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Confronting the State Budget and Establishing Quality-of-Life Benchmarks in Illinois: Results and Analysis of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute 2008 Statewide Poll

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**Confronting the State Budget and
Establishing Quality-of-Life Benchmarks in Illinois:
Results and Analysis of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
2008 Statewide Poll**

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**An Occasional Paper of
The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale**

January, 2009

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Introduction

In Fall 2008, The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale conducted its first statewide public opinion survey since 2004. Topics included the general direction of the country, the state, and respondents' respective areas of the state; benchmark quality of life measures for education, public safety, the environment, and the economy; opinions on important public issues, such as a proposal to amend the Illinois Constitution to allow recall of statewide elected officials and the proposed Constitutional Convention; and opinions on judicial selection issues in the state.

By far the most newsworthy section of the survey, released October 23 at the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield, dealt with public perception of the state government's performance crafting the budget. Most alarming was respondents' overwhelming belief that the Illinois government takes in enough money to meet its needs, and that relatively simple budget cuts could give the state sufficient funds to provide necessary services.

In addition, respondents were overwhelmingly opposed to cuts in areas that make up more than 90% of the state budget, and were opposed to or lukewarm toward a number of proposals for enhancing revenue. Only a proposal to add an income tax bracket for the highest-earning Illinoisans garnered majority support from poll participants.

At his last Capitol news conference before his retirement, Simon Institute Director Mike Lawrence noted that Illinois had a backlog of \$1.8 billion in unpaid bills, with a weakening economy making the outlook still bleaker. Illinoisans' belief that the government could cut its way out of its deficit problems, was particularly problematic. "It has never been more important for Illinoisans to understand what is going on in Springfield," Lawrence said. "They need to be better informed about the options. They need to be told the truth by the people seeking office and by elected officials."

As this Simon Institute Occasional Paper is being released in early 2009, the state's backlog of unpaid bills looks more like \$3 billion, and the national and state economic outlook is worse than it was in October. The media interest in the arrest and impeachment of Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich is diverting attention from the state's worsening budget problems. It is into this political environment that the Institute offers this initial snapshot of the state of Illinois public opinion

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute created and directed this telephone survey of more than 800 registered voters across the state of Illinois. Interviews were conducted between September 23, 2008, and October 17, 2008, by the Survey Research Office at the University of Illinois-Springfield's Center for State Policy and Leadership. Respondents were chosen at random, and each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. Results from the entire sample have a statistical margin for error of ± 3.4 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we were to conduct the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances the results would vary by no more than plus or minus 3.4 points from the result obtained here. The margin for error will be larger for demographic, geographic, and response subgroups.

Section One: Issue Analysis

I. ILLINOIS' BUDGET AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD QUALITY OF LIFE

A. The Budget

The 2008 Paul Simon Public Policy Institute poll found the Illinois electorate in a foul mood in the weeks leading up to the November elections. Nine in ten voters surveyed said they thought the United States was “off track and moving in the wrong direction.” Three-fourths said the same thing about the State of Illinois. They thought officials at every level were doing a bad job in putting together a state budget, and in open-ended questions, significant percentages offered bitter statements about the lack of honesty and empathy of elected officials and state workers.

It seems a poisonous environment in which state officials have to make difficult decisions about cutting a budget already repeatedly slashed, or about raising revenues in the face of an apparently tax-averse electorate. This Simon Institute Occasional Paper offers interested members of the policy community an often bleak look at where public opinion stands as these issues need to be addressed, with a few shafts of sunshine entering from a crack in the policy window.

First, and perhaps most worrisome, is that large majorities of Illinoisans in almost every demographic and geographic category (78 percent in the sample as a whole) believe that there is sufficient revenue in Illinois' coffers to meet the needs of the state; all its leaders have to do is to cut unnecessary programs and wasteful habits. The dollars-and-cents reality is that the backlog of unpaid bills dwarfs what might be reasonably cut from already lean budgets. The most common suggestions of poll participants—that the state cut spending by eliminating pay raises for state employees, or halting Governor Blagojevich's commutes between Springfield and Chicago—would be a spit in the budgetary ocean. As former Simon Institute Director Mike Lawrence noted, we could do away with the legislature entirely (“Chop away \$50 million,” he said) and barely make a dent in the problem.

Respondents' bad feelings about the direction of the state and the performance of their elected officials extends to their perceptions of the value they get for the tax dollars they pay to the state of Illinois. Only about one in eight said they felt they got an excellent or good value for the tax dollar they pay the state, a third said they got just an “average” value, and almost half said they felt they got a not-so-good or poor value.

When state-provided services such as education, parks, and public safety are couched as “quality of life” issues, large percentages say they get excellent or good service in their part of the state. This is indicative of the public mood when large percentages like the quality of service they receive, but perceive that they get a poor value for their tax dollar.

Worse, a substantial plurality of our respondents felt that tax dollars were disproportionately being spent outside of their home area: 44.7 percent said they felt their area was getting less than its fair share of state spending, compared with 33.8 percent who said they got about the right amount, and only 8.5 percent who thought they probably got more than their fair share. If tax increases are hard to swallow, it may be even worse when taxpayers perceive that other areas are benefiting at the expense of their own areas.

Further compounding the problem is that—in a refrain familiar to students of public opinion—voters want a cut in the state budget, but they do not want a cut in the services the state provides. We offered respondents the opportunity to support or oppose budget cuts in six policy areas, which together comprise the vast bulk of the state budget. Large majorities opposed the budget reductions, from 65.7 percent opposing cuts in state workers' retirement to 85.6 percent opposing cuts in K-12 education. More than 70 percent also opposed cuts in spending on state universities, public safety, natural resources, and programs for the needy.

Forty percent of respondents offered at least one answer to an open-ended question about other suggestions they may have had for ways to cut state spending. The largest category, more than 40 percent of open-ended responses, was to cut government salaries, including those of both elected officials and state workers. Almost ten percent suggested eliminating Governor Blagojevich's commutes between Chicago and Springfield.

Of five revenue-enhancing measures, only one received majority support. Almost two-thirds (65.7 percent) supported the notion of adding a higher-income bracket to Illinois' flat 3 percent income tax. Though support declined as respondent household income rose, the proposal retained majority support (57.5 percent) among those with annual household incomes above \$100,000. Lawrence noted in the round of interviews following the release of the poll results that such a measure probably would require a constitutional amendment and would not be a short-term solution. Still, this relatively high level of public support might show an open window that policymakers had previously thought closed.

Next-most popular, in a public-opinion tie, was expansion of legalized gambling, with 46.6 percent in favor and 46.9 percent opposed. Many in the policy community frown on financing public improvements through the encouragement of vices such as gambling—as opposed to excise taxes, the levies of which are meant to discourage such vices as smoking and drinking while raising revenues at the same time. Here in Southern Illinois, State Representative John Bradley (D-Marion) is among lawmakers whose principled opposition to gambling has killed capital-bill financing proposals.

Support for gambling expansion in Illinois was highest in the Chicago suburbs (51.4 percent), among men (55.4 percent), and among political Independents (49.2 percent).

In a tax-averse political atmosphere, lawmakers have floated the idea of selling or leasing assets such as the state lottery (for a minimum of \$10 billion) or the Illinois toll road system (with estimates as high as \$14 billion). Most of our respondents (52.2 percent)

opposed the idea. Support was highest, though still below a majority, in the Chicago suburbs (43.6 percent in favor). Almost six in ten (58.8 percent) downstate residents opposed the idea.

Using the sales tax to raise revenue was even less popular, with more than three-fourths (78.1 percent) opposed to raising the rate and two-thirds (67.6 percent) opposed to expanding the sales tax to include services.

About a quarter responded to an open-ended question asking for other ways to raise state revenues. Of those, one in eight (12 percent) reiterated calls to cut pay for government workers. One in twelve (8 percent) mentioned “sin taxes” on cigarettes and alcohol.

Mistrust in state government multiplies the problems of voter opposition to service cuts and the aversion to tax increases or other revenue enhancements. As state leaders confront the budget problems they do so on behalf of an electorate that disapproves of state government’s performance. Among respondents with an opinion on the matter, six in ten (59.6 percent) said the state is doing a poor job putting together a budget, and another third (32.3) said the government’s performance was not so good. A third (33.8 percent) said the legislature in particular was doing a poor job, and another four in ten (43.5 percent) said its performance was not so good.

Individual politicians didn’t fare much better: Governor Blagojevich’s ratings were worst (61.4 percent poor, 25.9 percent not so good), followed by those of Senate President Emil Jones (35.6 percent poor, 28.4 percent not so good) and House Speaker Mike Madigan (28.6 percent poor, 29.7 percent not so good).

On the brighter side, new leadership in 2009 may even benefit from the relative unpopularity of the politicians they replace. Illinois Senate President Jones has retired, and his replacement, Chicago-area Senator John Cullerton, may create a better working relationship between the Senate and Speaker Madigan’s House of Representatives. After adamant campaign promises, Governor Blagojevich would not consider any tax increase, regardless of its rationale.

As we release this Occasional Paper, Governor Blagojevich has been impeached by the Illinois House and awaits trial by the State Senate. If, as many expect, the governor is removed, now-Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn may use spending-and-revenue “straight talk” as a way to further distinguish himself from his predecessor.

Talk of shared sacrifice and acknowledgment of burgeoning deficits began coming out of Washington even before Barack Obama was sworn in. And by the end of 2008, State Senator Bradley had begun floating the idea of an eight-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax—a “user fee” to begin funding the massive capital improvement plan that state leaders have been struggling to enact. Perhaps a looming economic crisis and a changing leadership will allow policymakers to talk more openly about what it really costs to provide adequate state services.

B. Quality of Life in Illinois

One of the aims of the statewide survey project was to gauge citizen satisfaction with the quality of life in Illinois. We asked questions not only about the general “direction” of the state, but about the quality of life in the respective respondent’s area of the state, as well as aspects of the quality of life, such as the environment and education. We hoped, as we began the project, and continue to expect, that Simon Institute statewide and regional surveys would continue, and that the results of the 2008 survey could serve as a benchmark against which to compare future results on these quality-of-life items.

While citizen opinion of the direction of the state could hardly be more dismal (75.4 percent “wrong direction”), perception of the direction of one’s “area of the state” is less so (49.6 percent “wrong direction”). When asked about the quality of life in their area of the state—separate from their perception of the direction of their area—only about one in six (15.9 percent) said their quality of life was not good or poor. Almost half (47.2 percent) said their quality of life was excellent or good, and eight in ten (82.3 percent) said the quality of life in their area was at least average or better.

And, while most express dissatisfaction with the value they get for the tax dollar paid to the State of Illinois, they for the most part express satisfaction with the services they receive, at least when they are described as “aspects of the quality of life” in their area.

Half said the quality of the environment was excellent or good; six in ten said they thought the quality of public safety in their area was excellent or good; and six in ten said the quality of parks and recreation in their area was excellent or good. While significantly smaller percentages gave excellent/good responses to public education, infrastructure, and the performance of their area economy, majorities said these areas were performing at least at the “average” level.

Satisfaction with state services—even if in this instance they were presented as aspects of the quality of life in the state rather than as “services”—may help explain respondent reluctance to suffer budget cuts in these areas, particularly in education, public safety, and natural resources. A manifestation of this may have been last year’s public protests over the budget-related closing of state park facilities and historic sites.

