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The Simon Review

**The Climate of Opinion in Southern Illinois
Continuity and Change**

By: John S. Jackson and Charles W. Leonard
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The Climate of Opinion in Southern Illinois:

Continuity and Change

John S. Jackson and Charles W. Leonard

Introduction

Southern Illinois is a land rich in history, culture and friendly people. Its topography was originally shaped by the great glaciers of the Ice Age, which pushed this far south, leaving a hilly and rough terrain that is much different from the rich and flat farmland of central and northern Illinois. There are advantages to this physical terrain in terms of natural beauty; however, those advantages are also mitigated by the impact on farming, as most of southern Illinois supports only smaller and more marginal farms.

Southern Illinois after prehistoric times was originally settled by a great wave of southern migrants who came up out of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North and South Carolina (Kenney and Brown, 1992). These people were predominantly from the Scotch-Irish ethnic group that so heavily populated Appalachia and the rest of the South in that early era (Webb, 2004). They were soon joined by another wave of immigrants from Italy, Poland, and Eastern Europe who came to work in the coal mines. In addition, in some communities there were enclaves of German immigrants in places like Jacob and Neunert in Jackson County, Columbia and Collinsville in the Metro-east area, and Hardin County in Southeast Illinois (Rush, March 13, 2011). There was also a decidedly French influx in Randolph County, on Kaskaskia Island and in the counties across the river near St. Genevieve, Missouri. These ethnic Europeans were also soon joined by a small influx of African-Americans who came to Illinois after the Civil War to work on the railroad (Kenney and Brown, 1992). This amalgam of races and ethnic groups constituted the original human foundation that still persists in southern Illinois today. Later they were joined by immigrants from all over the world, some from very exotic places, many of whom came to this area to study or teach at Southern Illinois University Carbondale or to be a part of the growing medical community which serves the region.

While there is now a very diverse population in southern Illinois, there is still also a recognizable and distinctive cultural and political heritage, which provides the setting for our study.

Because of the southern roots of many of the original inhabitants, and the close proximity of Kentucky, Tennessee and northeast Arkansas, this area is often identified as having a decidedly southern accent and outlook still. For example, three of the four major television network affiliates are located in the border states of Kentucky and Missouri. They cover Tennessee and Arkansas news as well as the news of their home states. Political and governmental stories from the Mid-South and border states are very prevalent in the news coverage of this region. However, the region is also embedded in the state of Illinois and in the Midwest, so Midwestern history and values are a part of the cultural and historic mix, which helps to shape the attitudes of this region.

The Theoretical Perspective

Our basic theoretical outlook is founded in the political culture concept, which emerged from public opinion and comparative government studies in the 1960s (Almond and Verba, 1963). We think it is useful to understand individual political polls better by conceiving of them as tapping some important strains of an enduring political culture. It is especially useful to view longitudinal studies in that theoretical light. Our study is focused on a subnational region of one particular state, Illinois. National and state political cultures are made up of their regional building blocks and it is important to document those. Daniel Elazar pioneered the concept of state and regional political culture, and he defined three dominant types of the Traditional, the Individualistic, and the Moralistic cultures (Elazar, 1972). Elazar says each cultural type, “reflects its own particular synthesis of the marketplace and the commonwealth” (Ibid, 93).

The *Traditionalistic* culture holds that society is organized in a hierarchical form with rigid and well recognized class and group boundaries and a “paternalistic” conception of the commonwealth. The purpose of government is to protect the status quo and especially the prerogatives of those who already hold socio-economic and political power (Ibid., 99).

The *Individualistic* culture “...emphasizes the conception of the democratic order as a marketplace....it places a premium on limiting community intervention--whether governmental or nongovernmental--into private activities to the minimum necessary to keep the marketplace in proper working order...The individualistic political culture holds politics to be just another means by which individuals may improve themselves socially and economically” (Ibid., 94). The Individualistic political culture is a reflection of America’s commitment to rugged individualism and to its capitalistic economy and strong preference for doing business in the private sector. “In general, government action is to be restricted to those areas, primarily in the economic realm, which encourage private initiative and widespread access to the market place” (Ibid, p 94). This type holds that government and politics exist mostly to offer opportunities for personal advancement and material enrichment.

The *Moralistic* culture emphasizes the “commonwealth conception as the basis for democratic government...in the moralistic political culture, both the general public and the politicians conceive of politics as a public activity centered on some notion of the public good and properly devoted to the advancement of the public interest. Good government, then, is measured by the degree to which it promotes the public good and in terms of the honesty, selflessness, and commitment to the public welfare of those who govern” (Ibid, 96-97). This type emphasizes community and shared interests and shared values. The Moralistic approach emphasized the politics of the good government groups which have become well known today.

The South is noted for the dominance of the Traditionalistic culture. The Upper Midwest, places like Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa, are noted for the Moralistic political culture. Some of the Midwest and the Southwest tend to be dominated by the Individualistic culture, according to Elazar. In their well-respected book on Illinois government and politics, Samuel Gove and James Nowlan maintain that Illinois predominantly adopts the Individualistic culture and everyone looks out for number one (Gove and Nowlan, 1996). To paraphrase Calvin Coolidge, “the business of government is business” in this view of the relationship between the public and the private sectors. That may be largely true for the dominant political culture in Illinois, but we maintain that all states and regions feature a mixture of all three political cultural strains. In southern Illinois, the Traditionalistic strain may be more important than farther north as a result of our proximity to the South and because of our original immigration patterns, although the other two strains are important in some quarters as well.

Like many regions of the United States, this area now includes a diverse mixture of people whose ancestors came from multiple points on the compass and who live and work in the communities of southern Illinois. While most people identify with the city or town in which they live, there is also a recognizable region of southern Illinois which people identify with and are conscious of as a meaningful reference point. This is partially because of the physical topology, which creates at least some isolation and definition, marked by the state boundaries provided by the rivers. Three of the nation's great rivers, the Ohio and Wabash on the east and the Mississippi on the west form the natural boundaries which demark the borders of southern Illinois and of the state of Illinois. There is no natural boundary on the north; however, a man-made boundary, Interstate Highway 64, bisects the state from east to west and serves as a convenient reference point for defining the northern-most border of southern Illinois. It is that boundary that we have adopted in the present study. Thus, the physical limits of our study include the region extending from Mount Vernon on the north to Cairo on the south and from river to river on the east and west.

The Study

This is an empirical study of the opinions of the people who live in the region of southern Illinois. The study is primarily based on a survey conducted for the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute from February 14 - 22, 2011. This survey was based on a sample of telephone subscribers living in the 18 southernmost counties in Illinois, all south of Interstate 64. (See Appendix A for a list of the counties included). The respondents were located through random digit dialing techniques, which included both land lines and cell phones in the sample frame. The survey was contracted to Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas, which did the sampling and the interviews following specifications provided by the staff of the Simon Institute. The random digit dialing technique produced a total of 400 completed interviews. The sample has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

That most recent survey is also supplemented by the first annual southern Illinois survey, commissioned by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute in the spring of 2010. This was also a telephone survey and it was in the field from April 5 - 13 of 2010. A sample was taken of 401 registered voters and it, too, had a margin of error of 4.9 percent at the 95% confidence level. That poll was also conducted by Customer Research International under the auspices of the PSPPI (Leonard, June, 2010). While we think the two most recent polls are compatible and both capture reliable pictures of public opinion in southern Illinois, there are some important methodological differences. The 2010 poll depended on a sampling frame of registered voters who were then located and called on land lines. The 2011 sampling frame consisted of random digit dialing of telephone numbers which included both land lines and cell phones. Thus, the most recent survey is likely to have cast a somewhat wider net and included more mobile and perhaps younger populations than did the 2010 survey did.

The current surveys provide some very interesting and useful data documenting what the people of this vital region think and especially how they regard their political leaders, the services provided by their governments, and their positions on a wide variety of contemporary political and social issues. This is one important objective for this study. However, the 2011 study was also specifically designed to be a partial replication of two earlier studies done in 1976 and 1977. These two studies were similar in design and content and provide an extremely interesting opportunity for longitudinal comparisons in the same region across a thirty-five year time span.

The two earlier studies were done under the aegis of the Social Science Research Bureau (SSRB), which was located then at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The SSRB did the

surveys in August of 1976 and June of 1977. Their results were published in two reports, of which John Jackson was the senior author and which provide part of the data now replicated in this current report (Jackson, McGlynn, and Hawkes, 1976; Jackson, McGlynn and Starks, 1977). The two earlier studies were based on face-to-face interviews conducted by graduate students and faculty at SIUC. A stratified random sample of housing units formed the basic sample frame and respondents selected in the chosen households were determined by a random selection procedure. In the 1976 study 400 households were randomly chosen and 230 interviews were completed. In the 1977 study 400 households were chosen and 288 interviews were completed. This completion rate produced an accuracy level of plus or minus 6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Among other lessons, the comparisons of the two types of polls indicate just how much things have changed in survey research techniques. In 1976 and 1977 we relied on a sample frame of housing units, and the interviews were all done in person. This was the industry standard at the time. In 2011 telephone interviewing has taken over and almost all the major national polls are now conducted by phone, as was our most recent study.

