



ISSUE BRIEF

DETROITERS' TOP HOUSEHOLD CHALLENGES AHEAD OF THE 2025 MAYORAL ELECTION

SEPTEMBER 2025

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OVERVIEW

This report draws on data collected by the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS) in partnership with Outlier Media. This survey was self-administered online or interviewer-administered via telephone between January 13 and March 3, 2025, and captures the views of a representative sample of 2,270 Detroit residents. This report focuses on Detroiters' views of the greatest challenges their households are facing right now, and what they would like to see the city do to help reduce those challenges. Results have been weighted to reflect the population of Detroit. See [full results from DMACS surveys here](#).

INTRODUCTION

This year, Detroiters will head to the polls to select a new mayor—a decision that comes at a pivotal moment for the city. For the first time in over a decade, the mayoral race is wide open, with no incumbent on the ballot. As candidates present their visions for Detroit's future, understanding the lived experiences and priorities of city residents is more important than ever. To help inform this moment of civic decision-making, we asked Detroiters to share the greatest

challenges they face in their daily lives and how they believe city leadership should respond. Their insights offer a powerful lens into the hopes, concerns, and expectations shaping this historic election.

SAFETY TOPS THE LIST OF CHALLENGES FACING DETROIT HOUSEHOLDS, YET MOST WANT ALTERNATIVES TO MORE POLICE

- Safety was the most frequently cited major challenge, with just under 1 in 5 Detroit households (17.7%) identifying it as a top concern (see Figure 1).¹
- Among those who listed crime or safety as one of their household's top three challenges, fewer than half (47.1%) said that a greater police presence would make them feel safer (see Figure 2).²
- Detroiters who cited crime or safety as a major challenge identified a range of alternative investments that could improve safety, including stronger gun control (4.6%), better street lighting (4.5%), fewer vacant properties (4.4%), and more support for neighborhood associations and block clubs (3.9%).³

