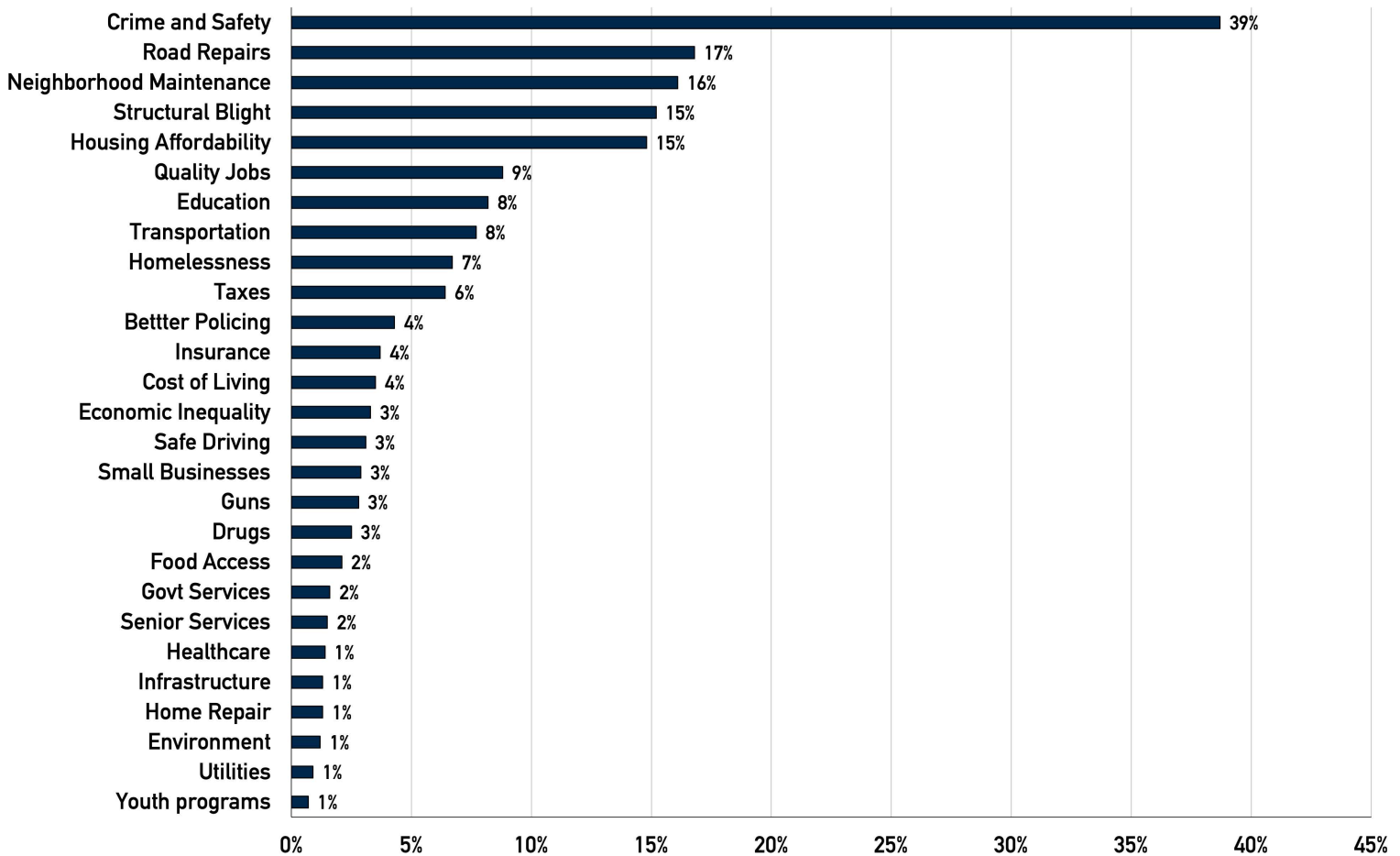
BY MARA CECILIA OSTFELD AND YUCHENG FAN

This report draws on data collected by the [Detroit Metro Area Communities Study \(DMACS\)](#) in partnership with [Outlier Media](#). This Detroit survey was administered from April 1 to April 12, 2024, and captures the views of a representative sample of 1,100 Detroit residents. This report focuses on Detroiters' views of the top priorities for U.S. government officials. Information about Detroiters' priorities was collected via open-ended questions, allowing Detroiters to report their priorities in their own words without the limitations imposed by a limited set of response options. Results have been weighted to reflect the population of Detroit. See [full results from DMACS surveys here](#).

