

VIEWPOINTS 2000

**Serious Economic Issues
and Policy Solutions**

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**Canadian Labour and Business
Centre Leadership Survey:
Serious Economic Issues and
Policy Solutions**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The third bi-annual Canadian Labour and Business Centre Leadership Survey of 4,442 private sector business leaders, public sector management, and private and public sector labour leaders was conducted between March and April 2000, and achieved a response rate of 18 percent. As in earlier surveys, this year's survey gathered respondents' views on (i) the seriousness of major economic and public policy issues facing the country, and on (ii) the public policy solutions which should receive more emphasis if these issues are to be addressed.

The survey provided not only a snapshot of constituency leaders' perceptions in 2000, but also insights into how these perceptions have changed since the first Leadership Survey in 1996. The responses to these questions on *Serious Issues* and *Potential Solutions* are summarized here.

SERIOUS ISSUES FACING THE ECONOMY

1. Top Priority Issues Continue to be Very Different

There continues to be a significant contrast between the top priority issues of management and labour. Both private and public sector labour respondents cite **Reduced Social Spending, Lack of Jobs, Unemployment Rate, and Environmental Degradation** among their top concerns. None of these issues ranks among those of most concern to management. In fact, all four issues are among those ranked lowest by management. In contrast, **High Taxes** was the single most significant issue for private sector managers, and **International Competitiveness** issues for public sector managers. Concerns about **Government Deficits/Debt, Brain Drain, and Shortage of Skilled Labour** constituted a second group of management issues.

2. Moderating Concern Over Broad Political and Macroeconomic Issues

Except for the issues of **High Taxes** and **Interest Rates**, respondents regarded most overall political and macroeconomic issues with noticeably less concern in 2000 than in 1996. In some cases, particularly **Uncertainties Regarding National Unity** and **Concern Over Lack of Jobs**, the decline in concern among all constituencies over this four-year period was marked. Three constituencies viewed **High Taxes** as a somewhat more serious problem in 2000 than in earlier years, although management's concerns over this issue remained much higher than those of labour. Labour respondents maintained earlier years' moderate concerns over **High Interest Rates**, while management respondents' concerns over this issue, very low in 1998, rose noticeably in 2000.

3. Convergence in Attitudes to Skill Shortage Issues

Skill Shortages continued to be a concern for the management respondents, and a source of increasing concern for labour. Private sector labour and management respondents, in fact, showed virtually identical levels of concern over this issue. This increased concern occurred against a backdrop of reduced concerns over many other economic and labour market-related issues.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

As with their responses regarding the issues facing Canada, respondents from the four constituencies differed in terms of the priority they attached to various solutions.

The overall analysis points to the following broad conclusions:

1. Private Sector Business is Unique in its Top Policy Prescriptions

Private sector business respondents, alone among the four constituent groups, called for much less government involvement in their affairs. This was reflected in their top three potential solutions – **Lower Taxes, Reduced Government Spending, and Reduced Government Regulation**. In contrast, the three other constituencies agreed on two of their top three priorities – **Improving Education and Improving Workplace Training**. As a third priority, public sector managers chose **Increasing R&D**, while labour in both the public and private sectors pointed to the need to **Strengthen Social Security**.

The four constituencies shared a common second-tier set of priorities, which included **Increased Investment in Innovation, and Increased R&D**.

At the other extreme, all four constituent groups placed the need to **Increase Immigration** at the very bottom of their lists of solutions. This implies, for most constituencies, a ‘made in Canada’ solution to the important issue of skill shortages.

2. Management and Labour Differ on Strengthening Social Security and Reducing Work Time

Labour and management respondents held significantly differing views on the need to **Strengthen Social Security** or **Reduce Work Time**. For private and public sector labour respondents, **Strengthening Social Security** ranked among the foremost priorities, while for management respondents it ranked among the lowest priorities. Similarly, **Reduced Work Time** had the support of about 40% of labour respondents but only 10% of management representatives in the survey.

3. Management and Labour Maintain Past Years’ Emphasis on Fiscal and Labour Market Measures

Comparing 2000 to 1998, all labour and management constituencies maintained or in some cases increased the priorities they attached to fiscal measures such as **Lower Interest Rates, Reduced Government Spending, and Lower Taxes**. On the question of **Lower Interest Rates**, the interest of private sector management rose sharply, approaching levels of priority expressed by labour.

Similarly, most management and labour constituencies maintained the priorities attached to **Improving Education, Improving Workplace Training, or Improving Labour/Management Relations**. Again, private sector management differed from the other constituencies by placing noticeably less priority on **Improving Education and Workplace Training** in 2000 than in 1998.

INTRODUCTION

The significant challenges facing the Canadian economy continue to evolve over time. International competition, in financial markets and in markets for products, services, and skills, increasingly shapes the Canadian economic environment. Unemployment has been reduced, and concerns over skill shortages are increasingly being voiced. Over the last several years, most governments have made painful fiscal adjustments and many are now weighing their options on how to apply budgetary surpluses.

These are among the many serious issues that must be addressed at both the national and provincial/territorial levels. The attitudes of business, labour and government leaders to issues such as these will colour the actions they take to deal with them.

These primarily economic issues ultimately affect workplaces in Canada, either directly or indirectly. In turn, they have important implications for both management and labour, as well as significant impacts on the relationships between these two workplace parties. As an independent organization which seeks to improve the dialogue between labour and business in Canada, Canadian Labour and Business Centre has sought to monitor these developments over time.

In March and April, 2000, the Centre surveyed over four thousand leaders from the business, labour and public sector (education, health, and government) communities to determine their perspectives on a range of issues related to:

- challenges facing the economy and potential directions for solution;
- the current state of labour/management relations in Canada;
- demographic issues and the labour market;
- 'Healthy Workplace' issues, and
- workplace practices.

In most of its questions, this survey repeated similar ones conducted in 1996 and 1998. It thus provides a point-in-time snapshot of constituency leaders' current perceptions of these issues, as well as an insight into how leaders' perceptions on these issues have evolved over the last four years. Some topics, notably the 'Healthy Workplace', were included in the 2000 Survey for the first time, so that no time series data are available for these subjects.

This report summarizes the 2000 Survey's findings regarding respondents' perceptions of the key economic issues facing Canada, and of the priority policy solutions required to address these. Separate releases will cover subjects related to workplace practices, demographic labour force questions, labour-management relations, and the Healthy Workplace.

It must be stressed that the focus is on respondents' *perceptions* of particular issues. A sense of the different perceptions among constituencies, and of how these perceptions are changing over time, can help explain changes in their attitudes and actions. In addition, exploring the factors which influence constituencies' perceptions can provide a basis for further dialogue among the constituencies themselves.

METHODOLOGY

In March and April 2000, Canadian Labour and Business Centre mailed 4442 survey questionnaires to business, labour and public sector leaders. The questionnaires were identical in content. By the end of April, 790 responses had been received, for an overall response rate of 18%. The mailings, responses, and response rates for individual constituencies were as follows:

<i>Business leaders:</i>	1966 sent; 345 returned; 18% response rate
<i>Labour leaders:</i>	2147 sent; 303 returned; 14% response rate
<i>Public Sector leaders:</i>	329 sent; 142 returned; 43% response rate

The intent of the survey was to identify the perspectives of opinion leaders from each constituency. Accordingly, respondents to the survey were identified as leaders and senior officers of their respective organizations. For individual constituencies, the identification of respondents was as follows:

Private Sector and Public Sector Labour: Questionnaires were sent to the executive officers of the Canadian Labour Congress, its affiliates, all provincial federations of labour, and major district labour councils. The Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada, published by the Workplace Information Directorate of Human Resources Development Canada, was a major source for these mailings. In the analysis and text that follows, responses were disaggregated into public sector labour and private sector labour.

