

## The Views of Economics and Policy Academics in Illinois

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**Abstract:** In August 2015, nearly 100 economics academics and policy academics from accredited university programs in Illinois voluntarily participated in a *Poll of Illinois Economics Professors, Instructors, and Experts* (PIE<sup>2</sup>). The survey contained 25 questions about general public policy issues, Illinois-specific policy issues, and the field of economics. Relative to the actual number of economics and policy academics at accredited universities in Illinois, the 94-person sample size produces a margin of error of  $\pm 9.0\%$ . The responses show that economics and policy academics in Illinois are strong supporters of infrastructure investment, anti-discrimination laws, public education, marijuana legalization, and action on climate change. They are more mixed on policies and institutions that address income inequality, such as minimum wage laws and labor unions. Finally, a significant majority of Illinois' economics and policy academics do not think that elected officials generally have a strong understanding of economics.

**Question topics:** 1) university type; 2) qualifications; 3) area of study; 4) voting status; 5) voter affiliation; 6) minimum wage; 7) labor unions; 8) anti-discrimination; 9) public education; 10) transportation infrastructure; 11) climate change; 12) national policies; 13) role of government; 14) Illinois budget problems; 15) Illinois income gap; 16) Illinois infrastructure investment; 17) vehicle miles traveled; 18) public construction; 19) influence of unions; 20) Illinois minimum wage; 21) improving employment; 22) social issues; 23) elected officials; 24) field of economics; 25) problems conducting research.

### Introduction

In August 2015, the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) surveyed nearly 100 economics academics and policy academics from accredited university programs in Illinois. The anonymous, 25-question survey contained questions on general public policy issues, Illinois-specific issues, and the field of economics. Most questions were designed to elicit an overall judgement of support or opposition to a particular issue or public policy. To understand how Illinois' top economics and policy academics generally think on a variety of economic issues, questions ranged from topics such as support for minimum wage laws or for transportation infrastructure to views on the essential functions of government. Participants were also asked to volunteer which policy changes they thought would improve Illinois' employment outcomes and grow the economy.

The results may raise more questions than answers. ILEPI has made every effort to objectively analyze the available data— which has been made publicly available<sup>1</sup>— and to put the results in context with other relevant surveys. However, the concluding section provides a bit more narrative in summarizing areas of general consensus among economics and policy academics. Ultimately, the purpose of this survey is to help Illinois' residents and elected understand the views of expert economists and public policy professors in their state.

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<sup>1</sup> A publicly available spreadsheet with full respondent results is available online at: <https://goo.gl/vczgdm>.

**Description of Survey and Limitations**

The Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI) compiled a list of 404 publicly-available email addresses of economics and public policy academics employed at universities throughout the State of Illinois. The academic contacts included professors, lecturers, and instructors in economics departments at 26 accredited universities and at eight major public policy programs across Illinois (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Among these are the economics department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, institutions from which the author has earned a degree. The only program ILEPI intended to contact which did not have email addresses available online was the public policy and administration program at Northwestern University. These 33 individuals, however, are including in the margin of error calculation.

*Figure 1: Academic departments and institutions represented in the contact list*

<b>Economics Department</b>	<b>School/Department of Public Policy (or Related)</b>
Aurora University	DePaul University
Benedictine University	Loyola University Chicago
Bradley University	Northern Illinois University
DePaul University	Southern Illinois University
Dominican University	University of Illinois at Chicago
Eastern Illinois University	University of Illinois at Springfield
Governors State University	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Illinois State University	University of Chicago
Illinois Wesleyan University	
Lewis University	
Loyola University Chicago	
Millikin University	
National Louis University	
Northeastern Illinois University	
Northern Illinois University	
Northwestern University	
Roosevelt University	
Saint Xavier University	
Southern Illinois University Carbondale	
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	
University of Chicago	
University of Illinois at Chicago	
University of Illinois at Springfield	
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	
University of St. Francis	
Western Illinois University	

The inaugural *Poll of Illinois Economics Professors, Instructors, and Experts* (PIE<sup>2</sup>) was emailed to the 404-person contact list on August 18, 2015. Responses were collected through August 26, 2015. Note that the PIE<sup>2</sup> was not a random survey – all of the state’s top the economics and policy academics were contacted as long as their email was readily available.

Nearly 100 economics and policy academics participated in the poll. In total, 94 professors, instructors, and experts completed the survey, for a response rate of 23.3%. While the small sample

<sup>2</sup> For the complete list of economic and policy academic email addresses (to be used for *research purposes only* and not for spam), please contact author Frank Manzo IV at [fmanzo@illinoisepi.org](mailto:fmanzo@illinoisepi.org).

size limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions, the results do provide *suggestive* evidence of broad agreement on certain issues. The margin of error associated with this sample size is  $\pm 9.0\%$ , so it can be stated with relative confidence that a majority of the state’s top economics and policy academics hold a particular position if the results show a consensus of 60% or greater.

