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Results and Analysis of The Third Annual Simon Poll: A Statewide Survey of Illinois Voters, Fall 2010

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The Simon Review

Results and Analysis of The Third Annual Simon Poll: *A Statewide Survey of Illinois Voters, Fall 2010*

By Charles W. Leonard
Visiting Professor

Paper #24
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Southern Illinois University Carbondale

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction **1**

Section One: Issue Analysis

A. Direction of Nation, State, and Area 3

B. Political and Electoral Reforms 3

C. Addressing the State Budget Deficit 5

D. Electoral and Political Climate – 2010 8

E. First Amendment Awareness and Press Freedom 10

F. Social Issues and the Economy 10

Section Two: Item Analysis

A. State of the Country and Quality of Life 12

B. Redistricting Reforms 14

C. Presidential Approval Rating 16

D. First Amendment and Press Freedom Issues 16

E. Tea Party Awareness and Influence 19

F. Election Section 21

G. Political Reforms 23

H. Budget Issues 27

I. The November Elections 35

J. Positions on Social Issues 37

K. Economic Situation "This Year" and "Next Year" 40

Summary and Conclusions 42

Appendix: Questionnaire and Response Frequencies 44

Introduction

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute conducted its third annual Simon Poll® in the fall of 2010. The Institute is using its series of statewide polls to build a time series of statewide opinion on budgetary, governmental ethics, and quality of life issues, as well as addressing other topics important to the state of Illinois. Last year, as in 2008, another election year, we included "horse race" questions on important state electoral contests—in this case the races for Illinois governor and United States Senator from Illinois.

In order to achieve a smaller statistical margin for error, and in order to get more reliable results from subgroups of the population of Illinois registered voters (such as partisan group, area of the state, income categories, etc.), the Institute increased the number of respondents in our sample from the 800 we interviewed in 2008 and 2009 to 1,000 registered voters in the 2010 survey.

A primary focus, as in the previous Simon Polls, was the state's disastrous budget situation. Illinois' multibillion-dollar deficit is an ongoing topic of concern and discussion, not only in political and public policy circles, but in the mass media. Most of our respondents had firm opinions on the budget situation, and we speculate that it is one of the factors contributing to voters' sour opinion on the direction of things in the state. Only about one respondent in eight (12.2%) thought things in the State of Illinois were headed in the right direction.

Most Illinoisans surveyed believed, as they did last year, that the vast deficit could be bridged by cutting "waste and inefficiency." And, as before, most opposed both cuts to specific areas of the budget and proposals to increase revenues. However, in some important areas, we do see significant movement toward acceptance of certain cuts and revenue enhancements.

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute also continues to be concerned with state ethical issues and with political and electoral reform—critical in a state that often becomes a laughingstock for its record of imprisoned governors, indicted officials, and out-of-control, special-interest spending on state judicial races. Our series of surveys continues to show that Illinois voters are ready to support reform in the redistricting process, in the election process, and in the process of selecting judges.

Our survey received significant coverage for its findings in the Illinois governor and U.S. Senate races. Released October 12, just three weeks before the November 2 election, our results mirrored those of other sources, showing the Republican challenger, State Sen. Bill Brady, with a single-digit lead over Gov. Pat Quinn—a lead that Quinn subsequently overcame. Our results in the Senate race showed Republican Congressman Mark Kirk with a slim, statistically insignificant lead over Democratic State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias. That result, too, looked like what other organizations found at the time, and in fact looked very much like the final result—a slim Kirk victory.

In the 2010 Simon Poll, as we have seen before, majorities of Illinois voters took progressive positions on abortion rights and gay-rights issues, and a conservative position on the death penalty. There is a clear metropolitan/downstate split on social issues, with Chicagoland voters much more likely to take the liberal position than small-town and rural voters.

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute created and directed this telephone survey of 1,000 registered voters across the State of Illinois. Interviews were conducted by Issues & Answers Network, Inc., of Virginia Beach, Virginia, between September 30 and October 10, 2010. Issues & Answers reports no Illinois political figures as clients and was paid with non-tax dollars from the Institute's endowment fund.

Respondents were chosen at random, and each interview lasted approximately 19 minutes. Results for the entire sample have a statistical margin for error of ± 3 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 points from the results obtained here. The margin for error will be larger for demographic, geographic, and response subgroups.

Section One: Issue Analysis

A. Direction of Nation, State, and Area

One might have thought that perception of the direction of the country and the state had hit bottom in the fall of 2008, with a deep recession settling in and with deeply unpopular leaders sitting in the governor's mansion and the White House. Only 6.3 percent of Illinoisans thought the country was going in the right direction, and only about one in eight (12.2%) said things in the State of Illinois were going in the right direction. Our respondents were somewhat less pessimistic about the direction of things in their city or their area of the state (40.4% "right" direction).

Satisfaction with the direction of the country and state took a great leap in the 2009 Simon Poll, with the election of a popular Illinoisan, Barack Obama, as president and with the removal of the unpopular Rod Blagojevich from the governor's office. By fall 2009, 42.3% said they thought the country was going in the right direction, and an improved but still-dismal 21.8% saying they thought the State of Illinois was going in the right direction. More than half (52.0%) said they thought things in their city or area of the state were going in the right direction.

As the recession wore on in the nation and the state, and as the popularity of the president and the governor fell from post-election highs, so, too, did optimism about the direction of the country and of Illinois. In the 2010 poll, only three in ten (30.2%) thought the country was going in the right direction. Just one in eight (12.2%) thought the state was moving in the right direction—identical to the unhappy level of the 2008 poll. Even satisfaction with the direction of respondents' city or area of the state took a small dip, from 52.0% to 45.5%.

B. Political and Electoral Reforms

As in previous Simon Institute surveys, Illinois voters in 2010 were strongly in favor of reforming the ways in which elections are funded, judges are chosen, districts are redrawn, and how long legislators serve and lead each other.

Redistricting Reform

The 2010 poll, much like the 2009 one, shows three-fourths of respondents disapproving of the portion of the current redistricting plan that calls for literally drawing a name out of a hat to break a partisan tie on the redistricting commission. About two-thirds favor a proposal that would have the Illinois Supreme Court appoint a neutral person to the redistricting panel in case of a tie.

In 2010 we added a question to gauge support for a constitutional amendment that would have an independent commission draw up a legislative district map, which it would then submit to the legislature for an up-or-down vote. Voters in our survey were twice as

likely to support it as to oppose it (53.5% to 27.1%), while about one in five voters (19.4%) remained undecided.

Judicial Reform

Three-fourths of voters in our sample responded favorably to a proposal to place limits on the amount of money individuals could contribute to a judicial campaign, such as ones for Illinois Supreme Court justices. Voters in northern Illinois during this election cycle were exposed to the multimillion-dollar retention election of Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Kilbride, who fought off a retention challenge of a business-funded group called the Illinois Civil Justice League. Some Southern Illinois voters may recall the 2004 Gordon Maag-Lloyd Karmeier Supreme Court race, in which more than $9 million was spent. Half (53.2%) strongly favored and another one in five (21.7%) somewhat favored the proposal to limit contributions in judicial races.

A proposal that would go even farther to reduce appearances of influence-buying in judicial races is to publicly finance judicial campaigns. Such proposals for statewide races in general have garnered plurality, rather than majority, support in past Simon Polls. However, in the case of publicly financing judicial elections, a majority either strongly favor (30.2%) or somewhat favor (23.3%) the public-financing proposal.

Political Reform

Satisfaction with the direction of Illinois is at startlingly low levels, even after the little spike of optimism we observed in 2009. It is not surprising, therefore, to see sky-high support for a proposal to limit state representatives to five two-year terms and state senators to three four-year terms. Eight respondents in ten either strongly favored (57.3%) or somewhat favored (22.7%) the term limit proposal.

A proposal to limit terms for legislative leadership positions such as Senate President and House Speaker drew favorable responses from more than three-fourths of respondents in the 2009 Simon Poll. In the 2010 poll, respondents were even more enthusiastic, with well over half (57.0%) strongly favoring the proposal and another quarter (24.3%) somewhat favoring it.

The 2009 poll asked about a proposal to limit the amount of money party leaders could redistribute to candidates in the primary election—a reform measure favored by two-thirds of our respondents and subsequently passed as part of a reform package. In the 2010 survey we asked respondents whether they favored a similar proposal to limit the amount of money leaders could distribute in general elections. It received a similar level of support, with about two-thirds either strongly favoring (43.6%) or somewhat favoring (21.4%) the proposal.

In an amendatory veto last year, Governor Quinn removed the provision in election law in which, during primary elections, voters must ask for a particular party's ballot. Though the veto was not sustained, and the underlying legislation died, voters in our survey

overwhelmingly favor removal of public party declaration, either strongly (62.2%) or somewhat (13.2%).

We also included a question on the constitutional amendment on the ballot allowing for a complex gubernatorial recall process. While we did not go into the details, about two-thirds (65.0%) said they would vote for the amendment. This looks very much like the 65.9% margin by which the amendment passed in November.

In previous surveys we saw overwhelming support for a more generic proposal to allow recall elections for any statewide elected official (65.4% in 2008 and 72.4% in 2009).

C. Addressing the State Budget Deficit

The state of Illinois' large, crushing, structural budget deficit is its central political and management issue, effecting every state service and reaching into virtually every municipality, school district, and institution of higher education. It is something that almost all respondents in the 2010 Simon Poll had an opinion on.

In the 2009 poll and again in the present one, we offered respondents three ways to "fix" the budget deficit problem: increase taxes, cut "waste and inefficiency," or a combination of the two.

Table 1: Solutions to Budget Problem

2009 – 10 Statements About The Budget	2009	2010
The state of Illinois has a budget deficit of over 13 billion dollars. I'm going to read three statements that people have made about how to fix the deficit, and ask you which one comes closest to your views, OK? If you haven't thought much about the issue, just tell me that.		
Illinois' public programs and services have already been reduced significantly. We can only fix the problem by taking in more revenue, such as a tax increase.	9.5%	9.3%
The state takes in plenty of money to pay for public services but wastes it on unnecessary programs. We can fix the problem by cutting waste and inefficiency in government.	56.5%	57.0%
Illinois' budget problem is so large it can only be solved by a combination of budget cuts and revenue increases.	27.3%	26.6%
Haven't thought much about it.	3.4%	3.4%
Other/Don't know	3.4%	3.7%

Discussion of the deficit and of proposed solutions for it have filled Illinois newspapers and endless policy papers and blogs. It has even filtered down into television news—a medium not usually well suited to discussion of financial matters. It is generally

acknowledged, even by deficit hawks, that the $13 billion chasm—somewhere around half of the state's general revenue fund—cannot be bridged simply by cuts to unspecified "waste" or legendary "inefficiency." Yet, after a year of such discussion—which may seem to us in the policy community to have been intense and boisterous—public opinion on the question has not budged; from the results of this question, the voting public appears to have neither taken in nor even heard the discussion. (See Table 1 above.)

If a year-long discussion in the mass media and the policy community did not move the public-opinion needle on reasonable remedies to the budget mess, the three-year time series of Simon Polls on other budget-balancing questions does show some movement in favor of cuts to state programs and services as well as toward acceptance of tax increases.

Table 2: Budget Cut Proposals

Do you favor or oppose cuts in:	2008	2009	2010
Spending on kindergarten through high school education?			
Favor	10.7%	13.0%	14.0%
Oppose	85.6%	84.4%	82.1%
Other/Don't know	3.6%	2.7%	3.9%
Spending on state universities?			
Favor	20.9%	31.9%	34.0%
Oppose	72.0%	61.4%	57.4%
Other/Don't know	7.2%	6.8%	8.6%
State spending on public safety, such as state police and prison operations?			
Favor	16.8%	16.3%	21.0%
Oppose	77.3%	79.8%	74.5%
Other/Don't know	5.9%	4.1%	4.5%
Spending or natural resources, such as state parks or environmental regulation?			
Favor	21.2%	32.0%	40.0%
Oppose	73.3%	63.0%	53.1%
Other/Don't know	5.5%	5.0%	6.9%
Spending on programs for poor people*?			
Favor	20.6%	20.4%	24.9%
Oppose	73.0%	72.4%	66.3%
Other/Don't know	6.4%	7.3%	8.8%
Spending on programs for people with mental or physical disabilities?			
Favor	NA	11.8%	12.4%
Oppose		85.3%	83.2%
Other/Don't know		3.0%	4.4%
Spending on pension benefits for state workers' retirement?**			
Favor	24.1%	39.5%	45.5%
Oppose	65.7%	53.4%	47.3%
Other/Don't know	10.2%	7.2%	7.2%

* *In 2008, "programs for the needy."*
** *In 2008, "state workers' retirement"*

For example, in Table 2, above, we can see significant movement in public opinion from 2008 levels to 2010 in favor of accepting cuts in spending on state universities, state workers' pensions, and natural resources.

While pluralities still opposed cuts in each category, movement across categories is readily apparent. We might be justified to credit publicity over the budget crisis as a mover of public opinion in these instances.

We might expect a different story on the revenue side of the equation. In the 2010 survey, as in 2008 and 2009, majorities opposed every proposal for increasing revenue through taxation or other means. If concern over the budget is motivating voters to accept cuts in state spending, could it also move them toward acceptance of revenue enhancements?

