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Half See Cuts as Solution to Illinois' Budget Deficits; Little Agreement on Specifics

At a time when public educational institutions, social service providers, and state and local governments are struggling to emerge from Illinois' multi-year budget impasse, half (51 percent) of registered voters say the solution to the state's \$1.5 billion budget deficit is to cut "waste and inefficiency in government." One in ten (10 percent) say the solution is more revenue, and not quite three in ten (28 percent) say the problem requires a combination of revenues and cuts.

This series of questions about the state's budget come from a recent poll by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The Simon Poll® was based on a statewide sample of 1001 registered voters conducted February 19-25. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.1 percent.

While voters consistently believe cutting waste and inefficiency in state government could solve the budget crisis, voters have also consistently been unable to agree on where to cut. When offered a choice of major budget categories from which to cut spending, 29 percent chose higher education, 17 percent chose health and human services, and 6 percent chose K-12 education. The largest response category, however, was a volunteered "none of the above," at 32 percent.

"This year, as in years past, our poll shows the people of Illinois support spending cuts in the abstract, but are reluctant to endorse specific spending cuts. This underscores one of the essential reasons for our state's seemingly intractable budget problems. The people of Illinois seem to be saying, 'Please cut spending, but we have no idea of where to actually cut spending- and stay clear of the programs that we like'" said John Shaw, director of the Paul Simon Institute.

There are some areas in which a majority of voters would support increased revenue, starting with the so-called "millionaire's tax," which would impose an extra 3 percent levy on income over \$1 million, favored by three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents in the sample. Nearly as many (72 percent) would favor a constitutional amendment to allow a graduated income tax, with higher rates for higher earners and lower rates for lower earners.

A slight plurality (49 percent favor, 46 percent oppose) would favor legalized gambling in Illinois to raise state revenues.

Less popular were a sales tax on services (39 percent favor) and a tax on gasoline to fund highway, road, and bridge improvements (42 percent favor).

A recurring idea is for the state to tax retirement income, such as pensions and social security. This idea is widely unpopular, with 74 percent opposing and only 22 percent in favor. However, in a follow-up question in which only retirement income above \$100,000 would be taxed, majorities are in favor. Combining the 22 percent who favored it in the first question with the 52 percent of the 745 initial opponents who would favor it with the exemption, 60 percent of the total sample favor taxing retirement income above \$100,000.

The Paul Simon Institute has been asking the “cuts-versus-income-versus-both” budget question since 2009. From 2011 to 2015, the percentage of voters believing that cuts were the answer to the problem dropped more than 15 percentage points, from 58 percent to 42 percent (Figure 1). That number has since flattened, and jumped to 51 percent favoring cuts in the latest poll.

“This is a perplexing phenomenon in Illinois public opinion,” said Charlie Leonard, an Institute visiting professor and one of the directors of the poll. “After more than a decade of cuts to public budgets, people can’t let go of the idea that there is \$1.5 billion in waste to cut. We have written about this extensively before, but the persistent belief in cutting ‘waste,’ coupled with the inability to agree on solutions, means we’ll probably still be writing about it in the future.”

(See Simon Review paper *The Climate of Opinion in Illinois 2008 – 2016: Roots of Gridlock* http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi_papers/47/)

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The margin of error of the entire sample of 1,001 voters is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the population proportion would be within plus or minus the reported margin of error for each subsample. For subsamples, the margin of error increases as the sample size goes down. The margin of error was not adjusted for design effects. Among self-identified primary election voters, the margin is plus or minus 6 percentage points in the 259-voter sample of Republicans, and 4.5 percentage points in the sample of 472 Democrats.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas using the random digit dialing method. The telephone sample was provided to Customer Research International by Scientific Telephone Samples. Potential interviewees were screened based on whether they were registered voters and quotas based on area code and sex (<60% female). The sample obtained 51% male and 49% female respondents. Interviewers asked to speak to the youngest registered voter at home at the time of the call. Cell phone interviews accounted for 60 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available.

Field work was conducted from February 19 through February 25. No auto-dial or “robo” polling is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund. The data were not weighted in

any way. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute's polling web site, simonpoll.org.

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute is a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative. AAPOR works to encourage objective survey standards for practice and disclosure. Membership in the Transparency Initiative reflects a pledge to practice transparency in reporting survey-based findings.

The Institute's polling data are also archived by four academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The four open source data repositories are: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (<http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/>), The University of Michigan's Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (<http://openicpsr.org>), the University of North Carolina's Odum Institute Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

Note: 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 SIU Carbondale.

Frequency Tables¹ **BUDGET SOLUTION**

The state of Illinois has a budget deficit of over 1.5 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. If you haven't thought much about this 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.*
- *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.*
- *Illinois' budget problem is so large it can only be solved by a combination of budget cuts and revenue increases.*
- *Haven't thought much about it.*

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Revenues	10%
Cuts	51%
Both cuts and revenues	28%
Haven't thought much	6%
Other/Don't know (not read)	5%

CUTS

Education and HHS

Since 85 percent of the state's budget is made up of K-12 education, higher education, and health and human services, which one of these areas should be cut to make up the difference?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
K-12	6%
Higher education	29%
Health and human services	17%
All of the above (<i>not read</i>)	3%
None of the above (<i>not read</i>)	32%
Other/Don't know	13%

¹ Values are rounded and may not sum to 100 percent.