Figure 1. Major Challenges Facing Detroit Households

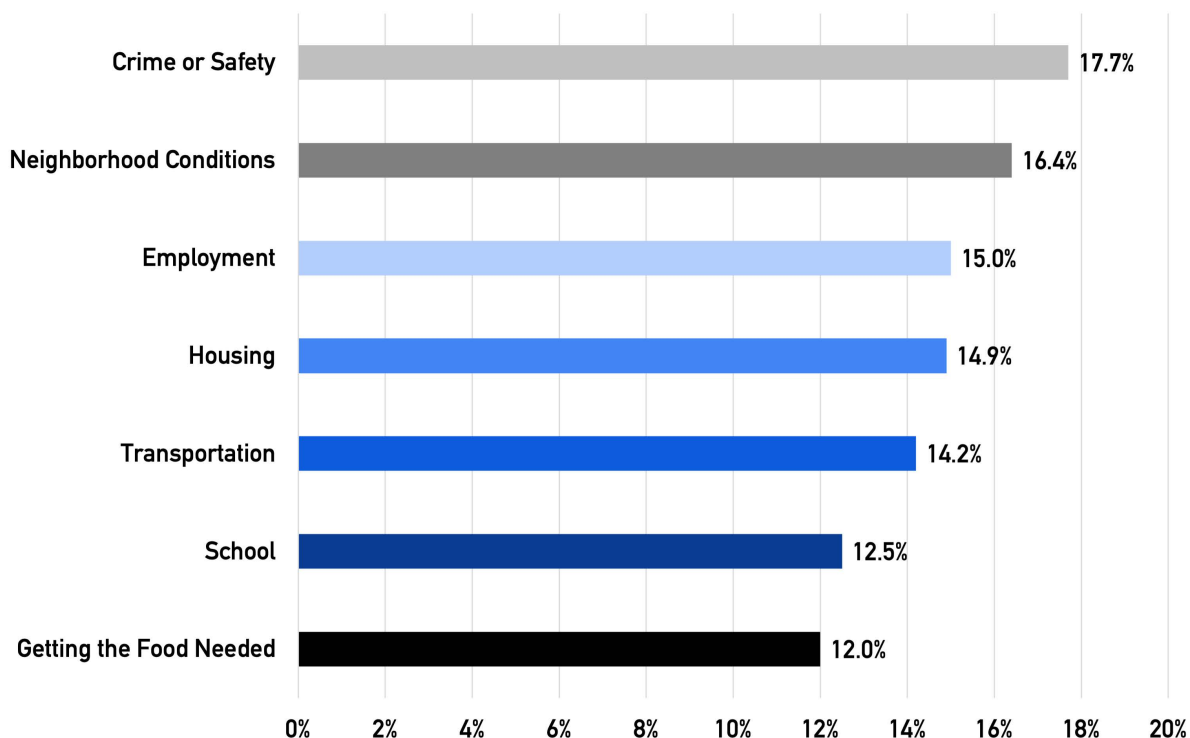
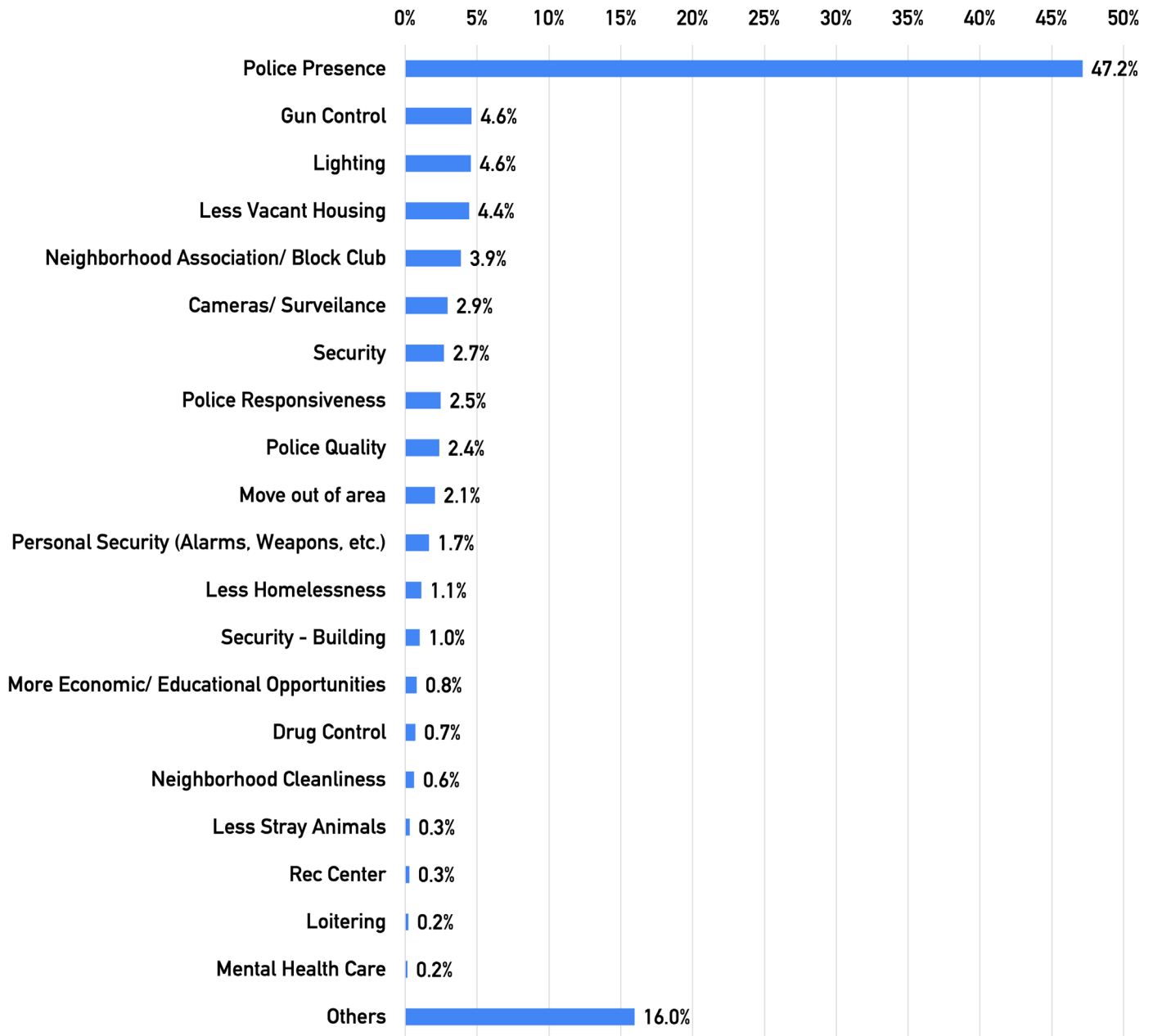