Table 3: Revenue Increases

Do you favor or oppose:	2008	2009	2010
A proposal to add brackets to the state income tax structure so that higher-income residents pay higher taxes?			
Favor	65.9%	NA	NA
Oppose	28.8%	NA	NA
Other/Don't know	5.2%	NA	NA
Raising the state income tax rate from 3 percent to 4 percent*?			
Favor	NA	32.1%	40.9%
Oppose	NA	65.5%	56.2%
Other/Don't know	NA	2.4%	2.9%
Raising the state sales tax rate?			
Favor	17.0%	21.4%	24.5%
Oppose	78.1%	75.5%	72.9%
Other/Don't know	4.9%	2.4%	2.6%
Expanding the sales tax to cover services like dry cleaning or haircuts, which are not currently taxed?			
Favor	28.4%	44.1%	45.2%
Oppose	67.6%	53.3%	51.4%
Other/Don't know	4.0%	2.7%	3.4%
A proposal expanding legalized gambling in the state?			
Favor	46.6%	44.5%	49.9%
Oppose	46.9%	51.4%	46.3%
Other/Don't know	6.5%	4.1%	3.8%
Selling state assets, such as the lottery and the Illinois toll road system, to private investors?			
Favor	37.8%	25.9%	30.4%
Oppose	52.2%	63.5%	60.1%
Other/Don't know	9.9%	10.6%	9.5%

* *In 2009, "3 percent to 4.5 percent."*

The time series data appear to show that opinion was moving toward acceptance of an income tax increase (now a fait accompli) and an increase in the reach of the sales tax to cover services as well as goods. (See Table 3 above.)

Acceptance of an increase in the state's sales tax rate appears to have moved little since 2008, as does the proposal to expand legalized gambling. Acceptance of the notion of selling state assets such as the lottery and state toll roads appears to have fallen since the 2008 poll.

D. ELECTORAL AND POLITICAL CLIMATE – 2010

Fall of 2010 saw a roiling national electoral climate, with predictions of a momentous Republican takeover of the US House of Representatives, a reinvigorated "Tea Party" movement, and a sustained low approval rating of President Barack Obama, due largely to the ongoing economic recession that began in the fall before he was elected.

The political and electoral climate here in Illinois was no less exciting, with bitter primary battles in both parties, particularly in the governor's race. On the Democratic side, incumbent Governor Pat Quinn, the "accidental governor" who inherited the office from ousted Governor Rod Blagojevich, narrowly survived a nasty primary race with Illinois Comptroller Dan Hynes. In a primary field crowded with Chicago-area Republican hopefuls, State Senator Bill Brady, a downstater from Bloomington, squeaked out of the race with a 200-vote plurality over State Senator Kirk Dillard of suburban Hinsdale.

Quinn and Brady fought a mostly negative contest in the press and on TV, with the Republicans trying to hang Blagojevich around the neck of Quinn, while blaming him for the state's fiscal train wreck. The Democrats, on the other hand, had plenty of ammunition, which they were not loath to use, on Brady's business dealings, conservative social stands, and controversial floor votes and bills, such as a proposal to allow mass-gassing at animal shelters.

While the path to their parties' nominations in the Senate race was easier, Democratic State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias and Chicago-area Republican Congressman Mark Kirk fought a heated race to fill Barack Obama's old U.S. Senate seat. Illinois televisions were ablaze with Kirk commercials accusing Giannoulias of running a crooked Mob bank and Giannoulias commercials blasting Kirk's serial misrepresentations of his military career.

To gauge electoral support in these two races, we used a subsample of 758 "likely voters" in our 1,000-voter sample. We counted respondents as likely voters if they told us they were absolutely certain to vote and if they knew exactly where their polling place was. *(All other results in this white paper are taken from the full 1,000-voter sample.)*

Polls in the summer leading up to the 2010 elections had shown Sen. Brady with double-digit leads over the beleaguered Gov. Quinn. By the fall the Brady lead had shrunk to single digits and, as we know now, the slump in his support continued toward his

eventual defeat. Our poll, begun at the end of September and going into the first ten days of October, was in line with other surveys: Brady led Quinn by about nine points among likely voters, 38.4% to 29.8%. Colorful, controversial Independent candidate Scott Lee Cohen had the support of 5.9% of our respondents, and Carbondale attorney and Green Party candidate Rich Whitney had just 2.2%. Almost one in five (19.5%) remained undecided.

The Giannoulias-Kirk race for Obama's Senate seat was closer from the start, and the numbers were far less spongy than in the gubernatorial race. Among likely voters in our sample, Kirk led by just half a point, 37.3% to Giannoulias's 36.8%. Green Party candidate LeAlan Jones pulled 3.3% support and Libertarian Mike Labno had 1.8%. As in the governor's race, almost one in five (18.3%) were as yet undecided.

Elsewhere in the state, there were tight races for U.S. Congress and, though Democratic control of the Illinois General Assembly was not much in doubt, millions were spent to either capitalize on or to stave off the Republican wave that overtook Democratic elected officials across America.

One problem for Democratic politicians in Illinois in 2010 may have been the significant drop in approval ratings for President Obama. In the 2009 poll, we measured 62.4% of Illinois voters either strongly approving or approving of the job the president was doing. By the fall of 2010, that number had dropped more than ten points to 51.2%, a bare majority.

As they anticipated a Republican takeover of the U.S. House of Representatives, pollsters and pundits nationwide were talking about the "enthusiasm gap" between Republicans, who were more enthusiastic about voting and therefore more likely to turn out, and Democrats, who were less so. In our own polling in Illinois, we found this to be the case here: More than half (52.5%) of the Republicans in our sample said they were more enthusiastic than usual about voting in the 2010 elections, while just three in ten Democrats (29.6%) said they were more enthusiastic.

Unlike the results in the national polls, however, the "generic ballot" question in Illinois slightly favored the Democrats: 40.5% said they would vote for the Democratic Party's candidate for Congress in their district, while 36.5% said they would vote for the Republican candidate.

Tea Party Impact

Voters and activists aligned with the so-called Tea Party movement (a name arising from the slogan "Taxed Enough Already?") are thought to have had a big impact on the voter enthusiasm that sent a Republican wave crashing over the U.S. House of Representatives after the November 2010 elections. It is hard to know precisely how much impact members of the Tea Party had here in Illinois, but our survey showed almost universal recognition of the movement, and a significant amount of agreement with them and influence due to them.

Virtually everyone we surveyed had heard or read either a lot (45.5%) or a little (45.6%) about the Tea Party protests that had taken place over the past year. About as many agreed with the Tea Party (37.9%) as disagreed with them (35.5%), though almost a quarter expressed no opinion (23.3%).

While agreement with the Tea Party held a slight and statistically insignificant lead over disagreement, that agreement did not necessarily translate into support at the ballot box. While about one in three (30.6%) said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate that was affiliated with the Tea Party, about half-again as many (46.0%) said they would be *less* likely to do so.

E. First Amendment Awareness and Press Freedom

In support of the School of Journalism's participation in the Liberty Tree Initiative, we included a number of First Amendment-related questions in the Fall 2010 poll. We asked an open-ended question about whether respondents could name one of the freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment to the Constitution, whether the mass media in America are more interested in honest reporting or in audience-building, and whether respondents thought the press in America had too much freedom to do what it wants.

We asked respondents, in an open-ended format, whether they could name "any of the specific rights that are guaranteed by the First Amendment." On first response, a majority (56.3%) named "freedom of speech." Strikingly, though, the next-most frequent response was an inability to name one of the rights (28.5%), which, combined with incorrect or "other" responses (2.8%), means that three in ten registered Illinois voters cannot name even one right guaranteed under the First Amendment.

Illinois voters' attitudes toward the news media reflect the overall sour views that polling shows nationwide. For example, respondents on our poll were three times more likely to say the mass media in this country are only interested in building audiences (68.9%) than they were to say the media try to do a fair and honest job of reporting the news (22.3%).

Regarding press freedom, our respondents present a two-sided coin: On the one hand, most (52.5%) think the balance of press freedom is "about right." However, among other responses, Illinois voters were three times more likely to say the press has too much freedom (30.1%) than to say the press has too little (9.5%).

F. Social Issues and the Economy

Illinois voters' opinions on the legality of abortions and views on same-sex marriage looked much like they did in the 2009 Simon Poll. As before, about three-fourths said abortion should be legal either under certain circumstances (45.0%) or all circumstances (31.5%). Just one in five (19.1%) said abortion should be illegal under all circumstances.

Opinions on same-sex unions are split fairly evenly among the three options offered to respondents: that gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to marry (33.6%), that they should be allowed to form civil unions (33.9%), or that there should be no legal recognition of same-sex relationships (26.5%). These proportions are very close to what we found statewide in 2009.

We added a question to the 2010 survey in advance of President Obama's decision to end the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, which prohibited gay men and lesbians from serving openly in the military. Judging from the results, Illinoisans overall approve of that decision. Seven in ten either strongly favored (36.8%) or somewhat favored (35.8%) allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military. Just 16.3% either opposed or strongly opposed allowing openly gay service members.

Our survey was in the field before the General Assembly introduced and passed a bill doing away with the death penalty in Illinois, which Gov. Quinn signed on March 9, 2011. Our survey showed, however, that a majority of Illinoisans thought the moratorium on the death penalty, imposed by Gov. George Ryan ought to be lifted (56.4% favored death penalty reinstatement and 36.3% opposed it).

Current and Future Effects of Economic Downturn

Political scientists and commentators speculated that the weakened economy drove much of the electorate's dissatisfaction with the political status quo and perhaps fed much of the Tea Party-related anger. We asked respondents whether, overall and generally speaking, their family's economic situation was better, about the same, or worse than it was a year ago. About half (51.7%) said their family's situation was about the same. However, among those who reported a change, we were much more likely to hear that the respondent's situation was worse (38.4%) than to hear that it was better (8.5%).

When reporting on their expectations for their family's financial status next year, however, respondents were more optimistic. While a similar percentage thought things would be about the same (54.0%), our Illinois voters were more likely to respond that things would be better (23.4%) than to say they would be worse (17.5%).

Section Two: Item Analysis

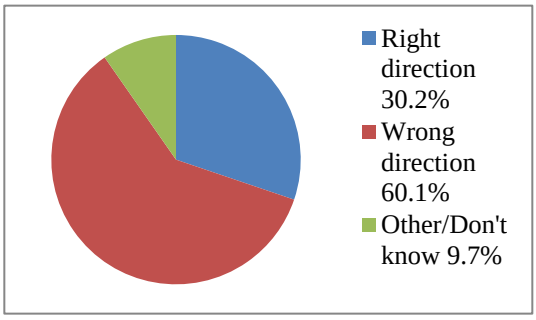
A. State of the Country and Quality of Life

The Simon Poll, like many political and policy-related surveys, begins with questions about the general direction of the nation, state, and locality. Starting the interview in this fashion gets the respondent accustomed to answering questions that are simple, require little thought, and set a mental stage for public policy questions.

The "direction" questions also serve a useful purpose when part of a time series, as well as taking the "temperature" of the electorate in a very broad and general way. For instance, the direction questions in the Simon Poll in 2010 found a pessimistic electorate, particularly on the general direction of things in the State of Illinois.

1. Direction of the Country

Only three in ten registered Illinois voters in our sample thought things in the country were headed in the right direction; twice as many thought things were "off track and headed in the wrong direction." Right-direction answers were down 12 percentage points from the 2009 poll, while wrong-direction answers were up ten points.

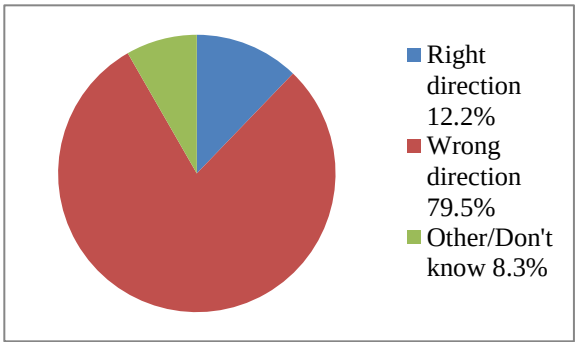


Democrats were almost ten times more likely to be optimistic about the direction of the country than were Republicans (51.9% "right direction" versus just 5.6%).

Similarly, City of Chicago respondents were most likely to give "right direction" responses (51.9%), while significantly fewer did so in the Chicago suburbs (30.8%), in northern and central Illinois (23.5%), and in southern Illinois (21.2%).

2. Direction of the State of Illinois

Only one respondent in eight thought things in the state of Illinois were headed in the right direction, sinking back to the level we observed in the 2008 Simon Poll. Almost eight in ten thought things were off track and headed in the wrong direction.

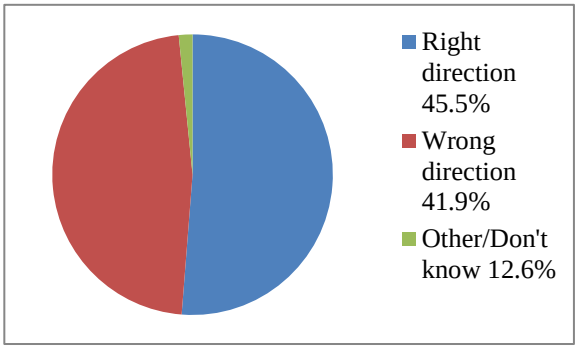


In no group did large percentages think the state was headed in the right direction. With Democrats in control of most of state government, it is not surprising that their partisans were more likely to think things were going right (just 20.9%) than were Republicans (4.0%).

