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Illinois Voters: Political Corruption “Common” In Our State

Overwhelming majorities of Illinois voters believe political corruption is the norm for both federal and state governments, according to the latest poll by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

Fewer people believe political corruption at the local level affects their lives – unless they live in Chicago.

The poll of 1001 registered voters across the state conducted Feb. 12 -25 has a margin for error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. The survey found:

- 89 percent of Illinoisans feel corruption is somewhat common in the state, with 53 percent believing it’s very common.
- 79 percent say corruption at the federal level is at least somewhat common, with 45 percent saying it’s very common.
- 62 percent of all Illinoisans believe county or city political corruption is at least somewhat common, with 35 percent reporting local corruption to be very common.
 - However, 85 percent of those living in Chicago believe county or city political corruption is at least somewhat common, with 55 percent perceiving local corruption to be very common.

“These are sad numbers,” said David Yepsen, Director of the Institute. “No wonder many people don’t vote and participation in civic affairs seems limited. It’s unhealthy for a society to have such little confidence in the integrity of government. It makes Illinois an unattractive place to live.”

Ryan Ceresola, a first-year PhD student in sociology researching these issues for the poll, said, “If individuals think corruption is common, it raises the question of whether individuals actually think corruption has an impact on their daily lives.” The answer is many people do:

- 60 percent of respondents report that state or federal corruption has a good amount or quite a bit of an impact on their daily lives.
- On average, 45 percent of Illinoisans think county or city corruption has a good amount or quite a bit of an impact on their daily lives. This finding varies significantly when broken down further:
 - 60 percent of people living in Chicago perceive county or city corruption to have a good amount or quite a bit of an impact on their daily lives.
 - 45 percent of people living in Chicago Suburbs perceive county or city corruption to have a good amount or quite a bit of an impact on their daily lives.
 - Only 35 percent of people living downstate perceives county or city corruption to have a good amount or quite a bit of an impact on their daily lives.

“The fact that about 90 percent of people think federal corruption is common, but only 60 percent think that federal corruption has an impact on their lives suggests people think federal corruption occurs, but they view it as having less of an impact on their lives than might be expected,” says Ceresola.

Ceresola is a first-year PhD student who is using the survey as an element in his dissertation and as the first step in a multi-year study about statewide political corruption. The Institute makes the survey available to graduate students to add questions for use in their research.

The 2014 Simon Poll interviewed 1,001 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin for error of plus or minus 3.5 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 3.5 percentage points from the results obtained here. The margin for error will be larger for demographic, geographic and response subgroups.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. Cell phone interviews accounted for 30 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund.

Note: The “Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Poll,” 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.

TABLE 1: How common do Illinoisans perceive local political corruption to be?

Now thinking about your city or town, how common do you think political corruption by local government employees is? We're talking about elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants...

	Total	Chicago	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Very Rare	13.5 percent	3.5 percent	15.8 percent	16.3 percent
Somewhat Rare	20.7 percent	9.5 percent	22.4 percent	25.3 percent
Somewhat Common	27.3 percent	30 percent	27 percent	25.9 percent
Very Common	34.8 percent	54.5 percent	30.8 percent	28.2 percent
(Don't Know)	3.8 percent	2.5 percent	4 percent	4.3 percent

TABLE 2: How common do Illinoisans perceive state political corruption to be?

Now thinking about your state, how common do you think political corruption by State government employees is? We're talking about elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants...

	Total	Chicago	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Very Rare	1.4 percent	3 percent	1 percent	2 percent
Somewhat Rare	7.1 percent	9.5 percent	6.6 percent	6.3 percent
Somewhat Common	35.6 percent	45 percent	35.6 percent	29 percent
Very Common	53.1 percent	39.5 percent	54.2 percent	60 percent
(Don't Know)	3 percent	3 percent	3 percent	3 percent

TABLE 3: How common do Illinoisans perceive national political corruption to be?

Now thinking about the country, how common do you think political corruption by Federal government employees is? We're talking about elected officials, political appointees, and civil servants...

	Total	Chicago	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Very Rare	4.7 percent	5.5 percent	4.6 percent	4.3 percent
Somewhat Rare	12.4 percent	18 percent	13.6 percent	6.6 percent
Somewhat Common	34.6 percent	37 percent	33.6 percent	34.6 percent
Very Common	44.8 percent	34 percent	44.2 percent	52.8 percent
(Don't Know)	3.6 percent	5.5 percent	4 percent	1.7 percent

TABLE 4: How much impact does local corruption have on Illinoisans' lives?

How much of an impact do you think political corruption at the county or city level has on your life on a daily basis?

	Total	Chicago	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
None at all	12.2 percent	7 percent	12 percent	16 percent
Some, but not much	40.7 percent	31.5 percent	40.4 percent	47.2 percent
A good amount	23.5 percent	29.5 percent	23 percent	20.3 percent
Quite a bit	21.2 percent	29.5 percent	21.8 percent	14.6 percent
(Don't Know)	2.5 percent	2.5 percent	2.8 percent	2 percent

TABLE 5: How much impact does state corruption have on Illinoisans' lives?

How much of an impact do you think political corruption at the state level has on your life on a daily basis?

	Total	Chicago	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
None at all	6.1 percent	8 percent	5.4 percent	6 percent
Some, but not much	31.1 percent	34 percent	32.8 percent	26.3 percent
A good amount	29.2 percent	28 percent	28.4 percent	31.2 percent
Quite a bit	31.3 percent	27 percent	30.8 percent	34.9 percent
(Don't Know)	2.4 percent	3 percent	2.6 percent	1.7 percent

TABLE 6: How much impact does national corruption have on Illinoisans' lives?

How much of an impact do you think political corruption at the Federal level has on your life on a daily basis?

	Total	Chicago	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
None at all	7 percent	8.5 percent	8.6 percent	3.3 percent
Some, but not much	31 percent	38 percent	30.4 percent	27.2 percent
A good amount	24.9 percent	23 percent	24.8 percent	26.3 percent
Quite a bit	34.7 percent	28 percent	33.4 percent	41.2 percent
(Don't Know)	2.5 percent	2.5 percent	2.8 percent	2 percent