REVENUES

Expand Gambling

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

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Favor	49%
<i>Strongly favor</i>	23%
<i>Favor</i>	26%
Oppose	46%
<i>Oppose</i>	18%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	28%
Other/Don't know	6%

Tax Retirement Income

Do you favor or oppose applying the state income tax to retirement income, such as pensions and Social Security?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Favor	22%
<i>Strongly favor</i>	11%
<i>Favor</i>	10%
Oppose	74%
<i>Oppose</i>	16%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	59%
Other/Don't know	4%

Tax Retirement Income – Exempt \$100,000

Would you favor or oppose applying the state income tax to retirement income if it exempted from taxes the first \$100,000 earned per year?²

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Favor	60%
<i>Strongly favor</i>	28%
<i>Favor</i>	32%
Oppose	32%
<i>Oppose</i>	12%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	20%
Other/Don't know	8%

Millionaire Tax

Do you favor or oppose a proposal to impose an extra 3 percent state tax on all income above \$1 million a year?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Favor	76%
<i>Strongly favor</i>	57%
<i>Favor</i>	19%
Oppose	21%
<i>Oppose</i>	9%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	13%
Other/Don't know	3%

² This is the net approval combined with those that favor taxing retirement income generally without any caveat.

Tax Services

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

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Favor	39%
<i>Strongly favor</i>	13%
<i>Favor</i>	25%
Oppose	58%
<i>Oppose</i>	22%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	36%
Other/Don't know	3%

Graduated Income Tax

Would you favor or oppose a proposal to change the Illinois Constitution to allow a graduated income tax – that is, tax rates would be lower for lower-income taxpayers and higher for upper-income taxpayers?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Favor	72%
<i>Strongly favor</i>	47%
<i>Favor</i>	24%
Oppose	24%
<i>Oppose</i>	8%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	16%
Other/Don't know	4%

Gas Tax

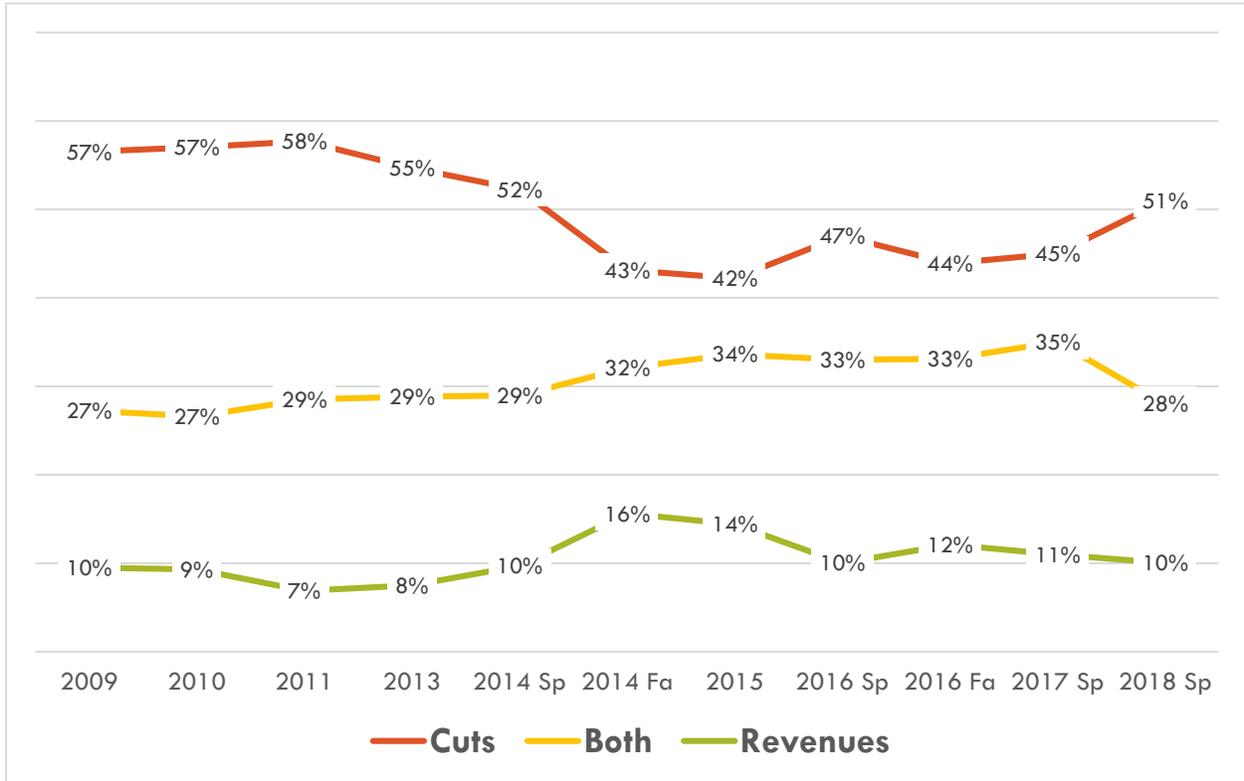
Would you favor or oppose a proposal to raise the state gasoline tax to fund improvements to Illinois highways, roads, and bridges?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Favor	42%
<i>Strongly favor</i>	16%
<i>Favor</i>	26%
Oppose	57%
<i>Oppose</i>	16%
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	41%
Other/Don't know	1%

Figure 1
Demographic Crosstabs and Historical Trends

BUDGET SOLUTION

Historical Trend



By AREA

	Chicago City	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Revenues	13%	10%	10%
Cuts	46%	48%	60%
Both	30%	30%	21%
Haven't thought	7%	7%	6%
Other/Don't know	5%	6%	4%

By PARTY

	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Revenues	39%	53%	70%
Cuts	17%	5%	2%
Both	31%	34%	22%

Haven't thought	8%	3%	3%
Other/Don't know	5%	5%	3%

Figure 2

REVENUES

Historical Trends

