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For Immediate Release

Almost One in Ten Illinois Voters Is Without Picture ID

In the wake of Pennsylvania's tough, controversial new voter ID law being halted by a state judge, responses to a recent Paul Simon Public Policy Institute statewide poll show that almost one out of ten – 9.4 percent – of registered voters in Illinois say they do not have “a current, unexpired Illinois-issued ID with your picture on it.”

Many states have laws—some stricter than others—that require voters to present some form of identification at the polls. Proponents of strict voter ID laws say it prevents fraud by ensuring voters are who they say they are. Opponents say it unfairly keeps those without identification, who tend to be poorer and minority voters, away from the polls.

Opponents also say recorded instances of voter fraud are rare, but proponents argue any fraud is too much.

“This is a delicate issue,” said David Yepsen, director of the Simon Institute. “We all want clean elections, yet no one should inadvertently disenfranchise voters either. This poll shows Illinois policy makers need to tread carefully if they want to pursue voter ID laws.”

Illinois voters currently simply sign their names at their polling places. If Illinois were to adopt a “strict” voter ID policy, the Simon Poll results show, roughly one in 11 voters might no longer be able to easily cast their ballot. With roughly 7.3 million registered voters in the state, potentially 685,000 might be effected by such a law—a number almost equal to the population of Will County in suburban Chicago.

The poll of 1,261 registered voters was conducted September 4 - 10. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.77 percentage points.

Some Republicans and conservative groups support voter ID laws, saying if you have to show an ID to cash a check or get on an airplane, you should also have to show one to cast a vote. Many Democrats counter that these are nothing more than turnout suppression efforts designed to reduce Democratic turnout.

Subgroup responses in the Simon Poll show that instances of voters without IDs are higher in groups that tend to vote Democratic. Registered voters with a high school education or less were more likely than average to be without ID (14.6 percent), as were

African Americans (16.2 percent), voters under 35 (13.4 percent) and those with household incomes below \$50,000 (14.0 percent).

In many states with strict voter ID laws, people are not allowed to vote until they have presented their ID. Furthermore, individuals unable to produce an ID are provided with a provisional ballot, kept separate from regular ballots until the individual voter is able to provide acceptable identification. If the voter does not return to provide identification, the ballot is thrown out. Some states require voters to present a photo ID, whereas others only require a form of ID such as a social security card or birth certificate.

Illinois' number is slightly less than the national statistic provided by the Brennan Center for Justice, which estimates that as "many as 10 percent of eligible voters" do not currently have or will be able to get proper identification in order to vote. Illinois is in line with estimates that show Pennsylvania with 9 percent estimates of eligible voters without a picture ID. The Simon Poll's estimate of 9 percent is higher than a recent 7 percent estimate in New Hampshire and a 6.7 percent estimate in Minnesota.

"I doubt this idea goes anywhere in Illinois very soon," Yepsen said. "With Democrats in control of the governorship and both houses of the Legislature, it doesn't stand much of a chance."

Methodology:

The 2012 Simon Poll was taken Sept. 4 -10 and interviewed 1,261 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin for error of plus or minus 2.77 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 2.77 points from the results obtained here. The margin for error will be larger for demographic, geographic and response subgroups.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. Cell phone interviews were included as well as land-line interviews. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute's endowment fund.

Note: The "Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Poll," the "Simon Poll" and the "Southern Illinois Poll" are the copyrighted trademarks of the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use and publication of these polls is encouraged – but only with credit to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIUC.

Table 1
Current State Photo ID

Do you have a current, unexpired Illinois-issued ID with your picture on it, like a driver's license?	
Yes	90.3%
No	9.4%
Other/ Don't know	.3%