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Illinois Voters' Views on the State Budget Impasse

Illinois voters are deeply divided over how to handle the state's budget impasse. Given three options for addressing the deficit, 45 percent favor cutting waste and inefficiency as the only way to handle the problem, while 11 percent favor a tax increase. However, 35 percent agreed with the statement that the state budget crisis will require both budget cuts and an increase in revenue. When the 35 percent who chose this option are added to the 11 percent who say they favor a tax increase, the result is 46 percent total who favor both raising taxes and cutting spending while 45 percent believe that cutting waste and inefficiency is sufficient.

This is one of the major findings of a recent statewide poll of registered voters taken March 4th-11th sponsored by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. Sixty percent of the interviews were via cell phones.

The increasing revenue option was favored by 13 percent in both Chicago and suburban Cook and the five Collar Counties while only 7 percent of downstate voters favored it. Forty three percent of Chicago voters thought a combination of both increased revenue and service cuts would be required, compared with 32 percent of suburban voters and 33 percent of downstate respondents who chose this option. Fifty percent of downstate voters chose the "cut waste and inefficiency" option, followed by 47 percent of suburban voters and only 34 percent of Chicago voters who chose this answer.

In terms of party identification, 18 percent of Democrats said increased revenue was the key; 7 percent of independents and 4 percent of Republicans chose this solution. In contrast, 60 percent of Republicans thought eliminating waste and inefficiency was the answer, while 45 percent of independents and 34 percent of Democrats took this choice. The combination of both increased revenue and cuts in services was the solution to the impasse according to 38 percent of Democrats, 39 percent of independents, and 29 percent of Republicans.

"The voters of Illinois are apparently as conflicted and divided over what to do about the budget impasse as their legislators and the governor are", said John Jackson, one of the designers of the poll.

"When the voters are deeply divided, particularly in policy areas where the divisions are close, the office holders are given more leeway to fashion workable solutions to problems like the

budget impasse, and then explain them and sell them to the voters, which is an obligation of leadership in a representative democracy,” Jackson continued.

Despite the growing number of Illinoisans who have come to the conclusion that the state’s budget crisis can only be managed by a blend of tax increases and program cuts, that forces legislators to vote for a pair of negatives; voting for tax increases while voting to cut programs people want and need.

The voters were asked about specific areas where there could be budget cuts in state service in areas ranging across education, welfare and a wide range of other state government services such as the state police, prisons, and parks and environmental regulation. Not a single governmental function was targeted by a majority of the voters as places they would support cuts in the agencies’ budgets.

In the case of K-12 education, fully 82 percent of the respondents were opposed to cutting budgets, and only 15 percent supported. The only function which came close to majority support for cuts was pension systems for public workers where 45 percent favored cuts and 49 percent opposed.

In “programs for poor people,” only 21 percent favored cuts, while 72 percent opposed cuts in those areas. Possible cuts to the state’s universities were opposed by 67 percent and supported by only 30 percent—both providing somewhat unexpected high levels of opposition to places where cuts have already been deep.

Note: the rest of these tables are not provided here but will be posted on the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute’s polling website: simonpoll.org.

The respondents were then asked about a series of specific ways that the state might raise additional revenue. The results showed that naturally some proposals were more popular than others. The most popular proposals had well over majority support.

The single most popular proposal was applying a surcharge of 3 percent on income above one million dollars per year: 78 percent approved; 19 percent disapproved, and 3 percent had no opinion or were undecided. This is a measure which has been championed for several years by House Speaker Mike Madigan. Illinois voters overwhelmingly supported an advisory referendum on the millionaire’s tax proposal in 2014, but House lawmakers narrowly rejected two attempts to place the amendment on the ballot in 2015 and 2016.

The next most popular revenue proposal was amending the constitution to allow a graduated income tax, which 72 percent supported, with 24 percent opposed and 4 percent undecided.

In that same vein, 55 percent favored applying the state income tax only to retirement income above \$100,000 per year; 39 percent opposed, and 5 percent were undecided.

Another proposal, which is a part of the current debate over raising revenue, is the possibility of expanding gambling in Illinois. This plan was a part of the “grand bargain,” which had been advocated by Senate President John Cullerton and by Republican Senate Minority Leader Christine Radogno, which passed the Senate in late February before the bargain fell apart.

Gambling expansion was approved by 55 percent and disapproved by 41 percent of respondents, with 4 percent undecided.