The two earlier studies specifically targeted the old 24th Congressional District. This Congressional District covered almost all of what was then considered to be southern Illinois. It was a predominantly Democratic district that also contained some pockets of Republican Party strength at the county level; however, the district had long been represented by Democrats (Trani, 2011). Kenneth J. Gray of West Frankfort represented the district for 20 years, 1954 through 1974. He was replaced by Paul Simon, who represented the district from 1974 through 1984 before being elected to the United States Senate. In addition, Democratic candidates for Governor and President usually did well in the 24th District. It consisted of 22 counties bounded on the east by the Ohio and Wabash Rivers and on the west by the Mississippi. The only major difference between the old 24th District and the sample used in the current study to define southern Illinois is that the northern boundary of the former district extended slightly above Interstate 64 in some places. Most notably it also included Monroe County which is not included in our more recent study. While there are some minor differences in the samples from the two eras, the similarities are much greater and provide a useful definition of the region of southern Illinois. A more detailed comparison of the geographic boundaries of the old district and the current sample frame is provided in Appendix A.

It is very unusual to have an opportunity to take advantage of such comparable longitudinal studies that extend across such a long time frame for an identifiable geographic region. Most of the venerable tradition of public opinion polling has been developed at the national level in the United States. We now have significant national surveys of the opinion of the American people that extend back in time to the 1930s. Experts like George Gallup and Lou Harris built the early and crucial foundation on which many other researchers have erected the superstructure of an industry that just keeps expanding. The national polling industry was originally oriented toward supplying the news media and also served the marketing needs of American business. Those studies were followed immediately after World War II by academic surveys initially based at the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The American National Election Study at Michigan has become the gold standard for academic studies since the 1950s and now influences virtually every other election study which has followed (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1956). Our own study is influenced and tutored by that early work.

There is also a well developed literature marking the contours of public opinion for many of the states (Key, 1949 and 1956; Erickson, Wright, and McIveer, 1993). While there are now

many fine academic and media-driven national studies of public opinion and a developing literature on some of the states, there are almost no sub-state studies of particular geographic regions. In addition, longitudinal studies that offer a look at public opinion and its development over time are very rare for studies at anything except the national level of analysis. Thus, our study affords us the unique opportunity to document the parameters of both continuity and change which have occurred in this region over a period of time which spans almost four eventful decades of American and Illinois history.

The Study Results

We begin by examining the distribution of party identification and how it has changed in southern Illinois. Party identification is the single most important variable in explaining voting behavior and a whole host of other important political attitudes, values and behaviors (Campbell, et al., 1960; Hetherington, 2001). Party identification has a direct impact on the way people vote and how they see and evaluate the candidates and the issues of the campaign. Party also serves as a “master cue,” helping the voters to sort out the confusion and conflict that mark modern American politics. The familiar “red state” versus “blue state” lexicon now marks entire states and even regions of the nation as predominantly and consistently favoring one or the other of the two major parties (Gelman, 2008). Thus it is important to demonstrate empirically what has been happening to this crucial variable in our region. Table 1 provides the data from our three studies.

Table 1
The Distribution of Party Identification

	<u>1976 Survey</u>	<u>2010 Survey</u>	<u>2011 Survey</u>
Republican	28%	33%	27%
Democrat	38	29	29
Independent	24	27	31
Other	2	11	12
No Preference	8		
	N= 220	N= 401	N= 400

Table 1 shows that the Democrats were the dominant party in southern Illinois in 1976. They had a base of 38 percent who identified with them compared to only 28 percent who called themselves Republicans and 24 percent who were Independents.** This was a 10 point advantage the Democrats enjoyed. That advantage was manifest by the same advantage they tended to hold in terms of local offices held in court houses and city halls across the region. In addition, in

**The direct comparisons between the 1976 survey and the 2010-2011 surveys on the party identification indicator must be made carefully. In 1976 we only asked the party identification question without the follow up probe for all independents, in which the independents are asked whether they “lean” toward one party or not. In Table 1 we have *not* lumped the “partisan leaners” with the partisans, which is commonly done now, but was not the usual practice in 1976. We think the basic points made in the narrative are valid, regardless of those differences in the classification of the responses.

statewide races, the Democratic candidates for governor, senator, and other constitutional offices could usually count on southern Illinois to produce lopsided vote totals for their side. As was noted above, the area had been represented in the U.S. Congress by a Democrat since 1954 and with one exception back to the New Deal of the 1930s.

By 2010 the Democratic advantage had declined dramatically. In our survey that year only 29 percent identified as Democrats compared to 33 percent who identified as Republicans. It was a bad year for the Democrats nationally in 2010 and southern Illinois was no exception. The Republicans had a 4 percent advantage in partisan identification in the spring of 2010, or a 14 percent point swing to the Republicans' advantage since 1976.

Judging by party identification in 2010 alone, the change since our poll in 1976 represented a drastic turnaround in the partisan make-up of the region. Party identification is ordinarily what scholars call a "long term" commitment and people generally do not change that identification easily (Campbell, et al, 1960). Even generational change, which entails significant groups and cohorts of people shifting from one party to another, is relatively rare in American public opinion. Yet as we know during this era there was a partisan realignment going on in American politics and the tracks of that realignment may well be evident in the data we have in these three polls. The Democrats recouped somewhat in our latest Southern Illinois poll taken in February of 2011. In the most recent poll, the Democrats were at 29 percent and the Republicans at 27 percent with 31 percent in the Independent category. If one lumps the Independent leaning Republican and the Independent leaning Democratic in with their respective party identifiers, the two parties are essentially tied at 40 percent each in the 2011 poll. As the economy rebounded from the Great Recession of 2008-2010, and President Obama's job approval ratings increased somewhat the Democratic Party's stock also rose a bit in the national polls. Our results comparing 2010 to 2011 in southern Illinois indicate that the Democrats' modest national rebound may also have been felt in southern Illinois. At this point we think the data warrant the conclusion that this region is now very competitive, and it is one which either party can win, depending on the candidates and issues involved and the larger national context in which the contest is being held.

Table 2 shows that the original Democratic advantage was even more marked when one taps the behavioral definition of partisanship. We asked the respondents which primary they voted in for the March 1976 primary, which for the Democrats had featured a hotly contested race between the incumbent Governor, Daniel Walker, and his challenger, the Secretary of State, Michael J. Howlett. This was also the primary when the Republicans chose James R. Thompson to be their nominee for Governor. Thompson won the Republican Primary and went on to defeat Michael Howlett, the challenger, who had upset Walker in the Democratic Primary. In Table 2 we see that over two-thirds of the residents of southern Illinois claimed to have voted in the 1976 Democratic Primary, which had been held just five months before our survey was taken. That advantage was still large in 2010 when 57 percent of the respondents said they had voted in the Democratic Primary held in February; 35 percent said they voted in the Republican Primary and 8 percent listed "other" as their primary of choice and presumably this would have been the Green Party primary that year.

Table 2
Vote in the Party Primaries

	<u>Which Primary Voted in 1976?</u>	<u>Primary Plan to Vote in 2010</u>
Democrat	69%	57%
Republican	31	35
Other	8	
	N= 220	N= 401

It is easy to see from Tables 1 and 2 that southern Illinois was a bastion of strength for the Democratic Party in the 1970s. In fact this preference for the Democrats extended well back in the history of the region. Southern Illinois was a marginal area in the Civil War era where there were plenty of sympathizers for the Confederacy mixed closely with Yankee supporters. It was said that the region could have gone either way at the start of the war as the equivocal behavior of such leaders as Union General John A. Logan seemed to indicate. As noted earlier, much of the region was originally populated by mass migrations of people from the traditional South of the old Confederacy. In their preference for the Democratic Party then, a clear plurality of southern Illinois residents in the 1976 survey were simply continuing that Democratic Party tradition and were following the allegiances which had been established for decades.

In addition, the region's dependence on the coal mines had ensured earlier that there would be a strong labor union movement in this area. In that era the United Mine Workers organized most of the mines in southern Illinois, and they in turn helped to bring in and strengthen other unions such as the United Auto Workers and the United Steel Workers, who organized many of the manufacturing plants in the region. These unions and others were also important to building and maintaining the strength of the Democratic Party.

Southern Illinois had been represented by a Democrat in the U. S. Congress since 1954 when Kenneth J. Gray was first elected. Gray was the "King of Pork," and southern Illinois apparently appreciated how well he "brought home the bacon." By 1976 when this first survey was taken, the region was then represented by Paul Simon, who succeeded Gray in Congress in 1975, and who served ten years in the House before moving up to the U. S. Senate. In addition, most of the counties in the area had a predominance of Democratic office holders. In most counties, having the Sheriff, the County Clerk, the Treasurer and a majority of the County Board served to strengthen the hold of the Democratic Party on the region. The Democrats used that courthouse-level strength to dominate southern Illinois politics for generations, and Tables 1 and 2 clearly indicate that advantage in the 1976 survey.