Differences in Quality-of-Life Measures

One cloud on the quality-of-life horizon lies hidden in the differences in group responses to these quality-of-life items. Compared with white Illinoisans and residents of the Chicago suburbs, African American respondents and those living in the City of Chicago were significantly less likely to say the quality of life in their area was excellent or good, whether we are talking about their overall view or their satisfaction with the various “aspects” we tested. Given the generalizations that political scientists (mostly accurately) make about suburban quality of life versus that in the inner city, this is not a surprising result; nor is it a happy one.

(Population distribution in Illinois makes it harder to compare small towns and rural areas with each other or with Chicago and its suburbs. In our 800-interview sample, roughly

200 respondents lived in Chicago, and more than 350 lived in the suburbs. This leaves—in proportion to Illinois’ actual population—only about 250 respondents to represent the entire remainder of the state, from Galena to Cairo, which our analysis refers to as “downstate.”)

Most residents of suburban Chicago (54.4 percent) thought their area’s **overall quality of life** was excellent or good, while about half of those in the city (48.7 percent) thought their quality of life was only average—or worse. A quarter (23.9 percent) of urbanites thought their area’s quality of life was not good or poor, compared with 13.1 percent in the suburbs. A third of black respondents thought their area’s quality of life was not good (17.6 percent) or poor (16.7 percent) compared with just one in eight combined for whites.

In regard to **the environment** in respondents’ areas, urban Chicagoans were twice as likely as their suburban neighbors to say the quality was not good or poor (23.2 percent vs. 12.5 percent). Black respondents were more than two times more likely than white respondents to say the environment in their area was not good or poor (26 percent vs. 11.7 percent).

Geographic differences are evident in respondents’ perceptions of the quality of **infrastructure** in their area. True to pattern, those in the City of Chicago were most likely to say their area’s infrastructure was not good or poor (43 percent) versus those downstate (39.3 percent) and in the suburbs (32.5 percent).

Stark regional and racial differences in perception of the quality of **public safety** are evident in the survey’s crosstabs. For example, while statewide perceptions of public safety quality are quite high (more than 60 percent excellent/good), urban Chicagoans are a lot more likely to say its quality is not good or poor (25.4 percent) than are those in the suburbs (7.6 percent). The gap is no less striking between the negative perceptions of black respondents (23.8 percent not good/poor) and those of whites (8.7 percent). This may help explain why black respondents were significantly more likely than whites (24.8 percent vs. 15 percent) to favor cuts in the public safety budget.

In regard to the quality of **public education** in their areas, perceptions of Chicago residents versus those of suburban residents are upside-down. While in both areas 20 percent of respondents think their area’s educational quality is average, the excellent/good ratings of Chicago-area suburbanites (at 56.9 percent) is the mirror image of the not good/poor ratings of those in the City of Chicago (56.2 percent). The percentage of African Americans who perceive their area’s educational quality as not good or poor is more than double that of their white counterparts (50.9 percent vs. 22.7 percent).

Similar patterns emerge in perceptions of the **performance of the local economy**. As the seriousness of the economic downturn was becoming evident last fall, 31.7 percent of those in the Chicago suburbs said their area’s economic performance was not good or poor, compared with 42.4 percent of respondents downstate and 45.7 percent of those in the City of Chicago. Half of the black Illinoisans we surveyed said the performance of the

economy was not good or poor in their area (52.8 percent), compared with a third (35.4 percent) of whites.

Parks and recreational opportunities practically define the American postwar suburb, and true to form, the overwhelming majority of Chicago area suburbanites (71.5 percent) say their area's services are excellent or good, compared with just under half (48.7 percent) in the city of Chicago. Black Illinoisans surveyed were twice as likely as whites (29.6 percent versus 15.5 percent) to say the parks and recreational opportunities in their area were not good or poor.

The purpose of this section was to provide a snapshot of citizen perception of quality of life in Illinois, and, we hope, a benchmark for comparison in future quality-of-life surveys. In a time of economic downturn and a sour public mood—nationally as well as in Illinois—we hope future measurements show improvement.

Urban/suburban and black/white disparities in quality of life are well known to social scientists and politicians; our purpose in analyzing those differences here is not to make policy recommendations, but to lay out another set of benchmarks. Would a deepening recession hit hardest in the city or the suburbs? Would an economic recovery—presided over by the first African American president—have a larger proportional effect on the perceptions of black Illinoisans than whites? A benchmark survey, by definition, can have nothing to say about the movement of public opinion, only about the measures with which the series starts.

Section Two: Item Analysis

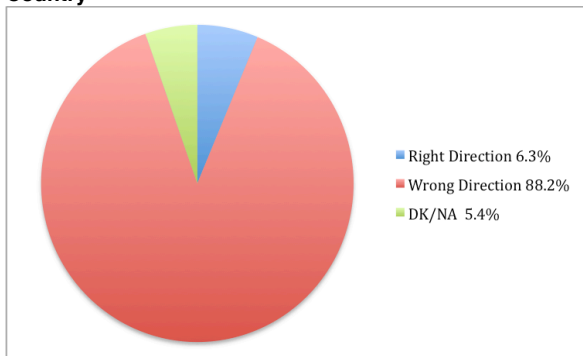
II. STATE OF THE COUNTRY AND QUALITY OF LIFE

A common introductory question in public opinion surveys is to ask respondents a general question about the state of the country—this serves to gauge public optimism or pessimism, as well as to “clear the throat” and get the respondent used to the phone interview format. In the Simon Institute survey, we asked respondents about the general direction of the country, the state of Illinois, and the respondent’s own area of the state.

A. Direction of the Country

An overwhelming majority of respondents (88.2 percent) said they thought the United States was “off track and heading in the wrong direction.” Only about one respondent in 20 (6.3 percent) said the country was moving in the right direction. This was no surprise, given that many election-season national polls had shown similar results.

Figure II-A: Direction of the Country

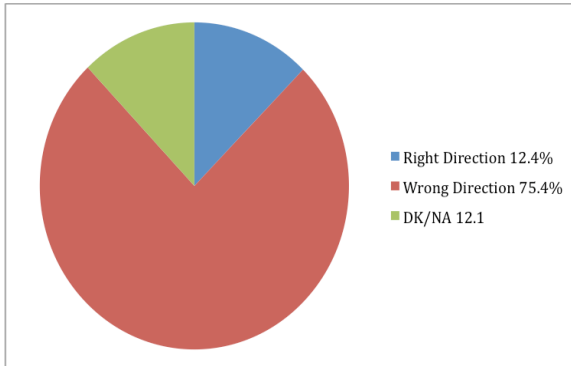


- *Little variance among subgroups is likely when nine in ten respondents feel the same way. In this instance, Republicans (at 14.7%) were slightly more likely than average to say that things in the country were moving in the right direction.*

B. Direction of the State

In general, as the level of government or geographic subject gets closer to home, the “right direction” responses tend to rise. In the case of the state of Illinois, respondents gave an unusually high percentage (75.4%) of “wrong direction” responses. This is not surprising, as fighting among politicians, backlogs of infrastructure repair, billions of dollars of unpaid state bills, and indictments and arrests of high-level state officials have dominated the headlines the past several years.

Figure II-B: Direction of the State of Illinois

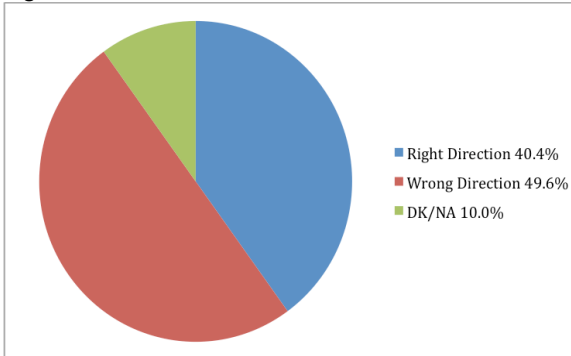


- *Democrats (17.0%) and African Americans (18.5%) were slightly more likely than average to say that the state was moving in the right direction.*

C. Direction of “Your Area of the State”

Opinion moves in the expected direction as we get closer to the respondents’ homes, just four in ten (40.4%) said their area of the state was moving in the right direction; half said their area was moving in the wrong direction. Regional and demographic variations are not as wide as might be expected. The malaise respondents felt toward their country and state may have been playing out at the local or regional level as well.

Figure II-C: Direction of Your Area of the State

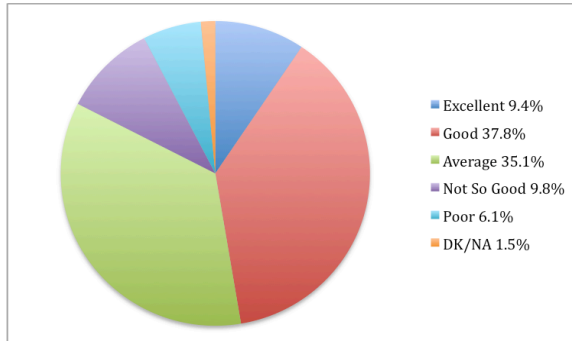


- *Most likely to say their area was going in the right direction—though still not reaching a majority—were residents of the Chicago suburbs (48.1%). Residents of urban Chicago were the group most likely to say their area of the state was going in the wrong direction (59.2%).*
- *Republicans were more likely to say their area was going in the right direction than were Democrats (49.5% vs. 35.6%).*

D. Quality of Life

We asked respondents what they thought about the quality of life in their area of the state, regardless of what they had just said about its general direction. About one in ten (9.4%) thought quality of life in their area was excellent, almost four in ten (37.8%) said it was good, a little more than a third (35.1%) thought it was average. One in ten (9.8%) thought their area’s quality of life was not so good, and a little more than one in twenty (6.1%) said it was poor. The combined 47.2% who said their area’s quality of life was excellent or good is a little higher than the 40.4% who said their area was going in the right direction.

Figure II-D: Quality of Life in Your Area of the State



- *A majority of respondents in the Chicago suburbs (54.4%) thought*

the overall quality of life in their area was excellent or good, while almost half of those in the city of Chicago (48.7%) thought their quality of life only average or worse.

- *One in eight whites (12.0%) thought the quality of life in their area was not good or poor, compared with one in three blacks (34.3%).*

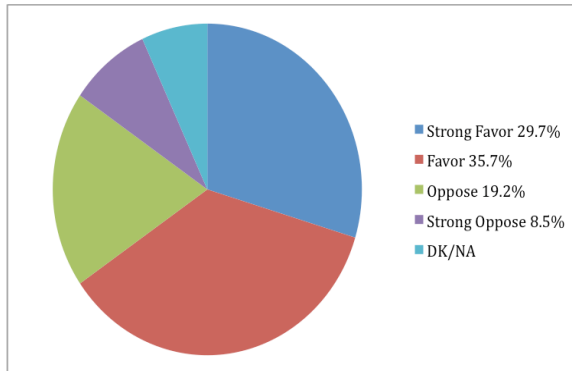
III. PUBLIC POLICY QUESTIONS

We asked respondents how they would vote on a much-discussed constitutional amendment to allow recall votes for statewide elected officials, and whether their views were closer to the arguments for or the arguments against the proposed Illinois Constitutional Convention.

A. Recall Amendment

Support was high across the board for the constitutional amendment allowing recall of statewide elected officials, with three in ten (29.7%) strongly favoring and more than a third (35.7%) simply “favoring” the amendment, for two-thirds (65.4%) total support.