Other revenue plans garnered less than majority support. Raising the income tax to 4.99 percent was approved by 35 percent and opposed by 61 percent, with 4 percent undecided. Applying the income tax to all retirement funds was favored by only 23 percent; with 72 percent opposed and 6 percent undecided.

The respondents were asked about expanding the sales tax base “to cover services like home repairs and landscaping.” This proposal was supported by 36 percent and opposed by 60 percent, with 4 percent undecided. But asked if they favored this addition to the sales tax if the overall tax rate was reduced by half a percent, 57.1 percent favored, 39.4 percent opposed, and 3.5 percent said they did not know.

Finally, the poll asked if the gasoline tax should be raised in order to fund improvements to state highways, roads, and bridges: 42 percent favored, 56 percent opposed, and only 2 percent were undecided.

“It’s a perfect storm. There is divided government in Springfield, no clear voter support for a solution, no taste for cuts to specific areas of the budget, and tremendous amounts of campaign cash already gearing up for the 2018 election,” said Delio Calzolari, associate director of the Institute.

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The margin of error for the entire sample of 1,000 voters is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. This means that if we conducted the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances, the population proportion would be within plus or minus the reported margin of error for each subsample. For subsamples, the margin of error increases as the sample size goes down. The margin of error was not adjusted for design effects.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas using the random digit dialing method. The telephone sample was provided to Customer Research International by Scientific Telephone Samples. Potential interviewees were screened based on whether they were registered voters and quotas based on area code and sex (<60 percent female). The sample obtained 51 percent male and 49 percent female respondents. Interviewers asked to speak to the youngest registered voter at home at the time of the call. Cell phone interviews accounted for 60 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available.

Field work was conducted from March 4 through March 11. No auto-dial or “robo” polling is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund. The data were not weighted in any way. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute’s polling web site, simonpoll.org.

The Paul Simon Public Policy Institute is a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative. AAPOR works to encourage objective survey standards for practice and disclosure. Membership in the Transparency Initiative reflects a pledge to practice transparency in reporting survey-based findings.

The Institute's polling data are also archived by four academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The four open source data repositories are: The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (<http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/>), The University of Michigan's Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (<http://openicpsr.org>), the University of North Carolina's Odum Institute Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

Note: 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.

Frequency Tables¹ **BUDGET SOLUTION**

The state of Illinois has a budget deficit of over 10 billion dollars. I'm going to read three statements that people have made about how to fix the deficit, and ask you which one comes closest to your views. If you haven't though much about this issue just tell me that.

- *Illinois' public programs and services have already been reduced significantly. We can only fix the problem by taking in more revenue, such as a tax increase.*
- *The state takes in plenty of money to pay for public services, but wastes it on unnecessary programs. We can fix the problem by cutting waste and inefficiency in government.*
- *Illinois' budget problem is so large it can only be solved by a combination of budget cuts and revenue increases.*
- *Haven't though much about it.*

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Revenues	11.1%
Cuts	45.1%
Both cuts and revenues	34.5%
Haven't though much	3.7%
Other/Don't know (not read)	5.6%

CUTS

Education

Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on kindergarten through high school education?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	14.8%
Oppose	82.1%
Other/Don't know	3.1%

¹ Values are rounded and may not sum to 100 percent.

State Universities

Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on state universities?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	29.6%
Oppose	67.1%
Other/Don't know	3.3%

Public Safety

Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on public safety, such as state police and prison operations?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	25.1%
Oppose	69.6%
Other/Don't know	5.3%

Natural Resources

Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on natural resources, such as state parks or environmental regulation?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	32.5%
Oppose	62.8%
Other/Don't know	4.7%

Poor People

Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on programs for poor people?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	21.4%
Oppose	72.2%
Other/Don't know	6.4%

Mental/Physical Disabilities

Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on programs for people with mental or physical disabilities?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	10.9%
Oppose	86.1%
Other/Don't know	3.0%

State Workers' Pension

Do you favor or oppose cuts in state spending on pension benefits for state workers' retirement?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	44.8%
Oppose	48.8%
Other/Don't know	6.4%

REVENUES

Expand Gambling

Do you favor or oppose a proposal expanding legalized gambling in the state?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	54.5%
Oppose	41.3%
Other/Don't know	4.2%

Tax Retirement Income

Do you favor or oppose applying the state income tax to retirement income, such as pensions and Social Security?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	22.8%
Oppose	71.6%
Other/Don't know	5.6%

Tax Retirement Income – Exempt \$100,000

Would you favor or oppose applying the state income tax to retirement income if it exempted from taxes the first \$100,000 earned per year?²

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	68.0%
Oppose	28.1%
Other/Don't know	3.9%

² This is the net approval combined with those that favor taxing retirement income generally without any caveat.

