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Southern Illinois Poll Shows Santorum Ahead of Romney; Majority in the Area Still Dissatisfied with Direction of Nation and State

Republican primary voters in southern Illinois favor former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum over former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney 29 percent to 21 percent, according to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute's latest Southern Illinois Poll.

The survey, conducted last week, also shows former US House Speaker Newt Gingrich as the choice of 11 percent of GOP primary voters, while Texas Congressman Ron Paul drew 6 percent.

The "front-runner" among area voters is "undecided." A plurality of southern Illinois Republicans – 30 percent – said they were undecided, and 4 percent chose "other."

This is the third annual Southern Illinois Poll conducted by the Institute, located at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

In the survey of 400 registered voters from Illinois' southernmost 18 counties, conducted February 23 – 28, before the March 6 "Super Tuesday" contests, about a third of respondents (32 percent) said they would vote in the Republican primary, another third (33 percent) said they would vote in the Democratic primary, and the other third (35 percent) said they were either unsure or were unlikely to vote.

"This is an interesting result, and consistent with what we see in the volatile Republican primary in the rest of the country," said Simon Institute Director David Yepsen. "About one in five supported Romney, and three in ten supported Santorum—the current leading 'not-Romney.'"

Another way to look at the results is that among those with an opinion, 46 percent wanted someone other than Romney. Another 30 percent were undecided just a few weeks out from the Illinois primary.

Charles Leonard, a visiting professor at the Institute who supervised the poll, said "We should remind people not to over-interpret these results, taken as they are from a relatively small

subsample of voters in our survey, which was conducted in Illinois' least populous region. It's suggestive, perhaps, but not conclusive."

In another finding, the poll also showed voters in southern Illinois with a negative view of the direction of both the nation and the state. A little less than one in five voters (19 percent) thought the country was headed in the right direction, while three-fourths (75 percent) thought things were off track and headed in the wrong direction.

As has been the pattern in Simon Institute polling, the numbers were even worse regarding the direction of the state. Only about one southern Illinois voter in 12 (8 percent) thought things in the state were headed in the right direction, while the vast majority (83 percent) said things were headed in the wrong direction.

Voters in the Southern Illinois survey were more optimistic about the direction of things in their city or their area of the state; half (50 percent) thought things in their part of the state were going in the right direction, while four in ten (40 percent) thought things were headed in the wrong direction.

"This continued pattern of greater voter pessimism at the state level than at the national level demonstrates just how grim citizens' view of Illinois politics really is," said Leonard. "In most surveys in most places, the closer you get to home, the higher the 'right direction' responses should be. Since our first statewide Simon Poll in 2008, pessimism about the direction of the state has always been worse than voters' already-dim view of the direction of the country."

The poll of 400 registered voters came from the 18 southernmost counties in Illinois: Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, Washington, White, and Williamson. Live phone interviews were conducted February 23 – 28. The sample of 400 has a margin of error of ± 4.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the result would be within plus or minus 4.9 percentage points from the results obtained here.

The interviews were conducted by Issues + Answers of Virginia Beach, VA. It reports no Illinois political figures as clients. The poll was paid for with non-state dollars from the Institute's endowment fund.

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For more information, contact:

Charles Leonard, Visiting Professor and Polling Director,
Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Cell phone 618-303-9099

John Jackson, Visiting Professor, Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Office phone 618-453-3106

J. Tobin Grant, Associate Professor of Political Science
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Cell phone 618-559-2215

David Yepsen, Director, Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Cell phone 618-559-5854

Table 1 – Party Primary

As you may know, primary elections in Illinois will be held this March. Thinking ahead, are you likely to vote in the Democratic/Republican primary or will you probably not vote in the primary elections?

Republican	32.0%
Democratic	33.0%
Probably not vote	17.3%
Don't know	17.8%

Table 2 – Republican Primary Vote

And if the Republican primary for president was being held today, would you vote for...?

Mitt Romney	21.1%
Ron Paul	5.5%
Newt Gingrich	10.9%
Rick Santorum	28.9%
Someone else	3.9%
Don't know	29.7%
<i>N=128</i>	

Table 3 – Direction of Nation, State, and Area

First we would like to know what you think about the direction of the United States of America. 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	18.8%
Wrong direction	74.5%
Other/Don't know	6.8%

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

Right direction	8.0%
Wrong direction	83.3%
Other/Don't know	8.8%

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	50.3%
Wrong direction	40.3%
Other/Don't know	9.5%