## INTRODUCTION

The oft-cited phrase, "All politics is local," reflects the idea that what is happening directly in one's community tends to be a more powerful determinant of one's vote than what is happening on Capitol Hill, in other parts of the country, or in other regions of the world. Regardless of the level or type of office a candidate is seeking, voters want to see policies that shape their day-to-day experiences. As Detroiters prepare to cast their ballots in upcoming elections, what are the local issues that they are looking for political candidates to discuss, prioritize, and address? In this brief, we identify the local issues that Detroiters are thinking about and looking for their government officials to take action on.

**Figure 1: Most frequently mentioned issues for the City of Detroit to address, among Detroiters**



# CRIME AND SAFETY TOPS THE LIST OF ISSUES THAT DETROITERS WANT THE CITY OF DETROIT TO ADDRESS, FOLLOWED BY CONCERNS ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD MAINTENANCE, BLIGHTED STRUCTURES, AND HOUSING AFFORDABILITY.<sup>1</sup>

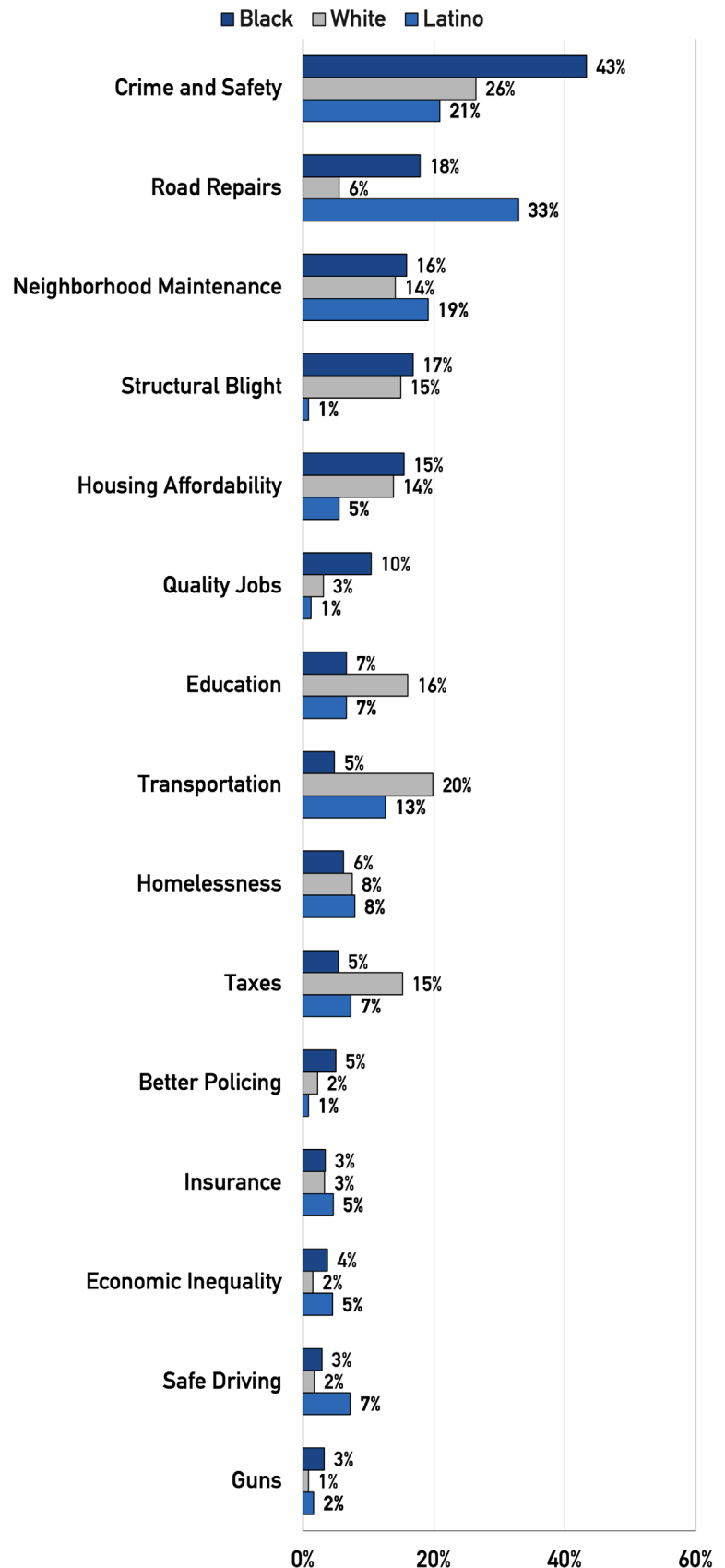
- The issue of crime and safety topped the list of issues that Detroiters want the city to address, as illustrated by the size and centrality of the words “crime” and “safety” in the word cloud in Figure 2. Nearly 4 in 10 Detroiters (39%) listed crime and safety as one of their top two priorities for the City of Detroit.
  - Specific points that Detroiters raised when discussing their concerns about crime and safety included: “lower crime rate,” “Safer streets, Safer Community to live and explore. Safety is Paramount,” “safety in the neighborhood,” and “Safe parks for the kids.”
  - Many residents also reported concerns about the quality of policing. Four percent of Detroiters listed improvements to the quality of policing as a top priority for local elected officials.
    - Some of the Detroiters who listed concerns about policing as a top priority emphasized a need for more police presence and attention with comments like: “better public police visibility” and “police presence in neighborhood.”
    - Other Detroiters who listed policing as a top policy priority for the city placed more emphasis on more equitable and supportive policing. These Detroiters emphasized points that included: the “temperament of officers,” “police deescalat[ion] training,” “police reform,” and “police corruption.”
- Road repairs were the second most frequently mentioned issue as a top priority among Detroiters (17%). The majority of responses related to road repairs listed concerns about potholes. Others cited concerns about “maintenance on city streets,” “smoother drivable roads,” “neighborhood street damage,” and “road upkeep.”
- Concerns relating to neighborhood infrastructure, including neighborhood maintenance (16%) and blighted structures (15%), were the next most commonly listed set of issues.
  - Those who listed neighborhood maintenance issues as top priorities for the city to address referenced concerns that included: “Fix the sidewalks [s]o people can walk without walking in the streets,” “Replace sick tre[e]s in the neighborhood,” “trash being dumped in vacant lots in the neighborhood,” “street lights,” and a need for “more light in areas.”
  - Some Detroiters raised concerns relating to blighted structures, including general references to blight as well as calls to “take down abandoned houses,” concerns about “burned out homes, homes that need to be torn down,” and “cleaning up of abandoned homes.”
- Housing affordability was listed as a top priority by about 15% of Detroiters, making it the fifth most frequently mentioned priority for local government.
  - Respondents who expressed concerns about housing affordability specifically mentioned concerns about “rising rent,” “new home costs,” “affordable housing for the poor,” and “low income housing.”
  - An additional 7% of Detroiters listed the related issue of homelessness as among the most important issues for the local government to address. These respondents highlighted the importance of “continued assistance for the homeless,” “shelters for the homeless,” and “resources for homeless.”



