

TO: Leading a Better Chicago
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: September 19, 2025
RE: Recent polling on Chicagoan's attitudes towards City's fiscal situation

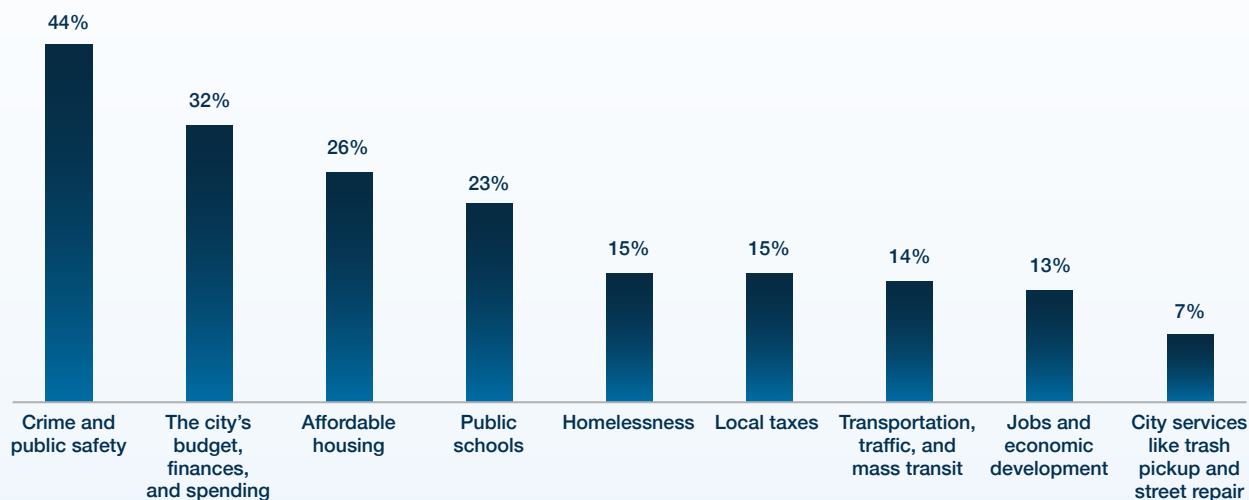
Between September 9 and 14, 2025, Hart Research conducted a survey via landline, cell phone, and text-to-web, among a representative sample of 601 registered voters living in the city of Chicago. The survey, which has a margin of error of $\pm 4.1\%$ and is fully representative of registered voters in Chicago by key demographic variables, including race (including 39% white, 29% Black, 24% Latino, and 4% Asian).

The following sets forth the key findings.

#1. The City's fiscal problems are top of mind for voters, vying with crime and housing, among others, as top concerns (in other words, not a niche issue). Simply put, Chicagoans know the city is in serious financial trouble.