Figure III-A: Position on Amendment Allowing Recall of Elected Officials

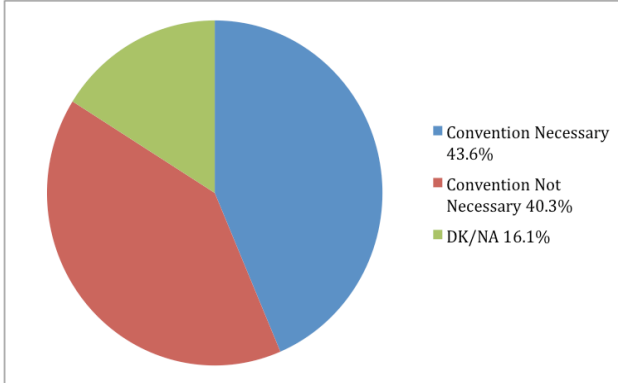


- *This result appeared fairly consistent across demographic, geographic, and response groups.*

B. Constitutional Convention

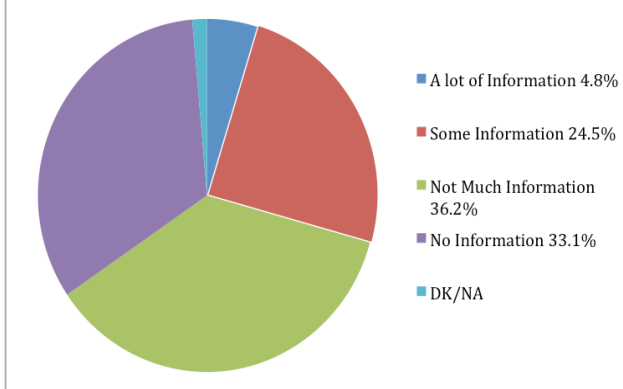
Though we were in the field in September and October before a historic presidential election, and there were many interest items on the ballot, the Constitutional Convention question was explicitly not a “how would you vote” item. We were interested in whether the arguments in favor of the convention (summarized as “necessary because there are so many important issues that our current political leaders are not addressing”) were more or less convincing among Illinois voters than the arguments against the convention (summarized as “there are already ways to address these problems. A constitutional convention won’t help much, and could actually make things worse”).

What we got was essentially a nonresult, with 43.6% of respondents finding the pro-convention argument closer to their own views and a statistically similar 40.3% finding the anti-convention argument closer to their views. A relatively high one in six respondents (16.1%) did not want to venture an opinion on the issue.

Figure III-B: Statements on the Proposed Constitutional Convention

C. Level of Information on the Constitutional Convention

Because the interest level in the policy community toward the “con con” was high, the nonresult above may seem perplexing—it’s essentially a statistical coin flip. This may seem particularly odd in retrospect, in light of the decisive defeat (62% opposed, 38% in favor) of the ballot item, just a few weeks after our preliminary results were released. The nonresult is probably a consequence of survey design (the language was purposively balanced and even-handed) combined with an electorate that did not feel well informed about the issue—at least as reflected in our survey.

Figure III-C: Level of Information on the Constitutional Convention

In a different section of the survey we asked respondents how much information they had received on the Constitutional Convention—a lot, some, not much, or none. Even though it had been the subject of heated discussion among political and public policy devotees in Illinois, and even though every household with a registered voter in it had been sent an information sheet by the Secretary of State, only about three in ten voters combined said they had received a lot (4.8%) or some (24.5%) information on the Convention. Almost seven in ten combined said they had received not much (36.2%) or no information (33.1%) on the “con-con.”

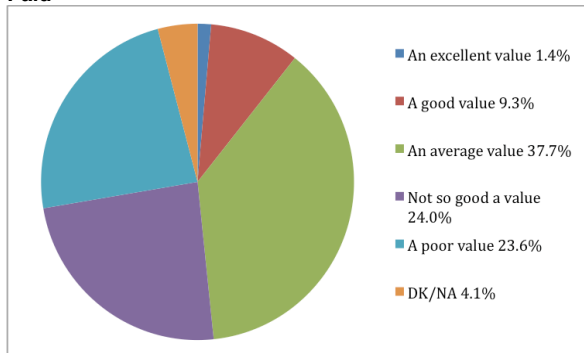
IV. VALUE AND QUALITY OF STATE SERVICES

We asked respondents how they felt about the value of services they get for the tax dollar paid to both the federal government and to the State of Illinois. We wanted to know what they thought about the share of state spending their area got, as well as what they thought about the quality of a number of state services in their area of the state. Interestingly, though most thought they got a not-so-good or poor value for the tax dollar paid in Illinois, large percentages would later say the quality of services they received was excellent or good.

A. Value of Services for Federal Taxes Paid

Not surprisingly, considering the overwhelming percentage of people who thought the country was going in the wrong direction, small percentages of our respondents thought they got an excellent (1.4%) or good value (9.3%) for taxes paid to the federal government. Just over a third said they got an average value. Combined, about half thought they got a not so good (24.0%) or a poor value (23.6%) for their tax dollar.

Figure IV-A: Value of Services for Federal Taxes Paid

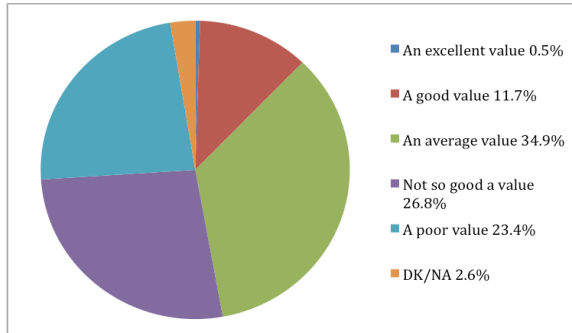


- *Men were almost twice as likely as women to say they felt they received a poor value of service for the tax dollar paid to the federal government (30.2% vs. 17.6%)*

B. Value of Services for Illinois Taxes Paid

While we might expect the average voter to feel better about the value of services for tax dollars paid to the state than they feel about the tax dollar paid to Washington, this is not the case in Illinois; the numbers look very similar. The bitter feelings about state government, even in the months before the arrest of Gov. Blagojevich, appear to have translated into respondents' negative feelings about the value of their state tax dollar.

Figure IV-B: Value of Services for Illinois Taxes Paid

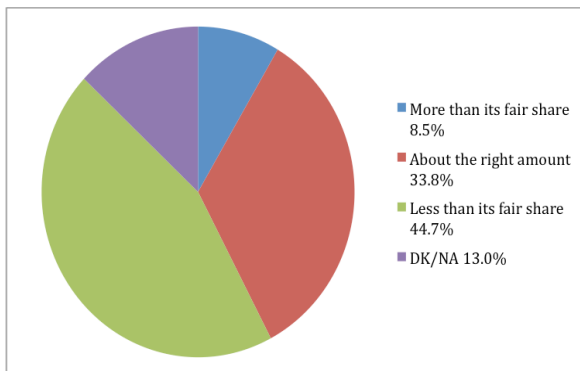


- *Republicans were more likely than Democrats to say they felt they got a poor value (31.3% vs. 18.5%) from the taxes they pay to the State of Illinois.*

C. Respondent's Area's Share of State Spending

We asked respondents whether their area received more than its fair share of state spending, about the right amount, or less than its fair share. Not surprisingly, given the prevalence of negative attitudes toward state government evident early in the questionnaire, the modal answer (44.7%) was “less than its fair share.” Only about one respondent in twelve (8.5%) thought their area got more than its fair share, while about a third (33.8%) said their area got about the right amount.

Figure IV-C: Your Area's Share of Illinois State Spending



- *Most likely to say they got more than their fare share or about the right amount were respondents in the Chicago suburbs (50.6%).*
- *In the small Southern Illinois sample, three-fourths (74.6%) said their area got less than its fair share. In the combined “downstate” group, 54.7% said their area does not get its fair share of funding—ten points above the Illinois average.*

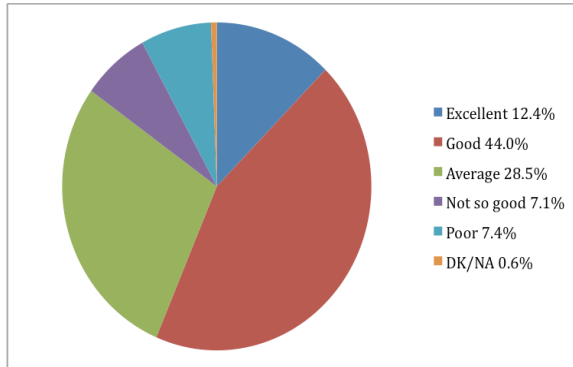
D. Aspects of State Quality of Life

We were interested in Illinois voters' perceptions of the quality of various aspects of public life, in areas such as the environment, infrastructure, public safety, education, the economy, and parks and recreation. The state spends and regulates heavily in each of these areas, but we couched these services as "aspects of the quality of life" in the respondent's part of the state. To present these to the respondents at this point of the survey as "state services" very likely would have biased the responses negatively.

Taken as a whole, majorities thought the quality of these "aspects" of life in their part of Illinois was average or better—though there was often notable regional and demographic variation.

1. Quality of the Environment More than half of those surveyed said they thought the quality of the environment in their area was at least good; about one in seven said environmental quality in their area was not good or was poor, and about three in ten chose the middle ground "average" for the quality of the environment in their area.

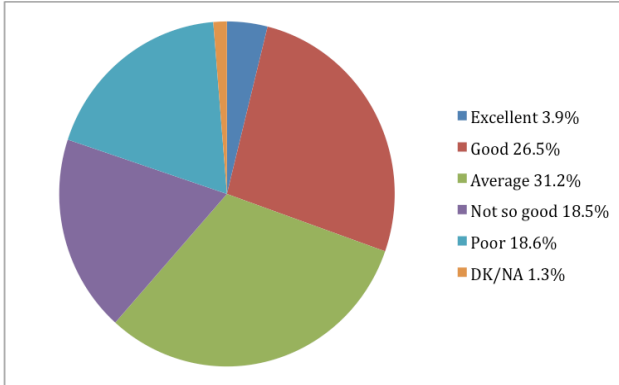
Figure IV-D.1: Quality of the Environment in Your Area



- *Almost a quarter (23.2%) of respondents in Chicago said the quality of the environment in their area was not good or poor, compared to just 12.5% in the suburbs. In the small Southern sample, more than two-thirds (68.2%) rated the quality of the environment as excellent or good.*
- *Blacks were twice as likely as whites (26.0% to 11.7%) to say the quality of the environment in their area was not good or poor.*

2. Quality of Infrastructure Opinion on the quality of infrastructure in respondents' areas was split roughly a third positive (31.4% excellent/good), a third neutral (31.2% average), and a little more than a third negative (37.1% not good/poor). There has of course been much discussion in the media about the backlog of unfunded infrastructure projects, and most respondents encounter infrastructure in the form of roads, bridges, and public works every day.

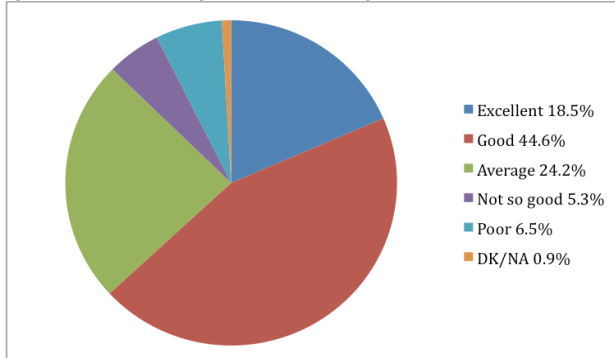
Figure IV-D.2: Quality of the Infrastructure in Your Area



- Respondents in Chicago were most likely to say the quality of infrastructure in their area was not good or poor (43.0%), followed by outstate residents (39.3%) and those in the Chicago suburbs (32.5%).