It is also evident that times have changed for partisanship in southern Illinois. 2010 was a very bad year nationally for the Democrats, and they also suffered in the elections held in southern Illinois on November 2, 2010. It was the mid-term elections for Congress and for many state legislatures, and nationally the Democrats took a beating. They lost a net of 63 seats in the U.S. House and their majority in the U.S. Senate declined from 57 to 53 seats. The Democrats also lost a long list of state governorships and control of multiple state legislatures where they had

been in control. In Illinois, the losses for the Democrats were not quite so dramatic as they continued to hold the governor's mansion and both houses of the General Assembly after the elections. However, in southern Illinois the Republican candidate for Governor, Bill Brady, and the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate, Mark Kirk, won every county except for Jackson and Alexander (Jackson, 2011). By 2011 the fortunes of the Democratic Party apparently rebounded somewhat in terms of party identification in southern Illinois; however, their long-term advantage had clearly been given up and they now faced a resurgent Republican Party in the region.

So 2010 may have been the recent high water mark for measuring Republican strength; however, this was a rising tide that had been growing for the Republicans for a generation. As the two parties divided more clearly on the ideological continuum and the Democrats became more clearly the liberal to moderate alternative and the Republicans became the conservative alternative, the nation became more polarized. In the terms of the political science literature, the nation sorted itself out along ideological and partisan lines (Levendusky, 2009). This created a party realignment based most notably in the American South, where white southerners exited the Democratic Party starting in the 1960s and gaining momentum in the 1970s and 1980s (Sundquist, 1983). At first they stopped short of embracing the Republicans fully and most stopped over as Independents first. They may have continued to vote for Democrats at the state and local level, just as their ancestors had done, but they faithfully voted for Republican candidates for President, U.S. Senator and U.S. House. African-American voters from the South had originally faithfully supported the Republicans, "the Party of Lincoln," from the end of the Civil War until the watershed election of 1964 when the choice was Barry Goldwater versus Lyndon Johnson. Black voters supported Johnson overwhelmingly because of his advocacy of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Goldwater's opposition to the passage of that law. The mass movement of black voters out of the Republican Party and into the Democratic Party and white voters in the opposite direction began then and it increased in scope and strength all through the last three decades of the 20th Century.

This Southern-led voting realignment is also relevant for southern Illinois. This region has been caught up in that national tide, but it has lagged somewhat behind the change that took place in the South. This realignment took time to gain momentum and take hold in southern Illinois, and it was not until the first decade of the 21st Century that it may have reached maturity. By 2010 a region that had been solidly Democratic for generations evidenced a slight Republican advantage in party identification. In the 2010 survey the Democrats may have regained some of their losses based on the changes in the national picture which no longer disadvantaged the Democrats as much as in 2009. However, our latest poll shows the Democrats now essentially tied with the Republicans on partisanship, and the region is a very competitive one in the general elections, and it is also marked by significant split-ticket voting.

Interestingly enough, Table 2 also shows that the 2010 Republicans' slight advantage in self-identified partisanship did not show up in the choice of a primary to vote in that year. The 2010 respondents said that they planned to vote in the Democratic Party's primary as opposed to the Republican Party's primary by a 57 to 35 percent margin. Analysts would ordinarily attribute a disproportionate turnout in the primary to the perceived competitiveness of the two primaries. Voters naturally gravitate toward the more competitive primary where they think their vote can make a more critical difference. In the instance of the 2010 primaries, however, this competitiveness difference is not very evident. The Democrats had a hot race for their nomination for governor between the incumbent, Pat Quinn and the challenger, State Comptroller Daniel Hynes. There was also a spirited race for the open U.S. Senate seat between Alexi Giannoulas, the eventual winner, and his challengers, most notably, David Hoffman. The same

was true on the Republican side where downstate champion and ultimate winner, Bill Brady, was pressed hard by four other candidates all from suburban Chicago. It turned out that Brady was extraordinarily popular in southern Illinois and he won all but two of the counties in this region in the general election against Quinn. That Republican voting advantage did not show up in the choice of ballots for the Republican Primary, however. Apparently the voters of this region thought the more important action was in the Democratic Primary, and our sample indicated a significant Democratic advantage on that behavioral measure of partisanship.

As long as the Democrats consistently draw more voters to their primary than the Republicans do, they will remain very competitive in southern Illinois. Southern Illinois voters will have to get used to and comfortable with asking for a Republican ballot in the primary, and our data suggest that some of their general election voters are not quite there yet. Of course, switching to an open primary would alleviate that disparity but so far the General Assembly has not been hospitable to that potential change.

Next we move to job approval for the governor. In 1977 the incumbent governor was Republican James R. Thompson. He won the governor’s race a year before, in November of 1976 by beating the Democrat, Michael Howlett. The Democrats were deeply divided over their choice of a nominee for governor between Howlett, who won their primary in March and Dan Walker who lost the primary despite being the incumbent governor. The marks of that divisive primary were still evident in the solid victory Thompson scored over Howlett in the general election. At the time our survey was taken in June of 1977, Thompson had been in office for six months. The voters had enough time to get to know him and to evaluate his time in office and thus we asked the respondents whether they were favorable or unfavorable toward Thompson. Table 3 provides some surprises.

Table 3
Attitudes Toward Governor

	1977 Attitude Toward <u>Jim Thompson</u>		2010 Attitude Toward Pat Quinn		2011 Attitude Toward <u>Pat Quinn</u>
Very Favorable	11%	Strongly Approve	4%		5%
Favorable	28	Somewhat Approve	27		24
Unfavorable	6	Somewhat Disapprove	25		22
Very Unfavorable	4	Strongly Disapprove	29		39
Uncertain or D/K	52	Uncertain or D/K	15		9

In spite of the fact that Thompson had run a high profile statewide campaign during much of 1976 and had actually been governor for half a year, the residents of southern Illinois were still predominantly withholding judgment in the summer of 1977. Our results showed that a plurality said they were “uncertain” about Jim Thompson. Of those who had made up their minds, Thompson’s ratings were more favorable or very favorable than unfavorable (39 percent total to

10 percent total). Later, the state did make up its collective mind about Thompson, and he became a very popular governor statewide including in southern Illinois. Thompson ultimately served a record 14 years in the Governor's office, leaving that office in 1991.

Chronologically the situation for Pat Quinn in 2010 was similar to that for Jim Thompson in 1977. Quinn took office in January of 2009 when he was elevated from the Lieutenant Governor's office upon the impeachment of former Governor Rod Blagojevich. This meant that Quinn had been in office for a total of fifteen months when we did our southern Illinois survey in April of 2010. Unlike the case of Jim Thompson earlier, the voters of this region fairly quickly and definitively made up their minds toward Pat Quinn and the job he was doing as governor. It is clear from our data that in the spring of 2010 the voters of southern Illinois were not in a good mood about their state government and some of their ire was directed at Governor Quinn. His somewhat or strongly approve numbers were a combined 31 percent. This was below but not so markedly different from Thompson in 1977 who stood at 39 percent favorable or very favorable.

However, Quinn's unfavorable marks were much higher than Thompson's. Most respondents (54 percent) disapproved of Governor Quinn's job performance at the time of our 2010 survey. Unlike Thompson in 1977, Pat Quinn came into the office in January of 2009, and he had already been governor for well over a year when he had to run for the first time based on his own record in that office. It was obvious that he had a steep hill to climb to be re-elected in the fall of 2010. As we now know, he successfully climbed that hill statewide on November 2nd when Quinn was elected to the Governor's office by a narrow margin over Bill Brady (Jackson, 2011). However, he achieved his statewide victory with only marginal help from the southern Illinois region. Quinn lost every county in southern Illinois to Brady except for Jackson and Alexander Counties. He also lost the popular vote in this region by a substantial majority (Ibid). These pro-Republican results were a far cry from the election of 1998, when Glenn Poshard carried practically every county in southern Illinois often by a wide margin, and many in central Illinois in his race against George Ryan. Rod Blagojevich did not carry all the counties in southern Illinois in either 2002 or 2006, but he carried a substantial minority of the counties and he did much better in the popular vote in this region than Pat Quinn did just four years later. It is evident from these data that the Democratic Governor has had some real opponents and critics in southern Illinois and his job approval ratings languished in the spring of 2010.

We turn now to how Quinn fared in the spring of 2011. Almost a year had ensued in the interim between our two polls, and much had happened in the political world. Most notably, Quinn was victorious in the fall 2010 general election, and the Democrats held onto the Illinois House and Senate although by much more narrow margins than they had before. In January of 2011 Pat Quinn and the Democrats pushed an increase in the personal and corporate income taxes through the General Assembly in the "lame duck" session which occurred on January 12th just before the new legislature was to convene. The Democrats had been saying for months that something had to be done about the state's deep state budget deficit, and Quinn had run on a pledge to increase the personal income tax rate from three to four percent. The final bill that passed the General Assembly was for 5 percent on the personal income tax and 7 percent on the corporate rate. The Republicans cried foul and not a single Republican voted for the tax increase in either the House or the Senate. Only two legislators from southern Illinois, Democrats John Bradley from Marion and Dan Reitz from Steelville, voted for the tax increase.