Restore State Income Tax Increase

Do you favor or oppose a proposal to restore the temporary state income tax increase, raising it from 3.75 percent to 4.99 percent?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	35.2%
Oppose	61.0%
Other/Don't know	3.8%

Millionaire Tax

Do you favor or oppose a proposal to impose an extra 3 percent state tax on all income above \$1 million a year?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	77.9%
Oppose	19.4%
Other/Don't know	2.7%

Graduated Income Tax

Would you favor or oppose a proposal to change the Illinois Constitution to allow a graduated income tax – that is, tax rates would be lower for lower-income taxpayers and higher for upper-income taxpayers?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	72.1%
Oppose	24.4%
Other/Don't know	3.5%

Gas Tax

Would you favor or oppose a proposal to raise the state gasoline tax to fund improvements to Illinois highways, roads, and bridges?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	42.0%
Oppose	55.7%
Other/Don't know	2.3%

Tax Services

Do you favor or oppose expanding the sales tax to cover services like home repairs and landscaping which are not currently taxed?

Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	36.3%
Oppose	60.2%
Other/Don't know	3.5%

Tax Services if Reduced Sales Tax

Would you favor or oppose expanding the sales tax to cover services like home repairs and landscaping that are not currently taxed if it reduced the overall sales tax rate by half a point?³

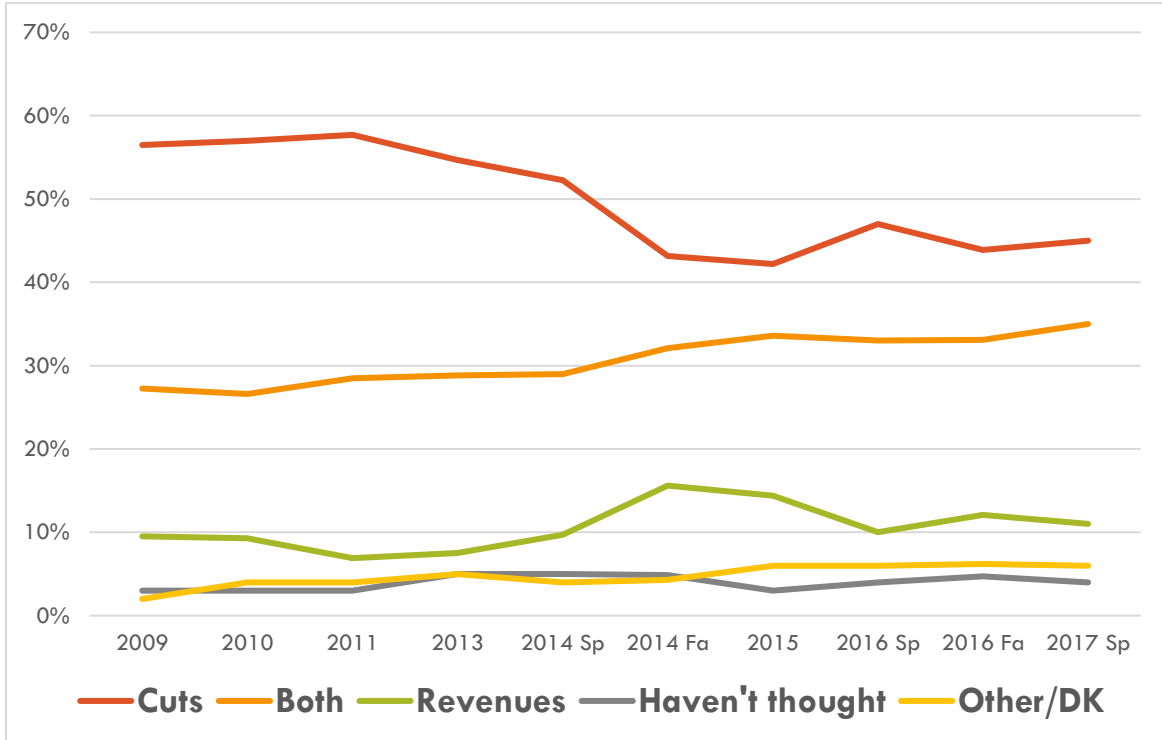
Response	Percent (n=1000)
Favor	57.1%
Oppose	39.4%
Other/Don't know	3.5%

³ This is the net approval including those that favor the proposal without a caveat.