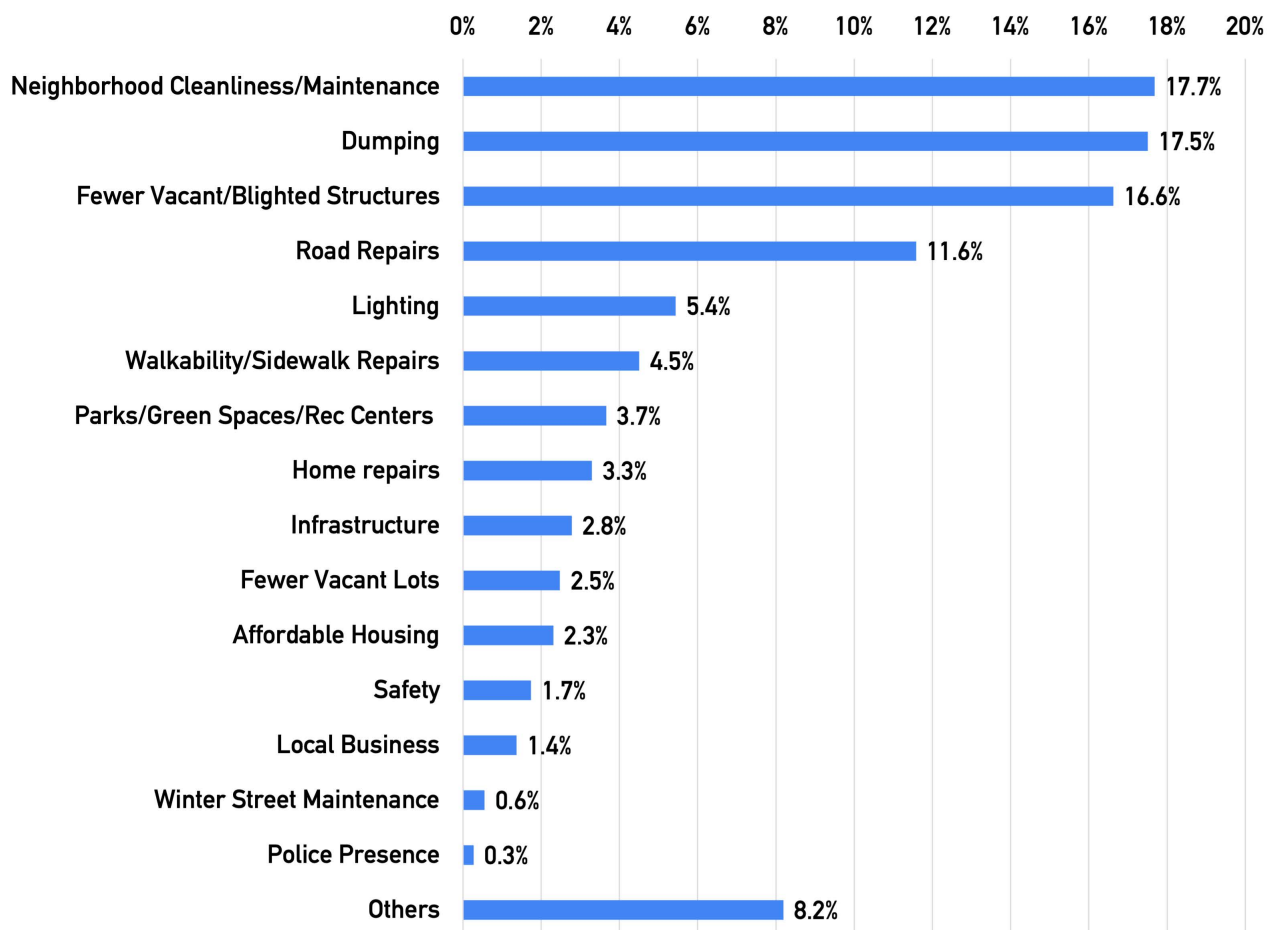
Figure 2: What Would Make Detroiters Feel Safer, among Detroiters Who Listed Safety as one of the Top Three Challenges Facing Their Household



RIVALING CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY, MANY DETROITERS POINT TO NEIGHBORHOOD UPKEEP—ESPECIALLY MAINTENANCE AND ILLEGAL DUMPING—AS A MAJOR CHALLENGE.

- Neighborhood condition and upkeep was listed by about 1 in 6 (16.4%) of Detroit households as one of the top three major challenges facing their household.
- Among respondents who listed neighborhood condition and upkeep as a major challenge, general neighborhood cleanliness and maintenance were the most frequently mentioned changes Detroiters said they want to see (17.7%) (see Figure 3). Residents emphasized the need for more consistent garbage cleanup and better upkeep of streets, alleys, and vacant lots.
- Dumping was also a commonly cited concern, with 17.5% of respondents referencing frustrations with “building debris,” “Illegal dumping,” “dumping of tires,” and “people coming for [a] show [and] dumping things from the suburbs.” Some respondents also suggested that “more public trash cans” and better “bulk trash pick up” could help mitigate this issue of dumping.
- About 1 in 6 Detroiters (16.6%) who listed neighborhood conditions among the top three challenges facing their household said they wanted vacant and blighted structures in their neighborhood addressed. Their comments included calls for “*menos casas abandonadas [fewer abandoned homes]*,” “*the elimination of blight and code enforcement follow-up*,” “*building more homes on these vacant lots*,” and “*demolish abandoned homes and repurpose the lots*.”
- Other respondents who listed neighborhood conditions among their household’s top three challenges identified road repairs (11.6%), additional street lighting (5.4%), and improved walkability or sidewalk repairs (4.5%) as the most needed changes in their neighborhood right now.⁴

Figure 3: Changes Detroiters Would Like to See in their Neighborhood, among Detroiters Who Listed Neighborhood Condition as one of the Top Three Challenges Facing Their Household



INADEQUATE PAY DRIVES THE EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES FACED BY DETROITERS.

- Fifteen percent (15%) of Detroit households identified employment as one of the top three major challenges facing their household.
 - Among those who named employment as a top concern, the majority (75.7%) reported that they have not been able to find a job, while a smaller share (24.3%) said they are dissatisfied with their current job.⁵
 - Across both groups, insufficient pay was the most pressing issue.
 - Nearly 9 in 10 (87.8%) respondents who identified employment as a major household challenge—and specifically cited difficulty finding a job—said that “more job opportunities with better pay” would help them secure employment.⁶
 - Almost two-thirds (64.8%) of respondents who identified employment as a major household challenge—and specifically cited dissatisfaction with their current job—cited “inadequate pay or compensation” as a major challenge in their jobs.⁷
- Among people who have not been able to find a job, the second most commonly cited solution was expanding job opportunities in their areas of interest (76%) (see Figure 4). A similar share (74%) said that more job opportunities with flexible schedules would help them address their employment challenges. Other frequently mentioned supports included increasing access to education, training, or apprenticeship opportunities (68.8%), as well as improving transportation options (61.7%).
- Among respondents who are dissatisfied with their current jobs, the work schedule emerged as the second leading problem, with nearly half of respondents (49.7%) listing it a major challenge (see Figure 5). A comparable proportion reported that the lack of upward mobility (49.3%) was one of the major challenges they faced at their current jobs.