All this political conflict provides the context for the column on the far right of Table 3. There we can see Pat Quinn's job approval ratings as of mid-February 2011. A total of 29 percent of the respondents either approved or strongly approved of the way Governor Quinn was doing his job. This contrasts with 61 percent who disapproved or strongly disapproved,

producing a 32 percentage-point plurality of the Governor’s critics over his supporters. This is a remarkably wide gap and probably reflects to some extent the general unhappiness with the tax increase as well as other grievances the voters had built up. It may also reflect the results of the November 2, 2010, general elections when Governor Quinn only carried two counties in all of southern Illinois. The Republican, Senator Bill Brady, not only carried the rest of the region’s counties, in most of them his vote advantage ranged from 10 to 30 percentage points (Jackson, 2011, Appendix B).

Governor Quinn’s vote totals and job approval ratings in southern Illinois, as well as the returns in the U.S. Senate race, in which Republican Congressman Mark Kirk enjoyed landslide victories over Democratic State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulis in southern Illinois, indicate just how significant a challenge Democratic candidates in statewide and federal office races will have to face in a region that has become increasingly difficult territory for the Democrats. This is particularly the case for Democrats who are from Chicago, since southern Illinois residents are particularly hostile to the city (Leonard, June, 2010). For a statewide Democratic candidate to win southern Illinois in today’s world, he or she almost surely needs to be from outside the city to have a good chance. Even popular incumbents like Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Secretary of State Jesse White face a tough and competitive environment in this region, although each carried Southern Illinois in 2010 (Jackson, 2011, Appendix A).

The foregoing discussion also provides the context for our analysis of the people of southern Illinois’ views of how well the Illinois House and Senate were doing their jobs in 1977 and how they rated those two legislative bodies in 2010 and 2011. Table 4 provides the results.

Table 4
Attitudes Toward Illinois House and Senate

	1977	2011	1977	2011
	House		Senate	
Very Favorable	7%	1%	8%	2%
Favorable	33	21	32	22
Uncertain	42	33	41	30
Unfavorable	5	25	5	25
Very Unfavorable	2	17	2	19
D/K	11	4	12	3*
N=	288		401	400

* Note there were minor wording changes in the 2011 survey, i.e. "Uncertain" was changed to "Haven't Heard Enough to Rate" and "Unfavorable" and "Favorable" were changed to "Somewhat Unfavorable" and "Somewhat Favorable".

From Table 4 it is evident that these questions capture an era of enormous change. In 1977 the people of southern Illinois were remarkably sanguine about their state government. Four in ten were either strongly favorable or at least favorable toward the Illinois House and a comparable 40 percent were either favorable or very favorable toward the Illinois Senate. In 1977 those who were not favorable toward both bodies were not, however, predominantly unfavorable (5 percent) or very unfavorable (2 percent) toward either of these legislative bodies, but they were predominantly in the uncertain or don't know categories. Over half were either uncertain or did not know enough to rank the legislative bodies.

This positive evaluation coupled with some reluctance to judge stands in marked contrast with the pervasive level of disapproval of the job being done by the Illinois House and Senate in the more recent poll. In the case of the Senate, 24 percent had a favorable or very favorable view of the job they were doing while a total of 44 percent had an unfavorable or very unfavorable view in our 2011 study. This is an approval versus disapproval gap of 20 percentage points.

The Illinois House scores no better. Only 22 percent of our respondents had either a favorable or very favorable of the House while 42 percent were either unfavorable or very unfavorable toward this body, again an approval-disapproval gap of 20 percentage points. Perhaps this high degree of negativism can be explained partially by the timing of our poll. It was taken just a month after the General Assembly had passed and Governor Quinn had signed a significant new increase in the state income tax on individuals and corporations. Given the massive size of the Illinois budget deficit and the fact that the state's financial crisis had been developing for years, this was arguably a perfectly responsible action on the part of the state government. It was, however, highly unpopular and roundly condemned on editorial pages, in letters to the editor, and on talk radio across the state. Tax increases are never popular in the United States; it is an engrained part of our political culture to oppose taxes while benefitting daily from the governmental goods and services they make possible.

A part of this increasingly negative view of state government is captured in our data. It is worth noting that the earlier poll did not reflect this same level of negativism and cynicism toward government. We found a certain level of ambivalence and uncertainty about the government in 1977; however, over 40 percent were favorable and only 7 percent were unfavorable in their evaluations of their state government's two representative bodies. One should keep in mind that the earlier poll was taken eight years after Illinois had instituted its first-ever state income tax and many observers predicted that those who had voted for the tax would be punished at the polls. With the possible exception of Governor Richard Ogilvie in 1972, that dire prediction did not come to pass. Most of southern Illinois had apparently forgotten their initial hostility toward their legislators by the time our earlier poll was taken or perhaps had time to see the benefits of the new revenue.

Our longitudinal data indicate major growth in the level of negativity toward state government during the ensuing era. This change represents a marked decline in the citizens of southern Illinois' evaluations of those people they elect to serve them in the Illinois General Assembly. Political elites, opinion leaders and the people themselves would do well to contemplate what it means to operate a mass democracy when the level of negative evaluation of our leaders, who are after all freely chosen in frequent elections, are held in such low regard by the very people they are supposed to be leading.

Table 5
Rating of Governmental Effect on Daily Life

	1976		2011		
	Federal	Local	Federal	State	Local
A Great Deal	47%	19%	50%	46%	24%
Some	40	54	33	37	45
Little	9	21	13	12	26
None	4	7	3	3	6
N=	217	216	N= 400		

We continue this theme of rating the various levels of government with the data reported in Tables 5 and 6. Table 5 asked for the respondents to rate the federal and local governments on how much effect those levels had on the daily lives of the respondents. In 1976, 47 percent said the federal government had “a great deal” of effect on their daily lives and another 40 percent said that the federal government had at least “some” effect. This left only 9 percent who said “little” effect and 4 percent who claimed that the federal government had no effect on their daily lives. The federal government out-ranked the local governments, which were also generally regarded as being very relevant to the daily lives of the people of southern Illinois. On this dimension the local governments came in second to the federal government. Ordinarily one might expect the local governments to be perceived to have more impact on the daily lives of the people than the federal government, but that was not the case in 1976.

Unfortunately we did not ask this question regarding state government in either 1976 or 1977. The results for 2011 are instructive nevertheless. State government ranked second to the federal government (at 50 percent compared to 46 percent) in the respondents’ evaluations that they had “a great deal” of impact on their daily lives. Another 37 percent ranked state government as having at least “some” effect. In these most recent data, state government widely outranked local government in the great-deal-of-effect category. This finding seems anomalous in light of the fact that the local governments provide for many of the services closest to the daily lives of the people, and we reserve an honored place in the American political culture for the Jeffersonian tradition of respecting government conducted by our friends and neighbors, many of whom an average citizen can know and interact with personally. Be that as it may, the 2011 ranking is federal, state, and local government, in that order in the respondents’ evaluations of which level has the most important effect on their daily lives.

Table 6
Evaluation of Governmental Effect on Daily Life

	1976		2011		
	Federal	Local	Federal	State	Local
Mostly Beneficial	42%	70%	33%	27%	54%
Mostly Harmful	24	11	54	59	31
Undecided	34	19	13	15	15
N=	201	197	N= 400		

The finding reported in Table 5 does not presage a benevolent attitude toward the federal and state levels of government, however. Table 6 asked the respondents to rate that governmental effect as “mostly beneficial” or “mostly harmful.” In 1976 the results for the federal government were some-what positive as 42 percent said the effects of the national government were mostly beneficial while 24 percent said they were mostly harmful. Almost one-third said they were undecided. Given the context of the times, coming soon after the bitter national conflicts over the War in Vietnam, Watergate and the resignation of Richard Nixon, this 1977 evaluation from the citizens of southern Illinois does not seem to be particularly critical or cynical toward their governments. Indeed, local governments are ranked by 70 percent of the respondents as being mostly beneficial as opposed to only 11 percent who ranked them as mostly harmful with 19 percent uncertain. Local governments are decidedly more favorably evaluated than the federal government in our 1976 survey although the ratio of positive to negative evaluations of the federal government is “mostly beneficial” by an almost two-to-one margin.

The change that is evident in the comparisons with the 2011 data is skewed markedly in a negative direction. Only one-third of our recent respondents ranked the federal government’s effect as being mostly beneficial leaving well over a majority (54 percent) who said that the national government’s effect on their daily lives was mostly harmful. The findings for state government are even more cynical. Only 27 percent said the state’s effects on their lives were mostly beneficial, leaving almost 6 in 10 who ranked the state’s effects as mostly harmful.

It is striking that this result comes out of southern Illinois, a region studded with state prisons, a major military installation at Scott Air Force base, a major state university at Carbondale, multiple state-supported community colleges, tourism in the Shawnee National Forest, a Veterans Administration Hospital in Marion, and a state mental health facility and veterans home in Anna. These major employers are in addition to the K-12 public schools, roads, streets, and highways, and the wide variety of social and human service agencies all deeply, directly dependent upon the state. All of these direct governmental expenditures in the region are supplemented by a wide variety of tax breaks for business and industry, e.g. the STAR (sales tax revenue) Bonds, the Interstate 57 interchange funding and Miners Stadium projects in Marion, the EDGE (Economic Development for a Growing Economy) program applied to Continental Tire in Mt. Vernon, and a variety of other programs designed to lure new projects to southern Illinois or expand those already here. Far from being the malevolent force that southern Illinoisans perceive, the state government supports the life and economy of the region in a way that it cannot live without.