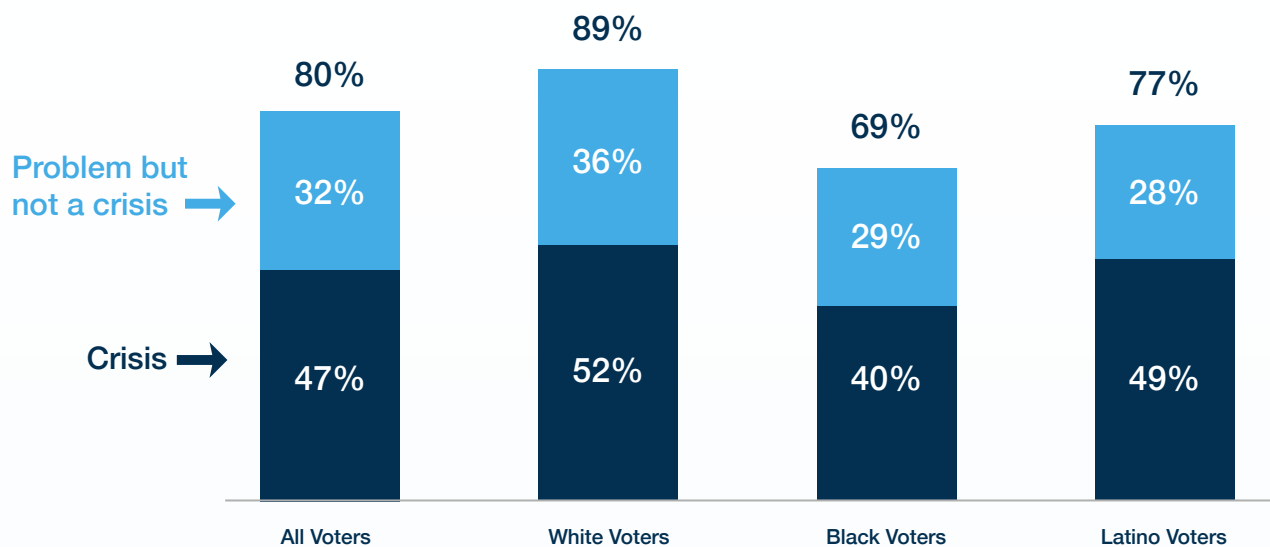
When asked to select from a list of nine issues facing Chicago, “the city’s budget, finances, and spending” is chosen by 32% of respondents, below “crime and public safety” (44%) and higher than “affordable housing” (26%)—showing the budget is a “mainstream” concern.

Now I'll list some issues facing Chicago, and ask which ONE or TWO are the most important for city government to deal with.



Perhaps as important, voters already bring to the table a reasonable amount of awareness about the scope of the city's budget problems (which means the electorate does not require much education or convincing that there is a problem and that it needs to be addressed). Before mentioning any information, a 47% plurality of voters characterize the current budget situation as a crisis, with another 32% saying it is a problem but not a crisis.

From what you may know, is the City of Chicago's current budget situation a crisis, a problem but not a crisis, or not much of a problem, or do you not have an opinion on this?

