Candidate Preferences and Prospects for Instant Runoff Voting: Results of a Pre-Election Poll

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The following tables were developed from a random survey of 1,131 likely voters across Illinois. The confidence interval is +/- 4 percent.

Polling was conducted through the Metro Chicago Information Center through a grant from the Joyce Foundation to the Midwest Democracy Center.

Polling Data

1. If your favorite candidate doesn't win the nomination, will you be less likely to vote for your party's nominee in the November general election?

Yes	20.1%
No	70.0%
Don't Know	10.1%

Among Democrats:

Yes	20.5
No	72.7
Don't Know	6.8

2. Will you definitely or probably vote [Party]?

Definitely Democratic	37.8%
Probably Democratic	12.7%
Definitely Republican	30.3%
Probably Republican	19.1%

3. Will you definitely vote for your first choice on primary day or might you switch to another candidate if you decide your first choice has no chance to win the primary?

Definitely vote for first choice	50.2%
Switch to another candidate	37.8%
Don't know	11.9%

4. Which candidate in your party's primary do you think has the best chance to win the general election?

Gery Chico	4%
Blair Hull	29%
Dan Hynes	20%
Barack Obama	9%
Maria Pappas	6%
Nancy Skinner	1%
Joyce Washington	1%
Don't Know	31%

John Borling	2%
Chirinjeev Kathuria	0%
Andy McKenna	8%
Jim Oberweis	11%
Steven Rauschenberger	3%
Jack Ryan	31%
Jonathan Wright	1%
Don't Know	45%

5. What is your impression of each of the candidates for Senate? (Asked of likely voters in that party's primary)

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Don't Know
Chico	13.1	3.8	20.1	62.9
Hull	40.9	9.3	25.7	24.1
Hynes	39.9	6.3	24.5	29.4
Obama	19.8	2.8	14.9	62.6
Pappas	22.7	9.1	24.3	43.9
Skinner	9.4	4.7	19.1	66.8
Washington	4.9	4.7	18.4	72.0

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Don't Know
Borling	3.6	1.1	18.9	76.4
Kathuria	2.5	1.8	15.7	79.8
McKenna	23.9	1.8	25.5	48.6
Oberweis	27.3	5.5	27.0	40.0
Rauschenberger	11.3	2.1	23.4	63.0
Ryan	45.4	5.7	27.7	21.1
Wright	6.3	1.3	20.5	71.8

6. Which candidates are your first and second choices?

	First Choice	Second Choice
Chico	5.9	7.3
Hull	27.4	17.5
Hynes	20.5	20.8
Obama	13.6	3.5
Pappas	9.8	7.7
Skinner	2.6	3.1
Washington	1.6	2.8
None	18.5	37.2

	First Choice	Second Choice
Borling	3.0	3.0
Kathuria	1.3	1.3
McKenna	7.9	10.4
Oberweis	14.1	10.0
Rauschenberger	4.1	4.5
Ryan	36.3	9.5
Wright	2.7	2.1
None	30.6	59.2

7. Age

	35 and Under	35 to 55	Over 55
Chico	5	9	7.7
Hull	40	33	26.6
Hynes	22.5	26	27.3
Obama	12	20.5	16.1
Pappas	5	7.5	14.7
Skinner	15.5	3	2.8
Washington	0	1	4.9

	35 and Under	35 to 55	Over 55
Borling	3.4	2.8	5.8
Kathuria		.7	3.2
McKenna	12.1	11.9	11.0
Oberweis	15.5	22.4	20.8
Rauschenberger	6.9	7	5.2
Ryan	58.6	51	50
Wright	3.4	4.2	3.9

8. Education

	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad
Chico	2.8	8.1	10.5
Hull	41.4	28.5	31.1
Hynes	22.8	26.8	25.3
Obama	11.7	17.9	19.5
Pappas	13.8	17.1	7.9
Skinner	4.8	.8	3.7
Washington	2.8	.8	2.1

	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad
Borling	4.5	2.1	5.0
Kathuria	1.1	3.2	1.5
McKenna	9.0	9.5	12.9
Oberweis	20.2	22.1	19.9
Rauschenberger	4.5	5.3	7.0
Ryan	55.1	53.7	50.7
Wright	5.6	4.2	3.0

9. Gender

	Males	Females
Chico	7.3	7.3
Hull	33.5	33.8
Hynes	27.7	23.1
Obama	18.4	15.4
Pappas	8.3	15.0
Skinner	3.9	2.7
Washington	1.0	2.7

	Males	Females
Borling	5.7	3.1
Kathuria	2.6	1.0
McKenna	11.9	10.8
Oberweis	20.6	20.1
Rauschenberger	5.2	6.7
Ryan	50.5	54.1
Wright	3.6	4.1

10. Income

	Under $30,000	$30,000 to $74,999	$75,000 and Over
Chico	3.2	7.9	10.1
Hull	46.2	30.9	26.6
Hynes	14.0	30.9	22.9
Obama	12.9	16.2	26.6
Pappas	14.0	8.9	11.0
Skinner	5.4	4.7	.9
Washington	4.3	.5	1.8

	Under $30,000	$30,000 to $74,999	$75,000 and Over
Borling	4.1	4.1	3.6
Kathuria	2.0	2.8	1.8
McKenna	10.2	13.1	11.8
Oberweis	6.1	25.5	23.6
Rauschenberger	4.1	5.5	7.3
Ryan	65.3	45.5	49.1
Wright	8.2	3.4	2.7

11. Region

	Chicago	Suburbs	Downstate
Chico	10.9	12.4	3.6
Hull	12.0	25.7	44.6
Hynes	9.8	19.5	33.3
Obama	35.9	20.4	8.0
Pappas	23.9	15.0	6.8
Skinner	1.1	4.4	3.6
Washington	6.5	2.7	0