3. Quality of Public Safety Six in ten respondents (63.1%) said the quality of public safety—specifically police and fire protection—was excellent or good. A quarter (24.2%) said the quality was average, and a relative few (11.8%) ventured that the quality of public safety in their area was not good or poor.

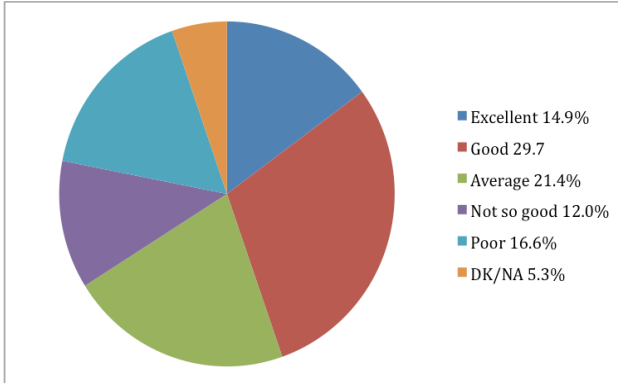
Figure IV-D.3: Quality of Public Safety in Your Area



- In the Chicago suburbs, almost three-fourths (71.5%) said the quality of public safety in their area was excellent or good, while only 7.6% said it was not good or poor. By contrast, in the city of Chicago, only four in ten (41.2%) said the quality was excellent or good, and a quarter (25.4%) said it was not good or poor.
- Looked at by race, whites were overwhelmingly likely (at 69.6%) to say the quality of public safety in their area was excellent or good, compared to just 44% of blacks (23.8% of whom said the quality of public safety was not good or poor).

4. Quality of Public Education Fewer than half of those surveyed said the quality of public education in their area was excellent or good, and nearly three in ten said it was not good or was poor.

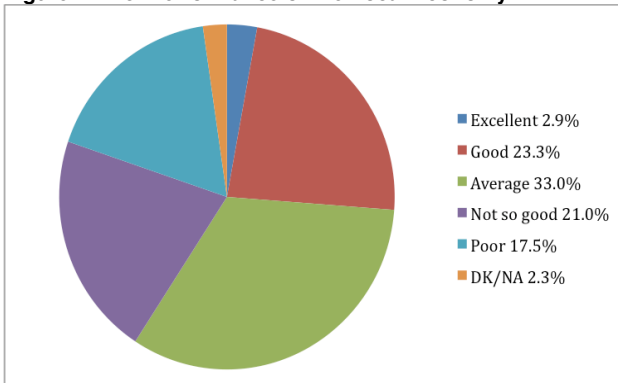
Figure IV-D.4: Quality of Public Education in Your Area



- *Striking regional differences exist on this question: 56.9% of those in the Chicago suburbs said the quality of public education in their area was excellent or good, compared with just 16.2% in the city. In fact, fully a third of those in Chicago (33.0%) said the quality of public education in their area was poor.*
- *The urban-suburban split looks very much like the race-group difference: Just under a quarter of whites said the quality of public education in their area is not good or poor (22.7%), compared to half (50.9%) of the blacks in our sample.*

5. Performance of the Local Economy Bank failures and large-scale economic worries were in full swing as our survey was in the field. These concerns appear to be reflected in respondents’ perceptions of the performance of their local economies. Only about a quarter said their local economy’s performance was excellent or good; almost four in ten said it was not good or was poor.

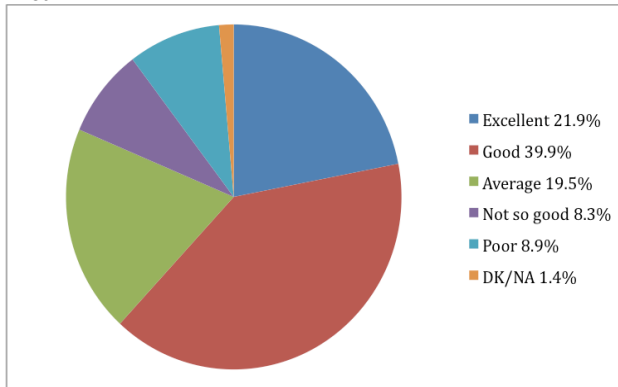
Figure IV-D.5: Performance of the Local Economy



- *Respondents in suburban Chicago were by far more likely than other respondents to say the performance of the economy in their area was excellent or good (36.1%). Those in the small Southern sample were more likely to say it was not good or poor (52.3%), though that is diluted somewhat when they are combined with other “downstaters” (42.4% not good/poor).*

6. Quality of Parks and Recreational Opportunities Respondents were as a whole much more upbeat about the state of parks and recreation in their areas, with six in ten saying the quality was excellent or good. Only about one in six said the quality was not good or poor.

Figure IV-D.6: Quality of Parks and Recreation in Your Area



- *Suburban Chicago residents account for 61.7% of the “excellent” responses in the whole sample. Seven in ten (71.5%) of those in the Chicago suburbs say the quality of their parks is excellent or good, compared to fewer than half (48.7%) in the city. A quarter (25.4%) of urban Chicago residents say the quality of the parks and recreational opportunities in their area is not good or poor.*

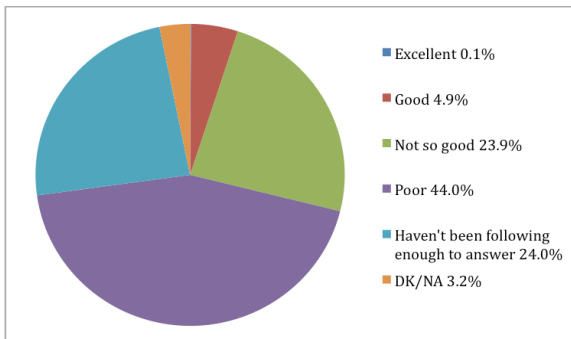
V. THE ILLINOIS STATE BUDGET

A major focus of the Simon Institute survey was the state’s budget situation: the performance of governmental actors in putting together the budget, the source of Illinois’ budget problems, and preferred ways to cut spending or to reduce revenue.

A. State Government Performance on the Budget

We first asked respondents to rate the job the state government had been doing on putting the budget together; in the total sample only about one in 20 said the state’s performance had been excellent or good—a harbinger of the stream of pessimistic answers to come.

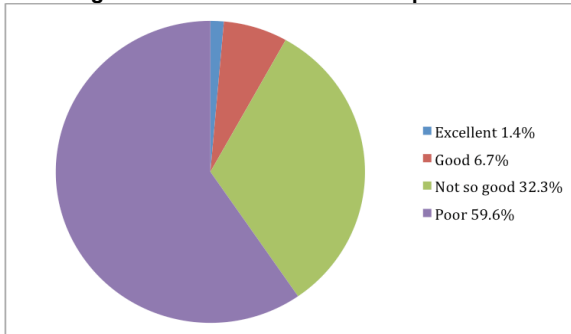
Figure V-A.1: State Performance on Budget, Including self-identified uninformed respondents



- *By a ten-point margin (31.0% to 20.9%), Democrats were more likely than Republicans to say they had not been following the story.*
- *Blacks were more likely than whites (38.0% to 21.5%) to say they had no opinion, since they were not following the story. Women were more likely than men not to express an opinion (27.2% to 20.6%).*

The wording of this item included the response choice “haven’t been following enough to answer.” Interviewees who chose this option were excluded from analysis of this question and skipped the following budget-performance questions. Therefore, the sample size is reduced—leaving out those respondents who said they didn’t have an opinion because they hadn’t been following the issue in the news. The group remaining is more Republican, white, and male than the sample as a whole. The statistical precision is therefore somewhat smaller than that of the whole sample, and is significantly smaller in demographic and geographic subgroups—the African American subgroup in particular.

Figure V-A.2: State Performance on Budget, excluding self-identified uninformed respondents



- *Republicans were more likely than Democrats (62.9% to 53.5%) to say the government was doing a “poor” job of putting together a state budget.*

Opinion among the three-quarters of the sample who ventured an opinion looks much more negative, with more than 90% giving negative ratings; six in ten said the state government's performance was poor.

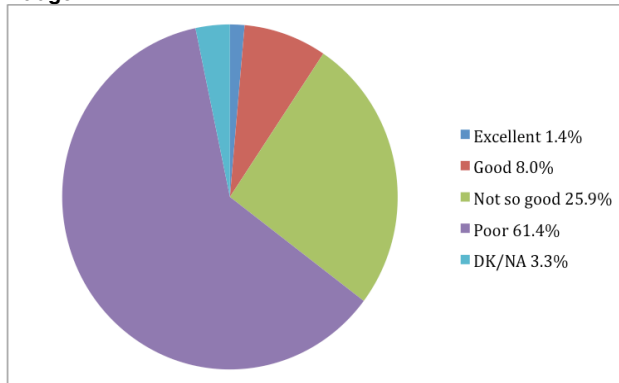
1. Open-ended: Who has been doing a good job on the budget? Only about one in seven respondents volunteered an answer to this open-ended question, and no single answer appeared in significant numbers. A few volunteered State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulis, House Speaker Mike Madigan, and Governor Rod Blagojevich. Others mentioned federal officials, such as Senator Dick Durbin or then-Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama.

2. Open-ended: Who has been doing a poor job on the budget? More than half (52.3%) volunteered an answer to the question of who has been doing a particularly poor job on the budget, with Governor Blagojevich by far the modal response. A number said "all of them" or some variant, and Speaker Madigan and Senate President Emil Jones received a few mentions, both by name and by position.

B. Governor Blagojevich's Performance on the Budget

Fewer than one in ten said Governor Rod Blagojevich had been doing an excellent or good job on the budget, with six in ten saying his performance had been poor.

Figure V-B: Gov. Blagojevich's Performance on Budget



- The only geographic group to give Gov. Blagojevich budget-approval ratings in

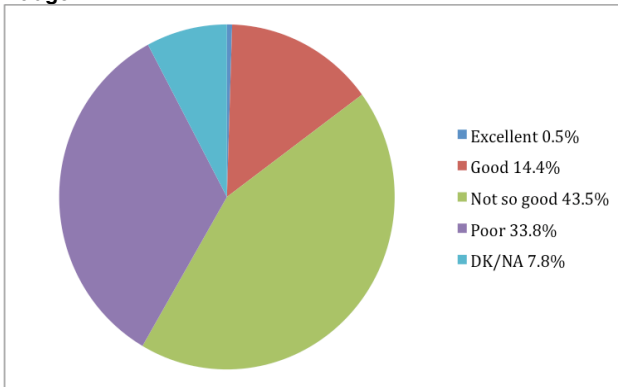
the double digits was Chicago residents (18.6%). Downstate, his not-good/poor ratings were near-unanimous (93.1%).

- His excellent/good rating among the diminished sample of black respondents was five times that of whites (26.2% vs. 5.2%).
- Democrats disapproved of Gov. Blagojevich's performance on the budget with an 80.6% not good/poor rating, while Republicans did so almost unanimously (95.2%). Republicans were much more likely to rate his performance "poor" than were Democrats (77.4% to 48.7%).

C. State Legislature's Performance on the Budget

The Illinois Legislature as a whole fared poorly among survey respondents, though, unlike in the Blagojevich question, the "not so good" responses outnumbered those for "poor." Fewer than one in five gave the legislature a positive rating.