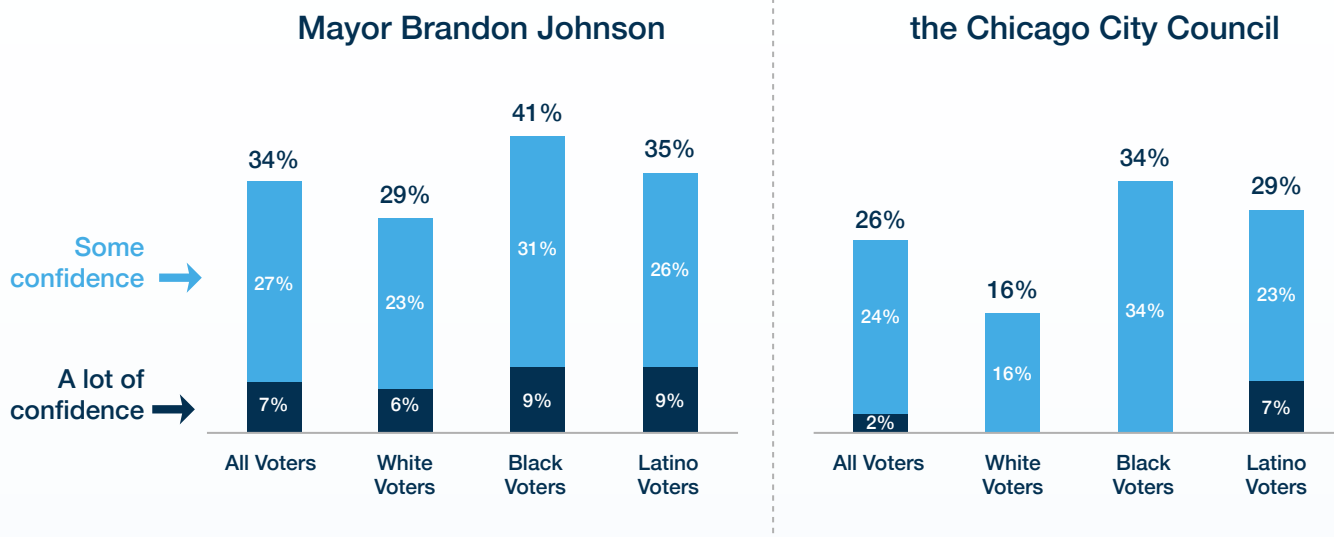


And when we inform survey respondents the City is facing a projected \$1.2 billion deficit, three in five (59%) say they are aware of the size of the budget deficit—which is a sizeable level of familiarity.

#2. To compound the challenges in addressing the current budget situation, voters express little confidence in the current city leadership.

In the case of Mayor Johnson AND the City Council, a majority of voters say they have little or no confidence in either to help solve the deficit and long-term fiscal problems. In fact, a plurality of respondents outright say they have “no confidence at all” in either the Mayor (35%) or the City Council (33%).

How much confidence do you have in _____ to help solve Chicago's budget deficit and long-term fiscal problems--a lot of confidence, some confidence, a little confidence, or no confidence at all?



#3. On a related note, the electorate places most of the responsibility for the city's fiscal situation on decisions made by current and past political leaders, suggesting that voters believe any solution lies in electing new leadership.

Three in four (75%) of voters say decisions by past mayors to sell off city assets to address budget shortfalls is a major factor in the current fiscal crisis, while a virtually identical result (74%) view excessive borrowing and reliance on one-time revenue sources as being a major factor. Not surprisingly, fully 83% of voters agree with the statement: “our elected leaders have not been honest with the people about the budget problems in Chicago.”

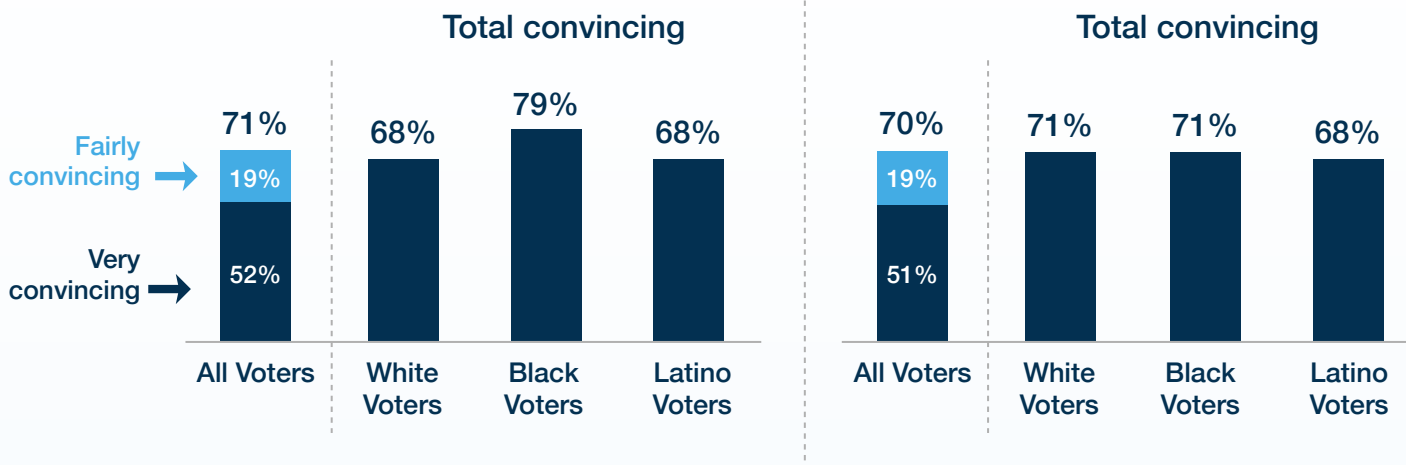
#4. A strong majority of Chicago voters clearly understand and find credible the dire consequences the city will likely face soon if the situation is not addressed, including the dramatic and extreme consequence of bankruptcy.