Private Sector Business: Questionnaires were sent to lists of individuals provided by the Alliance of Manufacturers & Exporters Canada, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and the Canadian Construction Association. Each association list included its Board of Directors together with a selection of CEOs or Vice-Presidents of other important member companies. Some associations included members of their human resources or related committees. Regional representation was assured either through including the directors/members of associations' regional/provincial divisions, where they existed, or directly through a selection of member companies in certain regions, or both. In some regions, the sample was supplemented by inclusion of CEO's and/or Vice-Presidents from companies listed in a commercial database. In the analysis and text that follows, this constituency is also referred to as business and private sector management.

Public Sector Management: Questionnaires were sent to the presidents of Canadian universities and community colleges, the Board of Directors of the Canadian Health Association, and senior federal, provincial, and territorial government officials at the Deputy Minister/Assistant Deputy Minister level, with responsibility for employment, labour, or labour market matters.

SERIOUS ISSUES FACING THE ECONOMY

The survey gathered the views of leaders from four constituencies, i.e. private sector business, private sector labour, public sector management, and public sector labour. The analysis compares and contrasts the responses of all four constituencies to individual survey questions.

As in 1996 and 1998, respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of a number of national-level issues facing the economy. While responses spanned a wide spectrum, some issues were common among constituencies. The analysis first describes the profile of the priority issues perceived by the various constituencies, and then turns to examine how these priorities have shifted since the 1996 Survey.

1. *Priority Issues in 2000 - Management and Labour Perspectives*

Chart 1(a) presents the top priority issues listed by labour and management in the private sector. The length of the bars represents the proportion of each constituency's respondents who regarded the issue as a serious problem. Chart 1(b) presents the corresponding top issues of management and labour in the public sector.

Several broad observations emerge from these charts, as follows:

Management/Labour Differences

There is a significant contrast between the top priority issues of management and labour. **High Taxes**, by a wide margin, are the top priority for business (i.e. private sector management) and are the second priority of public sector management. **International Competitiveness** is the top priority of public sector management, and ranks among private sector business respondents' top four. **Skill Shortage** and **Brain Drain** issues also ranked among the top five priorities of both public and private sector management respondents. None of these issues ranks near the top of labour's priority concerns, although it is notable that almost 50% of private sector labour respondents showed concerns over **High Taxes**.

In contrast, both private and public sector labour respondents cite **Reduced Social Spending** as their top concern, with **Lack of Jobs** an overall second. **Environmental Degradation**, **International Trade Issues**, **Income Inequality** and **Unemployment Rate** levels were also of relatively high concern for labour respondents. Most of these issues appeared among those ranked lowest by management.

Labour/Management Similarities

For the most part, the very top priorities of labour and management do not overlap at all. The two constituencies, however, do agree on several issues which for each are moderate priorities (40% of each constituency regards them as very serious). For all four constituencies, these are **Skill Shortages** and **Brain Drain**. Labour and management in the private sector also share concerns about **High Taxes**, **International Competitiveness**, and **Lack of Consensus over Canada's Economic Priorities**.

2. Priority Issues in 2000 – Public and Private Sector Perspectives

Charts 2(a) and 2(b) again present the top priority issues identified by each of the four constituencies, but organize them so that private and public sector respondents' priorities are directly compared, first for management (Chart 2(a)) and then for labour (Chart 2(b)).

It is clear from Chart 2(b) that there is a high degree of consistency between the views of private and public sector labour respondents as to which issues are more or less serious. In very few instances do the proportions of each constituency who view an issue as serious differ by more than 10 percentage points. Where there are differences, private sector labour respondents tend to stress economic performance issues such as **Inadequate Investment, International Competitiveness, or Poor Productivity**. Public sector labour respondents, on the other hand, stress broader social issues and measures, such as **Income Inequality, Environmental Degradation, and Reduced Social Spending**. These differences, however, are differences of degree, and are not large. A quite consistent set of priorities characterizes the broad labour constituency.

On the management side, however, priorities differ more between the public and private sectors. Chart 2(a) compares private and public sector managers' views on serious issues. The chart shows that while there is broad similarity between the perspectives of public sector managers and private sector businesspersons, this consistency is not as high as on the labour side, and is marked in several cases by quite distinct differences of perception.

In particular, private sector business respondents reported a much higher level of concern than their public sector counterparts over the broad role of government, citing concerns over **High Taxes, Government Deficits/Debt, and Government Regulations**. Private sector business respondents were also much more inclined to view with concern some of the practical economic and labour market issues with which they had to deal on a regular basis. These included concerns over **Brain Drain, High Labour Costs, Poor Productivity and High Interest Rates**.

In contrast, public sector management respondents laid relative stress, compared to their private sector colleagues, on more social issues such as **Reduced Social Spending and Environmental Degradation**. The **Quality of Workplace Training** was also of greater concern to public sector management respondents.

A final point to note is the public/private sector differences in perception on the importance of a **Lack of National Consensus on Economic Priorities**. On both the labour and management sides, especially the latter, private sector respondents shared a higher level of concern on this issue than their public sector colleagues. From a private sector perspective, it appears that there is still less overall agreement on this issue than public sector respondents perceive.

3. Changes in Perceptions, 1996-2000 — Overall Political and Macroeconomic Issues

Between 1998 and 2000, respondents continued to moderate their views of the seriousness of most overall political and macroeconomic issues, maintaining trends begun between 1996 and 1998. On virtually all issues covered in the survey, overall levels of concern were lower in 2000 than in 1996 among most constituencies.

The notable exception to this overall movement was respondents' views on **High Taxes**. On this issue, concerns increased slightly for most constituencies, reflecting a continuing debate around the impacts of taxes on Canadian competitiveness. For all constituencies except private sector labour, levels of concern on this issue stood at the same or higher levels than in 1996. At the same time, between 1998 and 2000, there was an increase in concerns around **Interest Rates**, especially among management respondents, reflecting their view of potential interest rate movements in the context of a rapidly growing economy. Between 1998 and 2000, most constituencies' views of the seriousness of **Government Deficits/Debt** remained largely unchanged, in spite of many jurisdictions' moves to deal with these issues.

Chart 3 shows how the proportions of respondents who perceived these issues as serious problems changed between 1996, 1998, and 2000.

It is apparent from the chart that almost universally, in each of the four constituencies, the proportion of respondents viewing these issues as serious problems has declined steadily since 1996. In some cases, the decline was marked, especially in constituencies' concerns over **National Unity** and **Lack of Jobs**. However, for the most part the direction of change since 1996 has been similar among all constituencies.

Of parallel interest is the fact that on several issues, the views of labour and business respondents appear to have converged somewhat, while on others they have diverged. Thus, the four constituencies were much closer together in 2000 than in 1996 in terms of their concerns over **Government Deficits/Debt**, **National Unity**, and **High Interest Rates**. In contrast, they are further apart in their perspectives on **Lack of National Consensus on Economic Priorities** and **Lack of Jobs**.

This convergence or divergence may signal the issues on which future debates between the constituencies may occur, with less of a focus, perhaps, on deficits/debt or national unity, and more of a focus on broader economic priorities and job creation.

4. Changes in Perceptions, 1996-2000 – Labour Market Issues

Chart 4 illustrates how the proportions of respondents who viewed individual labour market issues as serious problems changed between 1996, 1998, and 2000.

It is clear from the chart that in every constituency except public sector management, levels of concern over **Skill Shortages** were higher in 2000 than in 1998 or 1996, particularly among Private Sector labour respondents. Private Sector labour and business respondents now express the same degree of concern over this issue – a notable convergence from 1998. The **Skill Shortages** issue remains a major concern of all constituencies.

It is therefore somewhat surprising that when assessing both the **Quality of Education** and the **Quality of Workplace Training**, all four constituencies consistently reported lower levels of concern in 2000 than two years earlier. In view of the increase in concern over **Skill Shortages**, the reduced concern over education and training is notable. It suggests that respondents do not make a strong link between skill shortages and education or training quality, implying instead that other factors may be stronger contributors to skill shortages.