Figure V-C: State Legislature’s Performance on Budget

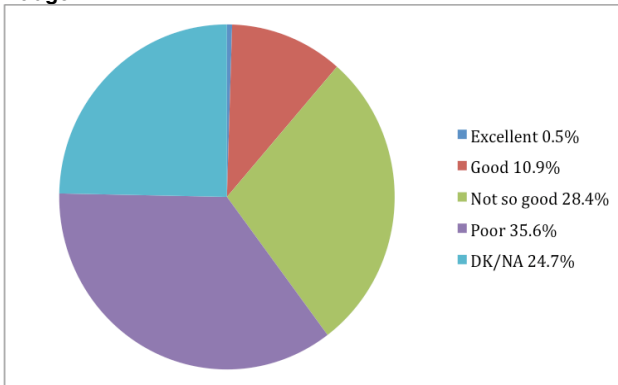


- *Three of four respondents said the legislature was doing a not-good or poor job putting together the budget, which didn't vary much across geographic or demographic groups.*

D. Senate President Jones’s Performance on the Budget

We asked respondents to rate the performance of Illinois Senate President Emil Jones in the budget process. As with the rest of the cast of players, his ratings were overwhelmingly negative. Notable on this item was the higher percentage of “don’t know” responses.

Figure V-D: Senate President Jones’s Performance on Budget

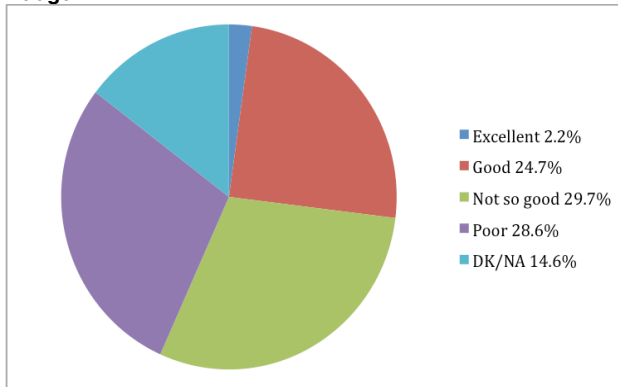


- *Black respondents were somewhat more likely than whites to say Sen. Jones was doing an excellent or good job (19.7% vs. 11.4%) on the state budget.*

E. House Speaker Madigan’s Performance on the Budget

To say that Speaker Michael Madigan fared best among the politicians and institutions mentioned is to damn with faint praise. Just over a quarter said he had been doing an excellent or good job, compared with nearly six in ten who said he had been doing a not-so-good or a poor job.

Figure V-E: Speaker Madigan's Performance on Budget



- *There was little interesting group variation regarding Speaker Madigan's budget performance.*

VI. THE BUDGET: SPENDING VS. REVENUE ENHANCEMENT

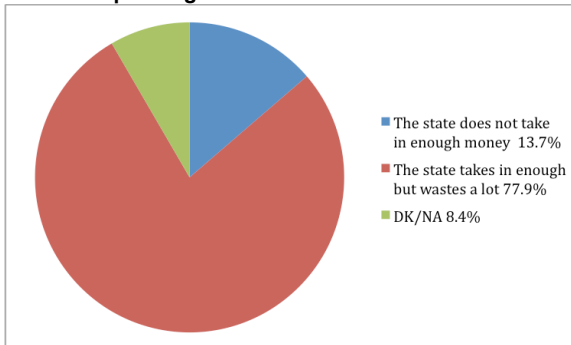
The next series of questions pointedly asked respondents whether they thought the budgetary problems were a result of wasteful spending or insufficient revenue, which large areas of the state's budgets ought to be cut, and whether they would support or oppose each of a series of methods of revenue enhancement.

The results were surprising in magnitude if not in direction: Large majorities across demographic, geographic, and response subgroups blamed wasteful spending for the state's budget woes, while large majorities opposed spending cuts in areas that comprise roughly 90 percent of the state's budget. Responses were mixed on the revenue enhancement measures; it was notable that a large majority supported a state income tax hike for well-off Illinoisans.

A. Not Enough Money vs. Too Much Waste

Respondents were asked to say whether Illinois' budget problems were due to the state not taking in enough money to pay for needed services or to excessive spending on unnecessary services and programs. Nearly eight respondents in ten said the state takes in enough money but wastes it. Only about one in seven respondents said the root of the budget problem was insufficient revenue.

Figure VI-A: Budget Problem: Not Enough Revenue or Wasteful Spending?



- *There is less variation on this question than a student of government might expect or hope for: For example, among education-attainment groups, those who never went to college and those with some college were only slightly less likely than*

those with a bachelor's degree or more to say that the state does not take in enough money (12.6% and 12.3% vs. 16.6%); the four-point difference between the lowest and the highest education-level groups could be attributed to statistical error.

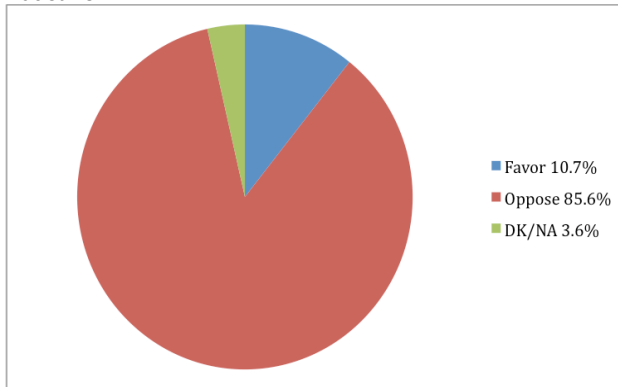
- *Residents of Chicago were more likely to say the state does not take in enough money (20.2%) than were those in the Chicago suburbs (13.0%) or downstate residents (10.6%).*
- *Though the percentage remains small, Democrats were three times more likely than Republicans to say that the state does not take in enough money to pay for necessary services (19.2% vs. 6.8%).*

B. Support for Cuts to State Programs and Services

Respondents were asked whether they supported or opposed reducing spending "in several areas where people have suggested that the state could make cuts." In each area, from education to public safety to natural resources, large majorities opposed cuts.

1. Spending Cuts in K-12 Education More than eight in ten respondents opposed cutting spending on "kindergarten through high school education."

Figure VI-B.1: Favor or Oppose Cuts in K-12 Education

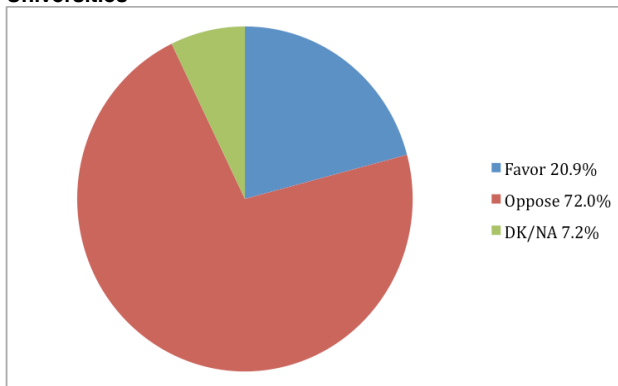


- *Republicans were twice as likely as Democrats to favor cuts (16.1% to 7.5%).*
- *Those who had not been to college were slightly more likely than those with some college or a college degree to favor cuts (13.5% vs. 9.9% and 8.8%).*

- *There were no meaningful regional differences in opposition to cuts in K – 12 education.*

2. Spending Cuts on State Universities Only one respondent in five favored cutting spending on state universities, though this is double the number who wanted to cut spending on K-12 education.

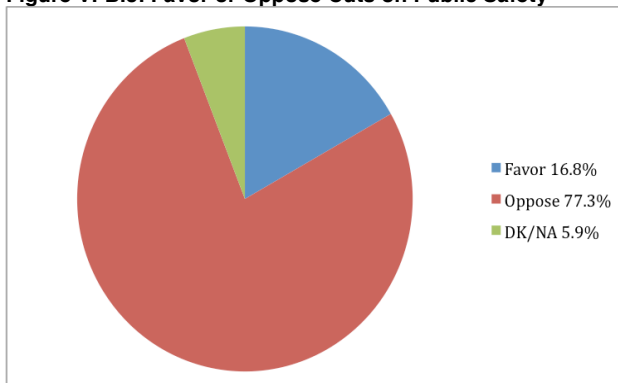
Figure VI-B.2: Favor or Oppose Cuts in State Universities



- *Whites favored cuts in state university spending more often than blacks (21.6% vs. 14.8%).*
- *Republicans and Independents were more likely to favor cuts (at 28.3% and 24.4%) than were Democrats (16.4%).*
- *Likelihood of favoring cuts in higher education falls as education levels rise, from 25.0% among those with no college to 20.8% among those with at least some college.*

3. Spending Cuts on Public Safety We asked respondents whether they would favor or oppose cuts to public safety, such as state police and prisons. More than three-fourths opposed cuts in this area.

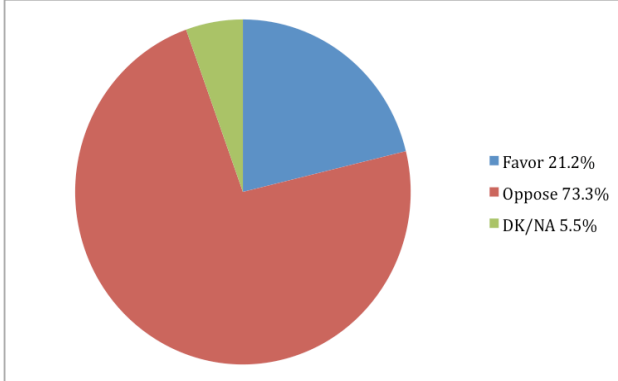
Figure VI-B.3: Favor or Oppose Cuts on Public Safety



- *Men were more likely to favor cuts on state police and prisons than were women (20.3% vs. 13.5%).*
- *Blacks were more likely than were whites to favor cuts in spending on public safety (24.8% vs. 15.0%).*

4. Spending Cuts on Natural Resources We gave respondents examples of natural resources spending, such as state parks and the environment. Almost three-quarters opposed such spending cuts.

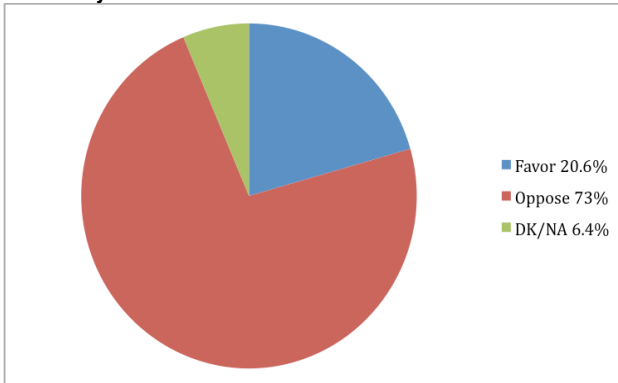
Figure VI-B.4: Favor or Oppose Cuts on Natural Resources



- *Black respondents were more likely than white ones to favor cuts in spending on natural resources (29.6% to 19.3%).*
- *Republicans were more likely to favor cuts here than were Democrats (29.3% vs. 20.2%).*

5. Spending Cuts on Programs for the Needy Only one in five respondents said they favored spending cuts for programs for the needy.

