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Illinois voters have strong views on major issues facing the state: Simon Poll

CARBONDALE, Ill. — Illinois voters support vigorous government action regarding two major issues on Illinois' policy agenda. That is the conclusion of a recent statewide poll of 1,001 registered voters released by Southern Illinois University Carbondale's Paul Simon Public Policy Institute.

Voters see a need for criminal justice reform

The first issue relates to the criminal justice system and possible reforms for it.

A total of 55 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that "The criminal justice system is biased against black people." There were 35 percent of voters who disagreed.

Where respondents live had a large impact on their views:

- 63 percent of Chicago residents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed.
- 60 sixty percent of suburban Cook and the collar counties agreed or somewhat agreed
- 42 percent of downstate residents agreed and 48 percent disagreed.

Partisanship, including political affiliation and race, also had a strong association with the responses:

- 73 percent of Democrats and 29 percent of Republicans agreed, overall.
- Among white voters, 50 percent agreed while 40 percent disagreed, overall.
- Among black voters, 79 percent agreed while 15 percent disagreed, overall

- Among Hispanics, 63 percent agreed while 29 percent disagreed, overall.

“Clearly race, party and place of residence are driving forces in shaping the voters’ views on bias in the criminal justice system,” said John Jackson, a visiting professor at the institute and one of the directors of the poll. “It is obvious that many Illinois voters live in two different worlds when it comes to matters of race and contact with the criminal justice system.”

Voters favor removing barriers that make it hard for people to find jobs after incarceration

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following: “The State of Illinois should remove barriers that make it more difficult for people who have been incarcerated to find jobs.” Overall, 76 percent of those responding agreed and only 15 percent disagreed.

Among geographic areas of the state, the breakdown was:

- Among Chicago voters, it was 80 percent to 10 percent who agreed
- Suburban Chicago and collar counties voters agreed by a 77-16 percent margin
- Downstate, the margin was 71 percent agreed and 17 percent disagreed.

There was also widespread agreement from political parties: with 84 percent Democrats, 83 percent Republicans and 76 percent of Hispanics also in favor of the state removing barriers.

Race also was not a factor in this question: 76 percent of white people, 77 percent of Hispanics and 83 percent of black voters agreed or strongly agreed.

Poll also shows dramatic call for change in corrections policies

The poll shows 73 percent of the state’s voters overall chose the option of “currently, we spend too much money on incarceration and not enough on alternatives such as education and treatment.”

The next most popular choice at 12 percent was “currently, the balance of spending between incarceration and alternative sentencing programs is about right.”

Only 8 percent chose the third option of “currently we spend too much money on alternative education and treatment programs and not enough on incarceration.”

Support to increase funding for education and treatment alternatives was statewide

The Chicago voters were the most liberal and downstate voters were the most conservative with the suburban voters in between, but the differences were small.

There were party differences with 85 percent of Democrats, 76 percent of Independents and 54 percent of Republicans believing more should be spent on alternatives to incarceration.

“It seems that if maybe not a clear consensus, a heavily majoritarian view has developed among Illinois voters that what we have been doing on corrections policy is not working and that more emphasis should be placed on alternative approaches such as more education and treatment programs,” said John Shaw, institute director.

Poll reflects importance of safe water supplies

Keeping a constant supply of safe, dependable water is one of the most crucial functions of state and local government. Illinois is blessed with abundant water supplies, but faces the constant threat of contamination from old supply pipes and runoff from agricultural and industrial sources.

The poll included three questions focused on the public’s perception of their water supplies.

The first question was, “I personally worry about the pollution of drinking water.”

The public was almost evenly divided on this issue, with 48 percent saying they worried a great deal or a fair amount about pollution of drinking water. Exactly one-half of those responding said they worried about their water supplies “only a little” or not at all.

“Those who worry about the pollution of their water may be reflecting the notoriety this matter got in the Flint, Michigan crisis of 2016,” said Kara Lawrence, a Howard Foundation Fellowship holder at the institute who is doing research on this issue. “The 50 percent who don’t worry

much about water quality may show that state and local governments are generally doing a good job of ensuring that the demand for safe water is usually met.”

Majority rate their water supply as excellent or good

69 percent rated their drinking water as excellent or good, 28 percent rated their supply as fair or poor. Only 3 percent don't know how they rate the quality of their drinking water.

There were no large differences based on geographic location or party identification on this issue. However, there were racial differences, with 19 percent of African-Americans rating their water quality as poor, compared to 6 percent of whites and 13 percent of Hispanics.

There is a division on trusting state government on water quality:

- 47 percent of respondents overall said they trust state government to do what is right about water quality “always” or “most of the time;”
- 34 percent trust the government to do what is right only some of the time;
- 15 percent said none of the time.

There were marginal regional differences with Chicago voters being the most trusting and the downstate voters the least trusting with suburban voters in between. There were no essential differences by party.