Public Improvements

Table 7
Potential Projects/ Programs

	1976			1977			2011				
	S.A. - Agree	D/K	Disagree- S.D	S.A.- Agree	D/K	Disagree- S.D	S.A.	Agree	D/K	Disagree	S.D.
Better Streets/ Highways	87%	8%	5%	88%	5%	6%	36%	42%	3%	12%	8%
Attract Small/ Medium Industry	83	9	8	82	9	6	58	34	2	3	3
Support local elem. And High School	62	20	18	59	20	20	42	33	3	13	10
Develop Tourism	59	24	17	65	21	11	31	41	5	16	8
Attract Large Industry	57	12	31	62	16	20	53	33	3	8	3
Provide Tax Breaks to Industry	51	21	28	*	*	*	42	38	5	10	6
Increase Financial support for C.C.	50	28	23	*	*	*	24	41	5	17	14

Note: Some columns may not equal 100% due to rounding or missing data.

*Not asked that year

We asked respondents whether they would support various public improvement projects for their communities. We instructed them to lay aside for the moment the question of how to pay for the projects and just focus on the desirability of doing these various things for the general improvement or general welfare of the community. As Table 7 reports, there was very high level of support for some of these projects in the 1976 and 1977 surveys, with the most popular projects gaining above 80 percent approval and none falling below majority approval. The most agreed-upon projects included building better streets and highways and attracting small to medium industries, both of which garnered agreement from over 80 percent of the respondents in both the 1976 and 1977 polls. The level of agreement had dropped somewhat, to 78 percent in our 2011 poll; however, there is still a very high level of approval for the building of better transportation networks for our region. People seem to understand and support the real need for a transportation system to link the area together and to transport people and goods to jobs, school and the market. The residents of southern Illinois in 1976 and 1977 clearly recognized that improved infrastructure was good for the community and the region and that recognition continues some 35 years later. In addition, improvement in streets and highways has always been a popular way for political leaders to “bring home the bacon” and build up the area while at the same time ingratiating themselves with their constituents. While Congressman Kenneth J. Gray was the champion of this project-oriented view of his role in the U. S. House in Washington, he was just the most effective of a long line of state representatives and members of Congress who have emphasized this role.

Likewise bringing business and industry to southern Illinois has been a mainstay of political promise and government activity for the past half century. The decline of the coal industry and of manufacturing in this area have increased the urgency of economic development. There is a constant refrain in favor of doing whatever is necessary, giving any tax break that can be devised, and building up any location with public improvements and infrastructure to attract any business which promised jobs. The state’s EDGE program has long been a mainstay in its

attempt to attract and subsidize business locations and job expansions throughout the state. The state and local concessions to support the STAR bonds project in Marion is just the latest example of a long line of incentives which have been offered widely by governments at both the state and local level in the constant competition for expanding the economy. Of course, the problem is that virtually every other state and community in the nation is also aggressively offering tax breaks and other incentives to get a company or business to locate in their areas as well. This is a particularly compelling quest in the more rural and sparsely populated sections of the nation, and southern Illinois joins a long list of places where new or expanded business and industries is eagerly sought. Industrial parks and TIF Districts are as common and ubiquitous as high school football stadiums in southern Illinois as they are in much of rural America today. This is a constant national competition pursued by eager state and local suitors who offer a wide variety of tax, financial, job training and infrastructure improvement incentives to business and industry to gain their favor.

Table 7 indicates that this objective directed toward small and medium-sized industry was popular in 1976 and 1977, and it has grown in public approval in 2011. By the time of our survey in the spring of 2011, fully 92 percent of the respondents had a favorable reaction to the prospect of attracting small to medium-sized industries to the southern Illinois area. Disagreement was limited to less than 10 percent of the respondents in our most recent survey. This comes about as close to a consensus value as one ever finds in real-world survey research. In addition, support for attracting large industry had grown markedly in this 35-year period. In our 1976 survey 57 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the need for the region to pursue this objective. This was more than a majority but hardly close to a consensus value in that era. By 2011 a whopping 86 percent were found in those two categories of positive support for big business development.

The closely related question is whether to provide tax breaks to industry in order to attract large employers. In 1976 this offering of financial incentives was approved by a bare majority, that is, by 51 percent of our respondents. Obviously giving tax breaks to business and industry deprives public bodies like local governments, schools, park districts, etc. of needed revenues and the demands on their services may actually increase if new business and industry successfully lure new people to the community. Sympathy for public taxing bodies is in short supply, however. By 2011 fully 80 percent of our respondents agreed with giving such financial incentives to attract business. It is easy in this climate to cloak virtually any proposal in the mantle of increased jobs, and our data indicate that the people of southern Illinois, like many other areas of the nation, are overwhelmingly in favor of doing whatever it takes to try to increase the employment levels in their regions.

The problem is, of course, that the competition is not only from the other areas of our own nation, the competition is increasingly from overseas and from masses of people who are willing to work for very low wages under very harsh conditions. Millions of American jobs have been outsourced by big and small businesses alike as they incessantly seek to maximize their profits. Workers in Illinois in general and southern Illinois in particular have a difficult time competing with the workers in the less developed world who have taken away millions of American jobs over the past two to three decades. In a global economy the competing worker likely is not located in Indiana, Kentucky or Missouri rather he or she is in China, India, and Vietnam. Our data indicate that the people of southern Illinois recognize this new reality, at least to some extent, but they do not know exactly what can be done about it to benefit our region. Thus, they are in favor of virtually any tax break or business incentive that seems at all likely to work and to create new jobs no matter what the trade-offs are.

Support for public education has also been a widely shared value in the southern Illinois region for a long time. Intuitively people understand that better education is a *sine qua non* for economic development and prosperity in a global economy. Developed economies like that in the United States will have to depend on advanced education and highly developed technical and scientific knowledge to provide the jobs that add value at a level which cannot be duplicated in the sweat shops of the less-developed world. Our data indicate that the people of southern Illinois get that basic truth about how the new economy works. In the two earlier surveys 62 and 59 percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their communities should increase support for elementary and secondary education. This support for the public schools was even higher in 2011, when exactly three-fourths of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with increasing support for the elementary and high schools in their communities.

Support for the community colleges is also widespread, but not as prevalent as for K-12 schools. In our 1976 survey 50 percent of the respondents were in favor of increased financial support for the community colleges and the remaining half either disagreed or said they didn't know if this was a good idea.

Since 1976 the community colleges have grown markedly in size and mission, and they are now seen as one of the keys to economic improvement for the region and enhanced opportunity for the lives of people who need basic education and jobs-oriented skills. By 2011, 65 percent of the respondents were in agreement with the suggestion to provide more financial support for the community colleges while 31 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Those who dissented probably thought the community colleges were being supported well already, and since approximately half of their funding comes from the local property tax, this proposal may have hit too close to home for some of our respondents in the recent survey. In addition, most people in this region recognize that the state of Illinois is caught in the deep throes of a state budget crisis and most of the talk for the past three years has been about places to cut state services and spending. Most southern Illinois residents recognize that a quality education is essential, especially for young people, to compete or even survive in the modern, knowledge-based economy. The focus on education is an even more widely shared value today than it was 35 years ago when our first survey was done.

Tourism is one path to increased jobs and economic development. Thirty-five years ago this path was just beginning to be developed in southern Illinois. There were nice state parks in the region and some emphasis on outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing, but there was no coordinated attempt to market the region with a coherent message and to attract outsiders to come visit southern Illinois. In our earlier survey, 59 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed and 17 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the objective of developing tourism for the region. Since then there have been numerous new initiatives to help encourage the tourism industry. These include the new southern Illinois Wine Trail, the opening of a wide range of Bed and Breakfasts and new hotel and motel facilities, expansion of the state parks system, and the World Shooting Complex in Sparta. In addition, there are much more coherent publicity campaigns now being aimed at wider audiences in such metropolitan areas as Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis and Nashville. All of this new effort is clearly approved by a wide margin by the respondents to our 2011 survey. As Table 7 indicates, 72 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that increasing tourism was a good idea and only 24 percent disagreed. Tourism is another activity where the appeal to increased jobs and greater economic development is widely approved by almost three in four residents of southern Illinois, and that approval has grown over the past three and a half decades.

Most Important Problem

A common approach in public policy surveys is to ask respondents to name the most important problem facing the nation, state, or locality in question. In the 1976 survey, researchers asked about the most important local problem; the 1977 study asked about the most important national problem. The 2011 telephone survey asked about both.

One approach is the open-ended method: Asking respondents to name a problem rather than to choose from among a list the interviewer presents has the advantage getting at unaided, top-of-mind perception without the introduction of bias from researchers. On the other hand, open-ended questions may have the disadvantage of disorganized, seemingly random responses, or of researchers placing responses into uneven categories.

