



**Paul Simon
Public Policy Institute**

Southern Illinois University Carbondale



Simon Institute Poll

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute

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ILLINOIS VOTERS UNSURE OF FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS

Roughly 30 percent of Illinois' registered voters are unable to name any of the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, according to a poll conducted this fall by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute.

Another 40 percent of the participants were able to name one of the five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment. The remaining 30 percent were able to name at least two of the freedoms.

Participants were asked to name one of the rights outlined in the First Amendment. Of the nearly 70 percent able to do so, 30 percent successfully named a second right.

“The polling gives us an idea of the attitudes of the citizens of Illinois toward First Amendment freedoms,” said Visiting Institute professor William H. Freivogel, who covered the U.S. Supreme Court for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and is a member of the Missouri Bar Association.

The statewide poll of 1,000 registered voters was taken September 30 through October 10, 2010 and has a margin of error of 3.5 percentage points.

Illinois' numbers match-up with the national average, according to a comparison between the Institute's poll results and a recent survey conducted by First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. The center found 33 percent of Americans cannot name a First Amendment right.

Institute polling further showed how Illinoisans feel about the mass media. While nearly 69 percent believe the media is only interested in its audience, 22.3 percent said the media tries to do a fair and honest job.

Additionally, 52.5 percent said the media has an appropriate amount of freedoms while 30.1 percent said it has too much. Less than 10 percent said the media does not have enough freedom.

Surveying First Amendment awareness in Illinois was the first of many projects the Institute and the SIUC School of Journalism plan to undertake through a grant made possible by the Liberty Tree Initiative. Sponsoring conferences at public institutions across the country, the goal of

Liberty Tree Initiative is to call attention to difficult issues surrounding free speech. Freivogel said such issues include anonymous negative postings on social media Web sites.

“As director of the School of Journalism at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, I believe that our campus and our school are ideal for a Liberty Tree Initiative conference in the spring of 2011, he said. “The conference will be aimed at the academic community but will also be open to the broader community.”

The mission of the non-partisan Paul Simon Public Policy Institute polling is to provide citizens, policy-makers and academic researchers with objective information about trends and issues facing society.

Telephone interviews for the poll were conducted by Issues & Answers Global Media Research of Virginia Beach, VA. It reports no Illinois political clients and was paid with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund.

Political scientist Dr. Charles Leonard directs polling for the Institute. He is assisted by Drs. John Jackson and J. Tobin Grant, also political scientists.

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**Poll Results of Likely Voters in Illinois
Conducted September 30-October 10, 2010
*Released December 22, 2010***

1. As you may know, the First Amendment is part of the U.S. Constitution. Can you name any of the specific rights that are guaranteed by the First Amendment?

Freedom of the press	5.1%
Freedom of speech	56.3%
Freedom of religion	3.8%
Right to petition	0.1%
Right of assembly	3.4%
Don't know/can't name	28.5%
Other	2.8%

2. Percentage of respondents able to name a second right guaranteed by the First Amendment:

Freedom of the press	6.5%
Freedom of speech	5.1%
Freedom of religion	9.8%
Right to petition	1.0%
Right of assembly	6.0%
Don't know/can't name	70%
Other	1.6%

3. Which of these statements comes closer to your opinion? On the whole, the mass media in this country...

Try to do a fair and honest job	22.3%
Only interested in audiences	68.9%
Other/don't know	8.8%

4. Overall, do you think the press in American has too much freedom to do what it wants, too little freedom to do what it wants, or is the amount of freedom the press has about right?

Too much	30.1%
Too little	9.5%
About right	52.5%
Other/don't know	7.9%

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

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