referenced "Neighborhood street damage," "Roads need to be rid of giant potholes," "Arreglar las calles [Fix the streets]," and "POT HOLES!!!"

- Latino Detroiters (12%) were also more likely to list concerns about drug use as a top issue that they wanted the city government to address, relative to Black (2%) or White (2%) Detroiters.
- Specific concerns relating to drugs included: "Drug use," "Drug traffic," "drug related homes" and "En la multiplicación de personas dr[o]gadictas en las calles" (the multiplying number of drug addicts in the streets).
- Among White Detroiters, transportation, schools, and taxes were more likely to be listed as top priorities for city government than they were among Black and Latino Detroiters.
- One in five (20%) of White Detroiters mentioned transportation as a top priority for the city government to address, compared to 5% of Black and 13% of Latino Detroiters. Detroiters who cited transportation as a top priority for the city government to address referenced "Mass transit," "Transportation barriers," a call to "improve and extend the people mover," "public transportation on west grand blvd," and "real public transit." One respondent highlighted that "[t]here are not enough bu[s] drivers. The schedules are horrible. The buses come once an hour if that often. We have to get to work to pay bills. The bus schedule makes us late."
- Sixteen percent of White Detroiters mentioned schools as a top priority for the city government to address, compared to 7% of Black Detroiters and 7% of Latino Detroiters. Some of the points raised among Detroiters who listed schools as a top priority for the city government to address included: "underfunded/ understaffed schools," "quality of k-12 public education," "Free community college," and generally, "youth education/ opportunity."
- Fifteen percent of White Detroiters listed taxes as a top priority for the city government to address, compared to 5% of Black Detroiters and 7% of Latino Detroiters. Many Detroiters who listed taxes as a top priority for the city government to address simply referenced "taxes" as a concern. Other comments were far more specific and mentioned things like "Property tax equity," "Exorbitant taxation," "lower property taxes for seniors like me," "appropriate housing taxes assessment and adjustment without requiring hearings to correct," and a call to "Pay Detroiters back the taxes owed to us!"