Another method is the “card sort,” a technique in face-to-face surveys. The interviewer presents the respondent with a list of cards, each, in this instance, representing an important public policy problem. The respondent then sorts them from most important to least important. While this does depend on the researchers’ perceptions of what the most important problems are, the stack of cards allows the respondent to process a larger number of problems than would be the case with a list of problems read over the phone.

We used the open-ended method of identifying the most important problem in the 2011 telephone survey. The 1976 and 1977 interviews used the card sort method.

Changes in the perception of “most important problem,” over time, can provide an interesting perspective on history. Happily, this is the case in our study—although the different methods used to identify the problems make our results not strictly comparable.

In 1977, respondents chose the most important and second-most important national problems from a series of 18 cards. (Results are shown in Table 8a.) No single problem predominates. A little more than a third chose crime as one of the top two problems in the country, followed by inflation and unemployment. One in five chose energy as the first- or second-most important problem.

Table 8a

First- and Second-Most Important Problems Facing Nation (1977)**

Crime.....	37%
Inflation.....	29%
Unemployment.....	27%
Energy.....	22%

In 2011, we asked the question in an open-ended format, and, during the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression, we were not surprised to see that the plurality of southern Illinoisans (45%) said jobs and/or the economy constituted the most important problem. (See Table 8b.) Not only was there one major salient issue, but the open-ended format brought a

** Percentages show the frequency of each problem having been chosen as first- or second-most important problem. Other tables in this section represent the single most-important problem.

wider-ranging, less focused set of other issues. About one respondent in five (19%) mentioned the federal deficit or government spending. Also receiving mentions were government accountability or leadership (9%), war or other foreign policy issues (8%), health care (5%), moral issues of some sort (5%), and education (3%).

Table 8b

Most Important Problem Facing Nation (2011)	
Jobs/economy.....	45%
Federal deficit/spending.....	19%
Government leadership.....	9%
War/foreign policy.....	8%
Health care.....	5%
Moral issues.....	5%
Health care.....	3%
Other.....	6%

The contrast regarding problems at the local level is even more interesting. In 1976, a relatively settled period in our history, respondents’ ideas of the most important problems facing their communities produced no predominant theme—only generalized, small-town issues: infrastructure, education, crime. On the other hand, in 2011 the crisis in the national economy looms as the largest *local* problem, dwarfing the sorts of issues that bubbled to the surface in 1976. Unemployment and an underperforming economy can quickly drive complaints about potholes or poor schools into the background. (See Table 8c.)

Table 8c

Most Important Problem Facing Town or Community			
1976	2011		
Water problems.....	12%	Jobs/economy.....	57%
Drug addiction.....	9%	Actions of politicians.....	16%
Unemployment.....	8%	Education.....	4%
Need more industry.....	7%	Crime/drugs.....	3%
Small-town problems.....	6%	Infrastructure.....	3%
Aid to education.....	5%	Health care.....	1%
Transportation, railroads.....	5%	Other.....	4%
Highway expansion.....	5%	No answer.....	12%

Interestingly, and consistent with a theme that resurfaces throughout this study, the second-most important issue among open-ended responses was categorized as “actions of

politicians.” These tended to be complaints about specific politicians (notably President Obama and Governor Quinn) or generally negative comments about the greed, ineptitude, or dishonesty of politicians in general. In other words, for many southern Illinoisans, the toxic, anti-government attitude is more salient than the more concrete, manifest public policy issues such as the roads, education, or public safety in their own hometowns.

Both the 1976 study and the 2011 study next asked respondents whether they would vote for a property tax increase to fix their “most important problem.” In 1976, a 44 percent plurality said no, with nearly as many (38 percent) saying yes. About one in five (18 percent) said “maybe.” (See Table 9a). In the virulently anti-tax environment of 2011, the no-property-tax reaction was much stronger, with almost three-fourths (73%) opposed and just one in five (21%) in favor.

Table 9a

Vote for Property Tax Increase to Fix Most Important Local Problem

	1976		2011
Yes.....	38%	Yes.....	21%
No.....	44%	No.....	73%
Maybe.....	18%	Other/DK.....	6%

In the 2011 study we also asked respondents whether they would support a sales tax in order to fix their most important problem. While a majority (55 percent) still opposed the sales tax, support for the sales tax was almost double that of the property tax (40 percent vs. 21 percent).

Table 9b

Vote for Sales Tax Increase to Fix Most Important Local Problem (2011)

Yes.....	40%
No.....	55%
Other/DK.....	5%

We might attribute the rise in opposition to the property tax to the heightened anti-tax tone of contemporary political debate. However, we should leave open the possibility that respondents recognized that a “most important problem” such as a bad national economy or a lingering mistrust of politicians is not amenable to being “fixed” by sales or property taxes in the same way that infrastructure projects or local education might be.

Opinion on Abortion

In Table 10 we explore one of the most polarizing and explosive social issues of our times. In 1976 the issue of abortion had just become a major national issue. *Roe v. Wade* was decided in 1973, and it was becoming controversial then but was not yet the politically polarizing issue that it is today. It was only in 1980 that the Republican Party adopted an anti-abortion plank in its national platform. Their nominee for the president that year, Ronald Reagan, was the first major presidential candidate for either party to take a clear and unequivocal position against legal abortions which, since *Roe v. Wade*, had been the law of the land (Craig and O’Brien, 1993). The Democrats quickly followed suit, making legal abortions a plank of their platform that same year. Since then the two parties at the national level have come to stand strongly in the pro-life or pro-choice positions. Since 1980 the fight over legal abortions has been one of the most contentious social issue conflicts of the times, and supporters on both sides of the argument have sorted themselves into warring camps. It is very difficult for the political system to process this conflict in the normal channels when compromise is viewed by both sides as an unacceptable sell-out of important moral and value-laden positions.

Table 10
View on Abortion

	1977 Survey		2010 Survey	2011 Survey
Strongly Oppose- Oppose Ban on Abortions	35%	Legal Under Any Circumstances	28%	12%
Strongly Support- Support Ban on Abortions	42	Legal Under Certain Circumstances	51	60
Uncertain	17	Illegal Under All Circumstances	17	24
		D/K or N/A	4	3

Note: The question in 1977 was whether respondents supported, strongly supported, opposed, or strongly opposed a ban on Abortions. It was somewhat different in 2010- 2011.

In 1976 we posed the question as a stark choice between supporting a ban on abortions and opposing a ban on abortions. Polling on the question was new then, and a widely agreed-upon question had yet been devised by the pollsters. As Table 10 indicates, the results on this item were fairly close then among southern Illinois residents, with 42 percent supporting a ban on abortions and 35 percent opposing such a ban with 17 percent saying they were uncertain. By 2010 and 2011 the picture had changed considerably. In 2010, 28 percent took the pure and unequivocal “legal under all circumstances” Pro-Choice position and 17 percent favoring the “illegal under all circumstances” or pure Pro-Life position. This was a marked decline in the Pro-

Life position compared to the 42 percent who wanted to ban all abortions in our 1977 survey. In 2011 the most pure Pro-Choice cohort was somewhat smaller at 12 percent and the pure Pro-Life position was somewhat larger than in 2010 with 24 percent claiming the Pro-Life mantle. This was not enough, however, to negate the very substantial movement which had occurred in the Pro-Choice direction over the 35 year period.

In both of the recent polls the most important category is the middle one, which claimed 51 percent of the respondents in 2010 and fully 60 percent in 2011. That is, the “legal under certain circumstances” position has definitely become the majoritarian position in this hotly fought and highly polarized conflict. Indeed, that is exactly the position that has prevailed in the realm of public policy since the fight began with *Roe v. Wade* and then escalated with the 1980 national conventions. In spite of all the high-profile conflict over this issue in the past four decades, abortions are still legal, but access has been curtailed with various legal restrictions passed by the state legislatures. This is not a pure position where either side can claim that their values have prevailed. In fact, the middle position is probably morally repugnant for those who claim the moral high ground on either side. However, the middle-ground position is exactly where we stand as a nation and as a state. Most of the people of southern Illinois have chosen this middle-of-the-road solution.

Views of Industries and Groups

In Table 11 we report the results of our three surveys with respect to the respondents’ views toward various groups. All of these groups were chosen because of their prominence in southern Illinois and their importance in the economic and social life of the region. The groups include coal miners, the coal industry, Southern Illinois University, college students, farmers and physicians. When taken together these groups represent the backbone of the economy in southern Illinois.

Table 11
Attitudes Toward Groups

	Very Favorable			Favorable			Uncertain			Unfavorable			Very Unfavorable		
	1976	1977	2011	1976	1977	2011	1976	1977	2011	1976	1977	2011	1976	1977	2011
The Coal Industry	34%	*	23%	40%	*	60%	20%	*	10%	5%	*	6%	0	*	1%
Coal Miners	35	35	23	47	44	65	14	17	8	3	2	4	0	1	1
SIU	26	31	16	48	48	57	17	13	10	6	4	13	1	1	5
College Students	24	33	16	54	50	69	17	11	9	3	2	6	1	3	1
Farmers	67	56	29	30	38	63	1	5	4	1	1	4	0	0	1
Physicians	40	38	15	43	44	63	11	11	12	4	5	9	2	2	2
N=	230	288				400									

Note: Some rows may not equal 100% due to rounding or missing data.