Demographic Crosstabs and Historical Trends

BUDGET SOLUTION

Historical Trend



By AREA

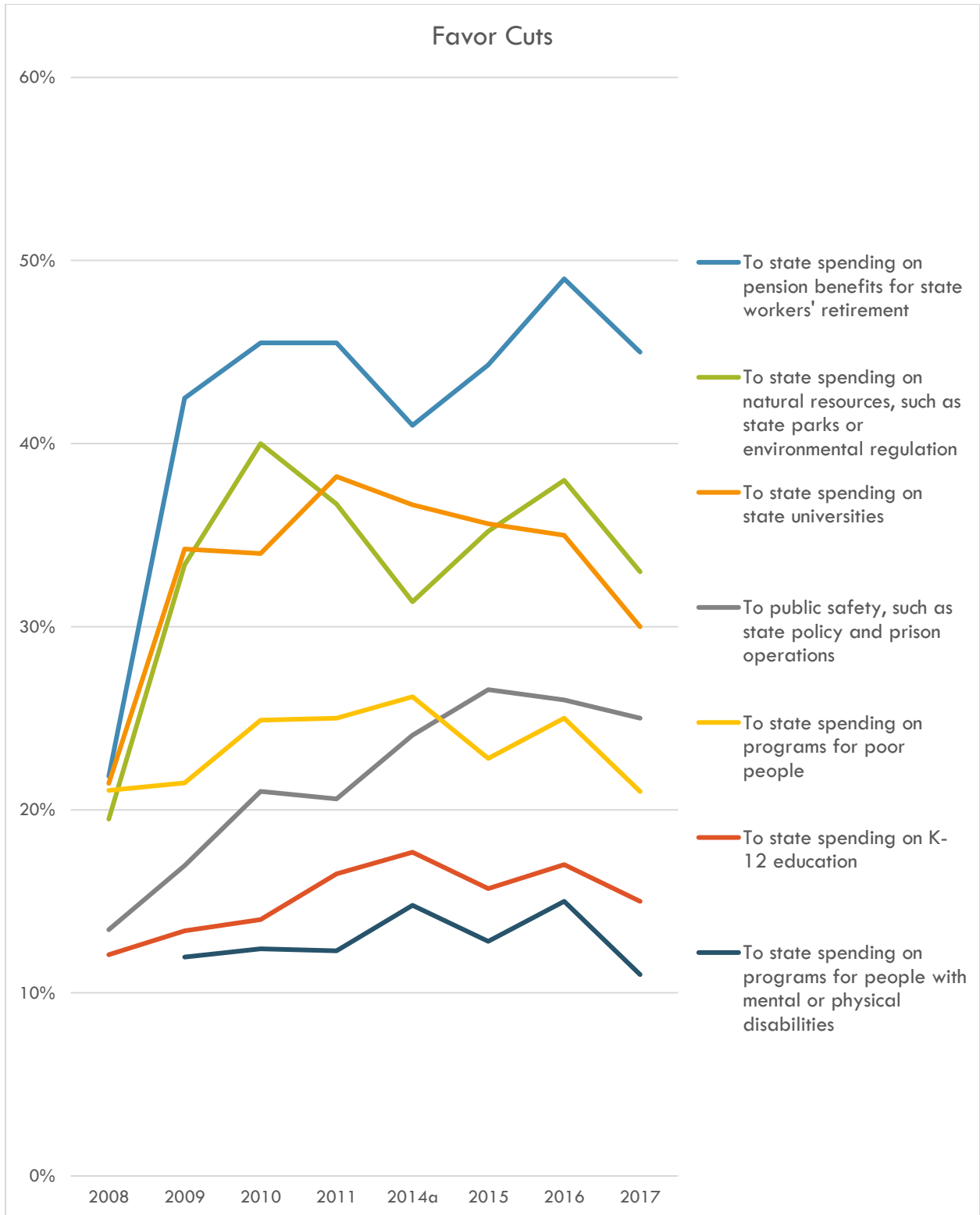
	Chicago City	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Cuts	34%	47%	50%
Revenues	13%	13%	7%
Both	43%	32%	33%
Haven't thought	5%	4%	3%
Other/Don't know	6%	5%	7%

By PARTY

	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Cuts	34%	45%	60%
Revenues	18%	7%	4%
Both	38%	39%	29%
Haven't thought	4%	2%	4%
Other/Don't know	6%	7%	4%

CUTS

Historical Trend



REVENUES

Historical Trend