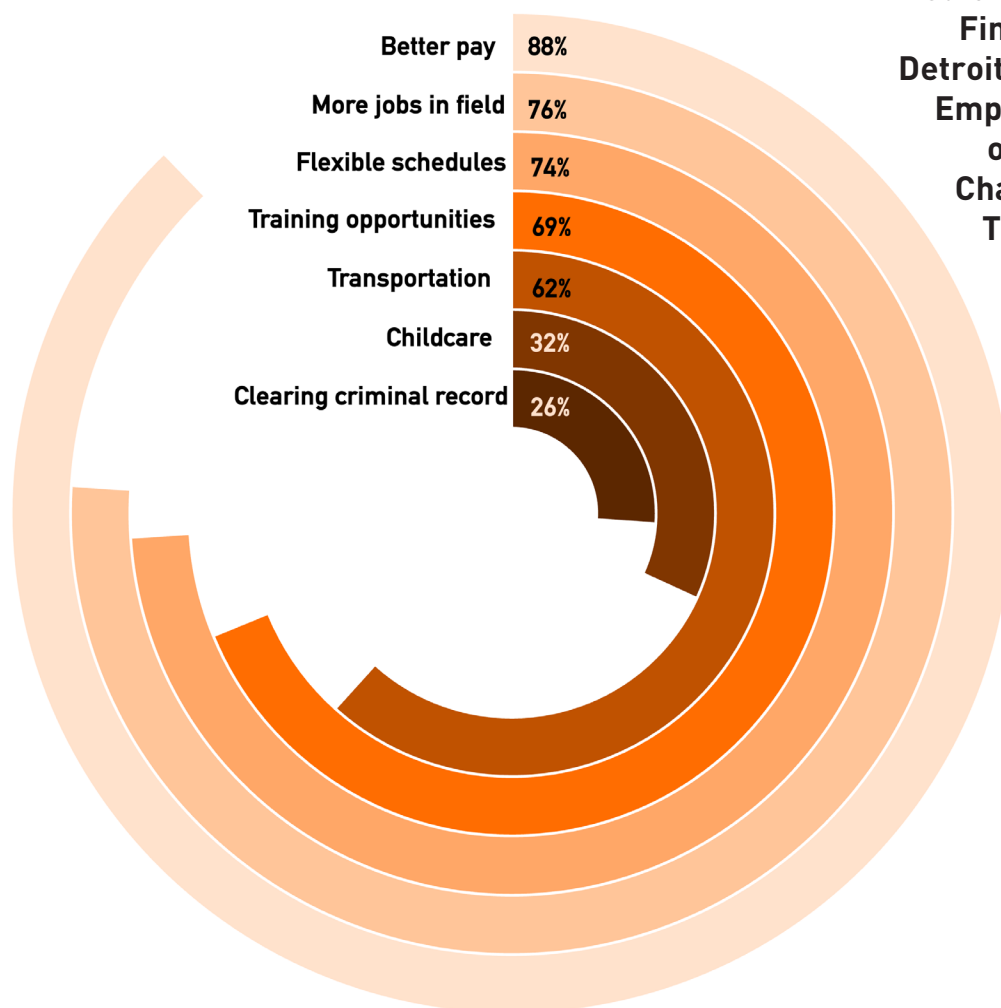
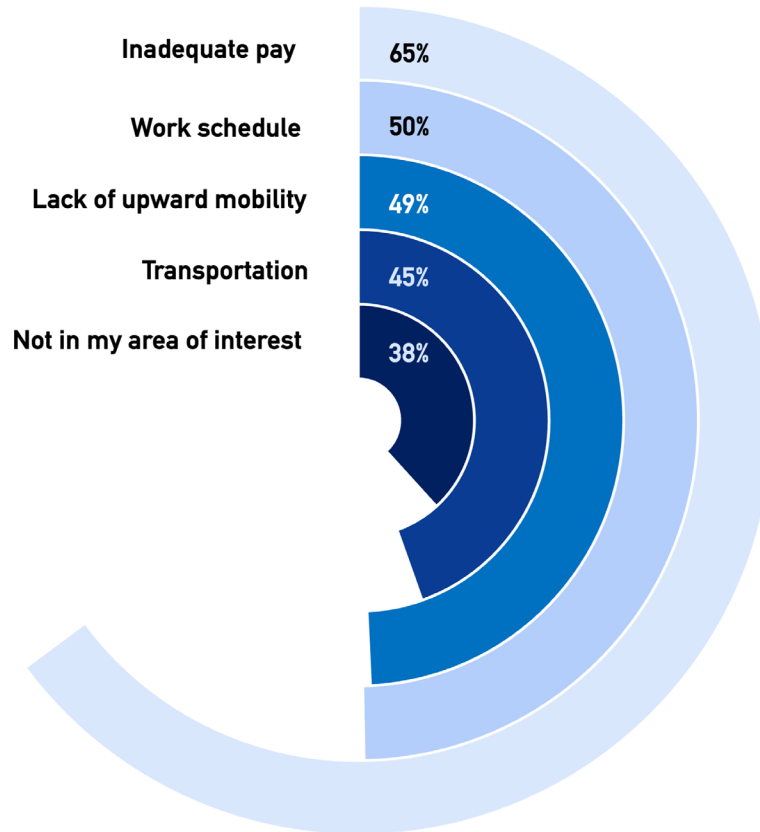