Figure VI-B.5: Favor or Oppose Cuts on Programs for the Needy



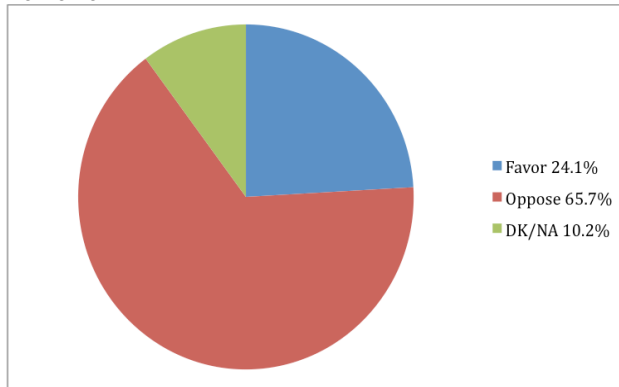
city to favor spending cuts on programs for the “needy” (22.0% vs. 17.5%). This looks very much like the statewide white/black split on the question (21.6% vs. 17.8%).

- *Republicans were almost three times more likely than Democrats to favor such spending cuts (34.4% vs. 12.8%).*
- *Men were more likely than women (25.2% vs. 16.6%) to favor spending cuts in programs for the needy.*

- *Respondents in the Chicago suburbs were somewhat more likely than those in the*

6. Cuts for State Workers’ Retirement Almost a quarter, the largest percentage of the programs tested, favored cuts in spending on state workers’ retirement. Even at this, almost two-thirds opposed such spending cuts.

Figure VI-B.6: Favor or Oppose Cuts in State Workers' Retirement



- Respondents in suburban Chicago were more likely (at 29.9%) than those in the city (20.2%) or downstate (19.3%) to favor cuts in state workers' retirement funds.
- Republicans were more likely than Democrats to favor retirement-fund cuts (29.2% vs. 19.4%).

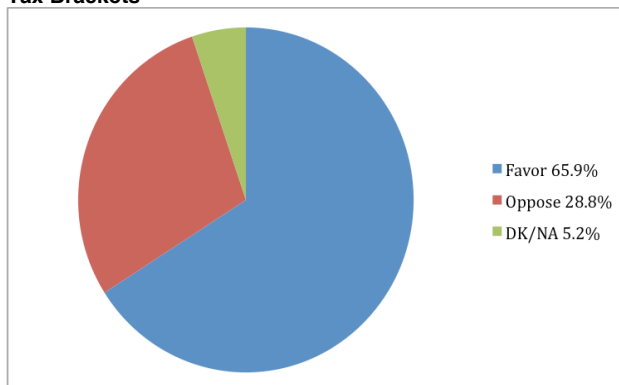
7. Open-ended: Suggestions for Other Budget Cuts Open-ended responses came from 325 respondents. By far the largest category (44.6%) was suggestions to cut spending on government officials' salaries. The next-largest category (9.8%) was suggestions to cut spending on the governor's commutes between Chicago and Springfield.

C. Support for State Revenue Enhancements

We asked respondents whether they would favor or oppose proposals to add a higher-income tax bracket to the state income tax structure, to raise the state sales tax rate, to expand the sales tax to cover service provision, to expand legalized gambling in the state, and to sell or lease state assets to raise revenues.

1. Adding a Bracket to the State Income Tax Structure The most heavily favored of the revenue enhancing measures tested was to add a bracket to the state income tax structure so that higher-income Illinoisans would pay a higher tax rate. Two-thirds favored the measure and fewer than a third opposed it.

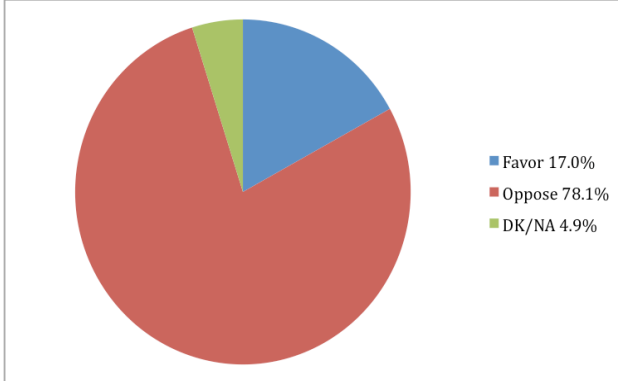
Figure VI-C.1: Favor or Oppose Adding Higher-Income Tax Brackets



- Support for adding new, higher-income brackets to the state's income tax structure falls rather predictably as respondent income rises, from 74.2% among those with household incomes less than \$50,000, to 68.9% among those earning \$50,000 to \$100,000, to 57.5% among those with household incomes above \$100,000.
- Blacks were more likely than whites to favor adding brackets (74.1% vs. 65.3%).
- Democrats were a lot more likely (80.3%) than Independents (65.5%) or Republicans (48.7%) to favor adding higher-income brackets.
- Respondents who had not been to college were more likely to favor adding brackets than those who had (72.1% vs. 63.7%).

2. Raising the State Portion of the Sales Tax More than three-fourths of respondents opposed raising the state sales tax in Illinois, while only about one in six favored it.

Figure VI-C.2: Favor or Oppose Raising the State Sales Tax Rate



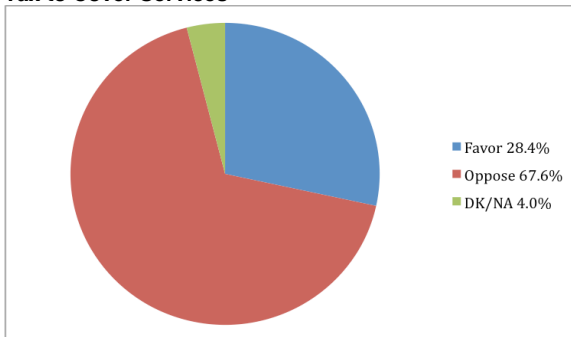
in Chicago (13.9%) or its suburbs (10.3%).

- *Independents were more likely to favor raising the sales tax rate (22.2%) than Republicans (12.6%) or Democrats (17.6%).*
- *College graduates were more likely to favor a sales tax hike (at 22.2%) than were those who had never been to college (15.0%) or who had attended but not graduated (14.4%).*

- *Respondents downstate were a lot more likely to favor raising the state portion of the sales tax (27.2%) rate than were those*

3. Expanding the Sales Tax to Cover Services Respondents were somewhat more likely to favor expanding the sales tax than to favor raising the rate, though two-thirds in our sample opposed this option, too.

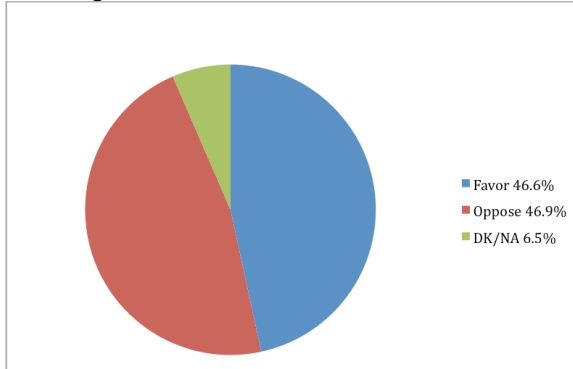
Figure VI-C.3: Favor or Oppose Expanding the Sales Tax to Cover Services



- *Respondents downstate seemed a little more likely to favor expanding the sales tax (32.2%) than those in Chicago (28.0%) or its suburbs (25.6%).*
- *Democrats (33.1%) and Independents (31.0%) were more likely to favor an expansion in the sales tax than were Republicans (22.0%).*

4. Expanding Legalized Gambling Opinion was evenly split on whether the state should enhance revenue by expanding legalized gambling.

Figure VI-C.4: Favor or Oppose Expanding Legalized Gambling



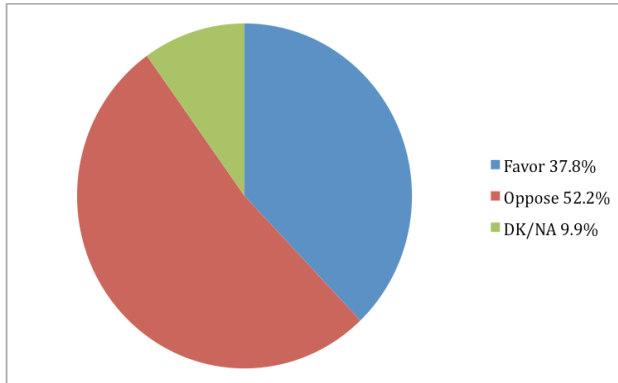
- Respondents in the Chicago suburbs were most likely to favor expansion of legalized gambling (51.4%), followed by downstate

respondents (45.2%) and respondents in Chicago (39.8%).

- Whites were more likely than blacks to favor gambling expansion (48.4% vs, 41.7%). Democrats and Independents (49.6% and 49.2%) were somewhat more likely than Republicans (43.7%) to favor it.
- A larger difference in favoring gambling expansion appears between men (55.4%) and women (39.3%).

5. Selling or Leasing State Assets Just over half of those surveyed said they opposed a proposal to sell or lease state assets, such as the Illinois lottery or the toll road system, to private investors.

Figure VI-C.5: Favor or Oppose Selling or Leasing State Assets



- Respondents in the Chicago suburbs (43.6%) and in the city (40.7%) were more likely than those downstate (29.0%) to favor sale or lease of state assets as a way to raise funds.

6. Open Ended: Other Ways to Enhance Revenue Almost two hundred respondents volunteered a comment on other ways to enhance state revenues in Illinois. Most frequently mentioned, again, were cuts in pay for government officials and state workers. Cigarette, alcohol, and other “sin taxes” were mentioned by 8%, and enhancing revenues from bars and casinos—either by allowing smoking or expanding the number of casinos—was mentioned by 6% of those volunteering an answer.

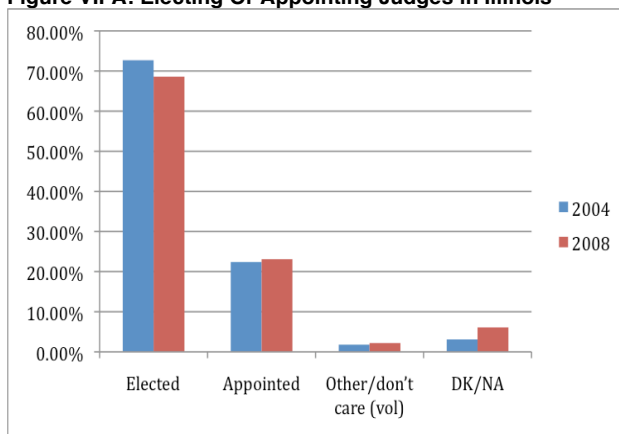
VII. ELECTION ISSUES IN STATE JUDICIAL RACES

We reprised a number of questions from the Institute’s 2004 statewide survey on judicial selection issues, to get an idea of whether public opinion had moved in regard to electing vs. appointing state judges, judicial candidates taking public stands during campaigns on issues that may come before them as judges, and questions regarding campaign contribution limits and public funding.

A. Should Judges Be Elected or Appointed?

After informing respondents that the Illinois system elects judges under partisan labels, we asked them, as we did in 2004, whether they thought judges should be elected or appointed. In 2004, 72.7% thought judges should be elected, as opposed to 68.5% in 2008

Figure VII-A: Electing Or Appointing Judges in Illinois



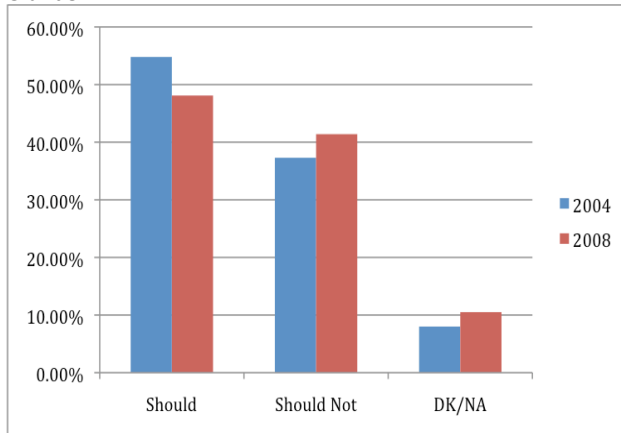
should be interpreted cautiously. The difference is little more than the survey’s 3-plus-point margin for error. The decline in the percentage saying “elected” is made up for largely with the increasing percentage saying “don’t know/don’t care” and other nonresponse.