5. *Changes in Perception, 1996-2000 – Labour/Management Relations and Productivity Issues*

Canadian Labour and Business Centre links labour/management relations directly to productivity. It is the view of the Centre that unless labour/management relations are constructive, it is very difficult to bring about increases in productivity. Thus these issues are examined together.

Chart 5 shows how the proportions of respondents who viewed these labour/management and productivity-related issues as serious problems changed over the years 1996, 1998, and 2000.

The chart presents some potentially significant differences of viewpoint.

First, it is clear that for management respondents in both the private and public sectors, there was increased concern in 2000 over Canada's **International Competitiveness**. At the same time, both constituencies also expressed increased concern over **High Labour Costs**, and the private sector business respondents increased somewhat their concern over **Poor Productivity**. It is clear that on the management side, there is a growing stress on competitiveness and productivity, accompanied by a sense that as the labour market tightens, labour costs may affect performance on these fronts.

Labour views on most of these issues stood in sharp contrast to those of management. While private sector labour respondents shared their management counterparts' concerns over **Poor Productivity**, overall labour perspectives on **High Labour Costs** and **International Competitiveness** changed little from the relatively low levels of earlier years.

The labour and management constituencies continued to differ in their views on **Labour/Management Relations**, with no appreciable change in relative perceptions. Thus about half of the labour respondents and about 20 per cent of the management respondents continued to view this issue as one of high importance, with little change of perception from earlier years.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

As with their responses regarding the issues facing Canada, respondents from the four constituencies differed in terms of the priority they attached to various solutions.

The overall analysis points to three broad conclusions, as follows:

1. Priority Solutions in 2000

Chart 6(a) presents the top proposed solutions listed in the 2000 Survey by management and labour in the private sector. The length of the bars represents the proportion of each constituency's respondents who felt the proposed solution needed greater emphasis. Chart 6(b) presents the corresponding top proposed solutions of management and labour in the public sector. Charts 6 (a) and (b) identify significant differences and similarities in respondents' views of the degree of emphasis which particular solutions require.

Differences in Priority Solutions

The four constituencies diverge markedly on the relative emphasis they feel should be given to many measures. Significantly, among labour respondents, the private and public sector labour leaders are in complete agreement on four priority areas for solutions, namely **Improve Workplace Training, Improve Education, Strengthen Social Security** and **Improve Labour/Management Relations**. For labour respondents, these four priority solutions stand out from all others; all four were cited by over 70% of labour respondents as needing more attention. They reflected labour leaders' concerns, expressed earlier, over the quality of workplace training and labour/management relations, as well as over income inequality.

These solutions differ, although not completely, from those emphasized by management. Within management, two distinct sets of policy priorities were expressed. On the one hand, private sector management respondents clearly sought to reduce the overall role of government; their top three policy priorities were to **Reduce Taxes, Reduce Government Spending, and Reduce Government Regulation**. On the other hand, the top four policy priorities of public sector management included none of these; rather, public sector managers pointed to a need to **Improve Education and Workplace Training, Increase R&D, and Increase Investment in Innovation**. For these respondents, **Reducing Taxes, Government Spending, and Government Regulation** ranked further down the priority list. In this regard, the public sector managers shared several priorities with the labour community.

Similarities in Priority Solutions

Despite these differences, two policy areas were ranked as requiring greater attention by over 60% of the respondents in every constituency. This degree of support suggests a strong degree of consensus and concern in these areas. These are **Improve Education, and Increase Research and Development**. Significantly, these two policy solutions also drew similar broad support in 1998. The first of these solutions directly reflects respondents' continuing perceptions of the seriousness of education issues, described in an earlier section. The second, however, is somewhat more surprising in view of the only moderate significance attached to issues of investment or innovation in the earlier

analysis. The stress on **Research and Development** may in fact be linked to broader concerns over Canada's international competitiveness, which for most constituencies was a priority issue.

2. Changes in Priority Solutions, 1996-2000 – Fiscal Measures

Chart 7 shows, for each constituency, how the proportion of respondents who felt that particular fiscal solutions required more emphasis changed over the period 1996, 1998, and 2000.

The continuing economic expansion which Canada has experienced in the last year has brought with it some interest rate increases, which in turn has prompted private sector business respondents to suggest that lowering interest rates be given greater attention. The proportion of private sector business respondents citing **Lower Interest Rates** as an area for greater attention doubled between 1998 and 2000, from 15% to 31%. Among other constituencies, however, there was no similar increase in concern in this area; for most constituencies the priority for reduced interest rates remained about the same as, or even slightly lower than, 1998. It must be noted, of course, that the labour constituency continued to place a greater priority on lower interest rates than the management respondents, even in spite of the increased private sector business concern.

Despite governments' continuing efforts at **Reducing Government Spending** since 1998, most constituencies maintained, or even slightly increased, their support for this as a policy solution in 2000. Policies implemented to date do not appear to have reduced the priority many constituencies attach to these activities. Over the longer horizon, the success of government spending restraint meant that most respondents in 2000 attached less priority to this than they had four years earlier. Nevertheless, private sector business respondents continued to be by far the most insistent of the constituencies in promoting this as an important policy direction, while public sector labour representatives were least so. Private sector labour and public sector management respondents attached the same level of importance to reduced government spending – a notable convergence of view from 1996, when there was an almost 20 percentage point difference in their views.

Management and labour respondents continued to differ on their views regarding **Lower Taxes**. The former, especially private sector business respondents, continued to give relatively high priority to lowering taxes, while labour respondents emphasized tax solutions to a much smaller degree. These perspectives changed very little since 1998. On the labour side, however, since 1996 there has been some convergence of view between public and private sector labour respondents on the importance of lowering taxes.

3. Changes in Priority Solutions, 1996-2000 – Labour Market Measures

Chart 8 illustrates how the proportions of respondents who felt that particular labour market solutions required more emphasis changed between 1996, 1998, and 2000.

The responses to this question are best viewed in the context of respondents' earlier attitudes to **Skill Shortages** and the seriousness of the **Quality of Education** and **Workplace Training**. Here it will be recalled that concern over skill shortages rose for

most constituencies between 1998 and 2000, while concerns about the quality of education and workplace training tended to decline.

Thus it is not surprising that between 1998 and 2000, there were mixed movements in constituencies' views of the priority they would ascribe to **Improving Education** and **Improving Workplace Training**. In this period, labour and public sector management constituencies maintained or slightly increased the priority they would ascribe to these solutions, while private sector business respondents appeared to place less emphasis on both.

Notwithstanding the very small shifts in attitude to these policy issues, it was notable that private sector business perspectives on the importance of these solutions have now diverged somewhat from those of other constituencies. While the other three constituencies were very close to one another in their views of the priority of these policy approaches in 2000, private sector business stood noticeably lower on both counts. It appeared that in 2000, the private sector business view returned to its 1996 levels, after a slight increase in 1998.

Constituencies' views on the priority to be ascribed to **Promoting Alternative Work Arrangements** and **Improving Labour/Management Relations** remained virtually unchanged from 1998. Higher proportions of labour respondents than management respondents continued to favour both policy solutions, and it was clear that perspectives in this regard have remained quite stable since 1998. Within each of the broader business and labour constituencies, there were no perceptible private sector/public sector differences on the question of **Improving Labour/Management Relations**. In terms of **Promoting Alternative Work Arrangements**, however, it was clear that the public sector component favoured such arrangements more than the private sector component.