	Chicago	Suburbs	Downstate
Borling	12.5	2.8	4.0
Kathuria	6.3	.7	2.2
McKenna	12.5	9.9	12.0
Oberweis	0	24.8	18.7
Rauschenberger	0	11.3	3.1
Ryan	68.8	48.9	54.2
Wright	0	1.4	5.8

12. Vote for George Bush

Definitely vote for George Bush	36.1%
Might vote for him	11.7%
Definitely won't vote for him	42.1%
Unsure	10.2%

Region

	Chicago	Suburbs	Downstate
Definitely vote for	14.0	36.5	39.5
Might vote for	3.3	12.8	12.4
Definitely won't vote for	68.6	41.3	38.4
Unsure	14.0	9.4	9.6

13. Among the Democratic candidates, who is your first choice?

Howard Dean	9.3%
John Edwards	22.7%
John Kerry	55.9%
Dennis Kucinich	2.1%
Al Sharpton	2.1%
Don't Know	7.9%

14. Age

	35 and Under	35 to 55	Over 55
Dean	5.4	8.8	13.7
Edwards	18.5	24.8	27.3
Kerry	75	61.5	52.2
Kucinich	1.1	1.8	3.7
Sharpton	.1	3.1	3.1

15. Education

	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad
Dean	11	9.8	9.5
Edwards	26.2	17.4	28.1
Kerry	60.4	68.2	56.1
Kucinich	1.2	1.5	3.6
Sharpton	1.2	3.0	2.7

16. Gender

	Male	Female
Dean	7.7	11.8
Edwards	27.5	23.9
Kerry	60.8	60.7
Kucinich	2.3	2.3
Sharpton	3.6	1.3

17. Income

	Under $30,000	$30,000 to $74,999	$75,000 and Over
Dean	11.2	11.6	8.5
Edwards	18.4	24.6	28.7
Kerry	67.3	58.5	57.4
Kucinich	2.0	2.4	1.6
Sharpton	1.0	2.9	3.9

18. Region

	Chicago	Suburbs	Downstate
Dean	14.1	7.6	9.4
Edwards	14.1	33.1	24.1
Kerry	59.8	55.2	64.0
Kucinich	5.4	2.1	1.4
Sharpton	6.5	2.1	1.1

19. Asked of likely Democratic voters, “Are you satisfied with these choices or would you have liked to vote for another candidate?”

Yes, satisfied	77.1%
No, Dissatisfied	16.3%
Don’t Know	4.9%

Improving the Voting System?

While many of us take for granted the assumption that whoever has the most votes, wins the election, however many candidates there may have been, it may profit the American public to undergo a more searching consideration of what is the best way to select winners of elections.

When there are only two candidates, one candidate must get at least fifty percent of the vote, guaranteeing that that candidate is the choice of at least a bare majority of citizens who have chosen to vote. However, when more than two candidates enter the race, it is common for a candidate who receives less, and sometimes far less, than half the votes to win the election. While in some instances, such as elections for alderman or mayor in Chicago, a runoff then follows so that the final winner will have at least 50 percent of the votes, in most Illinois elections that is not the case.

This "winner take all" aspect of most elections can be problematic for a number of reasons. In primaries, it may mean that a candidate who actually has less total support than another candidate may become the party standard bearer when, in fact, another candidate who had fewer "first place" votes, but might have had more widespread support, is not. This result could send a party to defeat in the general election when nomination of the other candidate need not have. In instances where three or more candidates share the vote in a general election, it may mean that a candidate with less overall support, but more intensive support from a plurality of voters, wins public office when overall the public might have preferred a different candidate. It is also possible that in races with three or more candidates, the current system encourages mobilizing a narrow base, so as to win with the largest possible plurality, rather than creating a public message and position designed to appeal to the widest possible constituency.

For hundreds of years political scientists and theorists have debated the best ways to conduct elections. Over the years a variety of alternatives to election of a candidate having a plurality have been developed. These include conducting runoffs of the candidates with the top two totals when none has 50 percent of the vote, methods that ask voters to rank candidates in order of preferences and then including all of the votes cast in the ranking, and methods that potentially pair each of the candidates against the others and then counts which candidate has the most votes.

American voters have long accepted runoffs as viable alternatives to electing candidates who have won only pluralities, yet many elections, primary and general, are not decided that way. In part, this is because to do so often would require conducting an additional election and is so not viewed as efficient. One way that governments have solved this problem is through the use of "instant runoff voting" or IRV. In an election utilizing IRV, voters cast not only their vote for their single favorite candidate, but also express their additional choices in order of preference. If one candidate in the election does not secure a majority of votes, then the second choices of voters are considered in the count until one candidate does have a majority. In this way, the winning candidate is the one with the broadest base of support. Currently the method is used in Australia for election of its legislature, in San Francisco city elections, and is under consideration in various places around the nation.

20. Are you comfortable with the current way of voting, which can result in a non-majority winner, or would you like to see changes that would better assure that the winner is supported by more than 50% of the primary voters?

Comfortable	53.7%
Would like to see changes	41.2%
Don't know	5.1%

21. Would you like to have the option to pick a first-choice candidate and a second-choice candidate when you vote in Illinois primaries?

Yes	47.0%
No	46.5%
Don't know	6.5%

22. Would you like to have this option when electing mayors and local elected officials?

Yes	43.8%
No	50.8%
Don't know	5.4%

23. Would you like a "second-choice" option to better ensure that the winner of Illinois' Electoral College votes has the majority support of Illinois voters?

Yes	50.0%
No	40.7%
Don't know	9.3%