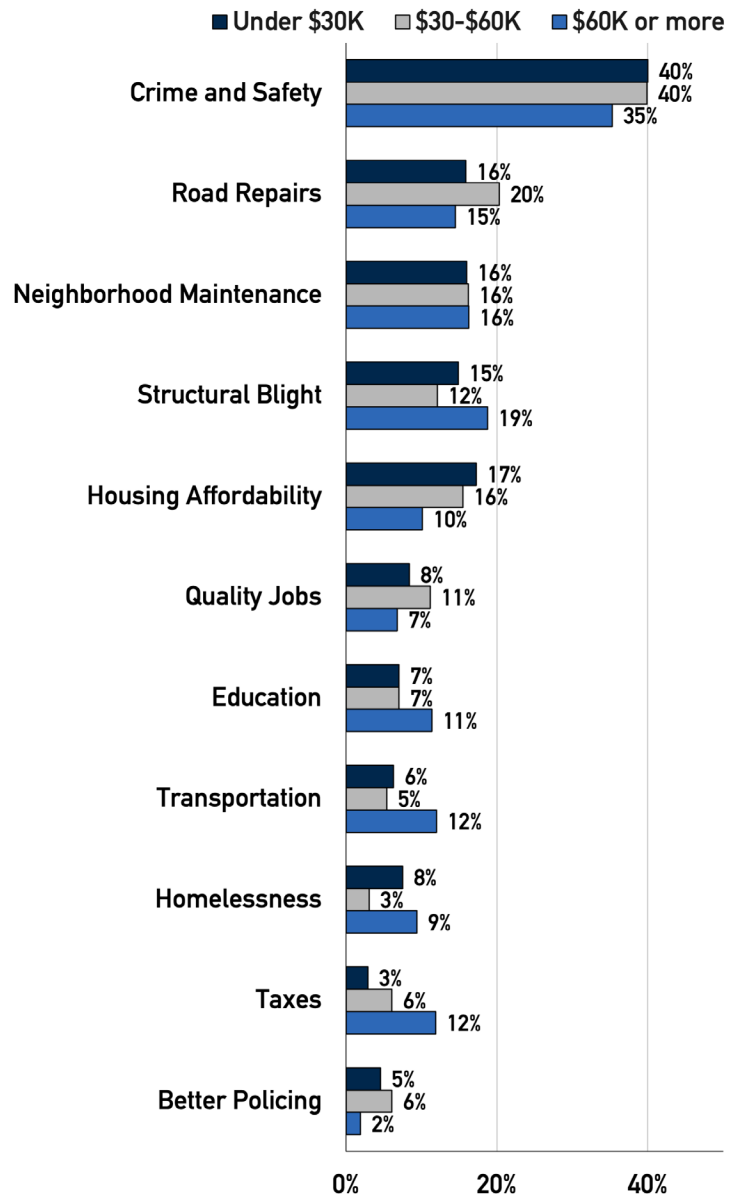
**Figure 3: Most frequently mentioned issues for the city of Detroit to address, by ethnracial group**



## THERE WERE LIMITED DIFFERENCES IN PRIORITIES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT BETWEEN INCOME GROUPS, WITH ALL INCOME GROUPS CITING CONCERNS ABOUT CRIME AND SAFETY.

- Across the income groups looked at in this study, crime and safety was the most frequently mentioned issue that Detroiters want the city to address. Forty percent of Detroiters with annual household incomes under \$30,000, 40% of Detroiters with annual household incomes between \$30,000 and \$59,999, and 35% of Detroiters with annual household incomes of \$60,000 or more listed crime and safety among the top two issues that they want the city to address.
- Housing affordability was more likely to be listed as a top priority for the city government to address among respondents with lower household incomes. Housing affordability was listed as one of the top priorities among 17% of Detroiters living in households with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 and 16% of Detroiters living in households with annual incomes between \$30,000 and \$59,999. These rates of prioritization were higher than they were among Detroiters living in households with annual incomes of \$60,000 or more (10%).
- Concerns about taxes were more likely to be listed as a top priority for the highest income group in our study – those with annual household incomes of more than \$60,000 – than Detroiters with lower annual household incomes. Twelve percent of Detroiters with annual household incomes of \$60,000 or more highlighted taxes as one of the top two issues that they wanted the city to address, compared to only 3% of Detroiters with annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 and 6% of Detroiters with annual household incomes between \$30,000 and \$59,999.