Figure 4. Things that Would Help Detroiters Find a Job, among Detroiters Who Listed Employment as one of the Top Three Challenges Facing Their Household

Figure 5. Challenges Facing Detroiters Dissatisfied with their Current Job, among Detroiters Who Listed Employment as one of the Top Three Challenges Facing Their Household



AFFORDABILITY—WHETHER IN BUYING, RENTING, OR KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON—IS AT THE HEART OF DETROITERS' HOUSING CHALLENGES.

- Nearly one in six Detroiters (14.9%) listed housing as one of the top three challenges facing their household, placing it on par with concerns about employment.
- Among those who identified housing as a major challenge, nearly three-quarters (72.7%) reported difficulty finding a home to buy that meets their family's needs and budget (see Figure 6). Slightly fewer Detroiters—about two-thirds—pointed to problems paying rent (65%), covering utility costs (63.2%), or keeping up with home maintenance (60.9%).⁸
- For those struggling specifically with utility costs, electricity bills stood out as the most pressing issue. Close to 80% of these households identified paying for electricity as their top utility challenge (see Figure 7).⁹

Figure 6. Types of Housing Challenges, among Detroiters Who Listed Housing as one of the Top Three Challenges Facing Their Household

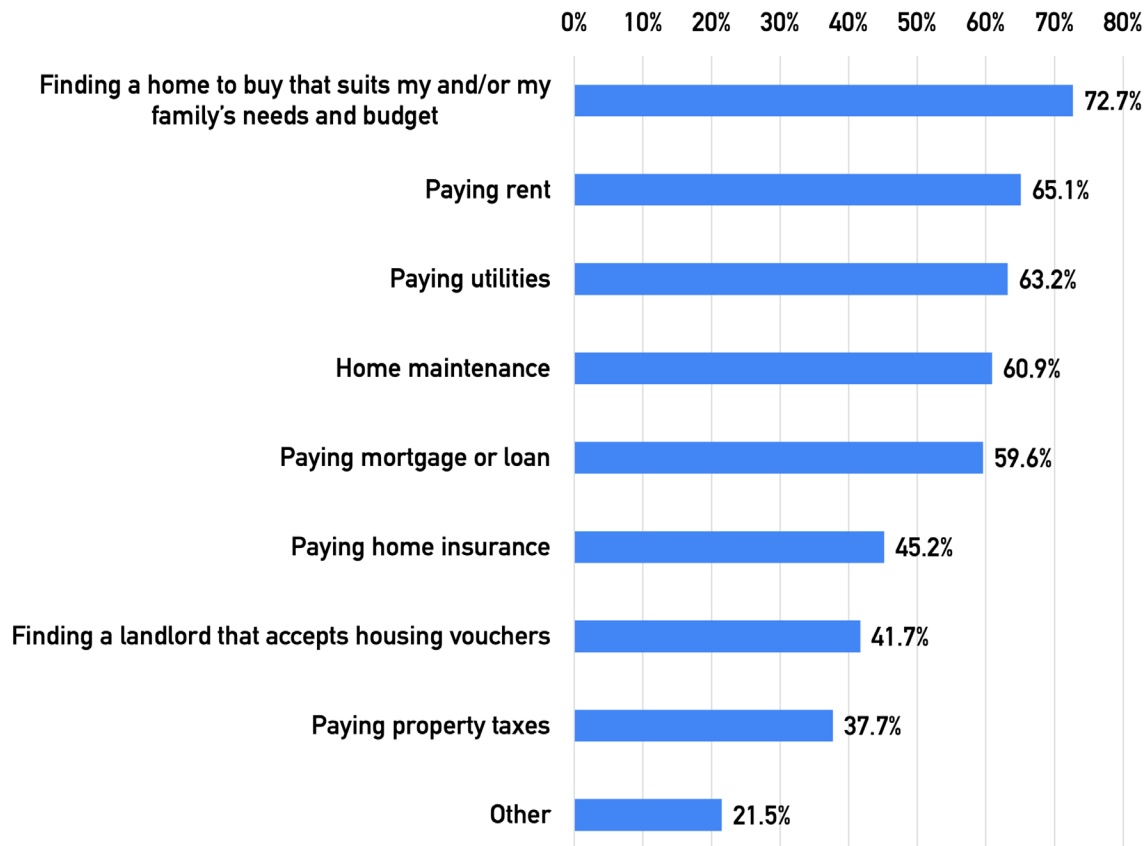
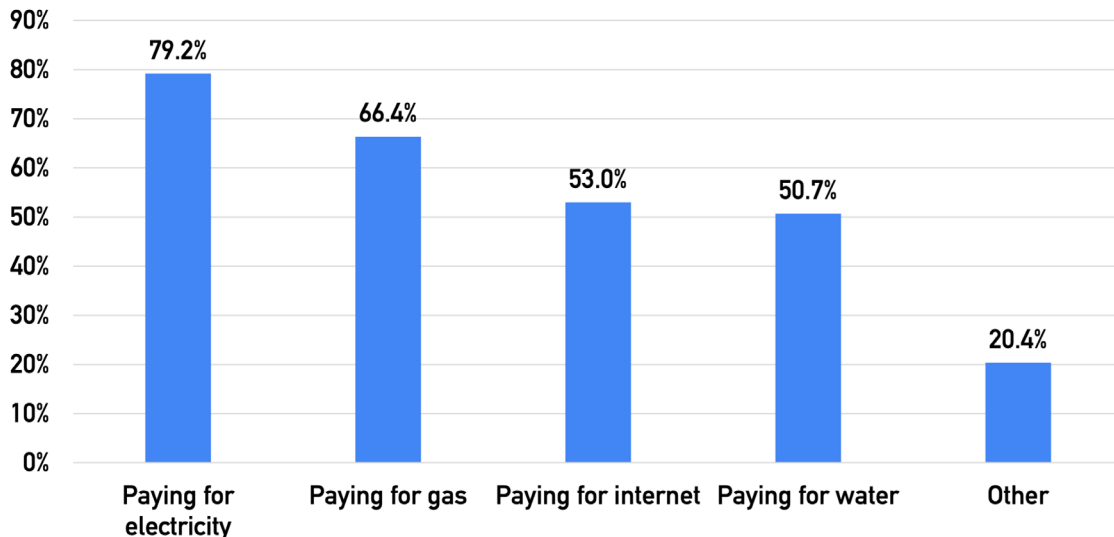


