

August 24, 2016

To: Illinois Economic Policy Institute
 From: John Anzalone / Brian Stryker
 Re: Chicago Tax Poll Findings

This poll, conducted at your behest, explored whether the building media narrative about a Chicago tax revolt had a basis in public opinion. It does not: there's no brewing tax revolt. Taxes aren't top of mind for voters, and people are willing to pay more taxes for improved services. Voters also understand the financial problems were created long before the current Mayor and city council got there, and they back the recent municipal pension agreement even though it includes a tax increase.

Key Findings

- **Voters do not blame the current Mayor and city council for the city's budget problem.** Only 12% of voters say the budget problems are the current government's fault, compared to 37% who blame past mayors and city councils. Springfield and Bruce Rauner (21%) also earn a higher share of the blame.
- **Taxes are not a top of mind issue.** Voters are more concerned about education (35%) as well as crime and police issues (34%) than they are about taxes (15%). Even the tiny 14% of Chicago voters who identify as Republicans list taxes as their #3 issue.
- **Voters are willing to pay higher taxes for more services.** Voters would rather pay higher taxes for more services (29%) than lower taxes for fewer services (20%), though a plurality would prefer the current level of both (44%). A majority are also willing to pay more in taxes for the following specific services:

	<i>Willing / unwilling</i>
More police officers on foot and vehicle patrol	66% / 32%
More funding for school construction, teachers, and science and technology improvements	64% / 33%
Free universal Pre-K classes for all four year olds in Chicago	57% / 41%
More neighborhood services like rat abatement, tree trimming, and road paving	56% / 41%

- **When forced to specific choices, voters prefer tax increases to cuts in services:**
 - Twice as many people prefer Chicago "raise taxes like property taxes and other fees" (53%) instead of "cutting services like schools and police officers" (25%) to pay the pensions Chicago promised to city workers.

The following findings are based on a poll of n=600 Chicagoans who voted in at least 1 of the last 3 Mayoral elections (2011 primary, 2015 primary, 2015 runoff) conducted from August 8-11, 2016 via landline and cellphone. The expected margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is +4.0% and higher for subgroups.

- Voters make the same decision about balancing the budget with the same choices (53% raise taxes / 24% cut services).
- **Voters trust Rahm Emanuel to handle the budget more than Bruce Rauner.** Twice as many voters trust the Mayor to manage the city's budget priorities (51%) over the Governor (23%).
- **People support the municipal pension agreement (61% support / 32% oppose):**

“As you may know, the Illinois Supreme Court recently struck down an agreement between the city of Chicago and its employees. The court ruling will mean hundreds of millions in additional pension costs for Chicago. Mayor Emanuel and city workers have agreed to a plan to protect the last of the four city pension funds for the long term. It asks newly hired workers to pay three percent more each year toward their pensions. Households will pay about fifteen dollars more per month on their city water bills, except for seniors whose increase will be half as much. If this agreement does not happen, the city's debt will increase and future payments could be larger. Do you favor or oppose this proposal between Mayor Emanuel and city workers?”

The almost 2:1 support comes from across the city, including

- 64% of Democrats, 59% of Independents, and 59% of Republicans
 - 72% of whites, 53% of African Americans, and 51% of Latinos
 - 62% of union households and 61% of non-union households
 - 64% of voters under 35 years old and 56% of voters 65 and older
 - 65% of April 2015 Emanuel voters and 63% of April 2015 Garcia voters
- **Voters support it because they think it's the right thing to do.** Among people who back the agreement, a third (33%) cite the best reason as: “We made promises to people who keep us safe, teach our kids, and keep Chicago running. We can't go back on our promises to those people who worked hard their whole lives.”

That's higher than the percentage of the agreement's supporters cite:

- Finally putting Chicago on a path towards fixing its budget (23%)
- A worry about jobs leaving the city (16%)
- No deal causing bigger future tax hikes and cuts to critical services (15%)

The moral argument is also the most powerful across partisan lines (Democrat 34% / Republican 29% / Independent 25%) and racial lines (Latino 37% / white 31% / African American 28%).