There was little difference among education-level and income groups, though again there were regional differences. A little over a quarter of Chicago-area respondents thought things in the state were going in the right direction (28.4%), while those in northern and central Illinois were least likely to say so (7.6%).

3. Direction of "Your Area of the State"

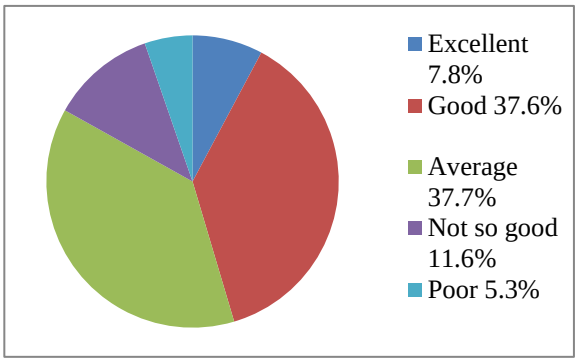
As expected, voters surveyed were much more likely to be optimistic about the direction of things in their city or area of the state—though levels of satisfaction were down from the 2009 poll , in which just over half thought things in their area were headed in the right direction.



Interestingly, while Chicagoans were more likely than those in other parts of the state to be optimistic about the direction of the nation and the state, they were *least* likely to be so regarding the direction of their own area. Those in the Chicago suburbs were most likely to say things were going in the right direction (52.9%), followed by those in southern Illinois (44.5%), northern and central Illinois (42.7%), and then the City (37.7%).

4. Quality of Life

We asked respondents to tell us about their perceptions of overall quality of life in their area—regardless of the direction in which they thought it was heading. Unsurprisingly, results look much like the "direction of your area" question above, with a little over 45% saying quality of life in their area was excellent or good.



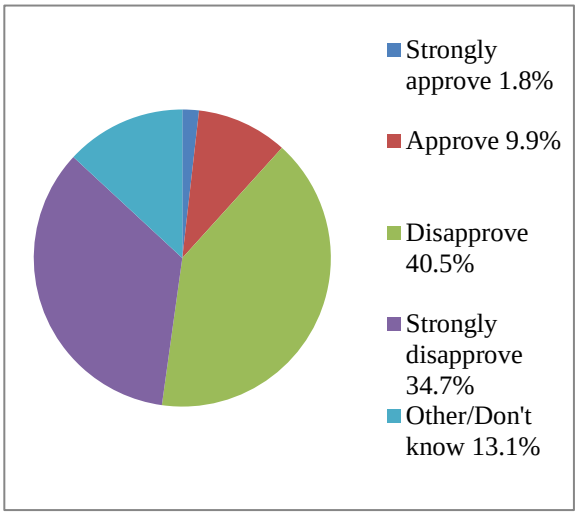
As in the previous question, there is a divide between the suburbs (54.1% excellent/good) and the City of Chicago (42.6%).

Similarly, perceived local quality of life climbs sharply with household income, from 36.4% excellent/good among those with household incomes below $50,000 to 43.8% among those with incomes between $50,000 and $100,000, to 63.0% among those with incomes above $100,000.

B. Redistricting Reforms

1. Approval of Current State Redistricting plan

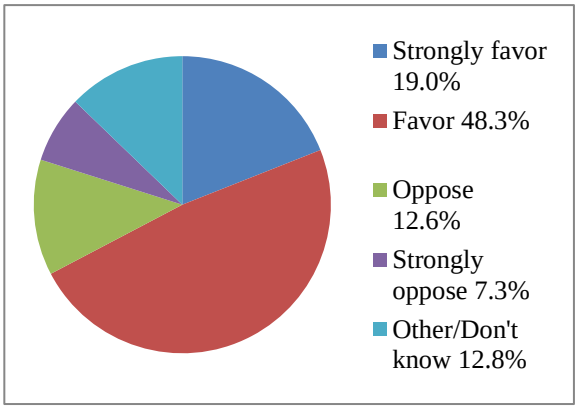
We told respondents about the part of the current Illinois redistricting plan that breaks partisan ties on the redistricting panel by pulling one party's name out of a hat. We then asked them whether and to what extent they favored or opposed that feature. Not surprisingly, and similar to the 2009 poll, three-fourths either opposed or strongly opposed this tie-breaking mechanism.



There appears to be little group variation on this question, whether by party, region, education, or income group—except, perhaps, to note that "don't know" responses fall as respondent education increases, from 18.6% of those with a high school degree or less to 8.5% among those with a bachelor's degree or more.

2. Favor Adding Neutral Person to Redistricting Panel

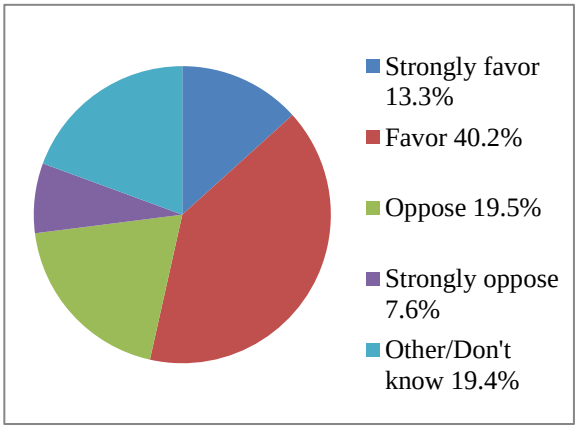
After hearing the present ridiculous-sounding proposal for breaking partisan ties on the redistricting panel, it is not surprising to learn that two-thirds of respondents favor having the Supreme Court add a neutral person to the panel in such a case.



Democrats were a little more likely to favor this proposal (73.3% strongly/somewhat) than were Republicans (62.0%).

3. Favor Constitutional Amendment Creating Redistricting Commission

Respondents were twice as likely to favor as to oppose the idea of a constitutional amendment to create an independent redistricting commission to remap legislative boundaries after the Census. The legislature would then vote up or down on the map created by the commission.

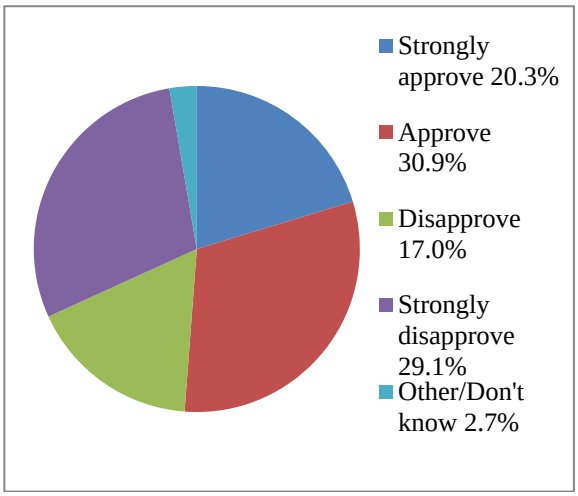


While Democrats were somewhat more likely than Republicans to favor the proposal (57.8% strong favor/favor vs. 49.1%), much of that difference is made up in a higher Republican "don't know" response.

Suburbanites were more likely than City of Chicago voters to favor the Constitutional Amendment (55.6% strong favor/favor vs. 46.3%), consistent with our perceptions of suburban "good government" voters.

C. Presidential Approval Rating

President Barack Obama's approval rating is down significantly from our finding in the 2009 Simon Poll. In 2010, 51.2% strongly approved or approved of the president's job performance, down from 62.4% the year before.



Partisan differences are, as expected, quite stark on the question of President Obama's job performance: 84.2% of Democrats in our sample approved or strongly approved, compared with 48.6% of Independents and just 13.0% of Republican voters.

Women were more likely than men to approve or strongly approve of President Obama's performance (57.2% vs. 41.8%).

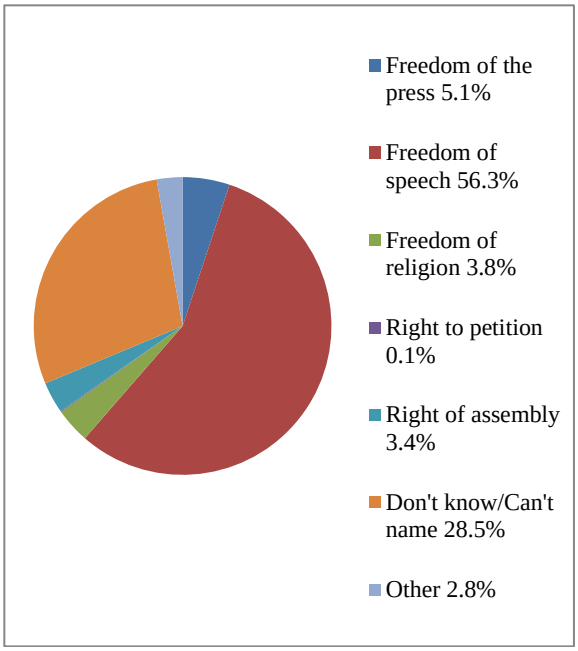
The President's approval rating plummets once we get outside the City of Chicago, and continues to fall the farther away we get: Three-fourths (76.6%) approve or strongly approve in the City, vs. 52.2% in the Chicago suburbs, 44.8% in northern and central Illinois, and just 32.7% in southern Illinois.

D. First Amendment and Press Freedom Issues

In support of the involvement of the School of Journalism and of Simon Institute Visiting Professor William H. Freivogel's involvement in the Liberty Tree Initiative, we included several First Amendment- and press-related questions in this year's survey. We asked whether respondents could name any First Amendment rights; whether they thought the press tried to do a fair job of covering the news, and whether the media in America had enough freedom.

1. Knowledge of First Amendment Freedoms

In an open-ended format, we asked respondents whether they could name any of the rights or freedoms guaranteed in the First Amendment. Most named freedom of speech; the second-most frequent response was "don't know/can't name."



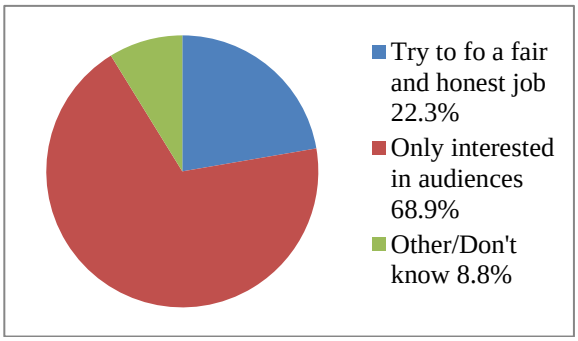
Respondents' education level is, of course, the best predictor of whether they can name a First Amendment freedom: among those with only a high school degree, nearly half (46.1%) could not name a First Amendment component, compared with those who have some college (33.3%) or who have at least a bachelor's degree (15.6%).

Other group differences are probably related very strongly to education differences among the various subgroups. For example, lower-income groups were more likely to be unable to name a First Amendment freedom (32.3% can't name) than respondents in six-figure-income households (20.2%).

Similarly, respondents in downstate Illinois (31.9% north-central, 32.1% southern) were more likely to be unable to name a First Amendment freedom than were those in Chicago (24.7%) or its suburbs (25.1%).

2. Do the Mass Media Try to Do a Fair and Honest Job?

We asked respondents whether they thought the mass media in this country try to do a fair and honest job of reporting the news or were mainly interested in building audiences without caring about the accuracy of their reports. The results ought to be troubling to reporters and editors: the "fair and honest job" response is low in every category we examined.

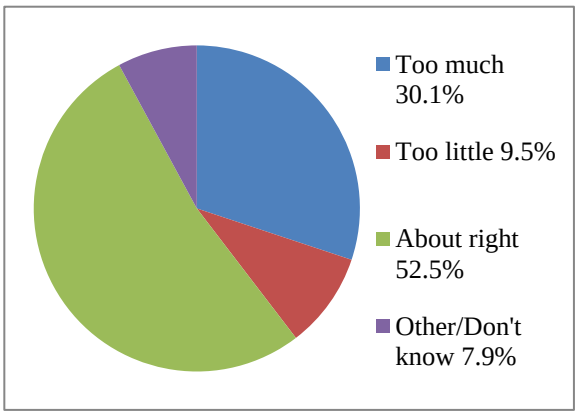


Cynicism with regard to the media's interest in audience-building appears to get worse as respondent education and income rise. For example, among those with household incomes below $50,000, 28.7% say the media try to do a fair and honest job, compared with 17.3% among those with household incomes above $100,000. Similarly, those with a high school diploma or less are twice as likely as those with a bachelor's degree or more to say they think the media try to do a fair and honest job (33.8% compared with 16.9%).

Democrats were about twice as likely as Republicans to say they thought the media try to do a fair an honest job (28.4% vs. 14.8%).

3. Does the Press in America Have Too Much Freedom?

We asked respondents whether they thought the press in America has too much freedom to do what it wants, too little freedom, or about the right amount. While most thought the balance was about right, those who thought the press had too much freedom far outnumbered those who thought the press didn't have enough.



