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Illinois Voters View Questions of Income and Wealth Disparities

Illinois voters are concerned about the growing concentration of wealth in the country, according to a new poll from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

When asked whether the distribution of wealth in this country was fair, or if money and wealth should be more evenly distributed among a larger percentage of people, 57.8 percent of registered voters said there should be a more even distribution, 34.5 percent felt that today's distribution was fair and 7.7 percent said they didn't know.

The poll of 1,261 registered voters was taken September 4 - 10. It has a margin of error of 2.77 percentage points.

From the Tea Party movement to the Occupy Wall Street protests, various groups have recently criticized the concentration of wealth and the growing gap between the very rich and everyone else in the United States.

This has also become one of the narratives in the presidential campaign. Of course, while the Tea Party and Occupy groups have drastically different solutions to the problems, they seem to agree that there are problems.

The results also showed:

- There are 46.9 percent of Illinois voters who agreed that "Most rich people are wealthy mainly because they know the right people or were born into wealthy families." This compares to 40.4 percent who said that "the rich are wealthy mainly because of their own hard work, ambition or education;" 7.8 percent who said both factors were at work equally and 2.2 percent who said neither.
- Another question asked if the federal government "should or should not pursue policies that try to reduce the gap between wealthy and less well-off Americans." There were 52.1 percent who said the federal government should take action to reduce the gap between the wealthy and other people; 41.1 percent who were opposed to such income leveling action and only 6.8 percent said they did not know.

"It appears that the public has been listening to the debates between the two parties, their candidates, and such groups as the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street," said John S. Jackson, one of the directors of the

poll. “More than half of Illinois voters come down on the side of those who call for the federal government to take some actions which would ameliorate the growing income and wealth gaps in the U.S.”

Charles Leonard, a Simon Institute visiting professor and director of the poll, said that, while majorities overall support the proposition that rich people are wealthy because of their connections and that wealth should be more evenly distributed, there are partisan differences.

“Republican voters in our survey were more than twice as likely to say the wealthy got that way because of their hard work rather than because of inheritance or connections. The reverse is true of Democrats, who are much more likely to say that the rich got their wealth because of inherited circumstances.

“Similarly, about three-fourths of Democrats felt the government should be involved in wealth redistribution, while about three-fourths of Republicans were opposed,” Leonard continued. “The balance came from Independents, who slightly but significantly favored policies to reduce the wealth gap between the rich and everyone else.”

The poll also included a series of questions about whether various groups had too much influence, too little influence, or about the right amount of influence in Illinois.

- There are 34.6 percent of registered voters who said the Tea Party had too much influence, 32.0 percent said the Tea Party influence was “about right” and only 15.9 percent said their influence was too little.
- Voters rated a comparable group from the other side, the Occupy Wall Street Movement, as follows: 34.0 percent said it had too much influence, 27.4 percent said the group’s influence was about right; and 17.4 percent said their influence was too little.

Methodology:

The 2012 Simon Poll was taken Sept. 4 -10 and interviewed 1,261 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin for error of plus or minus 2.77 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 2.77 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 were included as well as land-line interviews. 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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Table 1:

Which of these statements comes closer to your own view- even if neither is exactly right. Most rich people are wealthy because...

Of their own hard work, ambition, or education	40.4%
They know the right people or born into wealthy families	46.9%
Neither	2.2%
Both equally	7.8%
Other/don't know	2.7%

Table 2:

Do you feel that the distribution of money and wealth in this country today is fair, or do you feel that the money and wealth in this country should be more evenly distributed among a larger percentage of the people?

Fair now	34.5%
Should be more even	57.8%
Other/Don't know	7.7%

Table 3:

Do you feel you think the federal government should or should not pursue policies that try to reduce the gap between wealthy and less well-off Americans?

Should	52.1%
Should not	41.1%
Other/Don't know	6.8%

Table 4:

I'm going to read a list of groups. For each, I'd like you to tell me if that group has too much influence in Illinois, too little influence, or about the right amount: **The Tea Party movement:**

Too much	34.6%
About right	32.0%
Too little	15.9%
Don't know	17.5%

Table 5:

I'm going to read a list of groups. For each, I'd like you to tell me if that group has too much influence in Illinois, too little influence, or about the right amount: **The Occupy Wall Street movement:**

Too much	34.0%
About right	27.6%
Too little	17.4%
Don't know	21.0%