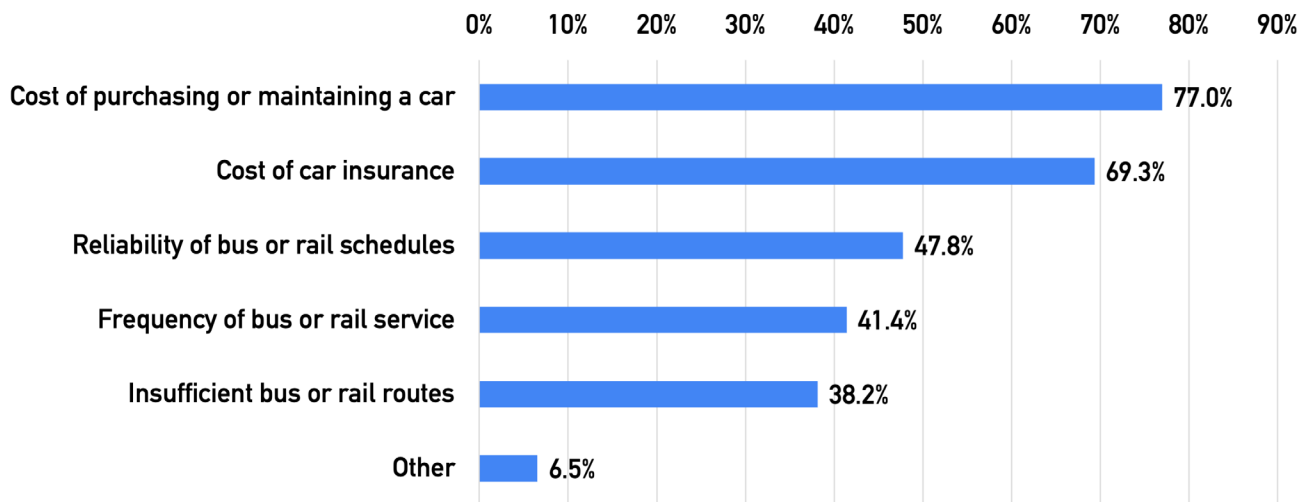
Figure 7. Utility Costs Presenting the Greatest Challenges, among Detroiters Who Listed Paying Utilities as a Major Housing Challenge Facing Their Household



HIGH COSTS OF CAR OWNERSHIP AND INSURANCE DRIVE DETROITERS' TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES.

- 14.2% of Detroiters identified transportation as one of the top issues facing their household, just behind employment and housing.¹⁰
- For those who highlighted transportation as a major challenge, the cost of owning a car was the dominant theme (see Figure 8). More than three-quarters (77%) reported that purchasing or maintaining a vehicle posed a major challenge, and nearly as many (69.3%) pointed to the high cost of car insurance. These findings underscore how financial barriers tied to car ownership are at the center of Detroiters' transportation struggles.
- By contrast, fewer than half of Detroiters who listed transportation as a major challenge for their household pointed to public transit issues. Among those citing transportation as a major household challenge, 47.8% identified unreliable bus or rail schedules, 41.4% mentioned infrequent service, and 38.2% pointed to insufficient routes.