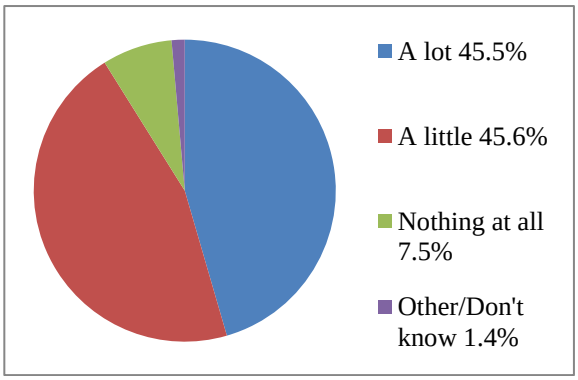
On this question, rising education and income seemed to have the effect of reducing the likelihood that a respondent would say the press has too much freedom and increasing the likelihood that he or she would say the balance was about right. For example, among those with a high school degree or less, 35.3% said the press in America has too much freedom, versus 21.5% among those with a bachelor's degree or more. Respondents with household incomes below $50,000 were about twice as likely as those with incomes above $100,000 to say the press has too much freedom to do what it wants (36.8% vs. 19.7%)

E. Tea Party Awareness and Influence

Considering how large and loud the Tea Party movement appeared to have been during the Fall 2010 election cycle, we decided to ask how much respondents had heard about the protests, whether they agreed with the movement, and whether they would be more or less likely to vote for a Tea Party-affiliated candidate.

1. Amount Heard or Read about Tea Party Protests

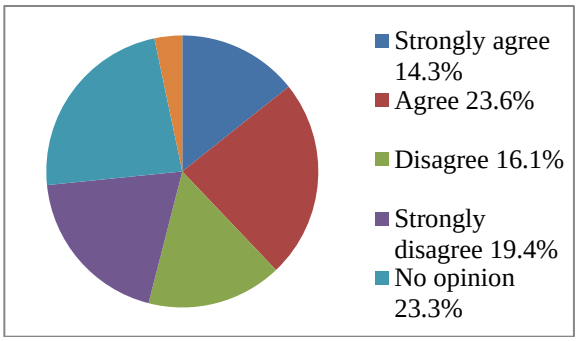
Nine in ten respondents said they had heard or read either a lot or a little about the Tea Party protests that had taken place over the past year.



The Tea Party protests obviously were the big political news story of the year. Only among the least-educated (17.6% of those with a high school diploma or less) and the lowest-income (12.6% among those with household incomes below $50,000) did even one in ten respondents say they had not heard of the Tea Party protests.

2. Agreement with the Tea Party Movement

We asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with the Tea Party Movement. "Agree" responses were statistically indistinguishable from the "disagrees," while about a quarter expressed no opinion on their agreement or disagreement.



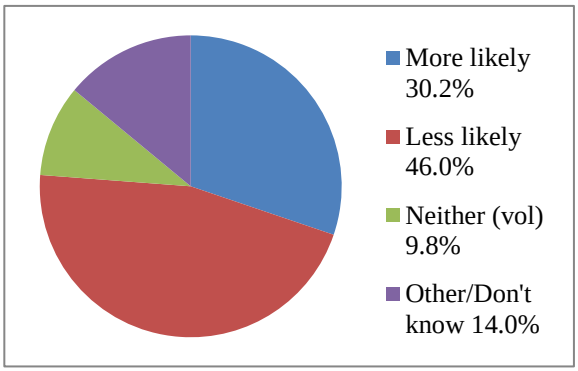
While agreement with Tea Party positions seemed to go down as respondent education went up (45.7% strongly agree or agree among those with a high school diploma or less vs. 35.0% among those with a bachelor's degree or more), there was no distinguishable difference among income groups (39.0% agreement among those with household incomes below $50,000 vs. 39.6% among those in $100,000-plus households).

There is a gender gap on Tea Party agreement: Men (46.5% agree/strongly agree) were more in accord with the movement than women (32.2%).

The expected partisan differences in Tea Party agreement appear in a robust fashion: 72.1% of Republicans agree or strongly agree with the Tea Party, compared with 40.7% of Independents and just 10.1% of Democrats.

3. Likelihood of Voting for Tea Party-Affiliated Candidate

We asked respondents whether they would be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who was affiliated with the Tea Party movement. While agreement with the Tea Party, above, was about equal with disagreement, the influence question was tilted toward the "less likely" rather than the "more likely."



The partisan differences on the influence question, particularly among Republicans, show less cohesion than the agreement question, above. For example, while 75.7% of Democrats say they would be less likely to vote for a Tea Party candidate, a little over half (56.5%) of Republicans say they would be more likely to do so.

Higher education appears to be associated with a higher aversion toward Tea Party candidates. While 35.0% of those with a high school diploma or less say they would be less likely to vote for such a candidate, among those with a bachelor's degree or more, 54.2% say they would be less likely.

And again, unlike the agreement question before, rising income appears to increase the likelihood that a respondent will be less likely to vote for a Tea Party candidate (37.2% among those with household incomes below $50,000 vs. 54.1% among those with incomes above $100,000).

The gender gap persists on the Tea Party influence question. Half (52.0%) of our female respondents said they would be less likely to vote for a Tea Party-backed candidate, compared with 37.2% of males.

A Tea Party affiliation appears to be a net positive in only one of the four regions surveyed: Among Chicagoans, 67.2% would be less likely to vote for a Tea Party-affiliated candidate; in the suburbs it is 28.6% more likely, 49.2% less likely; in northern/central Illinois, 34.0% were more likely to support a Tea Party candidate, 37.6% were less likely—a statistical wash. In southern Illinois, 42.6% would be more likely to support a Tea Party candidate; 35.2% would be less likely.

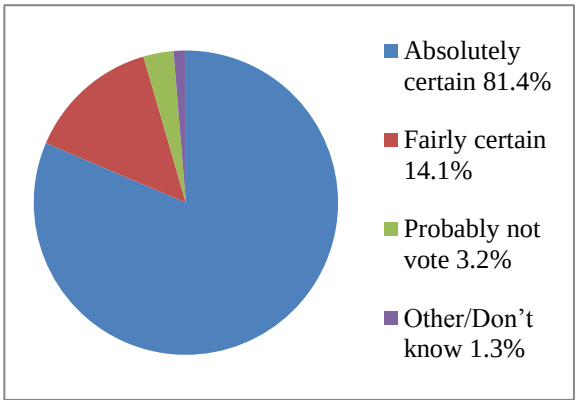
F. ELECTION SECTION

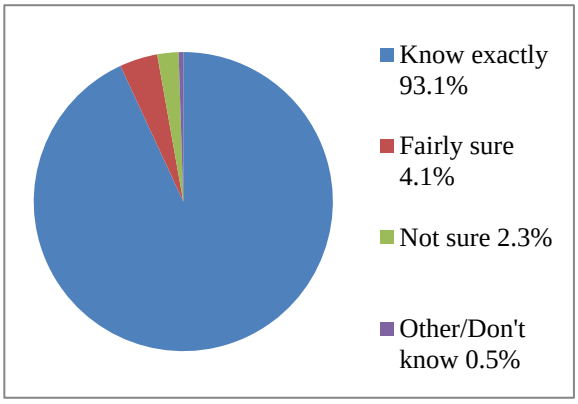
This portion of the survey includes the "likely voter" screening questions, the "generic ballot" on the U.S. Congressional races, and a question to test for the "enthusiasm gap" between Democrats and Republicans (and other groups) heading into the 2010 elections.

1. Likely Voter Screening Questions

Election surveys commonly screen for likely voters among the pool of registered voters, on the assumption that the statistical snapshot of the preferences of those deemed most likely to vote will be more likely to mirror the "true" preferences of the eventual, *actual* voters. This is an inexact science, at best. In the 2010 Simon Poll, our screening returned 75.8% likely voters, compared with Illinois' actual 41.8% turnout on November 2.[1]

First we asked respondents about their certainty of voting. And of those who said they were "absolutely certain" to vote, we asked if they knew exactly where their polling place was, were fairly sure, or not sure. Respondents who were both "absolutely certain" to vote and who also "know exactly" where their polling place was were deemed "likely voters" for the purpose of reporting the "horse race" questions we later asked about the races for Governor and US Senator from Illinois.

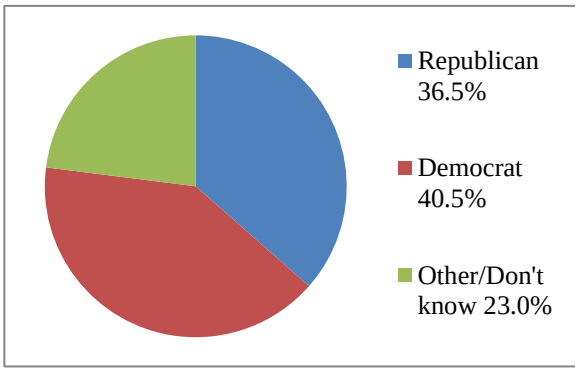




[1] George Mason University: United States Election Project 2010. The VEP statistic is "the vote for highest office divided by the voting-eligible population or VEP." See *http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html*

2. "Generic Ballot" Question

Without getting into specific races for U.S. House of Representatives, pollsters often ask the "generic ballot" question—whether the respondent intends to vote for the Republican or the Democratic candidate for the House. In the Democratic-leaning State of Illinois, we were not surprised to see the Democrats a few points ahead of the Republicans.



Party cohesion was tight on the generic ballot question, with only 2.5% of self-identified Republicans saying they intended to vote for the Democratic candidate and just 3.6% of Democrats intending to vote for the Republican candidate. Independents were somewhat more likely to report an intention to vote for Republicans than Democrats (31.1% vs. 23.0%), though the plurality (45.0%) remained undecided.

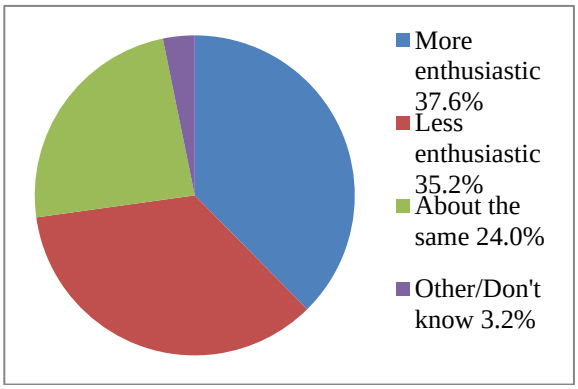
Regional results looked much as would be expected. Intention to vote for the Democrats held a majority in the City of Chicago (62.3%) and a plurality in the Chicago suburbs (41.7%), while Republicans held a plurality in north/central Illinois (42.7%) and in southern Illinois (46.0%).

A significant gender gap is apparent in Congressional vote intention, with women favoring Democrats over Republicans 45.4% to 30.5% and men favoring the Republicans 45.7% to 33.0%.

Likelihood of reporting a preference for Republicans increases with respondent income, from 32.3% among those with household incomes below $50,000 to 45.1% among those with household incomes above $100,000.

3. Enthusiasm about Voting

In an effort to gauge Illinois' overall partisan electoral climate, we asked respondents whether they were more enthusiastic than usual about voting this cycle, less enthusiastic, or about the same. While the "more" and "less" numbers look about the same overall, the partisan and regional breakdowns are revealing.



As was the pattern in nationwide polls, Republicans in Illinois were a lot more enthusiastic about voting in this cycle than were Democrats (52.5% vs. 29.6%). A plurality of Democrats (43.2%) were less enthusiastic.

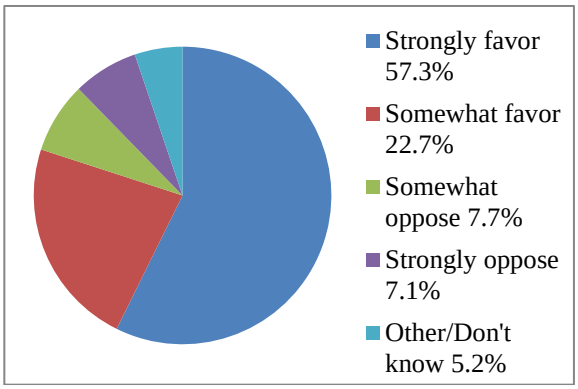
Regional partisan patterns help explain why the plurality of Chicago city voters were less enthusiastic (42.0% "less" vs. 34.0% "more") and the plurality of southern Illinois voters were more enthusiastic (40.9% "more" vs. 27.0% "less").

G. Political Reforms

We asked respondents whether they strongly favored, somewhat favored, somewhat opposed, or strongly opposed each of six reform measures that have been proposed for Illinois politics.

1. Legislative term limits

Voters in our poll overwhelmingly supported a proposal to limit state representatives to five consecutive two-year terms and state senators to three consecutive four-year terms.



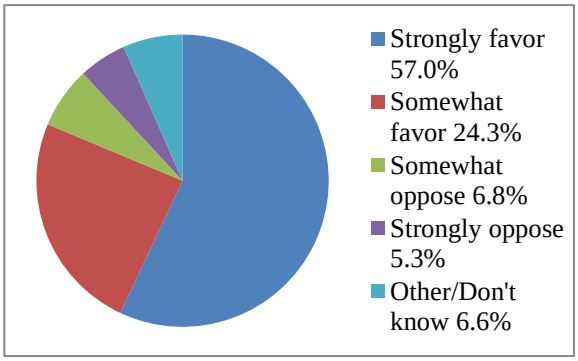
Support for the term-limit proposal was strong across demographic categories, without much statistically meaningful variation.

Republicans (83.9%) and Independents (84.1%) were more likely to favor or strongly favor term limits than were Democrats (75.8%).

Only in the City of Chicago did as many as one in five (19.7%) strongly or somewhat oppose legislative term limits.

2. Leadership Term Limits

Respondents in our survey were even more likely to favor a proposal to limit how long legislators could serve in leadership positions such as Speaker of the House or President of the Senate.