* Coal Industry question was not included in 1977.

At the top of Table 11 we started with the coal industry, including coal miners. Coal was once king in southern Illinois; it was the mainstay of the economy of this region when our initial surveys were done in 1976 and 1977. Almost everyone in southern Illinois in that era knew someone working in the coal industry or had a family member or friend working in the mines. In 1976 almost three-fourths, i.e. 74 percent of our respondents had a favorable or very favorable view of the coal industry and only 5 percent were unfavorable toward the industry. Closely related were the 1976 and 1977 results for coal miners where 82 percent were favorable or very favorable toward coal miners in 1976 and 79 percent were similarly favorable toward miners in 1977. There was a total of only 3 percent in both categories of unfavorable attitudes in 1976 and 1977. One could hardly find an occupation which drew more favorable reviews from the public than coal miners in that era.

The data in the right column representing 2011 on this table show that the coal industry is equally well regarded in our most recent poll. There, 83 percent of the respondents said they were either favorable or very favorable toward coal as an industry which is larger than the earlier positive results. Only 7 percent were unfavorable or very unfavorable. These results are reinforced by the people of southern Illinois' evaluations of coal miners, which have grown to an almost consensus level of favorable evaluations at 88 percent favorable and only a total of 5 percent in the two unfavorable categories combined.

This is a remarkable record in light of the very clear decline of the coal industry and drastic reduction in the number of active coal miners in southern Illinois. Coal is no longer king. In fact, the number of working mines and the number of people actively engaged in mining coal have declined precipitously in the 35 years since our first poll was taken. Nevertheless, the image and the mystique are still strong in southern Illinois. Many current residents had fathers or grandfathers who mined coal. Many local communities had much of their economy and their communal lives based around the coal mines. Honor and respect for those who followed this dangerous and hard work is a deeply engrained cultural norm in this region. Many people in the region still harbor the hope that coal will once again be mined on a widespread basis and the number of active mines and the number of people making a living off coal will again increase and be the economic salvation of the region. They hope for the resurgence of the coal industry to be led by various clean-coal technologies such as the various liquid-fraction plans which are currently being pursued. Even if this renaissance does not come to the industry in the coal belt of southern Illinois, the place of the mines and the miners is still secure according to the results of our most recent study. It will take more generations before that cultural norm is lost.

Farmers are much like coal miners in southern Illinois. The esteem and regard they elicit from their neighbors is evident in Table 10. Fully 97 percent of the respondents to our 1976 survey said they had a favorable or very favorable view of farmers and only 1 percent were unfavorable. Similarly, in 1977, 94 percent of the respondents were favorable and only 1 percent were unfavorable. The favorability ratings for farmers held up over the ensuing 35 years, as the results for 2011 show; 93 percent in our most recent poll were either favorable or very favorable toward farmers, with only 5 percent negative and 4 percent uncertain. There may be a minor note of critique in the current data, with a slightly more negative cast to the results. There are periodic conflicts in Illinois and the Midwest over the environmental impact of some farms, especially regarding the large animal operations where their waste may pollute water resources. A few respondents may recognize that large companies now own many farms and the corporate farm has replaced the family farm in many places; however, that is less the case in southern Illinois than in other more prosperous agricultural areas in central and northern Illinois. The mystique of the family farm is a powerful symbol in the American political culture and most notably in the rural areas like southern Illinois.

Medical doctors are also accorded great respect by the people of southern Illinois in all our polls; however, their levels of approval are generally below those achieved by the other occupations we studied in our three polls. In 1976 and 1977 over three-fourths of the respondents were either favorable or very favorable toward physicians. This left 11 percent uncertain and 6 and 7 percent respectively in the unfavorable or very unfavorable categories. By 2011 the level of very favorable ratings for physicians had declined significantly to only 15 percent; however, this was mitigated somewhat by 63 percent who held favorable views. The uncertain category remained about the same at 12 percent while the unfavorable or very unfavorable categories combined grew slightly to 11 percent.

It may well be that a generational change has been underway which has helped to sustain the image of medical doctors. As the baby boom cohort of the population has aged and more people are living very long lives, we are all more and more dependent on the care of a physician or teams of physicians. In addition, there is a growing medical community in southern Illinois especially anchored by the Southern Illinois Healthcare complex centered in Carbondale and the Heartland Regional Health Center in Marion and Good Samaritan in Mt. Vernon and the Southern Illinois Orthopedics Center located on the Route 13 corridor in Carbondale and Herrin. Thus, a growing medical community means more jobs and economic development for the region. People in southern Illinois may understand and salute both developments in the results of our polls.

Another mainstay of the southern Illinois economy is Southern Illinois University. It is often observed that SIU is the engine which drives the economy of this region. With more than 7,000 employees and about 20,000 students, SIU is by far the largest single employer south of Interstate 64 and one of the larger employers in the Springfield and Edwardsville regions. The recent financial stress experienced by SIU, caused by the state's structural deficit and consistent inability to meet its financial obligations, has caused many to focus anew on the importance of higher education as an economic stimulus to the region and the state.

Our data indicate that the importance of SIU and its students is appreciated among our current respondents; this regard is of long duration in the region. We noted in the earlier study that those polls were taken during unsettled times on university campuses. This was the era of the Vietnam War and its immediate aftermath. Our 1976 poll was taken only 6 years after the anti-war riots (following the tragedies at Kent State and Jackson State Universities) had taken such a toll in Carbondale that the campus had to be closed prematurely and the students sent home on May 12th of 1970. Town-gown relationships were at an all-time low point and the feelings of animosity toward the university and its students were palpable in much of the region.

In spite of all the conflict and problems attendant the cultural upheavals of the 1970s, even in 1976 our results show a reservoir of surprisingly widespread good will toward the university and its students. In 1976, 78% of the respondents were either favorable or very favorable toward college students in general and 74% were favorable toward SIU. This left only 3% unfavorable toward college students and 5% unfavorable toward SIU. The favorable results for both were even higher in 1977, and that favorable rating had grown by 2011. In our most recent poll, 85% were favorable or very favorable toward college students generically and 79% were favorable or very favorable toward SIU specifically.

The authors and sponsors of this study work for SIU, so we are hardly neutral observers in this story. This is an era when the university is beset by financial difficulties and many other challenges which have been widely publicized in the region. The enrollment and retention of students has taken on a new urgency, and our ability to recruit and retain students from southern

Illinois has been the target of some criticism. It is also an era of shrinking enrollments in area high schools because of a declining population base and increasing numbers of students choosing community colleges because of their lower costs and proximity to their homes. These changes have loosened the ties that bound the region so firmly to the university for many generations. Yet in the middle of all the bad news, which is widely published, there are grounds for optimism in these data. The university and college students in general are held in esteem by a very wide majority of the people of this region. This is a reservoir of good will which is a deeply engrained part of the culture of this region. It is a reservoir that the university can build on as it re-doubles its recruitment efforts in our own backyard. Southern Illinois is a well-defined geographical place fixed on the east, west and south by the boundaries of the great rivers. Only the northern boundary is ever in doubt. For the purposes of this study we chose I-64 for that boundary. The residents of this area also share some common cultural traits and values, and we have documented some of those in this research. The people of southern Illinois hold to very strong cultural norms which give great respect to such basic industries as coal mining and farming and the hard working people who pursue them. They are also very positive toward the medical profession. Southern Illinois University in particular and college students in general received high marks in our studies, which span a period of 35 years and much division and turbulence on university campuses, including ours.

Conclusion

Southern Illinois is a well-defined geographical place fixed on the east, west, and south by the boundaries of the great rivers. Only the northern boundary is ever in doubt. For the purposes of this study we chose I-64 for that boundary. The residents of “Little Egypt” also share some common cultural traits and values, and we have documented some of those in this research. The people of southern Illinois hold to very strong cultural norms which give great respect to such basic industries as coal mining and farming and the hard working people who pursue them. They are also very positive toward the medical profession. Southern Illinois University in particular and college students in general received high marks in our studies, which span a period of 35 years and much division and turbulence on university campuses, including ours.

The residents of this area also feel fairly positive toward their public schools and community colleges and toward their local governments and the services they provide. By and large they reject the idea of paying more taxes for these services, but when they do contemplate perhaps paying more, they vastly favor the “sin taxes” on gambling and cigarettes as opposed to more general taxes such as sales and income tax, which would be more widely distributed and would raise far more revenue. In general, the people in our studies do not like taxes and they prefer someone else to pay them. We think that attitude reflects the larger political culture and the generally critical view of government and public officials.

There is much negativism revealed in our studies. A significant majority share a strong sense of distrust of government, especially federal and state government. Only local governments get some respect from a majority of the citizens of this region. In addition, the prominent officials who are elected to lead the national and state governments are generally not given high marks for job performance by those we surveyed. That negative evaluation of governmental officials has grown markedly in the three-plus decades covered by these studies. Our most recent study, especially, reveals a strong vote of no confidence in both the federal and state governments.