“These results show that on the matter of providing safe and dependable water supplies, Illinois voters are more positive about the job the state is doing than one might expect from the generally negative reviews one often finds Illinois government getting,” Jackson said.

Sample size and margin of error

The margin of error for the entire sample of 1,001 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. Among self-identified primary election voters, the margin is

plus or minus 6 percentage points in the 259-voter sample of Republicans, and 4.5 percentage points in the sample of 472 Democrats.

Polling methodology

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 with 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. Cellphone interviews accounted for 60 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available.

Fieldwork was from Feb. 19 through Feb. 25. 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 was not weighted in any way. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the institute’s polling website, simonpoll.org.

Polling data available for use by scholars and the public

The 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](#)

- The University of Michigan’s Inter-university [Consortium for Political and Social Research](#)
- The University of North Carolina’s [Odum Institute Dataverse Network](#)
- The Simon Institute Collection at [OpenSIUC](#).

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.

SIDEBAR

Simon Institute Polls

The fourth Paul Simon Public Policy Institute poll this spring involves voters’ thoughts on solutions to Illinois’ budget deficit. [The Simon Poll™](#) of registered voters in Illinois has been conducted since 2008.

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Frequency Tables¹
CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Racial Bias

Do you agree or disagree with this statement: the criminal justice system in Illinois is biased against black people?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Agree	55%
<i>Strongly agree</i>	30%
<i>Somewhat agree</i>	25%
Neither	1%
Disagree	35%
<i>Somewhat disagree</i>	15%
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	20%
Other/Don't know (not read)	8%

Barriers to Jobs

Please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statement: The State of Illinois should remove barriers that make it more difficult for people who have been incarcerated to find jobs?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Agree	76%
<i>Strongly agree</i>	48%
<i>Somewhat agree</i>	27%
Neither	2%
Disagree	15%
<i>Somewhat disagree</i>	8%
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	7%
Other/Don't know (not read)	7%

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

Alternative Sentencing

I'm going to read three statements people make about corrections policy. Please tell me which comes closer to your view, even if it is not exactly how you feel:

- *Currently, the balance of spending between incarceration and alternative sentencing programs is about right.*
- *Currently, we spend too much money on incarceration and not enough on alternatives such as education and treatment.*
- *Currently we spend too much money on alternative education and treatment programs and not enough on incarceration.*

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Right balance	12%
Too much on incarceration	73%
Too much on alternatives	8%
Other/don't know	7%

WATER QUALITY

Drinking Water Pollution

I personally worry about the pollution of drinking water...?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
A great deal	23%
A fair amount	25%
Only a little	26%
Not at all	24%
Other/don't know	1%

Community Water Quality

I would rate the quality of the drinking water in my community as...?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Excellent	30%
Good	39%
Fair	19%
Poor	9%
Other/don't know	3%

Trust in Government

I trust my state government to do what is right in regard to water quality...?

Response	Percent (n=1001)
Just about always	13%
Most of the time	34%
Only some of the time	34%
None of the time	15%
Other/don't know	3%

Demographic Crosstabs
CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Racial Bias

by PARTY

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Agree	73%	50%	29%
Disagree	20%	36%	61%
Neither	1%	3%	1%
Other/don't know	6%	11%	9%

by AREA

	Chicago City	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Agree	63%	60%	42%
Disagree	26%	32%	48%
Neither	2%	1%	1%
Other/don't know	9%	7%	9%

by RACE

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Agree	50%	79%	63%	74%
Disagree	40%	15%	29%	15%
Neither	1%	2%	2%	4%
Other/don't know	9%	5%	6%	7%

Barriers to Jobs

by PARTY

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Agree	84%	76%	63%
Disagree	11%	13%	24%
Neither	1%	1%	3%
Other/don't know	4%	9%	9%

by AREA

	Chicago City	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Agree	80%	77%	71%
Disagree	10%	16%	17%
Neither	3%	1%	2%
Other/don't know	9%	5%	9%

by RACE

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Agree	76%	83%	77%	72%
Disagree	14%	15%	15%	22%
Neither	2%	0%	2%	0%
Other/don't know	8%	3%	6%	7%

Alternative Sentencing

by PARTY

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Right balance	6%	10%	22%
Too much on incarceration	85%	76%	54%
Too much on alternatives	4%	4%	16%
Other/don't know	5%	10%	7%

by AREA

	Chicago City	Chicago Suburbs	Downstate
Right balance	10%	9%	17%
Too much on incarceration	78%	75%	67%
Too much on alternatives	5%	8%	9%
Other/don't know	8%	7%	7%

by RACE

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Right balance	13%	6%	15%	7%
Too much on incarceration	72%	83%	79%	80%
Too much on alternatives	8%	7%	2%	9%
Other/don't know	7%	4%	4%	4%