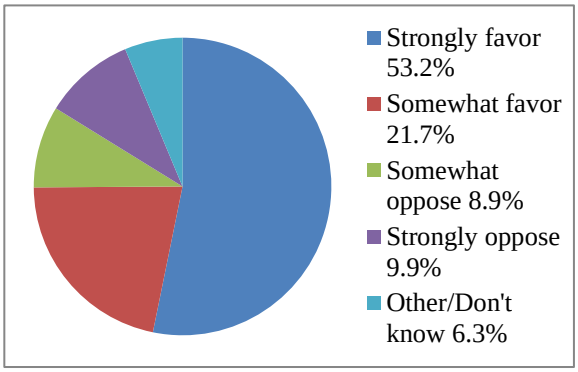
As before, support for leadership term limits was strong across most categories of respondents in our sample.

Support for leadership term limits was only slightly higher among Republicans (85.8% strongly or somewhat favor) and Independents (84.0%) than among Democrats (78.9%).

Similarly, regionally distributed opposition barely reached ten percent anywhere, except in Chicago, where 19.7% either strongly or somewhat opposed leadership term limits.

3. Contribution Limits to Judicial Campaigns

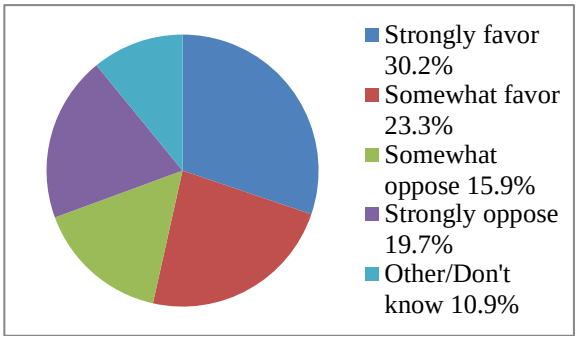
More than half strongly favored and another one in five somewhat favored a proposal to place limits on the amount of money people could contribute to judicial campaigns.



As with the previous reforms, there is little variance among demographic categories, nor, in this case, among partisan groups. The only meaningful difference is in the City of Chicago, where a quarter (25.3%) strongly or somewhat oppose this proposal. Even so, seven in ten (71.6%) strongly or somewhat favor it.

4. Public Funding for Judicial Campaigns

In past Simon Polls, support for public financing of elections in general has garnered more support than opposition, but has not reached a majority, as it has here for judicial elections.



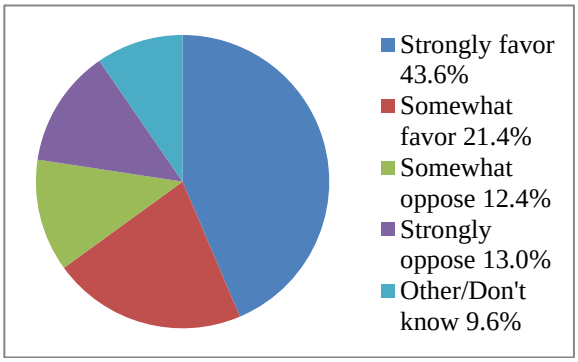
Democrats (56.3%) and Independents (57.9%) were more likely than Republicans (44.7%) to favor or strongly favor publicly financed judicial campaigns.

Respondents in the City of Chicago were more likely to favor public financing (60.5%) than those in the Chicago suburbs (54.1%) or northern/central Illinois (53.0%). Support and opposition were tied (45.3% vs. 45.2%) in southern Illinois.

Support for public funding of judicial campaigns appears to grow a little with respondent education, from 50.0% among those with a high school degree or less to 56.4% among those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

5. Limits on Party Leaders' Campaign Distributions

About two-thirds supported the proposal to limit the amount of campaign money that party leaders can distribute during the general election. A similar proposal limiting campaign distributions in the primary cycle has already become law.

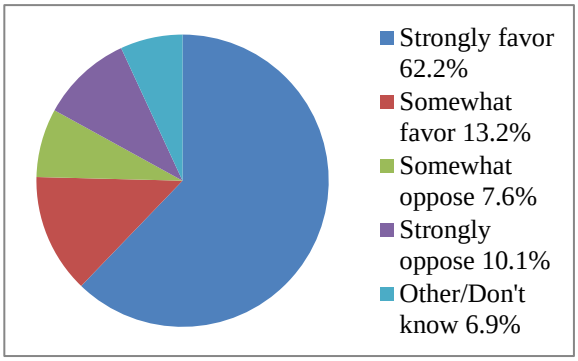


There is little variation by party or by demographic category on the party leader-distribution question.

Though majorities approve of the proposal across geographic categories, opposition is highest in machine-friendly Chicago (31.5% somewhat or strongly oppose) and lower in Southern Illinois (20.4%) and the Chicago suburbs (21.5%).

6. Change to "Secret" Primary Ballot

Voters in our sample overwhelmingly approved of the proposal to change the primary election process so that voters do not have to publicly declare which party's ballot they will choose.



Independent voters particularly liked the idea of not having to declare a party preference (86.3% strongly or somewhat favor), compared with Republicans (71.6%) and Democrats (73.3%).

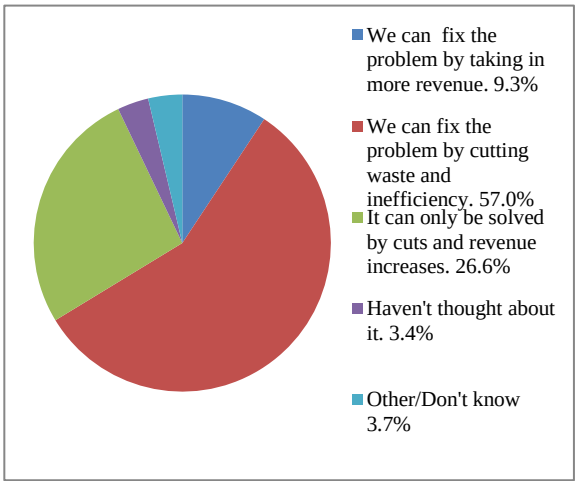
H. BUDGET ISSUES

We repeated the question from 2009 that asked respondents to choose the best of three ways to deal with the budget deficit, as well as a series of ideas for budget cuts and revenue enhancements, most of which date back to the Fall 2008 survey. The item analysis that follows generally will show the "conservative" answer disproportionately going to males, Republicans, and downstaters, and the "liberal" answer more often resting with females, Democrats, City of Chicago and suburban residents, and the college-educated.

1. Statements about How to Fix the Deficit

As in 2009, interviewers read an introductory statement describing Illinois' then-$13 billion deficit and asked them to choose the deficit remedy that was "closest to your view:" that large budget cuts had already taken place and only new revenues could fix the problem; that the state takes in plenty of money and could fix the deficit by eliminating waste and inefficiency; or that the deficit is so large that only a combination of cuts and new revenues could fix the problem.

As demonstrated in the Issue Analysis section earlier in this paper, public opinion on this issue remains virtually unchanged from the previous year's survey—most think eliminating waste and inefficiency can fix the state's budget deficit



The "cut waste and inefficiency" response was highest in southern Illinois (63.5%) and lowest in the City of Chicago (48.8%).

More than two-thirds of Republicans (67.9%) thought the problem could be solved by cutting waste and inefficiency, compared with just half of Democrats (49.0%) and Independents (53.0%)

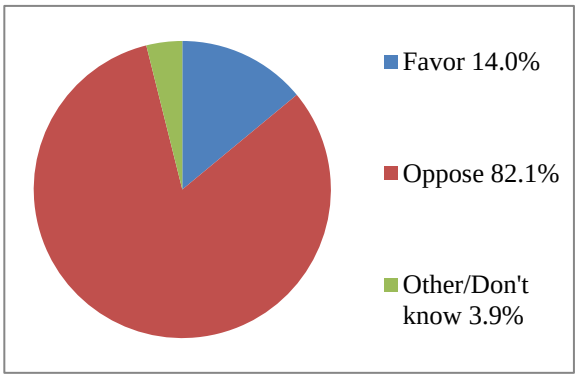
Higher education decreases the likelihood that one thinks the budget could be fixed by cutting waste and inefficiency (49.7% among those with a bachelor's degree or more vs. 62.9% among those with less than a college degree.

2. Cuts in State Spending

We asked respondents whether they would favor or oppose cuts in state spending on K-12 education, state universities, public safety, natural resources, programs for poor people, programs for people with mental or physical disabilities, and pension benefits for state workers.

2a. Cuts in Spending on Kindergarten through High School Education

Only one in seven overall favored cutting state spending on K-12 education, though we saw more willingness to cut here and group variance than we saw last year.

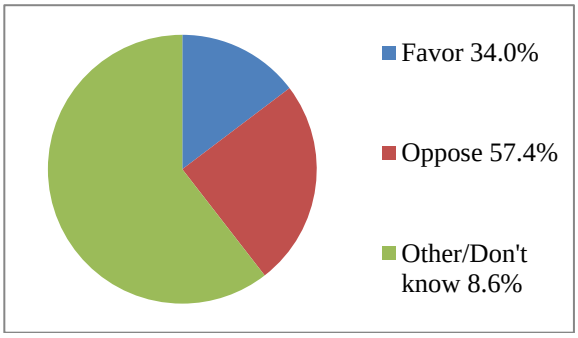


Men were about twice as likely as women to favor cuts to K-12 education (19.8% vs. 10.2%).

Republicans were three times more likely than Democrats to favor cutting kindergarten through high school education (22.2% vs. 7.3%).

2b. Cuts in Spending on Universities

A third favored cuts to spending on state universities, up sharply from the previous year.

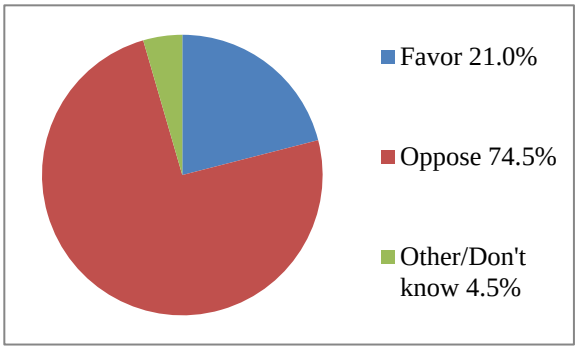


Our neighbors in southern Illinois were significantly more likely than average (at 46.0%) to favor cuts to state universities; almost twice more likely to say so than residents of the City of Chicago (24.1% favor).

Republicans were most likely to favor cuts to state universities, followed by Independents, then Democrats (45.7%, 37.2%, and 24.5%).

2c. Cuts in Spending on Public Safety

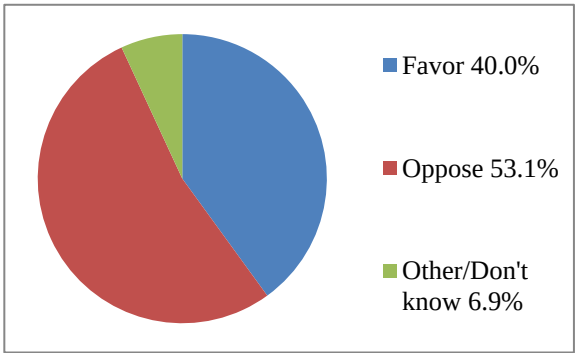
A little over one in five favored cuts to state spending on public safety, such as state police and prison operations.



Chicago residents (28.4%) and southern Illinoisans (26.3%) were in rare agreement, this time as being more likely than Chicago suburbanites (18.4%) and northern and central Illinoisans (18.1%) to favor cuts in spending on public safety.

2d. Cuts in Spending on Natural Resources

Four in ten respondents overall favored cuts in spending on natural resources, such as state parks or environmental regulations.

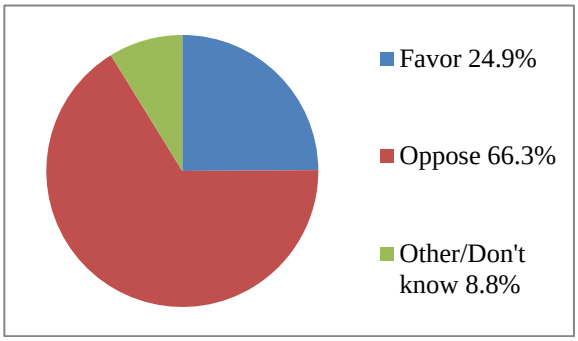


Even though southern Illiniosans are more conservative as a group than those in other parts of the state, it remains surprising to see them—often seen as more likely to be hunters and outdoorsmen—as the group most likely to favor cuts to natural resources (49.6% favor, vs. 27.2% among those in Chicago). It is possible the words "environmental regulations" may have something to do with their support of cuts in this area.

Republicans (48.8%) were more likely to favor cuts to natural resources spending than Independents (41.0%) or Democrats (32.8%).

2e. Cuts in Spending on Programs for Poor People

A quarter of our sample favored cuts in spending on programs for poor people.



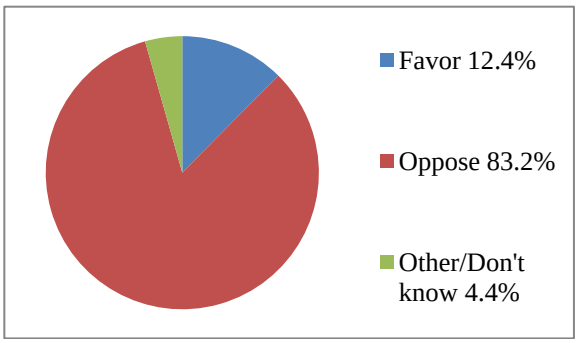
Chicago residents (17.9%) were about half as likely to favor cuts in programs for poor people than were southern Illinoisans (32.8%).