- *The percentage of Illinoisans agreeing that judges should be elected rather than appointed may have declined somewhat in the four years since the first PSPPI survey on the issue was taken, but the difference*

B. Should Judicial Candidates Take Issue Stands?

In both surveys we asked respondents whether they thought judicial candidates should take stands on issues they might have to confront if they reached the bench. In 2004, 54.8% said they should, while in 2008, 48.1% said so. At the same time, the percentage who said they should not take stands rose slightly, from 37.3% in 2004 to 41.4% in 2008.

Figure VII-B: Should Judicial Candidates Take Issue Stands?

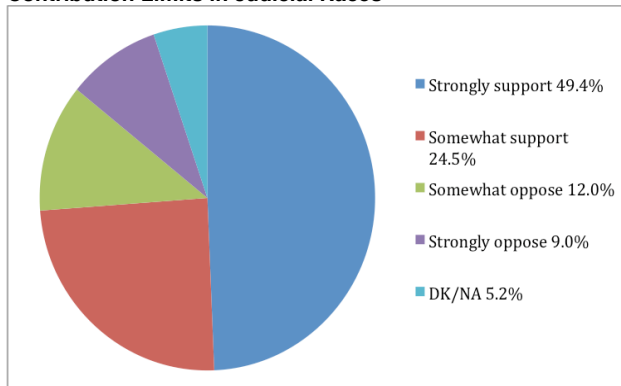


- *The gap in percentages between those who think judges should take issue stands in campaigns and those who think they shouldn't appears to have closed significantly in four years, from a 17.5-point gap in 2004 to 6.7 points in the current survey.*

C. Support for Judicial Campaign Contribution Limits on Individuals

We asked respondents whether they would strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose a proposal to place limits on the amount individuals could contribute to judicial campaigns. Three-fourths said they at least somewhat supported individual-contribution limits.

Figure VII-C: Support for Individual Campaign-Contribution Limits in Judicial Races

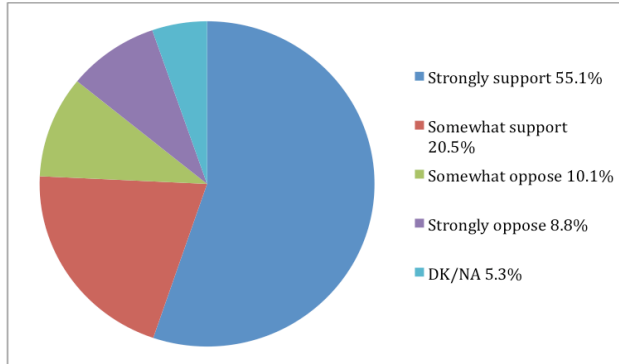


- *Seven in ten Democrats (71.7%) strongly or somewhat supported individual campaign contribution limits in judicial elections, as did even more Independents (80.2%) and Republicans (83.2%).*

D. Support for Judicial Campaign Contribution Limits on Groups

We next asked whether respondents would support or oppose contribution limits on groups and organizations in judicial campaigns. A combined three-fourths of respondents said they would support such limits.

Figure VII-D: Support for Group Campaign-Contribution Limits in Judicial Races

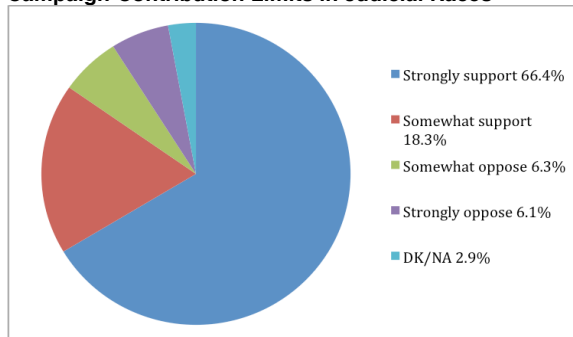


- *Independents (82.3% strongly + somewhat) and Republicans (81.7%) were more likely to support individual judicial campaign contributions than were Democrats (73.4%)*

E. 2004 Results on Judicial Campaign Contribution Limits

In 2004 the two questions—on individual limits and group limits—were lumped together to include “individuals, groups, and organizations”, so direct comparisons can’t be made. That said, the result in 2004 was as follows:

Figure VII-E: 2004 Support for Group and Individual Campaign-Contribution Limits in Judicial Races



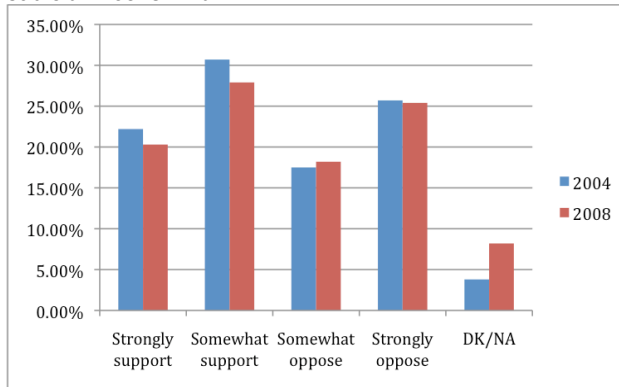
cooled slightly in the four years since the previous survey. We should point out that wording and questionnaire context are different in the two surveys. Respondents to the 2004 survey would have encountered this question late in a long survey that had been asking them to think about political influence and trustworthiness in the elected Illinois judiciary. We would want to take great care in ascribing to the Illinois public any systematic movement of opinion.

- *It might be tempting to say it appears that support for contribution limits may have*

F. Support for a Plan for Taxpayer-Funded Judicial Elections

We asked whether respondents would support or oppose a plan for judicial candidates to receive taxpayer funding for their campaigns, if they agreed to individual and group contributions, and to overall campaign spending. Total support was 52.9% in the 2004 survey and 48.2% in the 2008 survey.

Figure VII-F: 2004 Support for a Taxpayer-Funded Judicial Election Plan

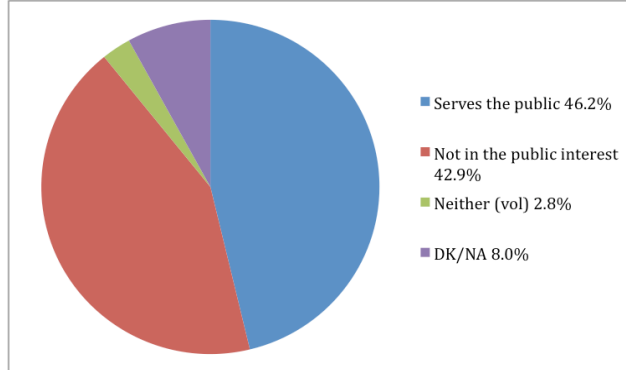


- *It appears as though public opinion has remained fairly stable on the public funding issue.*

G. Opposing Statements About Public Financing of Judicial Elections

We read two statements about public financing of judicial elections, and asked respondents which came closer to their own view: Whether it serves the public because it allows candidates to run without relying on the contributions of special interests, or, whether it does not serve the public interest because it forces taxpayers to support candidates they might not support. This question did not appear on the 2004 survey.

Figure VII-G: Public Financing of Judicial Elections and the Public Interest



- *As in the previous item asking respondents to choose between statements about the necessity of the Illinois Constitutional Convention, here we have two balanced statements, with reasonable face validity, drawing similar percentages of agreement.*

Summary and Conclusions

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute 2008 statewide poll confirmed some things that public policy watchers thought they already knew: Illinoisans shared the widely held national view that the United States was headed in the wrong direction, and that most felt the same way about the general direction of the State of Illinois.

Our respondents' feelings toward state government were negative to the point that we might even call them bitter. Large majorities thought the government as a whole—and high-profile statewide leaders in particular—were doing a bad job drafting the state budget. They felt they did not get a good value for the tax dollars they paid to the federal government or to the state, and many thought their area of the state did not get its fair share of state spending.

On the other hand, half thought the quality of life in their area of the state was excellent or good, and more than eight in ten said it was average or better. The people we surveyed were mostly happy with the quality of the environment, parks and recreation, and public safety in their areas. On the whole, they thought K-12 education, the infrastructure, and the economy in their respective areas were not as good.

We also noted regional and racial-group disparities in satisfaction with the quality of life in Illinois. Residents of suburban Chicago were happier with the quality of life in their area than were urban Chicagoans, and, where the statistics allowed us to make inferences, Illinoisans outside of Chicagoland. White respondents were consistently more satisfied with the aspects of quality of life that we tested than were black respondents.

We collected data on these measures, first, because it is inherently interesting to see how the people feel toward their government and how satisfied they are with the provision of services by the state. We hope this information will be useful to policymakers, analysts, advocates, and the interested public.

Second, this snapshot of Illinoisans' satisfaction with the quality of life will serve as a benchmark measure against which to compare results from future Simon Institute surveys. It is our intention, as we release this analysis to the public at the start of 2009, to conduct statewide and regional surveys more regularly—perhaps annually. This will allow us to determine whether citizens of Illinois perceive that our leaders have turned things around. In 2009 or 2010, will more respondents or fewer think that they get a good value for their Illinois tax dollar? Will more or fewer think that the quality of public education in their area is excellent or good? Will more or fewer say that the quality of infrastructure in their area is not so good or poor?

We hope that future surveys also will continue to pinpoint issues critical to good public policy in the state—as in this instance, with the poll's focus on the state budget crisis. In the present case, we learned that Illinoisans believe that wasteful spending by the state is so vast that our leaders can economize their way to a balanced budget. Regardless of the area of the state they live in, their political party, or their level of education, the citizens we surveyed overwhelmingly said the state takes in enough money to pay for needed services. Only about one in seven said the state does not take in enough money to do everything it needs to do for its citizens.

However, when we offered specific areas in which cuts could be made, large majorities, ranging from 66 percent to 84 percent, opposed spending reductions in such areas as education, the environment, public safety, and services for the needy.

At the same time, a majority of respondents favored only one of five revenue-enhancing measures we presented them. While around two-thirds favored adding brackets to the state income tax structure so that well-off Illinoisans would pay more, other measures met with less enthusiasm. Voters we spoke with were split on gambling expansion, and were opposed to selling or leasing state assets such as the lottery or the toll road system. They were overwhelmingly opposed to increasing or expanding the state sales tax.

We can only conclude that most voters in the state have not been fully informed about the extent of the budget crisis in the state. The backlog of unpaid bills and the looming state budget deficit far exceed that which could be squeezed out of waste or duplicated services—particularly during an economic downturn, when demand for state services increases as revenues fall. Politicians who tell the voters that they need to raise more money in the form of taxes or user fees are rarely rewarded at the polls for their candor.

Our fellow citizens are engaged in balancing their own complicated and multifaceted lives, and they entrust politicians and administrators to run government on their behalf. We are fortunate they recognize that there is a problem in something as arcane as a state budget. They don't need to be public policy experts to know something is amiss. To expect the general public to have a detailed knowledge of the workings of government "is a professorial invention for imposing professorial standards on the political system and deserves to be treated with extreme suspicion," wrote the great political scientist E. E. Schattschneider almost 50 years ago. Rather than lament an underinformed public, as such reports sometimes do, we challenge politicians, journalists, and others in the policy community to focus on informing and educating Illinoisans so they can in turn urge their leaders toward the right solution.