Chart 1(a): Private Sector Labour and Management Views on Major Issues
 (percentage of respondents who viewed issue as 'serious problem')

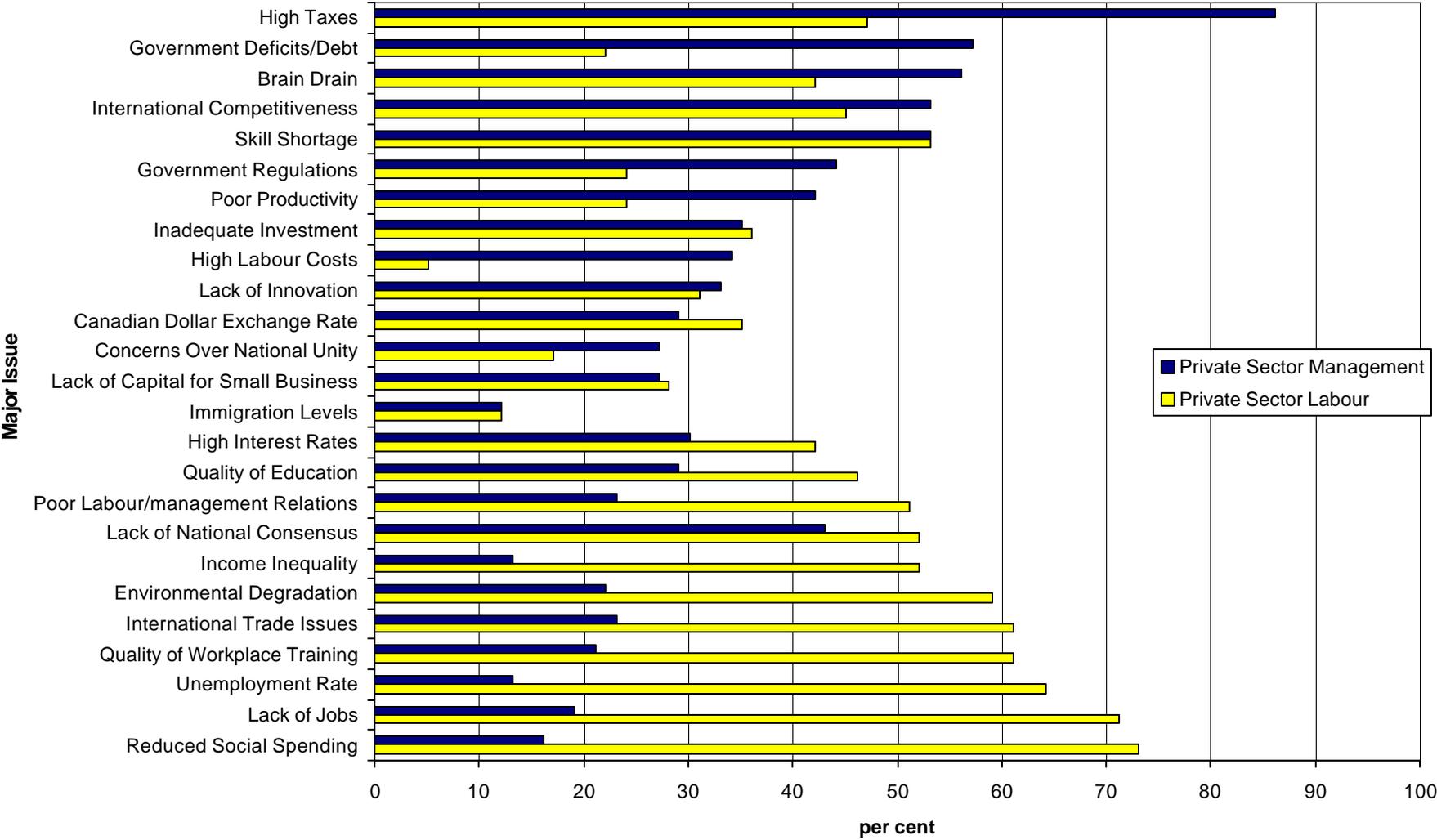


Chart 1(b): Public Sector Labour and Management Views on Major Issues
 (percentage of respondents who viewed issue as 'serious problem')

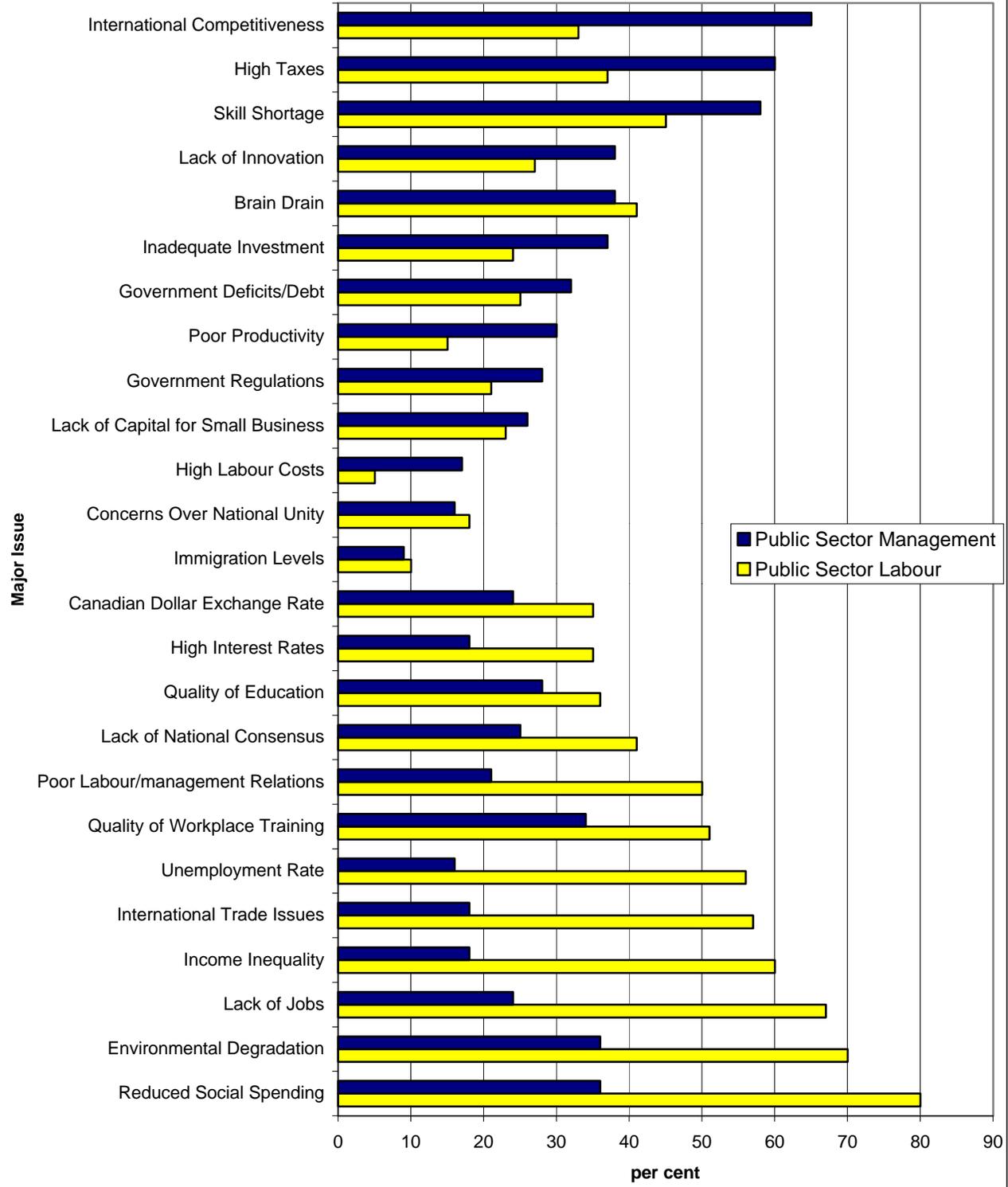


Chart 2(a): Private and Public Sector Management Views on Major Issues
 (percentage of respondents who viewed issue as 'serious problem')