Men, by more than eight percentage points, were more likely than women to favor cuts in programs for the poor (21.6% vs.12.9%).

Republicans, by almost three-to-one, were more likely than Democrats to favor cuts in programs for poor people (39.8% vs. 14.3%).

2f. Cuts in Spending on Programs for People with Disabilities

Only about one respondent in eight favored cuts in spending on programs for people with mental or physical disabilities.

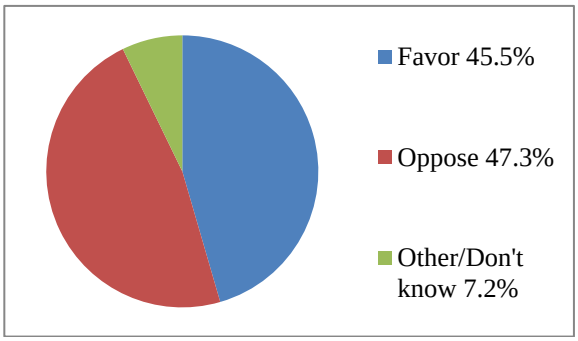


In geographic groups, residents of the Chicago suburbs were least likely to favor cutting programs for people with disabilities (8.2%), while those in southern Illinois were most likely (19.0%).

Republicans were about twice as likely as Democrats to favor spending cuts for programs for the mentally or physically disabled (16.7% vs. 8.7%).

2g. Cuts in Spending on Pension Benefits for State Workers

Along with cuts to programs for natural resources, cuts to state workers' pension benefits is the area that has seen the most movement over the course of the three annual statewide Simon Polls. Respondents to the 2010 survey were as likely to favor pension benefit cuts as to oppose them.



A majority (51.7%) of Chicago suburbanites favored cuts to state workers' pensions, followed closely by respondents in northern and central Illinois (48.6%). Respondents in southern Illinois—which houses a lot of state workers in universities, prisons, schools, and road crews—were somewhat less likely to favor such cuts (41.6%). Only three in ten Chicagoans surveyed (29.0%) favored cutting state workers' pensions.

Men were more likely than women to favor cutting state workers' pension benefits (52.0% vs. 41.3%).

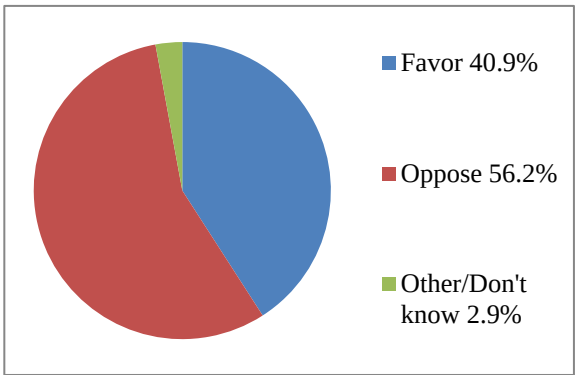
The great majority of Democrats opposed cutting state workers' pensions (60.0%), while a similar percentage of Republicans (58.3%) favored such cuts. A majority of Independents (53.6%) favored cutting state workers' pensions.

3. Proposals for Raising State Revenues

We told respondents there were a number of proposals for raising revenues to address the deficit. We read the list of five proposals and asked them whether they favored or opposed each.

3a. Increasing the State Income Tax Rate from 3 to 4 Percent

The percentage of respondents favoring the income tax increase rose in 2010 to 40.9% from 32.1% in 2009. A majority still opposed the increase, which at this writing is a moot point—the income tax having been temporarily increased to 5 percent.

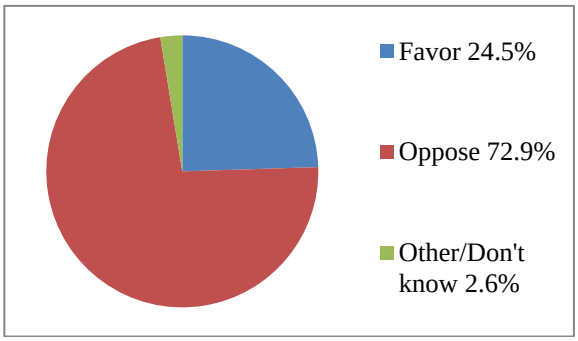


Democrats were more likely than Republicans to favor the income tax increase by 20 points (49.5% to 29.6%), with Independents in between (45.9%).

Having a bachelor's degree significantly raises the likelihood that a respondent will favor the income tax hike (50.6% among the college-educated vs. 32.4% among the high school-educated and 34.2% among those with some college).

3b. Raising the Sales Tax Rate

About a quarter of respondents favored raising the state sales tax rate, up slightly and probably not significantly from the 2009 survey.

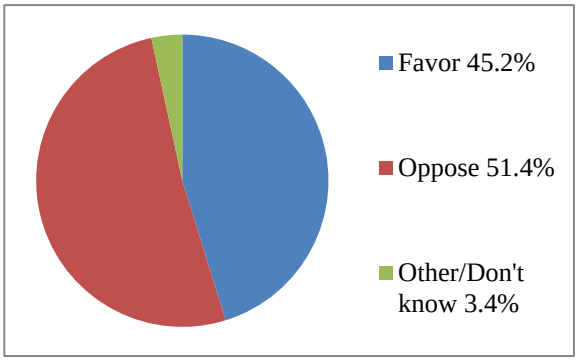


Southern Illinois respondents were most likely to favor increasing the sales tax rate (29.2%). Chicago residents were least likely (17.3%).

Independents were more likely (at 31.7%) to favor a sales tax rate increase than were Democrats (26.9%) or Republicans (19.8%).

3c. Expanding the Sales Tax to Cover Services

We asked respondents whether they would favor or oppose expanding the sales tax to cover services such as dry cleaning or haircuts. Support for this option has increased over the three annual Simon Polls so far.



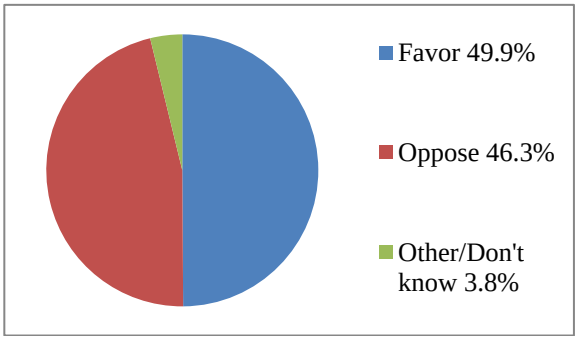
Support for this proposal gains a plurality in Chicago (49.4%), but opposition reaches the majority in the suburbs (54.3%), in northern and central Illinois (50.0%), and in the southern part of the state (54.8%).

Opinion here follows a predictable partisan pattern, with 53.6% of Democrats approving, 47.7% of Independents approving, and just a third (33.8%) of Republicans approving.

A majority of respondents with college degrees support the expansion of the sales tax to cover services (55.3%). Six in ten of those with a high school education (60.0%) or with some college (59.4%) oppose it.

3d. Expanding Legalized Gambling

Opinion on raising state revenue by expanding legalized gambling in the state is essentially split in half.



There is a clear metropolitan vs. downstate split on this question. A majority in Chicagoland favor expansion of legalized gambling (55.6% in the city, 55.3% in the suburbs), while a majority oppose it in northern and central Illinois (51.4%) and in southern Illinois (52.6%).

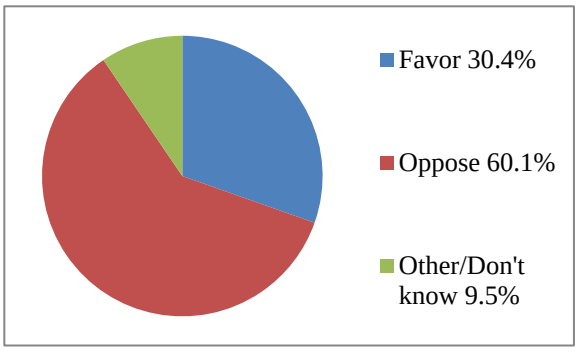
Men were more likely than women to favor expansion of gambling (55.6% vs. 46.2%).

Among educational groups, those with some college were most likely to favor gambling expansion (56.6%), followed by those with bachelor's degrees (49.4%) and then the high school-educated (40.7%).

Most who identified themselves as evangelical or born-again Christians opposed expansion of legalized gambling (55.2%), compared with just 41.5% of Christians who did not describe themselves as evangelical or born-again.

3e. Sale of State Assets to Private Investors

We asked whether respondents would favor or oppose selling state assets such as the Illinois Lottery or toll roads to private investors.



Support for selling state assets across geographic areas didn't vary much, except in the City of Chicago, where opposition was about ten points higher than the overall state percentage (71.6%).

As education rose, so did support for the sale of state assets, though not by much: Only a quarter of those with a high school diploma or less supported it (25.0%), and about a third (32.7%) of those with a bachelor's degree or more were in favor.

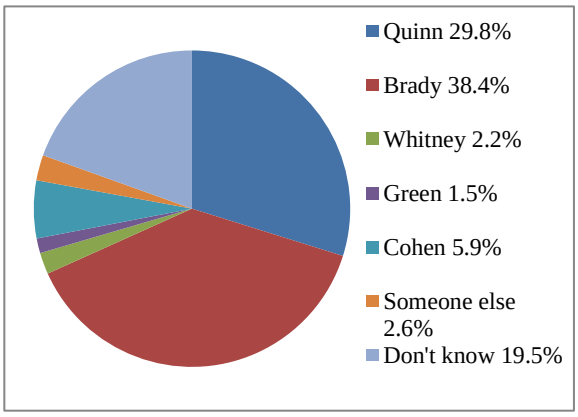
I. THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS

We asked respondents how they would vote for three items on the November ballot, the Illinois governor's race, the race for U.S. Senator from Illinois, and the constitutional amendment that would create a process for recall elections to remove the governor.

In this section we will be reporting results from the subsample of 758 "likely" voters, as described in Section F. 1.

1. Election of the Governor

In the gubernatorial election, Republican challenger Bill Brady held a nine-point lead over Governor Pat Quinn in our poll, consistent with other surveys that showed the narrowing of the race from Brady's double-digit lead over the summer.



By the time our interviewers finished calling two weeks before the election, Quinn had a commanding lead over Brady (53.6% to 16.1%) in the City of Chicago, but he was well behind in every other part of the state—particularly in the southern portion, where Brady led 50.0% to 24.1%).

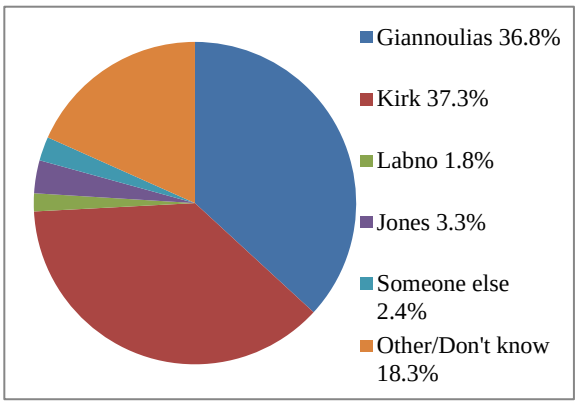
Brady led Quinn among men 47.9% to 26.9%. Among women they were essentially tied: 31.8% for Quinn, 32.0% for Brady.

Among women in the Chicago suburbs, however, Quinn held a six-point lead over Brady (32.6% vs. 26.7%), even while Brady statewide held a nine-point lead. This 15-point swing in a large, important bloc (which probably grew larger in the closing weeks) very likely helped Quinn gain the close-at-the-finish-line win.

Among partisan groups, Brady had higher party cohesion (76.4% of Republicans favored him) than did Quinn (57.0% support among Democrats). Brady had an eight-point lead at the time among Independents (32.6% to 24.6%).

2. Election of U.S. Senator

In the senatorial race, most polling had been showing a virtual tie, with Kirk slightly in the lead. Our likely-voter results were consistent with those polls, showing Republican Congressman Mark Kirk with 37.3%, State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias with 36.8%, 18.3% undecided, and the rest divided among Libertarian Mike Labno and Green Party candidate LeAlan Jones.



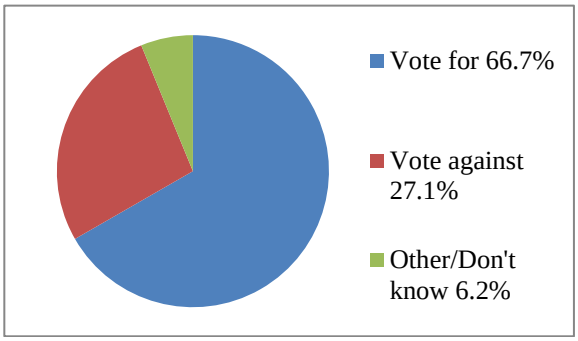
Giannoulias had a big lead over Kirk in the City of Chicago (62.5% vs. 17.9%) and was virtually tied with Kirk in the Chicago suburbs (37.9% vs. 38.3%). Kirk had a 10-point spread over Giannoulias in northern and central Illinois (40.7% to 30.0%) and an even bigger lead in southern Illinois (46.4% to 25.0%).