There are two powerful arguments that a large majority of respondents find convincing to address the city's fiscal problems immediately:

Next, let me read you some reasons people have given for why Chicago's budget deficit and long-term fiscal problems **MUST** be addressed immediately. For each one, please tell me whether you think it is a very convincing reason, a fairly convincing reason, a medium reason, or not much of a reason at all.

The city of Chicago currently faces a desperate fiscal and budget situation that if left unsolved could result in Chicago declaring bankruptcy.

The city of Chicago has the **LOWEST** bond rating of ANY major city in America, which means the city is spending hundreds of millions of dollars unnecessarily every year on higher borrowing costs.



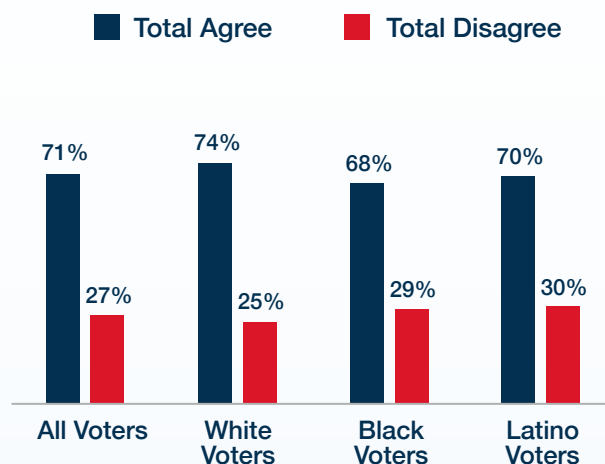
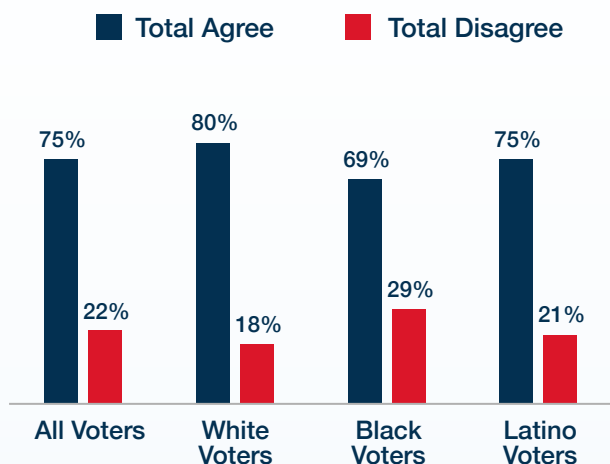
As the preceding chart shows, an impressive proportion of voters (spanning most demographic groups, including race) find it believable that the city is on the verge of bankruptcy, and a similar number understand (that as a result of the deficit) the city is spending money on items other than key city services.

#5. Lastly, Chicagoans are looking for a new leader who is willing to (finally) be honest with the voters about what it will take to solve the city’s fiscal problems, including hard choices of spending cuts AND tax increases. This is an important point—the poll indicates voters are ready for a leader to level with them about what it takes to solve the problem because they come to this debate already understanding that real and dramatic action is needed.

Next, let me read you some statements people have made about elected leaders in Chicago, and for each one please tell me whether you agree or disagree.

With the city of Chicago facing the WORST fiscal and budget crisis in its history and facing the real possibility of bankruptcy, it is time for our elected leaders to face up to the problem and take drastic actions that could include major spending CUTS or taxes.

Even if I may not like raising taxes, I would respect elected leaders who would have the honesty to make taxes a PART of the budget discussion.



Note that both statements (which draw agreement from more than 7 in ten voters) include the difficult and not popular solution of tax increases. We find that even a majority (albeit 53%) of tax-sensitive voters nonetheless agree they would “respect leaders who have the honesty to make taxes a part of the budget discussion.”