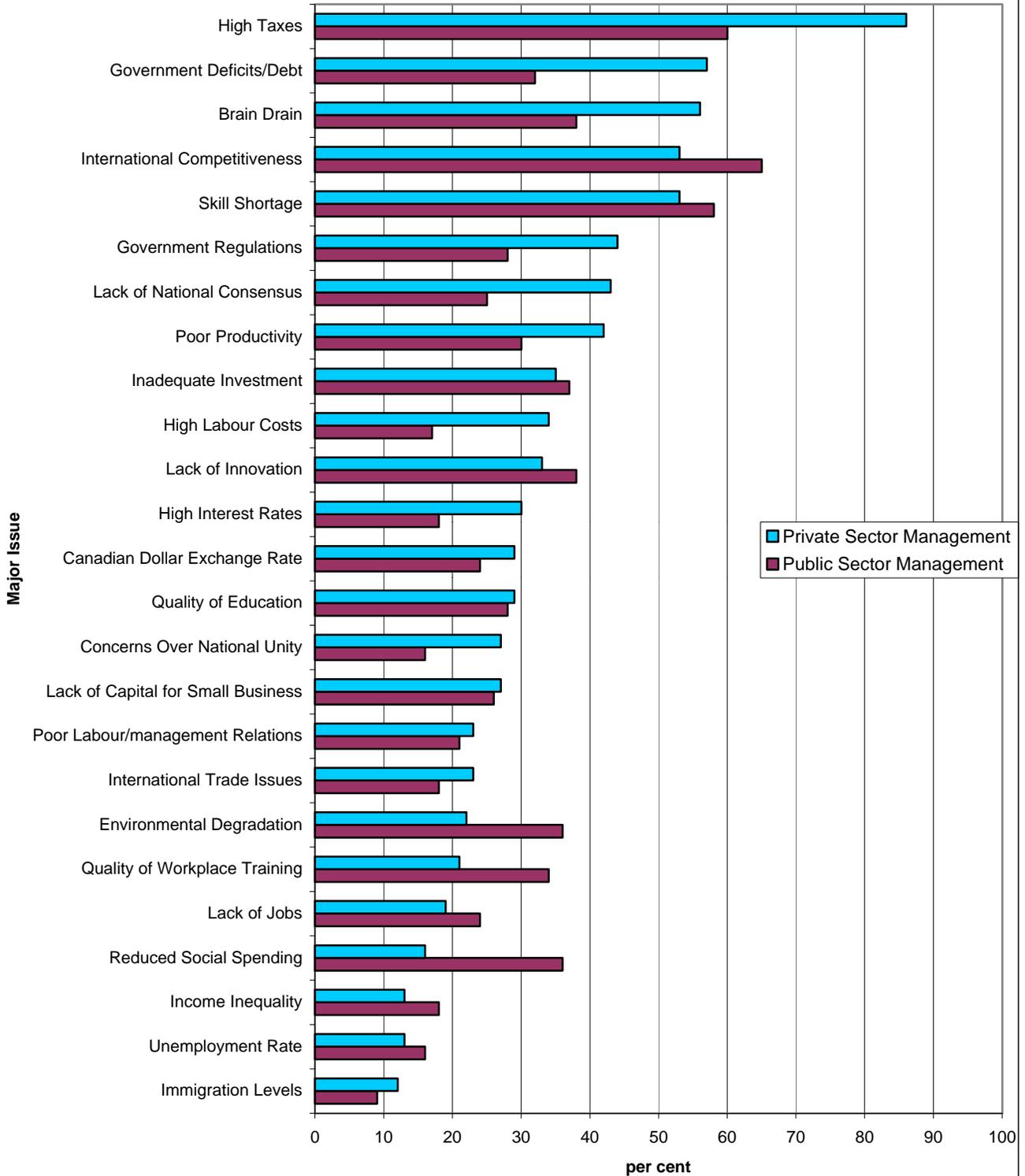
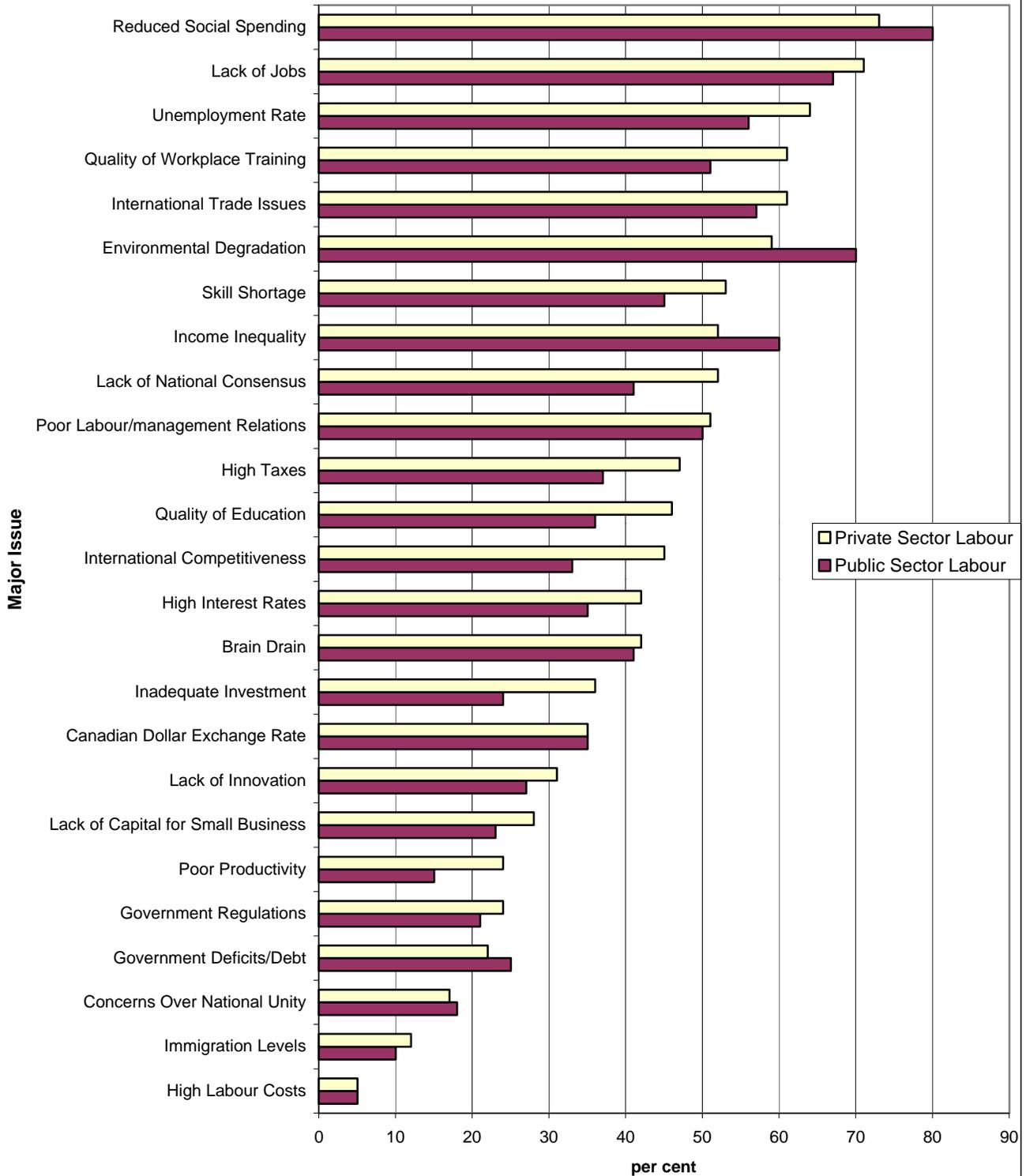


Chart 2(b): Public and Private Sector Labour Views on Major Issues
 (percentage of respondents who viewed issue as 'serious problem')



**Chart 3: Changes in Perceptions, 1996, 1998, and 2000:
Overall Political, Economic and Environmental Issues**
(Percentage of respondents who viewed issue as a 'serious problem')