**Appendix: Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale**

**Poll Results of Registered Voters in Illinois
Conducted September 23-October 17**

Released October 23, 2008

1. First, we'd like to know -- generally speaking, do you think things **in our country** are going in the right direction, or are they off track and heading in the wrong direction?

Right Direction	6.3%
Wrong Direction	88.2%
DK/NA	5.4%

2. And what about the direction of the State of Illinois? Generally speaking, are things in Illinois going in the right direction, or are they off track and heading in the wrong direction?

Right Direction	12.4%
Wrong Direction	75.4%
DK/NA	12.1%

3. And how are things going in your area of the state? In general, are things in your area going in the right direction, or in the wrong direction?

Right Direction	40.4%
Wrong Direction	49.6%
DK/NA	10.0%

4. Regardless of what you think about the direction your part of the state is going, tell us what you think about the overall quality of life in your area. Taking everything into account, would you say the overall quality of life in your area is:

Excellent	9.4%
Good	37.8%
Average	35.1%
Not so good	9.8%
Poor	6.1%
DK/NA	1.5%

Next, we'd like to know what you think about some public policy questions that are being talked about in Illinois. First is: (rotate)

5. Some people are talking about amending the constitution to allow recall elections for holders of statewide elected offices, such as secretary of state, governor, or lieutenant governor. That is, the people could vote at any time to remove an elected official from office rather than waiting until the next election. How do you feel about allowing recall elections for holders of statewide elected offices? Would you say you:

Strongly favor	29.7%
Favor	35.7%
Oppose	19.2%
Strongly oppose	8.5%
DK/NA	6.9%

6. There will be a question on the ballot this November asking voters whether there should be a convention in 2009 to rewrite all or parts of the Illinois state constitution.

Some people think the Illinois constitutional convention is necessary because there are so many important issues that our current political leaders are not addressing, and that delegates to a constitutional convention will address those issues in a more responsible fashion.

Other people say that the means of addressing these important issues already exist, and that a constitutional convention could go off track and actually make things worse.

Which is closer to the way you feel:

- that a constitutional convention is necessary because our state's political leaders are not addressing important issues. or
- that there already are ways to address these problems. A constitutional convention won't help much, and could actually make things worse.

Necessary	43.6%
Not necessary	40.3%
DK/NA	16.1%

Now here are a few questions about government taxes and services.

7. First, when it comes to the federal government in Washington -- how good a value would you say you get in terms of services for the taxes you pay? Would you say you get:

An excellent value	1.4%
A good value	9.3%
An average value	37.7%
Not so good a value	24.0%
A poor value	23.6%
DK/NA	4.1%

8. And what about the value of services you get for the tax dollars you pay to the state of Illinois?

Would you say you get:

An excellent value	0.5%
A good value	11.7%
An average value	34.9%
Not so good a value	26.8%
A poor value	23.4%
DK/NA	2.6%

9. Next, what do you think about state government spending in your area of the state? In terms of its share of state spending, do you think your part of the state gets:

More than its fair share	8.5%
About the right amount	33.8%
Or less than its fair share	44.7%
DK/NA	13.0%

Now we'd like to know what you think of various aspects of the quality of life in your area. For each feature that I read, I'd like for you to tell me if you think it is excellent, good, average, not so good, or poor.

10. The quality of the environment in your area, such as clean air and water.

Excellent	12.4%
Good	44.0%
Average	28.5%
Not so good	7.1%
Poor	7.4%
DK/NA	.6%

11. The quality of infrastructure in your area, such as roads and bridges.

Excellent	3.9%
Good	26.5%
Average	31.2%
Not so good	18.5%
Poor	18.6%
DK/NA	1.3%

12. The quality of public safety in your area – for example, police and fire protection.

Excellent	18.5%
Good	44.6%
Average	24.2%
Not so good	5.3%
Poor	6.5%
DK/NA	0.9%

13. The quality of public education in your area – from kindergarten through high school.

Excellent	14.9%
Good	29.7%
Average	21.4%
Not so good	12.0%
Poor	16.6%
DK/NA	5.3%

14. The performance of the local economy in your area.

Excellent	2.9%
Good	23.3%
Average	33.0%
Not so good	21.0%
Poor	17.5%
DK/NA	2.3%

15. The quality of parks and recreational opportunities in your area.

Excellent	21.9%
Good	39.9%
Average	19.5%
Not so good	8.3%
Poor	8.9%
DK/NA	1.4%

16. We talked earlier about the possibility of a convention being called next year to revise the Illinois state constitution. How much information have you seen or heard about the ballot issue on the Illinois Constitutional Convention? Would you say you have seen or heard:

A lot of information	4.8%
Some information	24.5%
Not much information	36.2%
No information	33.1%
DK/NA	1.4%

17. The state government has been working to put together a budget to meet the needs of Illinois citizens. Based on what you know, how would you rate the job the state government has done this year in putting together a state budget? Would you say:

Excellent	.1%
Good	4.9%
Not so good	23.9%
Poor	44.0%
Haven't been following enough to answer	24.0%
DK/NA	3.2%

18. Who, if anyone has been doing a really good job in terms of putting together a state budget?
(Open ended answers)

19. And who, if anyone, would you say has been doing a really poor job of in terms of putting together a state budget?
(Open ended answers)

Now I'm going to read you a short list of people and institutions - and for each, I'd like you to rate the job they have been doing in putting together a state budget this year.

20. First, what about Governor Rod Blagojevich? How would you rate the job he has been doing in putting together a state budget this year:

Excellent	1.4 %
Good	8.0%
Not so good	25.9%
Poor	61.4%
DK/NA	3.3%

21. What about the state legislature in general? How would you rate the job it has been doing in putting together a state budget this year:

Excellent	0.5%
Good	14.4%
Not so good	43.5%
Poor	33.8%
DK/NA	7.8%

22. What about the President of the Illinois Senate, Emil Jones? How would you rate the job he has been doing in putting together a state budget this year?

Excellent	0.5%
Good	10.9%
Not so good	28.4%
Poor	35.6%
DK/NA	24.7%

23. And what about the speaker of the Illinois House, Michael Madigan? How would you rate the job he has been doing in putting together a state budget this year?

Excellent	2.2%
Good	24.7%
Not so good	29.7%
Poor	28.6%
DK/NA	14.6%

24. Most leaders in the capitol believe that Illinois does not have the financial resources to address all the state's needs. Some say that this is because the state does not take in enough money to pay for everything it should do for its citizens. Others say that the state takes in plenty of money, and that the lack of resources is due to too much spending on unnecessary services and programs. Which is closer to your view?

The state does not take in enough money	13.7%
The state takes in enough but wastes a lot	77.9%
DK/NA	8.4%

There have been a number of proposals to address the state's budget problems by making cuts in state programs and services. I'm going to read several areas where people have suggested that the state could make cuts. For each one that I read, I'd like you to tell me whether you favor or oppose cutting spending in that area, OK?

25. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on: kindergarten through high school education?

Favor	10.7%
Oppose	85.6%
DK/NA	3.6%

26. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on: state universities?

Favor	20.9%
Oppose	72.0%
DK/NA	7.2%

27. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on: public safety, such as state police and prisons?

Favor	16.8%
Oppose	77.3%
DK/NA	5.9%

28. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on: natural resources, state parks and the environment?

Favor	21.2%
Oppose	73.3%
DK/NA	5.5%

29. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on: programs for the needy?

Favor	20.6%
Oppose	73.0%
DK/NA	6.4%

30. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on: state workers' retirement?

Favor	24.1%
Oppose	65.7%
DK/NA	10.2%

31. Is there any other area of state spending in which you would support cuts?

(Open-ended responses)

There have been a number of proposals to address the state's budget problems by finding ways to raise more money to pay for programs and services. I'm going to read several ways people have suggested for raising more money. For each one that I read, I'd like you to tell me whether you favor or oppose raising revenues in that way, OK?

32. First is: A proposal to add brackets to the state income tax structure so that higher-income residents pay higher taxes. Do you favor or oppose this?

Favor	65.9%
Oppose	28.8%
DK/NA	5.2%

33. A proposal to raise the state portion of the sales tax rate. Do you favor or oppose this?

Favor	17.0%
Oppose	78.1%
DK/NA	4.9%

34. A proposal to expand the sales tax to cover services, for example, dry cleaning, haircuts, accounting, and so forth. Do you favor or oppose this?

Favor	28.4%
Oppose	67.6%
DK/NA	4.0%

35. A proposal to expand legalized gambling in Illinois. Do you favor or oppose this?

Favor	46.6%
Oppose	46.9%
DK/NA	6.5%

36. A proposal to sell or lease state assets, such as the lottery and the Illinois toll road system, to private investors. Do you favor or oppose this?

Favor	37.8%
Oppose	52.2%
DK/NA	9.9%

37. Is there any other way of raising state revenues that you would support?
(Open-ended responses)

And now I'd like to ask you a few questions about judges and the Illinois courts. In Illinois, we elect judges who run at first under party labels. After they are elected the first time, we then vote whether or not to keep a judge in office. In these elections, candidates can spend as much as they want - and there are no limits on how much or who can contribute to judicial candidates.

38. In Illinois, do you think judges should be elected or appointed?

Elected	68.6%
Appointed	23.1%
Other/don't care (vol)	2.2%
DK/NA	6.1%

39. Would you say you feel strongly about this, or not so strongly?

	Strong	Not so strong	DK/NA
Elected	75.1%	22.4%	2.4%
Appointed	61.2%	35.4%	3.3%

40. During election campaigns, do you think candidates for judge should -- or should not -- take stands on issues that they might have to rule on if they become a member of the court?

Should	48.1%
Should not	41.4%
DK/NA	10.5%

Now, I'm going to read you a series of proposals. Some people think that these are good ideas but others disagree. We'd like to know what you think.

41. The first proposal is: We should limit how much individuals can contribute to candidates who are running for judge?

Strongly support	49.4%
Somewhat support	24.5%
Somewhat oppose	12.0%
Strongly oppose	9.0%
DK/NA	5.2%

42. We should limit how much groups and organizations can contribute to candidates who are running for judge?

Strongly support	55.1%
Somewhat support	20.5%
Somewhat oppose	10.1%
Strongly oppose	8.8%
DK/NA	5.3%

43. Some have suggested a voluntary plan where judicial candidates for the Illinois Supreme Court can get taxpayer funds to replace large campaign contributions. In this plan, candidates would first have to raise a certain amount of money from small contributors to show that they are serious candidates. Then, the candidates would receive taxpayer funds for their campaigns. But -- they would have to agree to limits on how much they would spend overall. And -- they would also have to agree to limits on how much any individual, group, or organization could contribute to their campaigns.

Strongly support	20.3%
Somewhat support	27.9%
Somewhat oppose	18.2%
Strongly oppose	25.4%
DK/NA	8.2%

44. Next, I'm going to read you two statements, and I'd like to know which comes closest to your own view. The first statement is: Public financing of state Supreme Court candidates serves the public by allowing credible, qualified candidates to run for office without relying on the contributions of special interests. The second statement is: Public financing of state Supreme Court races is not in the public interest because it would force taxpayers to fund candidates they might not support.

Serves the public	46.2%
Not in the public interest	42.9%
Neither (vol)	2.8%
DK/NA	8.0%