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Illinois Voters Continue to Favor Legislative Term Limits

Six in ten Illinois voters strongly favor term limits for state legislators, according to the most recent statewide poll from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University. When the pollsters included those who somewhat favor term limits, that number climbs to nearly eight in ten.

The results were released today in Chicago at the symposium “Term Limits for Illinois: Will They Work?” cosponsored by the Better Government Association, the Union League Club of Chicago, the McCormick Foundation, and the Simon Institute. The conference is designed to examine term limits, how well they’ve worked around the country and how they might work in Illinois. Supporters are organizing a ballot initiative to get the matter in front of Illinois voters this November.

The live-interview, statewide poll of 1001 registered voters was conducted February 12-25. Both land lines and cell phones were included in the sample. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In statewide Simon Polls going back to 2010, between 75 and 80 percent of Illinois voters surveyed have supported legislative term limits. Support for leadership term limits—in offices such as Speaker of the Illinois House and President of the Illinois Senate—has been just as strong.

“Regardless of your position on term limits, it’s clear the idea has support. If organizers are able to get the measure on the ballot – and it’s not clear the courts will allow that – it should be easy for them to win approval,” said David Yepsen, director of the Institute.

“People are so unhappy with Illinois’ gerrymandered redistricting and politics that the only tool they feel they have for rotating the crops in Springfield is a term limits measure,” he said.

Support for term limits is strong in every demographic, geographic, and ideological subgroup in the Institute's poll. For example, while Republicans were among the groups most likely to support the term limit proposal (89.9 percent strongly or somewhat in favor), even an overwhelming majority of Democrats approved of it (73.4 percent strongly or somewhat in favor).

In the 2014 Simon Poll, the wording of the term limit question referred to a combined eight-year limit of service in either or both houses, in order to reflect the proposal pushed by the group Term Limits and Reform, backed by Republican gubernatorial candidate Bruce Rauner. Previous versions of the question referred to limits of five terms in the Illinois House and three terms in the Illinois Senate.

“Regardless of whom you ask or how you phrase the question, legislative term limits are extraordinarily popular among the Illinois electorate,” said Charlie Leonard, a Simon Institute visiting professor who supervised the poll. “Unable or unwilling to limit their own representatives' terms through the ballot box, the voters seem to hope a blanket constitutional amendment will do the job for them.”

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.

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Legislative Term Limits

Would you favor or oppose a proposal to limit state legislators to a total of eight years of service, whether in the House of Representatives, the State Senate, or a combination of the two?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percent Responding</u>
Strongly favor	61.7%
Somewhat favor	17.8%
Somewhat oppose	8.5%
Strongly oppose	8.6%
Other/Don't know	3.4%

Leadership Term Limits

Would you favor or oppose a proposal to limit how long state legislators could serve in leadership roles – such as Speaker of the House or President of the Senate – before they stepped down to let other legislators lead?

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percent Responding</u>
Strongly favor	65.1%
Somewhat favor	17.6%
Somewhat oppose	8.3%
Strongly oppose	6.3%
Other/Don't know	2.7%