The gender gap in the Senate race has men favoring Kirk 45.6% to 32.1% and women favoring Giannoulias 40.0% to 31.8%. The gender gap in the Chicago suburbs is bigger. Women favored Giannoulias over Kirk 43.4% to 29.4%.

Examining education groups in our sample, Kirk wins among those with a high school degree or less (41.9% to 30.4%), the two are essentially tied among those with some college (36.7% Kirk, 34.8% Giannoulias), and Giannoulias wins among those with a bachelor's degree or more (41.8% to 35.9%).

3. Vote on Constitutional Amendment for Gubernatorial Recall

The constitutional amendment on the ballot created a procedure for elections to recall the governor. Two-thirds (66.7%) were in favor of the measure and just 27.1% opposed.



The recall measure was popular across Illinois regions, from a low of 58.9% in Chicago to a high of 77.7% in southern Illinois.

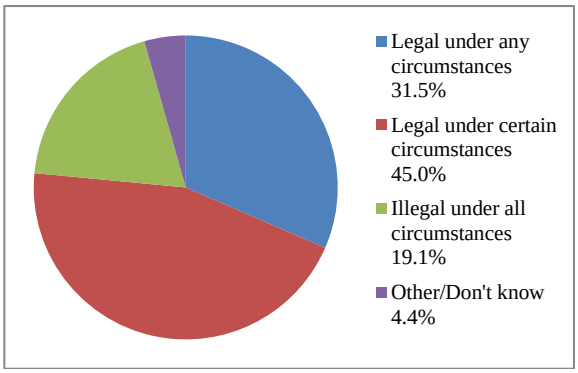
Support was also high across party categories, from 60.6% of Democrats to 68.1% of Independents to 71.2% among Republicans.

J. POSITIONS ON SOCIAL ISSUES

We asked respondents for their positions on the legality of abortion and same-sex marriage, whether they favored or opposed allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military, and whether the death penalty moratorium should be lifted.

1. Abortion

Three-quarters of the Illinois voters we surveyed thought abortion should be legal in at least some circumstances. About one in five thought it should be illegal under all circumstances.



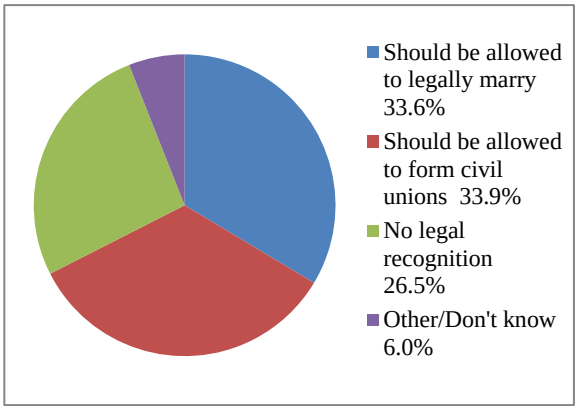
Interestingly, among those who self-identify as born-again Christians, 22.2% say abortion should be legal under any circumstances, and half (51.2%) say it should be legal under certain circumstances. The 22.8% of born-again or evangelical Christians who oppose abortion under all circumstances does not look that different from the 19.1% in the total sample.

The metropolitan/downstate divide is apparent on the abortion question, with full opposition at 10.5% in Chicago and 16.0% in the suburbs, jumping to 23.5% in northern and central Illinois and 24.8% in southern Illinois.

Republicans are more likely to say abortion should be illegal under any circumstances (29.9%) than are Independents (14.2%) or Democrats (11.9%).

2. Same-sex Marriage and Civil Unions

We asked respondents to choose one of three positions on the gay marriage issue: gays and lesbians should be allowed to legally marry; gays and lesbians should be allowed to form civil unions; or there should be no legal recognition of same-sex unions.



In the geographic breakdowns, support for at least civil unions reaches a clear majority everywhere except southern Illinois (51.0% marriage plus civil unions). Opposition to any legal recognition of same-sex unions reached 44.5% in the southern tip of the state. The combined "pro-gay" positions reach the highest level in the Chicago suburbs (78.9%). Support for outright gay marriage is highest in Chicago (43.2%).

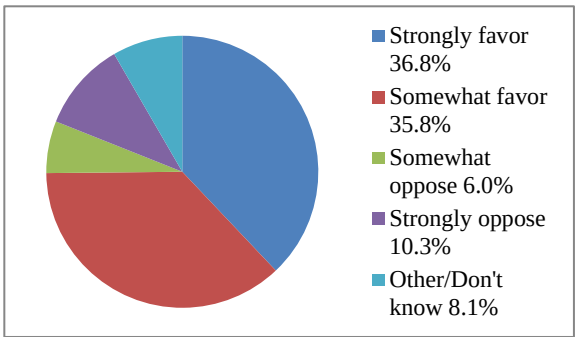
About half of Democrats (48.8%) support full, outright gay marriage, as opposed to just 16% of Republicans, among whom about four in ten (39.2%) oppose any legal recognition of same-sex unions.

Women are a lot more likely than men to support full gay marriage rights (39.0% vs. 17.9%). Men are a lot more likely than women to oppose any legal recognition for same-sex couples (45.1% vs. 18.9%).

Among respondents who self-identify as born-again Christians, 17.9% support same-sex marriage, 31.8% support civil unions (about the same as the total sample's 33.9%), and 45.1% oppose any legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

3. Gays Serving Openly in the Military

We asked respondents whether they favored or opposed allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the military.



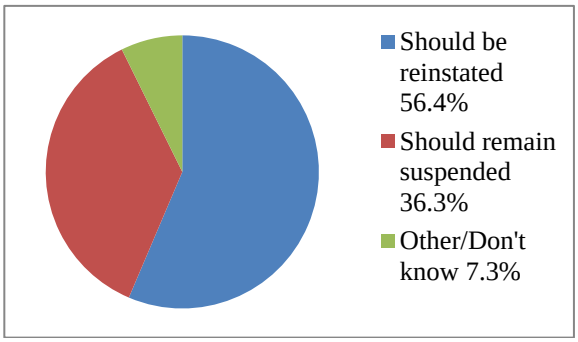
Across the state, most respondents strongly favored or somewhat favored allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military, from a high in the Chicago suburbs (80.1%) to a low in southern Illinois (57.7%).

Among Democrats, 84.6% supported allowing homosexuals to serve openly in the military. Among Republicans, 55.8% thought so. Three-quarters of Independents (75.4%) favored this reform.

Almost two-thirds (63.5%) of born-again and evangelical Christians favored allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military.

4. Reinstating the Death Penalty

Most Illinois voters we spoke with favored reinstating the death penalty from the moratorium imposed by then-Gov. George Ryan. A little over a third thought the death penalty should remain suspended.



Half of urban Chicagoans (50.0%) thought the death penalty should remain suspended. Everywhere else, majorities thought it should be reinstated, from a low of 52.3% in the Chicago suburbs to a high of 70.8% in southern Illinois.

Respondents with bachelor's degrees were more likely by ten points than respondents with no college to say that the death penalty should remain suspended (42.8% vs. 32.9%).

A whopping 69.1% of Republicans want the death penalty reinstated, vs. just 46.6% of Democrats. Most Independents (56.3%) also want it reinstated.

Men were more likely than women to favor the reinstating of the death penalty (64.2% to 51.3%).

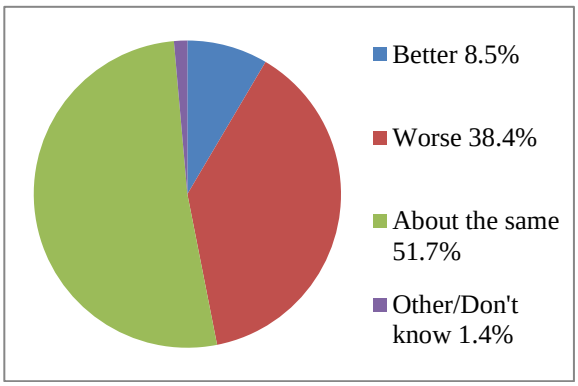
Among respondents who self-identify as born-again Christians, 63.0% say the death penalty should be reinstated, compared with 56.6% of Christians who do not call themselves evangelical or born-again.

K. Economic Situation 'This Year' and 'Next Year'

As a measure of Illinoisans' status in the economic downturn, we asked respondents whether their family's economic situation was better, worse, or about the same as it was the previous year. As a measure of their economic optimism, we asked them whether they expected their family's economic situation next year to be better, worse, or about the same as the present year's.

1. Economic Situation This Year

Almost four in ten said their family's economic situation in the present year was worse than it was in the previous year.



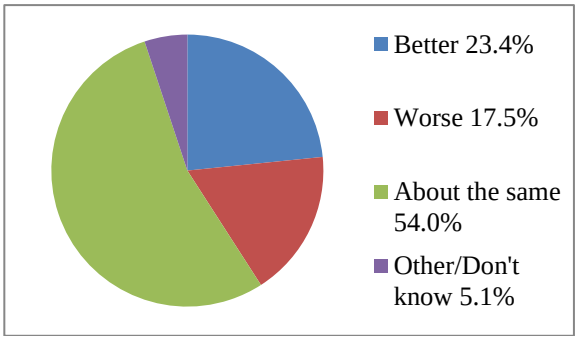
There is not much regional variation here. Those in the Chicago suburbs were most likely to say their economic situation was worse (40.5%). Respondents in southern Illinois were least likely to say so (34.3%).

There is stark if unsurprising variation in the "better off" question by income group. Those with household incomes below $50,000 were most likely to say their family's situation was worse (46.8%), followed by those with incomes between $50,000 and $100,000 (34.4%), and those in households with incomes above $100,000 (27.2%).

Among education groups, those with some college were most likely to say their family's economic situation was worse than a year ago (44.5%), followed by those with a high school degree or less (39.2%), and those with a bachelor's degree or more (33.9%).

3. Economic Situation Next Year

In a nice measure of optimism, respondents were more likely to say they thought their family's economic situation would be better next year than to say they thought it would be worse next year. As before, most thought their situation would be about the same.



Chicago residents were more likely by about ten percentage points than those in other regions (at 32.1%) to say they thought their family's economic situation would be better next year. Those in southern Illinois were most likely to say they thought it would be worse (20.4%).

Democrats were twice as likely as Republicans to say they thought their family's economic situation next year would be better than this year (30.3% vs. 15.7%); conversely, Republicans were twice as likely as Democrats to say they thought things would be worse (22.5% vs. 11.7%).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The 2010 Simon Poll does not offer much comfort to the budget-battle-weary. Most voters continue to oppose cuts in most significant areas of the state budget, and most continue to oppose raising revenues in areas that can bring in the most cash. However, the time series data do show some movement toward favoring cuts in higher education, parks and the environment, and in state employee pensions. On the revenue side there has been movement toward accepting an income-tax hike (now a fait accompli) and an expansion of the sales tax. Other polls have shown majorities favoring an increase in the cigarette tax. It may also be worth exploring the idea of taxing pension income above a certain level.

Voter opinion is probably—slowly—amenable to education from its elected officials and from opinion leaders. Better-off and better-educated voters appear to be more likely to have a grasp of the situation. Perhaps in this window, with more than a year before the next election cycle begins, leadership can begin to make necessary but unpopular decisions.

The dim view voters take of the direction of the State of Illinois provides wind to the sails of reform, if reformers were to steer correctly. Large majorities favor legislative term limits, for example, and limits on the length of leadership terms. These views might well be as much the result of frustration with the political class as they are in the faith of term limits as a solution to our political problems. While the Illinois Constitution makes adoption of these reforms less than likely, elected leadership would do well to heed these results as markers of voter dissatisfaction. Perhaps judicial election reform, more transparency in the redistricting process, and more reasonable campaign spending limits would serve to cool the ire of the electorate.

The Simon Poll continues to demonstrate that we are a divided state. The big Chicago metropolis sees the world very differently than do the small towns and farms from "downstate," whether they are on the Wisconsin, Iowa, or Kentucky borders. Democrats in Illinois see the world very differently than do Republicans—particularly on revenue-cutting and taxation issues. A significant minority of voters in the state agree with and would support Tea-Party-backed political candidates.

Polarization, whether partisan or geographic, makes both coming-together and compromising more difficult, and this at a time when concerted effort and cooperation are more important than ever.

We hope that future statewide Simon Polls find voters happier with the direction of their nation and their state, but we doubt that it will materialize in next year's survey. In the meantime, we are satisfied that the third such poll has been able to demonstrate reliable movement in statewide opinion. We hope that our efforts continue to provide value for students of policy, to journalists, and to policy-makers and elected officials in Illinois and beyond.

Author's Commentary

The budget crisis in Illinois—which was the impetus behind the first in this series of statewide Simon Polls, back in 2008—continues unabated. The two-percentage-point increase in the Illinois income tax passed in January 2011, as unpopular and controversial as it was, was a necessary but insufficient reform for filling the gap between what the state spends and what it takes in.

An underfunded pension system, an underperforming economy, an inability to get a handle on medical costs for which the state is responsible, and myriad other factors require more serious policy change. Slashed budgets for state services are a cold comfort in these times, particularly as programs for the poor, the addicted, for schoolchildren, and the disabled are able to serve fewer and fewer of Illinois' most vulnerable citizens.