Figure 8. Major Transportation Challenges, among Detroiters Who Listed Transportation as one of the Top Three Challenges Facing Their Household

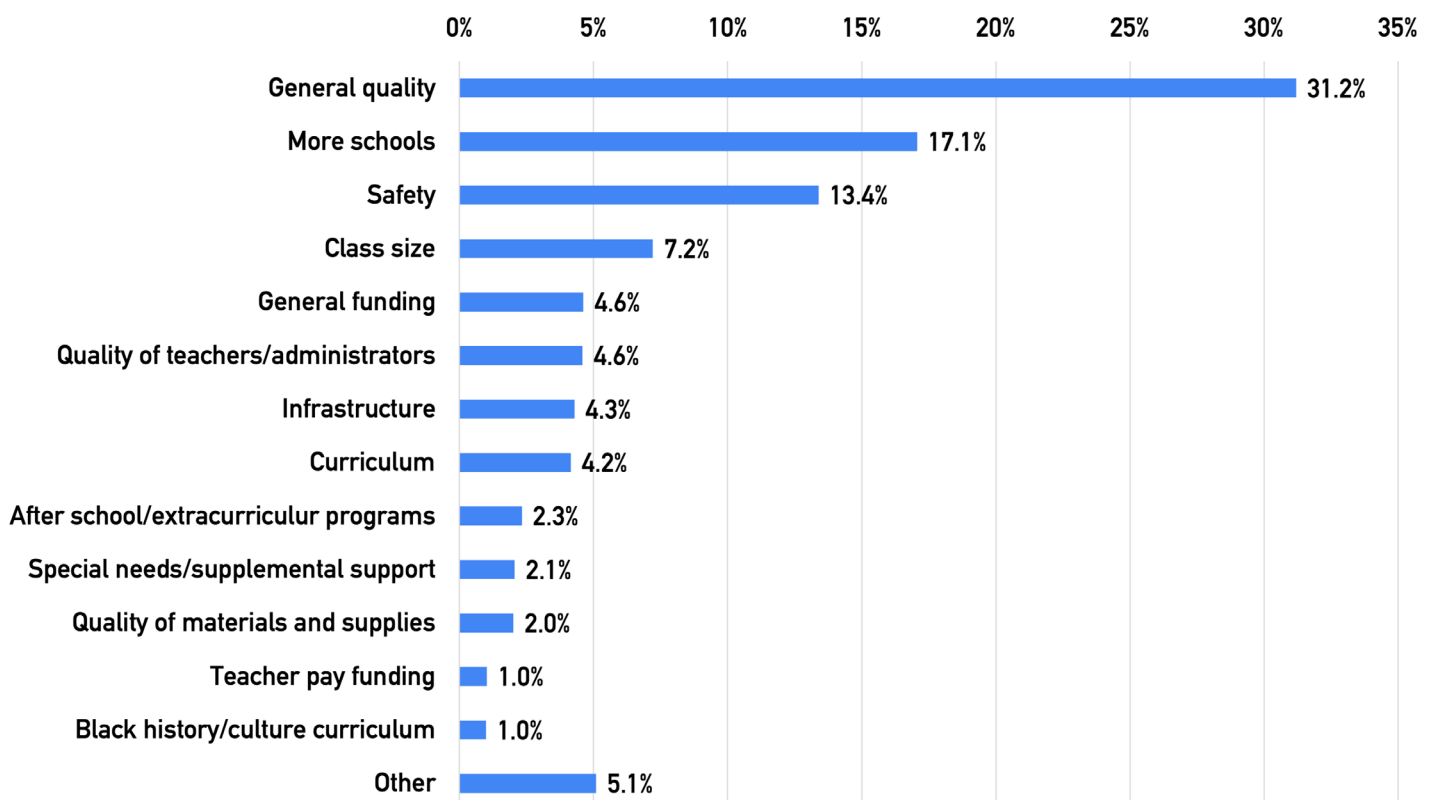


DETROITERS CONCERNED ABOUT SCHOOLS WANT MORE OPTIONS, SAFER ENVIRONMENTS, AND SMALLER CLASS SIZES.

- 12.5% of Detroit households identified the quality of K-12 schools as one of the top three major challenges facing their household.¹¹
- When asked what changes would most improve K-12 education, residents most often emphasized general improvements in school quality (31.2%) (see Figure 9). Many specifically pointed to the need for better teachers, stronger leadership, and more resources. Examples included: *"More qualified teachers in schools; more money per student," "Better quality education and opportunities,"* and *"Guaranteed public education that is good – how do people expect families to stay in Detroit if the schools are so bad?"*
- Beyond overall quality, the most frequently cited needs included more schools (17.1%). Residents lamented that *"there are not many schools anymore,"* that *"kids can't get into the few good ones even in their neighborhoods,"* and that *"school closings"* have left communities with limited or no options.

