



**Paul Simon
Public Policy Institute**

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Simon Institute Poll: Broad Support for Political and Electoral Reform In Illinois

Large majorities of Illinoisans are in favor of electoral and political reform measures similar to those proposed last spring by the Illinois Reform Commission, according to the latest statewide poll by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

“These results portray an Illinois public that embraces political and electoral reform very nearly across the board,” said Charles Leonard, the Simon Institute visiting professor who directed the survey. “These are proposals that are very difficult for elected officials to impose upon themselves, and the voters appear to believe that they need to do it themselves through the initiative and referendum process.”

David Yepsen, the director of the institute, said the result should give encouragement to legislators and others who want to change political and legislative practices in the state.

“People want change in Illinois, not half measures and fig leaves designed to cover up problems or look good on campaign brochures,” he said.

Both legislators and leaders of reform groups should be interested in the results of the poll, he said. “Reform groups should take these results as meaning they need to give serious consideration to using the initiative process to act if lawmakers fail to do so,” Yepsen said.

Highlights of the poll are:

*Nearly two thirds (65.4%) of registered voters in the Simon Institute poll said they favored one proposal that has been a sticking point for campaign finance reform in Springfield: to limit the amount of campaign money that party leaders can redistribute to candidates in legislative races.

*More than seven in ten voters surveyed said they favored a proposal to make Illinois campaign contribution limits match those at the federal level.

*More than three-fourths favored the idea of imposing legislative leadership term limits.

* More 70 percent favored proposals to limit in-kind political contributions.

*In the only question to repeat from last year’s poll, more than seven in ten (72.4%) favored a proposal to amend the state constitution to allow recall elections of all statewide officeholders, up from 65.4% in the 2008 Simon Institute survey.

*In separate questions, fewer than one in five voters surveyed said they approved of Illinois’ current redistricting process, in which partisan stalemates over competing redistricting maps are settled essentially by a coin flip, while more than seven in ten said they favored a proposal to have the Illinois Supreme Court add a neutral member to the redistricting panel in case of a partisan tie.

*By a margin of more than five to one, survey respondents said political reform should come about as a result of a public vote (64.8%) rather than through legislative action (12.5%).

*A plurality of registered Illinois voters (49.4%) favors public funding of legislative campaigns. There are 38.5 percent who oppose that idea and 12 percent who don't know.

*Nearly two-thirds said they favored a proposal to prohibit campaign contributions from companies seeking to do business with the state.

“This year’s survey reflects an electorate that is pessimistic about the direction of their state,” Leonard said. “Support for reform is strong, and it appears—at least in the one reform question that was repeated from last year’s survey—that it is growing. A look at the numbers reveals that favorability toward various reforms is not a knee-jerk reaction to every proposal. For example, just under half said they supported public financing of elections, while more than three-fourths support leadership term limits. I believe the voters are engaged, and that they understand some of the subtleties to a degree some might find surprising.”

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute created, directed and financed this telephone survey of 800 registered voters across the state of Illinois. Interviews were conducted between September 9, 2009, and October 8, 2009, by the Survey Research Center at the University of North Texas. Respondents were chosen at random, and each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. Results from the entire sample have a statistical margin for error of ± 3.4 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 3.4 points from the results obtained here. The margin for error will be larger for demographic, geographic, and response subgroups.

The non-partisan survey is paid for by the Simon Institute and is done to help Illinois policymakers, leaders and academic researchers better understand public opinion on key questions. This is the second year the institute has done the survey.

**Voter Support for Electoral and Political Reforms:
Results from 2009 Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Survey**