Figure 4: Most frequently mentioned issues for the City of Detroit to address, by annual household income

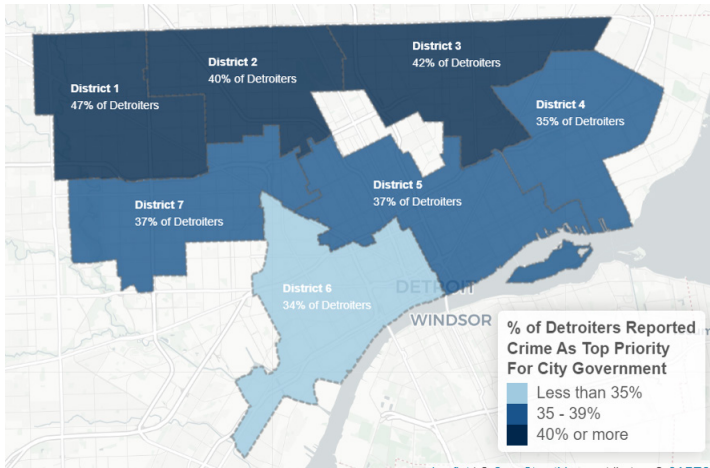


## PRIORITIES VARY ACROSS REGIONS OF THE CITY.

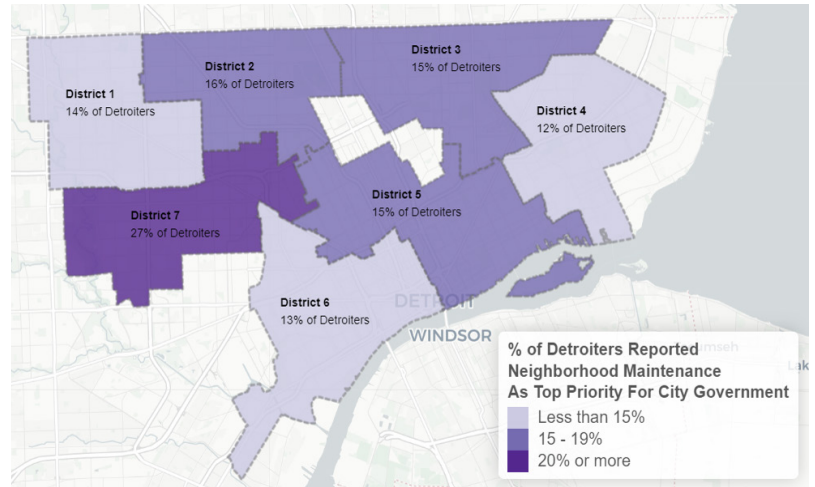
- Concerns about crime, the most frequently mentioned local issue that Detroiters want the city to address, were most pronounced in City Council District 1 (47%), in the northwest of Detroit.
  - The City of Detroit has invested in concentrated violence reduction initiatives in that area. Two of the six community violence intervention (CVI) programs recently initiated through the City of Detroit's new ShotStoppers program, Detroit People's Community and Detroit 300, are based in Detroit's City Council District 1.
- Neighborhood maintenance was most frequently mentioned as a top priority for the city to address in City Council District 7 (27%), on the west side of Detroit. This was a stark contrast from the degree to which it was prioritized in other city council districts, in which it was listed as a top priority among 15% of local residents or less.
- Road repairs were most frequently listed as a top issue for the city to address in City Council District 1 (23%), in northwest Detroit; in City Council District 4 (26%), in east Detroit; and in City Council District 6 (24%), in southwest Detroit.
  - Concerns about road repairs in southwest Detroit (City Council District 6) are consistent with the concerns that southwest Detroit residents have raised about semi-truck traffic in the district – especially around the Ambassador Bridge. This truck traffic will likely increase when the Gordie Howe Bridge opens, if additional regulations are not passed.<sup>3</sup>
  - Residents in east Detroit (City Council District 4) have recently raised similar concerns about the amount of semi-truck traffic that travels on their residential streets, often en route to the Stellantis Jefferson North Assembly Plant.<sup>4</sup>
- Housing affordability was listed as a top priority for Detroit to address in City Council District 3 (19%), on the eastside of Detroit; and in City Council District 5 (21%), which includes much of downtown Detroit; more than in other city council districts.