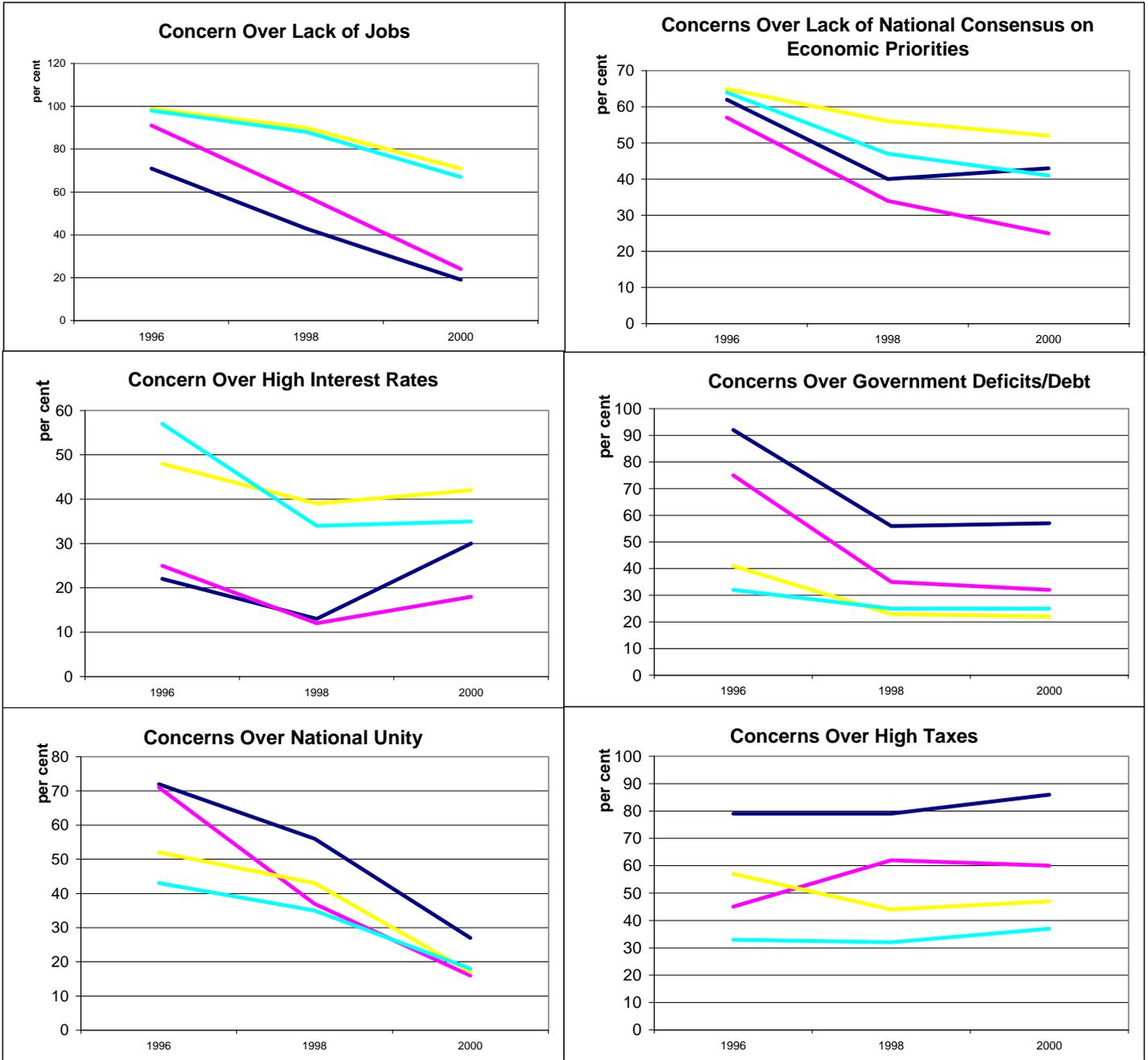


Chart 4: Changes in Perceptions, 1996, 1998, 2000
Labour Market Issues
 (percentage of respondents who viewed issue as a 'serious problem')

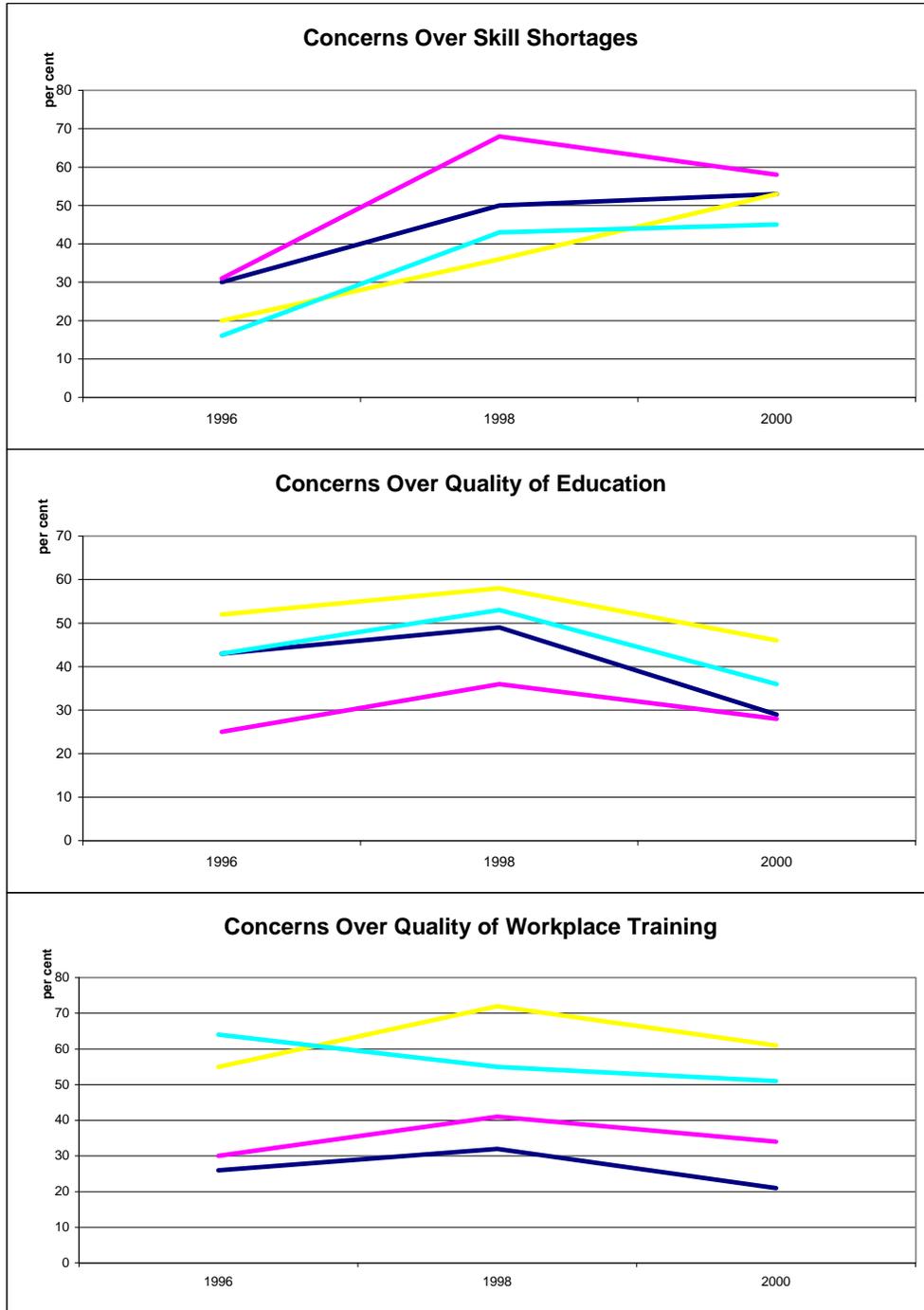


Chart 5: Changes In Perceptions, 1996, 1998, 2000
Labour/Management Relations and Productivity Issues
 (percentage of respondents who viewed issue as 'serious problem')

