



**Paul Simon
Public Policy Institute**

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Southern Illinois Voters Cool Toward Chicagoans

Most southern Illinois registered voters feel good about themselves as a group, though their feelings toward people from Chicago are on the cool side, according to the latest release of the Southern Illinois Poll from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute.

Like voters in the rest of the country, southern Illinoisans take a dim view of the United States Congress, though their feelings toward the U.S. Supreme Court are more positive.

Attitudes toward African Americans yielded conflicting findings on this sensitive and complicated topic of race.

Using a question construction that political scientists call a “feeling thermometer,” the poll asked respondents to describe their feelings toward groups or institutions on a 100-point scale, with ratings between zero and 49 representing “cool” feelings, a rating of 50 describing a “neutral” feeling, and ratings between 51 and 100 describing “warm” feelings.

“While our results confirm our assumptions that voters in the 18 southernmost counties of Illinois are more Republican and more conservative than voters in the rest of the state, the picture is more complicated than that,” said Dr. Charles Leonard, the visiting professor at the Institute who supervised the poll.

“For example, the region has a long tradition of union membership in mining, manufacturing, and the trades, and four of ten voters here give warm ratings to unions. The average rating for unions is a relatively warm 53.3, which you might not expect in an electorate in which most partisan identifiers call themselves Republican,” he said.

It was not surprising to see that half gave warm ratings to the National Rifle Association, and that the average rating was 65.1, Leonard said. “In an area with low population density, Republican leanings, and a strong hunting tradition, you’d expect the NRA to be warmly regarded.”

Not surprisingly, given low approval ratings in survey after survey nationwide, the United States Congress fared poorly among southern Illinois voters. Fewer than one in five (19 percent) gave it

warm ratings. By contrast, more than four in ten (43 percent) gave warm ratings to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Unsurprisingly, we like ourselves. “People from southern Illinois” garnered warm responses from three-quarters (78 percent) of those surveyed. Area voters similarly felt warmly toward Southern Illinois University, with a positive response from seven in ten (70 percent).

According to an earlier question in the Southern Illinois Poll, 81 percent feel their area does not get its fair share of state spending. Southern Illinois voters may direct some of this resentment toward “People from Chicago,” as reflected in one feeling thermometer question. Only 17 percent gave ratings in the warm range to “People from Chicago.”

The survey also asked southern Illinois voters what they thought of racial discrimination in the country today. A little over half (53 percent) thought there was a lot or some discrimination limiting black people’s ability to get ahead. About four in ten (42 percent) thought there was just a little or none at all. This looks very much like results of national surveys when asking about racial discrimination, Leonard said.

Group feelings toward race

Part of the mission of Paul Simon Public Policy Institute polls is to give graduate students experience in public opinion research and to allow them to include questions on the surveys that will help them advance their thesis and dissertation work. A series of questions on southern Illinois voters’ feelings toward African-Americans was included in the Southern Illinois Poll for this purpose.

Interviewers asked respondents where members of various groups might place black people on the feeling thermometer scale, and then where the respondent himself or herself might place blacks on that scale.

Respondents were most likely to say positive ratings of African-Americans would come from “Proud supporters of Barack Obama,” with 65 percent ascribing warm ratings to them. Voters in our survey were least likely to think positive feelings would come from “Members of an exclusive country club.” Only 17 percent thought members of this group would give a warm response to African Americans.

Interestingly, this series produced virtually no difference between “People from southern Illinois” and “People from Chicago” on the perceived feeling thermometer ratings toward black people. Just over half (51%) of southern Illinois respondents said “People from southern Illinois” would give a warm rating toward blacks. A statistically similar percentage (54%) thought “People from Chicago” would give a warm rating.

“Racial attitudes have always been hard to measure with public opinion surveys,” said Leonard. “This series of questions attempts to get at respondents’ attitudes in a roundabout way, asking them what other groups think about black people before asking the respondents themselves where they would place black people on the feeling thermometer scale.”

“The results yield a clear difference between Obama supporters and exclusive country club members,” Leonard said, “but not between ‘People from Chicago’—who themselves received negative ratings from most of our respondents—and ‘People from southern Illinois.’”

The warmest rating toward African-Americans came when interviewers asked, “And what about you? Where on a feeling thermometer would you rate blacks?” Three-fourths (77 percent) gave a rating higher than 50, with an average rating of 78.1 on the hundred-point scale.

“This shows how tricky it is to poll on racial attitudes,” Leonard said. “Six in ten respondents in our poll gave negative ratings to President Obama, yet individual respondents’ ratings toward black people are a lot higher than the ratings they ascribe to ‘Proud supporters of Barack Obama’? I think this shows people going out of their way to give a socially acceptable response.”

The poll of 401 registered voters in the 18-county area of southernmost Illinois was taken April 5 to 13 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.9 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The margin for error will be larger for subgroups. The interviews were conducted for the Institute by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. It reports no Illinois political figures as clients and was paid with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund.

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**Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
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**Poll Results of Registered Voters in Southern Illinois
Conducted April 5-13, 2010
Released May 4, 2010**

**Southern Illinois Voters' Views of Groups and Institutions
"Feeling Thermometer" Ratings**

"I'd like to get your feelings toward some groups in the news these days. I'll read the name of a group and I'd like you to rate that group using something we call the feeling thermometer. The feeling thermometer can rate things from 0 to 100 degrees. Ratings closer to 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the group. Ratings closer to 0 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward them. Rating the group at the 50 degree mark means you don't feel particularly warm or cold."

Feelings toward Institution or Group	% 0-49 "Cool"	%50 "Neutral"	%51-100 "Warm"	Mean Rating
The United States Congress	54%	27%	19%	36.4
The U.S. Supreme Court	21%	35%	43%	56.5
Southern Illinois University	8%	22%	70%	69.9
People from Southern Illinois	3%	20%	78%	78.7
People from Chicago	49%	34%	17%	38.8
Labor Unions	31%	28%	41%	53.3
The National Rifle Association	16%	27%	57%	65.1

"Next, we want to know how you think *other people* would answer a feeling thermometer question toward blacks or African-Americans."

Group/Individual Feelings Toward Blacks	% 0-49 "Cool"	%50 "Neutral"	%51-100 "Warm"	Mean Rating
People from Southern Illinois	14%	35%	51%	61.2
People from Chicago	16%	30%	54%	62.3
Members of an Exclusive Country Club	45%	38%	17%	41.5
Proud Supporters of Barack Obama	16%	19%	65%	68.6

Where on a feeling thermometer would you rate blacks?

4% 19% 77% 78.1

“How much discrimination against blacks do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead?”

A lot	10%
Some	43%
Just a little	30%
None at all	12%
Other/Don't know	5%

**Some columns do not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.*