Reform Proposal	% Favor/ Strong Favor	% Oppose/ Strong Oppose	%DK/ NA
A proposal to prohibit companies that seek business with the state of Illinois from making campaign contributions to state legislative campaigns	64.1%	29.6%	6.4%
A proposal to amend the constitution to allow recall elections for holders of statewide elected offices—such as governor or lieutenant governor. That is, the people could vote at any time to remove an elected official from office rather than waiting until the next election	72.4%	23.4%	4.3%
A proposal to limit the amount of campaign money that party leaders can redistribute to other candidates	65.4%	23.9%	10.8%
A proposal to limit “in-kind” contributions to state legislative campaigns. In-kind contributions are goods or services, such as office space, printing, or buying advertising on behalf of a candidate. Currently there are limits on how much cash people can contribute, but not on in-kind contributions	71.6%	19.5%	8.9%
A proposal to impose campaign contribution limits for Illinois offices that match the contribution limits for federal offices	70.3%	14.7%	15.1%
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	77.6%	14.7%	7.8%
A proposal to eliminate contributions to state legislative campaigns by providing public funding for all candidates who qualify for it	49.4%	38.5%	12.1%
Currently, when the political parties can’t agree on a 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 (% “Approve/Disapprove”)	17.0%	71.4%	11.6%
A new proposal for the redistricting process would have the Illinois Supreme Court add a neutral person to the redistricting panel in case of a partisan tie.	72.9%	17.8%	9.4%

**Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University Carbondale**

**Poll Results of Registered Voters in Illinois
Conducted September 8-October 9**

Released October 19, 2009

We'd like to know what you think about some public policy questions that are being talked about in Illinois.

1. First, a proposal to prohibit companies that seek business with the state of Illinois from making campaign contributions to state legislative campaigns. Would you say you:

Strongly favor	36.8%
Favor	27.3%
Oppose	20.1%
Strongly oppose	9.5%
No opinion/Don't know	6.4%

2. A proposal to amend the constitution to allow recall elections for holders of statewide elected offices—such as governor or lieutenant governor. That is, the people could vote at any time to remove an elected official from office rather than waiting until the next election. Would you say you:

Strongly favor	34.9%
Favor	37.5%
Oppose	18.0%
Strongly oppose	5.4%
No opinion/Don't know	4.3%

3. A proposal to limit the amount of campaign money that party leaders can redistribute to other candidates. Would you say you:

Strongly favor	31.5%
Favor	33.9%
Oppose	18.6%
Strongly oppose	5.3%
No opinion/Don't know	10.8%

4. A proposal to limit “in-kind” contributions to state legislative campaigns? In-kind contributions are goods or services, such as office space, printing, or buying advertising on behalf of a candidate. Currently there are limits on how much cash people can contribute, but not on in-kind contributions. Would you say you:

Strongly favor	32.1%
Favor	39.5%
Oppose	14.5%
Strongly oppose	5.0%
No opinion/Don't know	8.9%

5. A proposal to impose campaign contribution limits for Illinois offices that match the contribution limits for federal offices. Would you say you:

Strongly favor	27.8%
Favor	42.5%
Oppose	10.9%
Strongly oppose	3.8%
No opinion/Don't know	15.1%

6. 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 say you:

Strongly favor	38.0%
Favor	39.6%
Oppose	10.8%
Strongly oppose	3.9%
No opinion/Don't know	7.8%

7. A proposal to eliminate contributions to state legislative campaigns by providing public funding for all candidates who qualify for it. Would you say you:

Strongly favor	15.6%
Favor	33.8%
Oppose	27.9%
Strongly oppose	10.6%
No opinion/Don't know	12.1%

Next are a couple of questions about legislative redistricting in Illinois.

8. Currently, when the political parties can't agree on a 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	1.6%
Approve	15.4%
Disapprove	43.6%
Strongly disapprove	27.8%
No opinion/Don't know	11.6%

9. A new proposal for the redistricting process would have the Illinois Supreme Court add a neutral person to the redistricting panel in case of a partisan tie. Would you say you:

Strongly favor	19.3%
Favor	53.6%
Oppose	13.0%
Strongly oppose	4.8%
No opinion/Don't know	9.4%

10. Next I'd like to ask you whether the best way to reform Illinois politics is through a public vote in a referendum—or through action by the legislature. Which is closer to the way you feel? That:

Legislative action should reform Illinois politics	12.5%
The public should vote on political reforms in a referendum	64.8%
Haven't heard enough about it to have an opinion	18.9%
No opinion/Don't know	3.9%

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

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Note: Edited on Oct. 20, 2009, to correct erroneously identifying adding a neutral member to the redistricting panel as the Simon institute's recommendation.