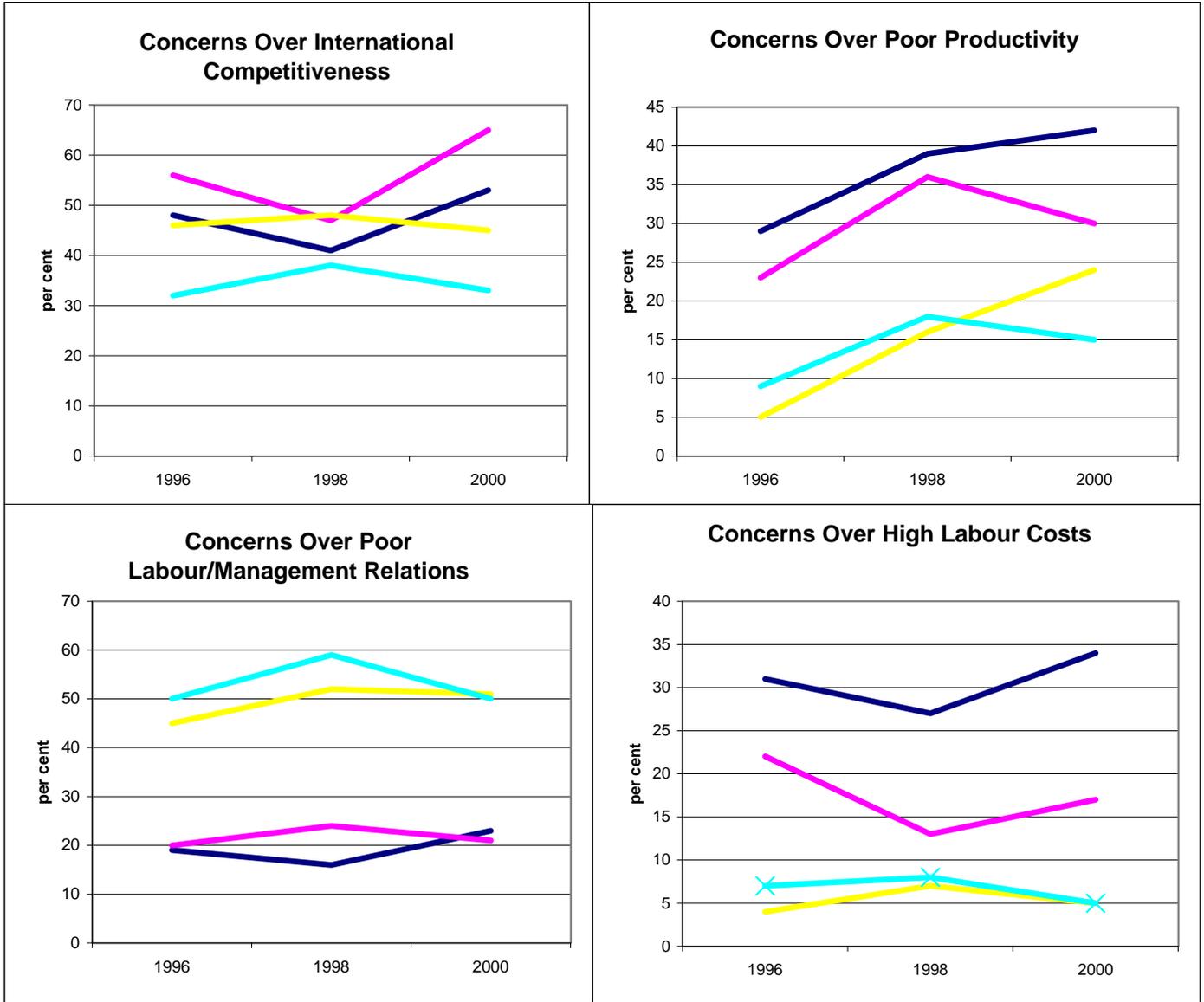


Chart 6(a): Priority Private Sector Solutions to Issues Facing the Economy

(percentage of respondents who felt solution needs more emphasis)

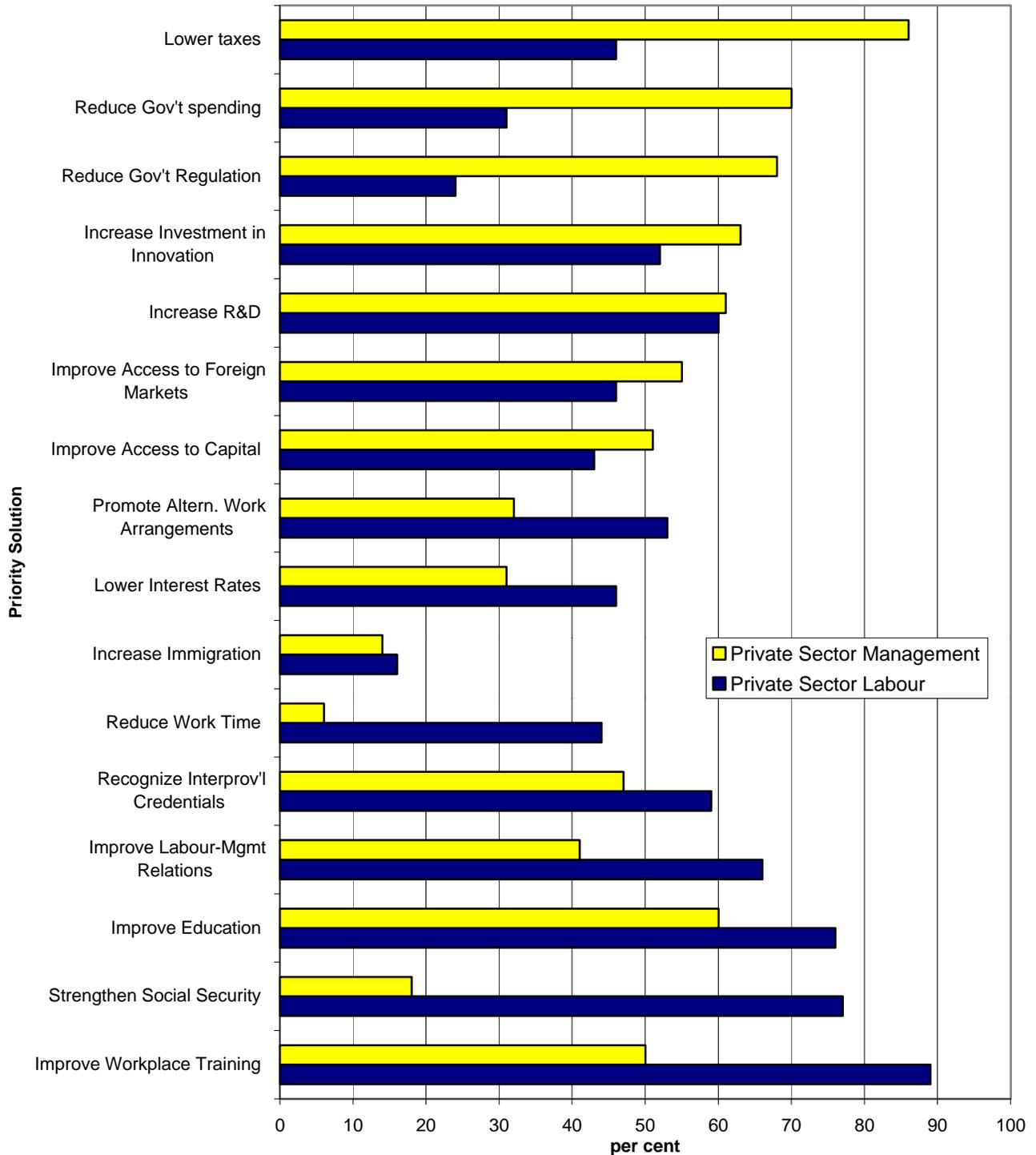


Chart 6(b): Priority Public Sector Solutions to Issues Facing the Economy

(percentage of respondents who felt solution needs more emphasis)