While some skepticism about government is always warranted in any democracy, the levels of distrust and disdain toward elected officials in this region borders on a degree of corrosive cynicism that cannot be functional for the system in the long run. Ironically, this is also a region where patriotism and basic regard for national symbols like the flag and the military are very strong components of the political culture as well. It is hard to square the two impulses. Theoretically one can love the overall nation, the basic system, without having respect for the current government and certainly that dichotomy constitutes a well-recognized pattern of attitudes in our political culture. However, in this country governments routinely change personnel composition and even partisan control with periodic elections held every two or four years, yet the negative evaluations tend to endure. This continuing cynicism and mistrust does beg the question as to where the boundaries between government and system begin and end. That is, the officials tapped in this study, as well as many others like it, are all popularly elected. They were not installed by coup or through overthrow of the government by the military as is the case in many other nations throughout history. As a people we generally take our respect for democracy and pride in American institutions quite seriously. However, the doubts about our basic respect for popular sovereignty are raised by data which consistently show that many Americans seem to love their country but hate their government, no matter which government is in power. There is a real disconnect between those two urges. Our national discourse encourages this disconnect.

We think the results of these surveys indicate that southern Illinois is now very much like the American South in its political attitudes. The Old South was dominated by Elazar's Traditionalistic political culture where protection of the status quo and the dominant position of the political and economic elites was everything. The New South has aggressively embraced the Individualistic culture where the emphasis is on whatever it takes to advance business interests, and economic development is paramount in the New South. Southern Illinois has strains of both in the political culture we have documented in this study. There is only a thin smattering of the Moralistic view which dominates among our neighboring states to the north and west of us. The Moralistic view places an emphasis on the community and on devising ways to address collective problems with real solutions for people like those in the southern Illinois region. It is hard to find many tracks of the Moralistic view in the data we have examined.

The two authors of this paper are transplants to southern Illinois. One of us grew up and was educated in the South, i.e. Arkansas, then moved to Texas, then to Georgia, then Maryland, then Tennessee, before coming to southern Illinois. The other grew up and was educated in a border state, Missouri. He then moved to Texas before coming to southern Illinois. We make our homes here now and find much to admire about the region and its people. We are both also students of southern and border state politics.

We see a lot that is familiar in the patterns of beliefs and values our polls have tapped. We think the partisan and ideological realignments which have swept the South over the past three decades are clearly at work in southern Illinois. The movement of the white South out of the Democratic Party, first to the Independent status, and finally to firm allegiance to the Republican Party at the national and state levels we have witnessed in our native states is also well underway in southern Illinois. The opposite pattern obtained for African-Americans in the South. This pattern may have been slower to take hold in southern Illinois than in the Deep South, but judging by recent voting returns as well as by much of our attitudinal data, the realignment is well along the way in this region. At the very minimum southern Illinois residents now resemble our border state neighbors like Missouri and Kentucky, and we are not far removed from our more southern neighbors. Much of southern Illinois is closer to Memphis geographically and attitudinally than we are to Chicago. It is worth remembering that we share a state with northern Illinois and not with west Tennessee or Kentucky, or the Delta of northern

Mississippi or east Arkansas. Southern Illinoisans need to take stock of where our future lies and to stress what unites us with our fellow citizens of the state more than emphasizing and aggravating what divides rural from urban, northern from southern, prosperous from struggling in this state and in the Midwestern region as a whole.

Editorial Opinion of the Authors

We have studied public opinion for a lot of years and reflected on the problems of representative government carefully. Based on that experience and our own reflections, we offer these observations about the national political culture in general, especially as they apply to southern Illinois in particular.

For at least four decades now the American people have been fed a steady diet of claims that the government was the enemy and that we would be better off without most, or perhaps all, of what the government does. That narrative includes the claim that the government is inherently corrupt, inefficient, and out to recklessly take money from the taxpayers to support unworthy people and capricious projects. These data from 2011 indicate that the “Nay-Sayers” toward the government have been getting their message across very effectively. The anti-government side is winning, and these results indicate that governments at all levels have very real problems with the confidence of the voters of southern Illinois. Other surveys show that this is also true for many parts of the nation as a whole (Rasmussen, March 21, 2011).

It is now popular and profitable for opinion leaders, cable television and radio talk show hosts to rail against the government routinely and incessantly. They attract an enthusiastic and broad audience by continuing to raise the temperature of the national discourse and hold it at the boiling point as much as possible. They also make a lot of money performing this act, wrapped as they are in constant moral outrage. This story line featuring a consistent sense of disenfranchisement and disappointment feeds the need to enlarge audiences and to sell more newspapers, but it is not functional for applying a reasoned approach to understanding and analyzing our collective problems and devising solutions that might work.

For all the best efforts of educators for the past two or three generations, the public is failing to learn one of the basic tenets of mass democracy, that is, there is a place and role for the public goods produced by the government and for a viable and even robust public sector. It does not have to be a zero-sum game that always pits the public sector against the private sector. Collective action is that which we must do together as a community because individuals cannot accomplish the same ends working separately. The government is the instrument for accomplishing those essential collective actions; however, many people do not understand that the state and the national governments are the absolutely essential arms of the people working together as the public sector.

The most recent contretemps between public employees and their unions and state officials in Wisconsin, Ohio, Florida, and New Jersey illustrate just how deep the resentment toward public-sector employees runs and how many political leaders are willing and ready to exploit that resentment.

There is a better and more productive way to view the question of the role of government and the size of the public sector, a discussion which has been relevant since the founding of the republic. Both the public and the private sectors perform critical functions for the social and

economic system. Each has its own particular role and contributions that must be made for the whole to function well and for the economy to grow and add to the prosperity of all. Our dominant political culture constantly pits one against another and suggests that the public sector is somehow a parasite on the private sector. The private sector is venerated in the United States. There is no problem with continuing that veneration, and that message is such a deeply engrained part of our political culture that it cannot be challenged anyway.

The public sector in southern Illinois, as in much of the rest of the nation, is often reviled and mistrusted, and that message is pervasive. Frequently this jaundiced view is also shared and perpetuated by the mass media. A certain amount of skepticism and constructive criticism is healthy in a democracy. Widespread and corrosive cynicism toward government, toward the public sector, and toward public employees, a sentiment that is endlessly repeated and reinforced in the 24-hour news cycle on cable television and talk radio, is a threat to the most fundamental premise of mass democracy, i.e. that, “We the people” have the basic good judgment necessary to govern ourselves. Thus, these polls and many others like them indicate that public educators have their work cut out for them whether they live in southern Illinois or anywhere else in the United States today. Public service should be regarded as an honorable calling and working for the government as laudable and important as working in the private sector.

Editorial Opinion of the Director

Americans have always had a healthy mistrust of government and politicians, often for good reason. That disgust is reflected in the surveys reported in this paper.

Polls rarely have shown institutions like Congress or State Legislatures to be popular. In Illinois, news reports are filled with stories about public officials on the take, being indicted or sweetening their pensions. In some regions, the corruption is sometimes viewed with humor and the state is the butt of jokes from late night comics.

From governors obstructing justice and selling favors to sheriffs dealing drugs to prison guards milking workers compensation systems, there is plenty of reason for people to disrespect public service. For too many officials, public service has become a path for personal gain. The bad apples spoil the image for the rest in the basket.

And when that happens at a time when people are struggling against the worst economy since the Great Depression, anger increases even more. That anger is compounded when public officials fail to deliver quality public services or are seen as profiting at public expense. Nationally, the failure of the two major parties to resolve the nation’s fiscal crisis – at a time when individuals are being forced to resolve their own – adds insult to the injury.

A former Reagan budget director, David Stockman, writing of deficit issues in the April 24, 2011 New York Times said, “So the Ryan plan worsens our trillion dollar structural deficit and the Obama plan amounts to small potatoes, at best. Worse, we are about to descend into class war because the Obama plan picks on the rich when it should be pushing tax increases for all, while the Ryan plan attacks the poor when it should be addressing middle class entitlements and defense.”

People sense that incompetence, as they have throughout our history, and this has helped fuel populist anger at the institutions of government and society. Today the fury is with the Tea

Party movement. A few years ago it was on the left with the MoveOn.org movement. In 2006 and 2008, it contributed to Democratic victories. In 2010, it contributed to Republican wins.

Improving the image and respect given public servants will require more than just changing media and talk show attitudes.

It requires producing results.

As outgoing Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley said on one of his farewell visits April 23 2011, “We’re public servants. We have to work. We’re public servants. We’re not entitled servants. We’re not entitled to anything. Whether you are a federal, state or county or city employee, you serve the public. You don’t serve yourself. We have to get back into that.”

Appendix A

Counties Included in Each Survey

1976-77

Alexander

Bond*

Clinton*

Franklin

Gallatin

Hamilton

Hardin

Jackson

Jefferson

Johnson

Marion

Massac

Monroe*

Perry

Pope

Pulaski

Randolph

Saline

Union

Washington

White

Williamson

2010-2011

Alexander

Franklin

Gallatin

Hamilton

Hardin

Jackson

Jefferson

Johnson

Massac

Perry

Pope

Pulaski

Randolph

Saline

Union

Washington

White

Williamson

*Not included in the 2010 and 2011 surveys

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