- Just over 1 in 10 Detroiters who referenced K-12 schools as a major challenge for their household highlighted the need for improved safety (13.4%), underscoring both access and security concerns. Safety concerns ranged from bullying and lack of security to fears about predators and unsafe building conditions, with some parents stating simply, *"I want safer schools."*
- Class size was another recurring issue, cited by 7.2% of respondents and elaborated on extensively in open-ended comments. Parents emphasized that *"classrooms are too crowded"* and called for a *"lower student-teacher ratio,"* as well as *"more teachers, more resources, and more social workers"* to meet students' needs. Some respondents worried that children are being *"passed along even though they don't understand,"* while others suggested solutions such as having *"two teachers to a class at all times."*
- Concerns about funding and resources also surfaced frequently. While 4.6% highlighted general funding concerns and another 1% pointed to teacher pay specifically, open-ended responses reveal frustration with *"very poor public schools in Detroit," "money being spent at the top instead of classrooms,"* and *"teachers not being paid fairly."* Respondents called for *"proper funding," "investment in schools and libraries instead of development,"* and *"better wages for teachers to get good staff."*
- Other specific improvements residents wanted included better curriculum (4.2%), with calls for more trade courses, financial literacy, and civics education, as well as *"greater emphasis on Black history and culture."* Parents also asked for *"less testing, more teaching,"* and more practical skills like handwriting and life skills.
- Infrastructure (4.3%) was also mentioned, with concerns about *"dilapidated school buildings,"* lack of heat or air conditioning, and the need for major renovations.
- Smaller shares of residents highlighted the need for stronger extracurricular opportunities, support for students with special needs, improved food quality, and better materials and supplies.

Figure 9. Changes Detroiters Would Like to See in K-12 Schools, among Detroiters Who Listed K-12 as one of the Top Three Challenges Facing Their Household



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the generous support of the Knight Foundation, The Ballmer Group, The Kresge Foundation, Outlier Media, and Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Percentages reflect the share of respondents who listed each item as one of the top three major challenges for their household. To assess these challenges, we first asked: "To what extent are you or anyone in your household facing challenges with each of the following right now?" For each item, respondents could indicate whether it was a "major challenge," "minor challenge," or "not a challenge." If a respondent selected more than three "major challenges," they were then asked: "Of the major challenges you selected, which three are presenting the greatest challenge for you or your household right now? Select up to three."
- 2 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of respondents who indicated crime or safety was one of the top three challenges facing their household. The item read: "You previously identified 'crime or concerns about safety' as a major challenge for you or your household. What would make you feel safer?" Responses were open-ended.
- 3 Responses classified as "Others" included (1) general safety concerns (e.g., "ways to stop thieves," "less cars being stolen"); (2) broad ideas (e.g., "if the entire system was refreshed," "people getting help"); and (3) responses that appeared only once (e.g., "gas stations," "judicial system should be better," "more [project] green light").
- 4 Responses classified as Others" included (1) general summaries of concerns (e.g., "government taxes people too much"); (2) broad ideas (e.g., "everyone doing better"); (3) responses that appeared only once (e.g., "no more property taxes," "community service," "removal of slumlords," "ending of bridge construction"); and (4) expressions of uncertainty (e.g., "not sure").
- 5 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of respondents who indicated that employment was one of the top three challenges facing their household. The item read "Which of the following better describes your employment challenges right now?" Response options included: "Have not been able to find a job" or "Do not like my current job."
- 6 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of participants who identified employment as one of the top three challenges facing their household, and specified that not being able to find a job described their employment challenge: "How much would each of the following help you find a job?" Response options included: "Better transportation," "Better childcare," "More education/training/apprenticeship opportunities," "More jobs in my field or area of interest," "Assistance clearing a criminal record," "More jobs with flexible schedules," "More job opportunities with better pay," and "Other." For each item, respondents could indicate whether it "would help a lot," "would help some," or "would not help at all/not applicable."
- 7 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of participants who identified employment as one of the top three challenges facing their household and specified that not liking their job described their employment challenge. The question read: "How much of a challenge is each of the following with your current job?" Items included: "Transportation," "Work schedule," "Lack of upward mobility," "Not in my area of interest," "Inadequate pay/compensation," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."
- 8 These estimates are based on responses to the following question asked of participants who identified housing as one of the top three challenges facing their household. The question read: "How much of a challenge are each of the following housing-related issues for your household right now?" Items included: "Finding a home to buy that suits my and/or my family's needs and budget," "Home maintenance and repair," "Paying rent," "Finding a landlord that accepts housing vouchers," "Paying mortgage or loan," "Paying property taxes," "Paying home insurance," "Paying utilities," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."
- 9 These estimates are based on responses to a question asked of participants who identified housing as one of the top three challenges facing their household and indicated that "paying utilities" was a major challenge. The question read: "How much of a challenge are each of the following utility costs for your household right now?" Items included: "Paying for gas," "Paying for electricity," "Paying for internet," "Paying for water," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."
- 10 These estimates are based on responses to a question asked of participants who identified transportation as one of the top three challenges facing their household. The question read: "How much of a challenge are each of the following transportation issues for your household right now?" Items included: "Cost of car insurance," "Cost of purchasing or maintaining a car," "Frequency of bus or rail services," "Reliability of bus or rail schedules," "Insufficient bus or rail routes," and "Other." Response options were: "Major challenge," "Minor challenge," or "Not a challenge."
- 11 These estimates are based on responses to a question asked of participants who identified the quality of K–12 schools as one of the top three challenges facing their household. The question read: "You previously identified 'the quality of K–12 schools' as a major challenge for you or your household. What changes would you most like to see in K–12 schools right now?" Responses were open-ended.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Support for DMACS comes from the University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, Institute for Social Research and Poverty Solutions. DMACS is also supported by the Knight Foundation.