**Figure 5: Percentage of Detroiters that listed the following issues as a top priority for the City, by city council district**

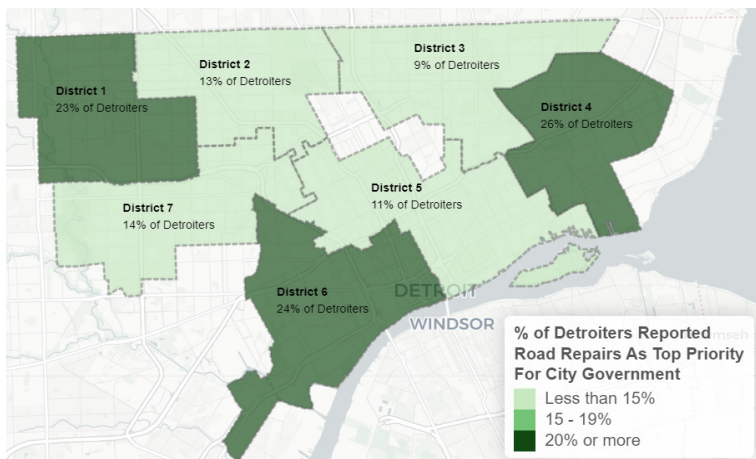
**Crime and Safety**



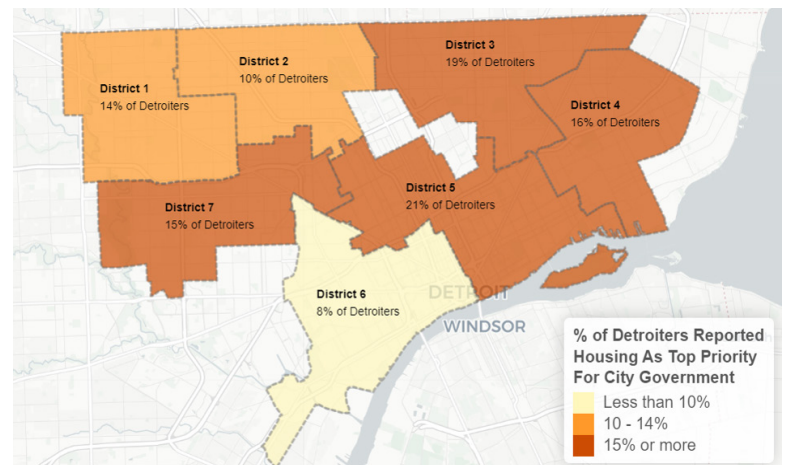
**Neighborhood Maintenance**



**Road Repairs**



**Housing Affordability**





## AUTHORS

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 We determined Detroiters' priorities by analyzing responses from the 985 individuals who provided valid answers to the following open-ended survey question: "On the whole, what are the two most important issues that you want the City of Detroit to address?" Respondents entered their answers into two small text boxes. Three independent coders then inductively classified the responses into thematic categories. The coders met to agree on the categories and re-evaluate any responses that had been classified differently.
  - 2 Our sample included 765 individuals who identified only as Non-Hispanic Black, 165 respondents who identified as only non-Hispanic White, 85 respondents who identified only as Latino, and 85 individuals who identified with another ethnoracial group (e.g. Middle Eastern/ North African, Asian American, Native American) or multiple ethnoracial groups.
  - 3 Allnutt, B. (2023, April 6). "Southwest Detroiters want a truck route ordinance now. City officials tell them to wait on another study." *Planet Detroit*. <https://planetdetroit.org/2023/04/southwest-detroiters-want-a-truck-route-ordinance-now-city-officials-tell-them-to-wait-on-another-study/>
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- 4 Brooker, J and Mondry, A. (2023, April 6). "Heavy and unregulated truck traffic is plaguing easy side residents." *BridgeDetroit*. <https://www.bridgedetroit.com/stellantis-truck-traffic-through-eastside-detroit/>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Learn more at [www.detroiturvey.umich.edu](http://www.detroiturvey.umich.edu)

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