It is disconcerting that most Illinoisans continue to think there is so much waste and inefficiency in state government that its elimination could balance the budget. This argument strains credulity. Its adherents have to both greatly overestimate the amount of waste in state spending *and* to greatly underestimate the size of the gap. Of course $13 billion is a hard figure to wrap one's head around. Then again, people hear what they want to hear, and there are plenty of speakers in official positions who push the "cut, cut, cut" mantra, which is far more advantageous to say to voters than to say the more honest "pay the bill for the services you have demanded."

Not only is "bring in more revenue" an unpopular message, but its messengers lack credibility. True, citizens paint with too broad a brush, too quickly making the line from politicians like Rod Blagojevich to the majority of them who labor on principal and for their perception of what is good for the state. However, voters' deep dissatisfaction with the direction of the state is lingering and real. Our state's politicians are saddled with the blame. Voters balk at difficult budget solutions and "shared sacrifice" because they don't believe the politicians are shooting straight with them.

Politicians and reformers should pay attention to the strong and sustained support for meaningful political and electoral reforms that the past three Simon Polls have shown. If our state's leaders want to restore their credibility on budget remedies and other important public policy issues, they should adopt popular reforms that return more power to the hands of the electorate. If they want to keep the term-limit movement at bay, they should embrace redistricting reforms, thereby demonstrating that they trust the voters to pick their leaders, rather than letting the leaders pick their voters. They should limit the ability of litigants and interest groups to influence judicial elections.

If voters are to believe elected leaders when they say we need to pay more or we need to give up important services, their credibility would be enhanced if they were to give up something, too. Giving up special-interest money and backroom deal-making over legislative boundaries would be a good place to start.

Appendix:
The Simon Poll Fall 2010
Questionnaire and Response Frequencies

1. 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	30.2%
Wrong direction	60.1%
Other/Don't know	9.7%

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

Right direction	12.2%
Wrong direction	79.5%
Other/Don't know	8.3%

3. And how are things going in your city or area of the state? In general, are things in your city or area going in the right direction, or are they off track and heading in the wrong direction?

Right direction	45.5%
Wrong direction	41.9%
Other/Don't know	12.6%

4. Taking everything into account, would you say the overall quality of life in your area is…

Excellent	7.8%
Good	37.6%
Average	37.7%
Not so good	11.6%
Poor	5.3%

5. Currently, when the political parties can't agree on a legislative redistricting plan, they end the stalemate by pulling a party's name out of a hat. The winning political party gets to draw the new legislative district map. Do you

Strongly approve	1.8%
Approve	9.9%
Disapprove	40.5%
Strongly disapprove	34.7%
Other/Don't know	13.1%

6. One proposal for improving the state legislative redistricting process would have the Illinois Supreme Court add a neutral person to the redistricting panel in case of a partisan tie.

Strongly favor	19.0%
Favor	48.3%
Oppose	12.6%
Strongly oppose	7.3%
Other/Don't know	12.8%

7. Other people have proposed a constitutional amendment that would have legislative district maps created by a commission that is independent of the elected representatives. The legislature would then vote up or down on the independent commission's redistricting plan.

Strongly favor	13.3%
Favor	40.2%
Oppose	19.5%
Strongly oppose	7.6%
Other/Don't know	19.4%

8. Now I'd like for you to tell me how President Barack Obama is doing his job. Do you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, or strongly disapprove of the job President Obama is doing?

Strongly approve	20.3%
Approve	30.9%
Disapprove	17.0%
Strongly disapprove	29.1%
Other/Don't know	2.7%

9. As you may know, the First Amendment is part of the U.S. Constitution. Can you name any of the specific rights that are guaranteed by the First Amendment?

Freedom of the press	5.1%
Freedom of speech	56.3%
Freedom of religion	3.8%
Right to petition	0.1%
Right of assembly	3.4%
Don't know/Can't name	28.5%
Other	2.8%

10. Which of these statements comes closer to your opinion: On the whole, the mass media in this country*:* try to do a fair and honest job of reporting the news; or are mainly interested in building audiences and don't care how accurately they report the news.

Try to do a fair and honest job	22.3%
Only interested in audiences	68.9%
Other/Don't know	8.8%

11. Overall, do you think the press in America has too much freedom to do what it wants, too little freedom to do what it wants, or is the amount of freedom the press has about right?

Too much	30.1%
Too little	9.5%
About right	52.5%
Other/Don't know	7.9%

12. How much, if anything, have you heard or read about the Tea Party protests that have taken place in the U.S. over the past year?

A lot	45.5%
A little	45.6%
Nothing at all	7.5%
Other/Don't know	1.4%

13 From what you know, do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

Strongly agree	14.3%
Agree	23.6%
Disagree	16.1%
Strongly disagree	19.4%
No opinion	23.3%
Other/Don't know	3.3%

14.Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate that was affiliated with the Tea Party movement?

More likely	30.2%
Less likely	46.0%
Neither (vol)	9.8%
Other/Don't know	14.0%

15. Thinking ahead to November, how certain are you that you will vote? Are you absolutely certain to vote, fairly certain you will vote, or will you probably not vote?

Absolutely certain	81.4%
Fairly certain	14.1%
Probably not vote	3.2%
Other/Don't know	1.3%

16. (Asked of those "absolutely certain" to vote) In some jurisdictions, there is confusion about the location of polling places. What about in your area? Do you know exactly where your polling place is, are you fairly sure, or are you not sure where your polling place is?

Know exactly	93.1%
Fairly sure	4.1%
Not sure	2.3%
Other/Don't know	0.5%

17 If the elections for U.S. Congress were being held TODAY, would you vote for the Republican Party's candidate OR the Democratic Party's candidate for Congress in your district?

Republican	36.5%
Democrat	40.5%
Other/Don't know	23.0%

18. Thinking about the congressional elections that will be held this November, compared to previous elections, are you more enthusiastic about voting than usual, or less enthusiastic?

More enthusiastic	37.6%
Less enthusiastic	35.2%
About the same	24.0%
Other/Don't know	3.2%

We also are interested in your opinions on political reform in Illinois. I'm going to read you some proposals that some people have offered. For each, I'd like you to tell me if you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose that idea. First is (rotate):

19. A proposal to limit how long state legislators could serve. It would limit state representatives to five consecutive two-year terms and state senators to three consecutive four-year terms. Would you…

Strongly favor	57.3%
Somewhat favor	22.7%
Somewhat oppose	7.7%
Strongly oppose	7.1%
Other/Don't know	5.2%

20. A proposal to limit how long legislators could serve in leadership positions—such as Speaker of the House or President of the Senate—before they stepped down to let other legislators lead. Would you…

Strongly favor	57.0%
Somewhat favor	24.3%
Somewhat oppose	6.8%
Strongly oppose	5.3%
Other/Don't know	6.6%

21. A proposal to place limits on the amount that people could contribute to judicial campaigns, such as those for the Illinois Supreme Court. Would you…

Strongly favor	53.2%
Somewhat favor	21.7%
Somewhat oppose	8.9%
Strongly oppose	9.9%
Other/Don't know	6.3%

22. A proposal to eliminate contributions to judicial races by providing public funding for all candidates who qualify for it. Would you…

Strongly favor	30.2%
Somewhat favor	23.3%
Somewhat oppose	15.9%
Strongly oppose	19.7%
Other/Don't know	10.9%

23. A proposal to limit the amount of campaign money that party leaders can redistribute to other candidates in the general election. Would you…

Strongly favor	43.6%
Somewhat favor	21.4%
Somewhat oppose	12.4%
Strongly oppose	13.0%
Other/Don't know	9.6%

24. Currently in Illinois, when voting in a PRIMARY election, the voter has to ask for a specific party's ballot. Would you favor or oppose a proposal to change the primary-election process in Illinois so that voters do not have to publicly declare which party's ballot they have chosen?

Strongly favor	62.2%
Somewhat favor	13.2%
Somewhat oppose	7.6%
Strongly oppose	10.1%
Other/Don't know	6.9%

25. The state of Illinois has a budget deficit of over $13 billion. I'm going to read three statements people have made about how to fix the deficit, and ask you which one comes closest to your views, OK? If you haven't thought much about the issue, just tell me that.

Illinois' public programs and services have already been reduced significantly. We can only fix the problem by taking in more revenue, such as a tax increase.	9.3%
The state takes in plenty of money to pay for public services but wastes it on unnecessary programs. We can fix the problem by cutting waste and inefficiency in government.	57.0%
Illinois' budget problem is so large it can only be solved by a combination of budget cuts and revenue increases.	26.6%
Haven't thought much about it.	3.4%
Other/Don't know	3.7%

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 budget cuts in that area, OK?

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

Favor	14.0%
Oppose	82.1%
Other/Don't know	3.9%

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

Favor	34.0%
Oppose	57.4%
Other/Don't know	8.6%

28. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on public safety, such as state police and prison operations?

Favor	21.0%
Oppose	74.5%
Other/Don't know	4.5%

29. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending or natural resources, such as state parks or environmental regulation?

Favor	40.0%
Oppose	53.1%
Other/Don't know	6.9%

30. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on programs for poor people?

Favor	24.9%
Oppose	66.3%
Other/Don't know	8.8%

31. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on programs for people with mental or physical disabilities?

Favor	12.4%
Oppose	83.2%
Other/Don't know	4.4%

32. Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on pension benefits for state worker's retirement?

Favor	45.5%
Oppose	47.3%
Other/Don't know	7.2%

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 areas where people have suggested that more money could be raised. For each one that I read, I'd like you to tell me whether you favor or oppose raising revenues in that way, OK?

33. Do you favor or oppose raising the state income tax rate from 3 percent to 4 percent?

Favor	40.9%
Oppose	56.2%
Other/Don't know	2.9%

34. Do you favor or oppose raising the state sales tax rate?

Favor	24.5%
Oppose	72.9%
Other/Don't know	2.6%

35a. Do you favor or oppose expanding the sales tax to cover services like dry cleaning or haircuts, which are not currently taxed?

Favor	45.2%
Oppose	51.4%
Other/Don't know	3.4%

35b. Do you favor or oppose expanding the sales tax to cover things like legal work or accounting services, which are not currently taxed?

Favor	38.3%
Oppose	53.6%
Other/Don't know	8.1%

36. Do you favor or oppose a proposal expanding legalized gambling in the state?

Favor	49.9%
Oppose	46.3%
Other/Don't know	3.8%

37. Do you favor or oppose selling state assets, such as the lottery and the Illinois toll road system, to private investors?

Favor	30.4%
Oppose	60.1%
Other/Don't know	9.5%

We are interested in your opinions on the elections to be held next fall for U.S. Senator from Illinois and for the Illinois governor.

38. First, the election for Governor of Illinois…if the election were held today, would you vote for…

Quinn	28.4%
Brady	34.4%
Whitney	3.1%
Green	1.4%
Cohen	6.8%
Someone else	2.7%
Don't know	23.2%

38a. If there were no third parties on the ballot for Governor, would you probably vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate? *(N=113)*

Democrat	36.3%
Republican	28.3%
Would not vote at all	23.9%
Other/Don't know	11.5%

39. Next, the election for the U.S. Senator from Illinois…If the election were held today, would you vote for…

Giannoulias	35.1%
Kirk	33.4%
Labno	1.8%
Jones	4.5%
Someone else	2.4%
Other/Don't know	22.8%

39a. If there were no third parties on the ballot for Senate, would you probably vote for the Democratic or Republican candidate? *(N=63)*

Democrat	28.6%
Republican	33.3%
Would not vote at all	30.2%
Other/Don't know	7.9%

40. There will also be a proposal on the November ballot to amend the state constitution to allow for so-called "recall" elections, in which voters could remove the governor from office before the governor's term was up. If the election were held today, would you vote for/against the recall election amendment?

Vote for	65.0%
Vote against	26.8%
Other/Don't know	8.2%

41. Some have also proposed that the state constitution should be amended to allow for recall elections in which voters could remove any statewide elected officials from office before their term was up. For example, this would apply to such offices as lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, or comptroller. Would you vote for or against the recall amendment for all statewide office holders?

Vote for	66.7%
Vote against	27.1%
Other/Don't know	6.2%

Next, we are interested in your opinion on some social issues. First…

42. Do you think abortions should be legal under all circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?

Legal under any circumstances	31.5%
Legal under certain circumstances	45.0%
Illegal under all circumstances	19.1%
Other/Don't know	4.4%

43. Which of the following three statements comes closest to your position on the legal rights of gay and lesbian couples in Illinois?

Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry	33.6%
Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions, which would give them some legal rights	33.9%
There should be no legal recognition of relationships between gay and lesbian couples	26.5%
Other/Don't know	6.0%

44. All in all, do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military?

Strongly favor	36.8%
Somewhat favor	35.8%
Somewhat oppose	9.0%
Strongly oppose	10.3%
Other/Don't know	8.1%

45. Illinois suspended enforcement of the death penalty in its prisons in the year 2000. Which is closer to the way you think, that the death penalty…?

Should be reinstated	56.4%
Should remain suspended	36.3%
Other/Don't know	7.3%

46. Overall, and speaking generally, would you say your family's economic situation is better than it was a year ago, worse than it was a year ago, or about the same?

Better	8.5%
Worse	38.4%
About the same	51.7%
Other/Don't know	1.4%

47. Overall, and speaking generally, do you expect your family's economic situation next year will be better than it has been this year, worse than it has been this year, or about the same as this year?

Better	23.4%
Worse	17.5%
About the same	54.0%
Other/Don't know	5.1%