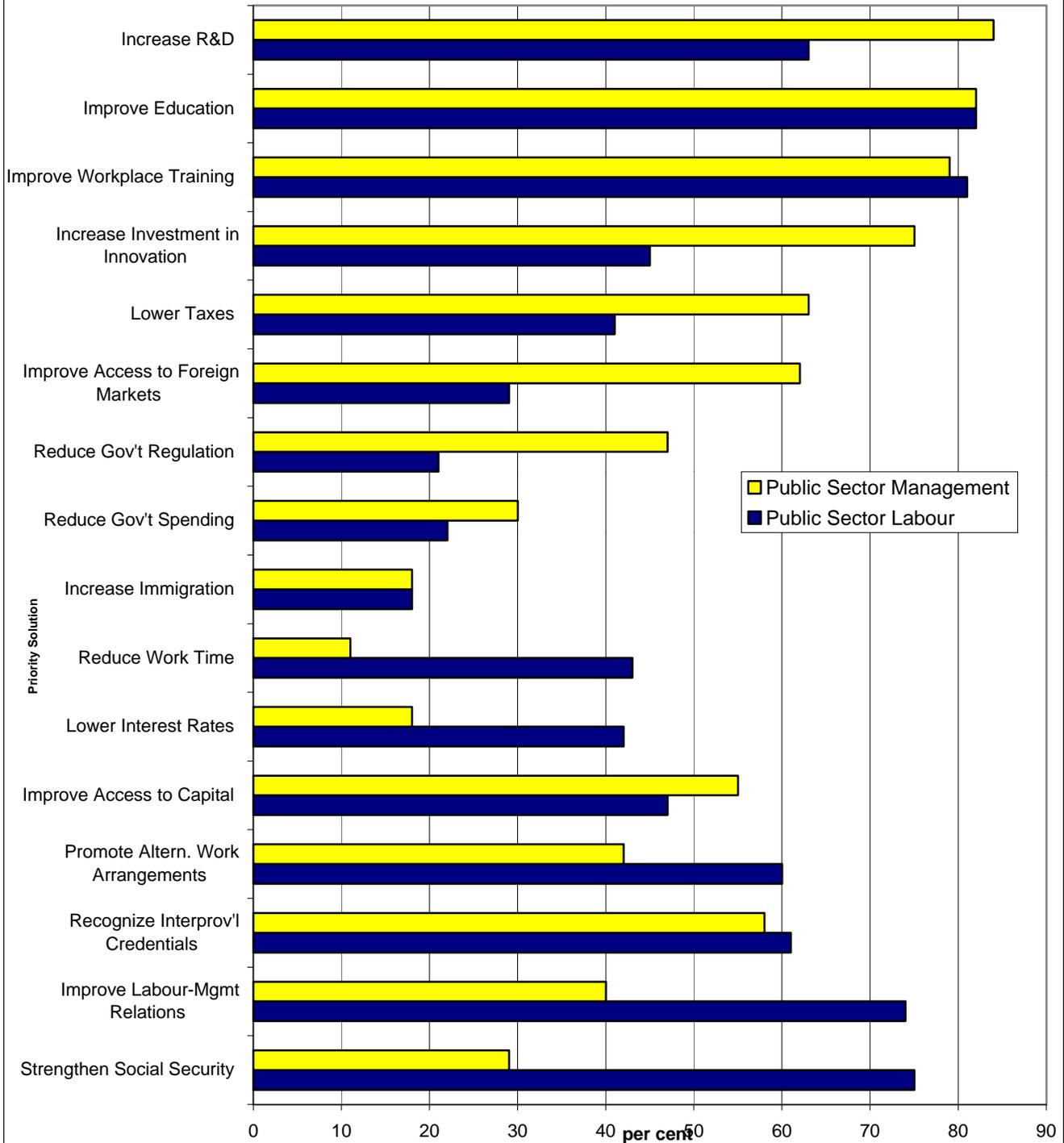


Chart 7: Changes in Priority Solutions, 1996, 1998, 2000: Fiscal Measures
 (percentage responding that potential solution needs more emphasis)

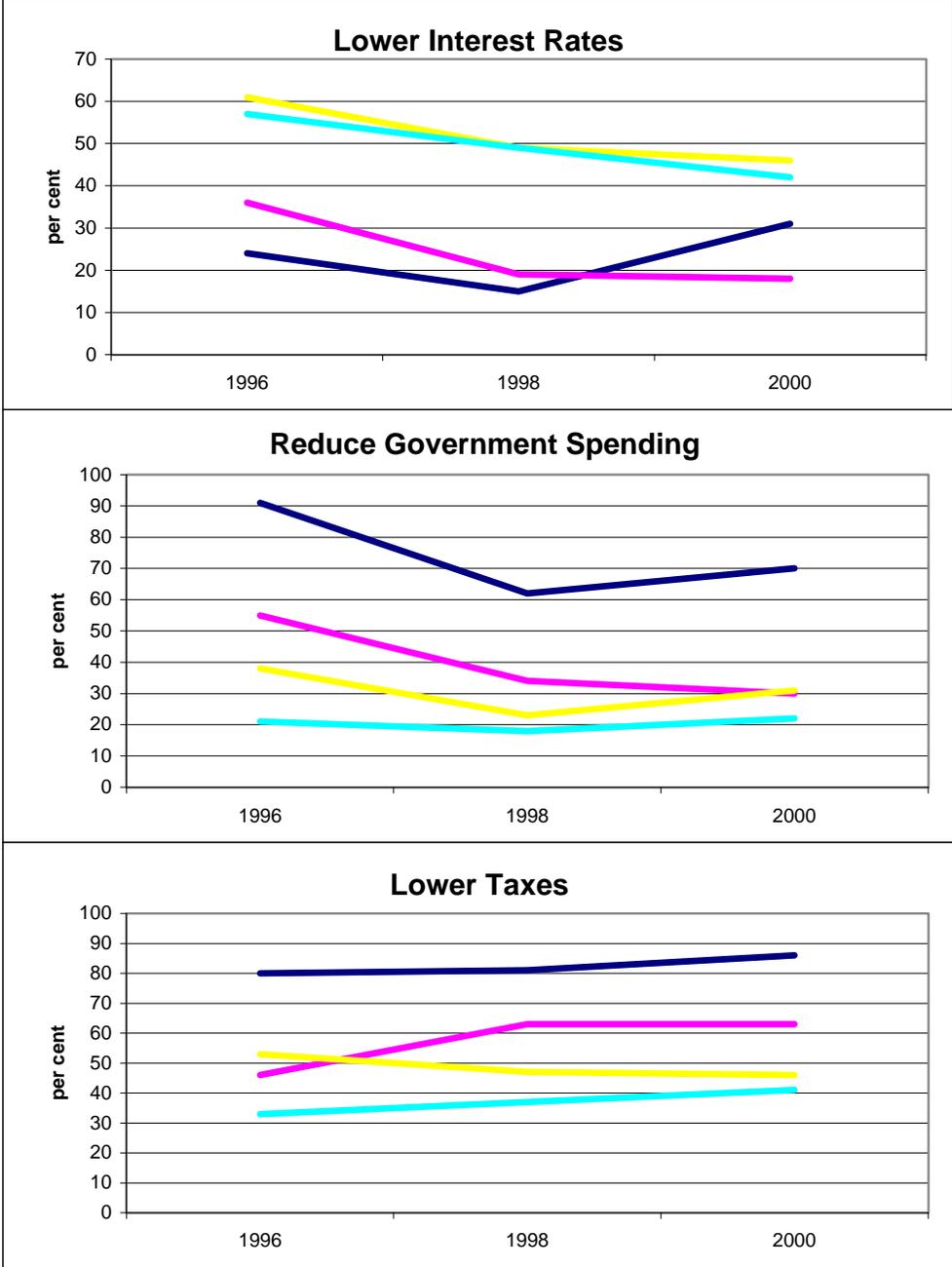


Chart 8: Changes in Priority Solutions, 1996, 1998, 2000: Labour Market Measures
 (percentage responding that potential solution needs more emphasis)