**The Respondent Academics**

Respondents were essentially evenly split between academics at public universities and at private universities. A total of 45 academics (47.9%) report that they are employed in a public university in Illinois and 46 academics (48.9%) say they work at a private university in Illinois. Three respondents (3.2%) state that they are not employed as a faculty member at a university in Illinois but have earned a Ph.D. in Economics. These three individuals may be employed at a university in another state, be employed at another institution (e.g., the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago), be retired professors, or be currently unemployed.

*1) Are you employed as a faculty member at a university in Illinois?*

Yes, at a public university	45	47.9%
Yes, at a private university	46	48.9%
No	3	3.2%

\*The three “No” responses all indicated that they had earned a Ph.D. in Economics. Their responses are included in the remainder of the analysis.

The sample of academics mostly contains individuals with a Ph.D. in Economics (76.6%). Slightly more than one-in-ten respondents have earned a Ph.D. in Political Science, Public Policy, Public Administration, or a related field (13.8%) and one individual has attained a Ph.D. in Business or Business Administration (1.1%).

*2) In what field did you earn your advanced degree?*

I have a Ph.D. in Economics	72	76.6%
I have a Ph.D. in Business, Business Administration, or a related field	1	1.1%
I have a Ph.D. in Political Science, Public Policy, Public Administration, or a related field	13	13.8%
Other	7	7.4%

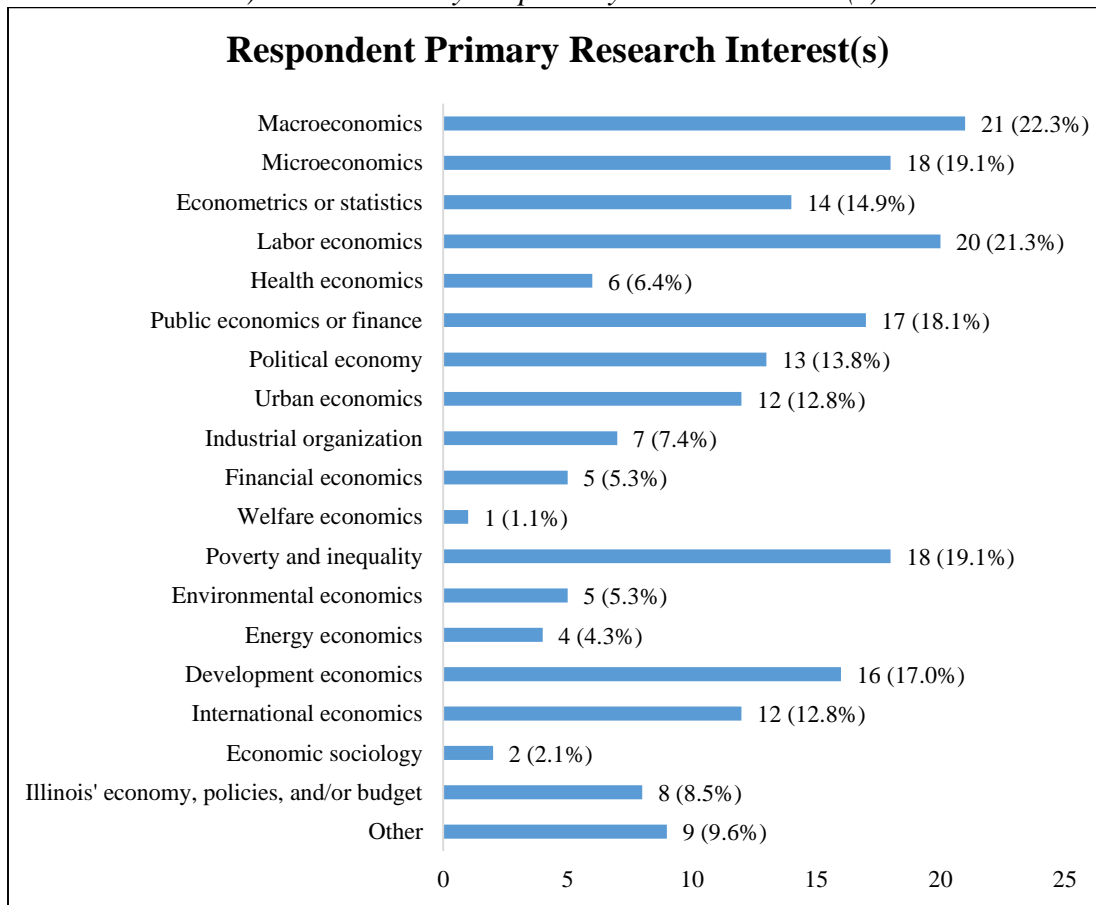
\*Other: MBA in Finance/Economics, Ph.D. in History, Ph.D. in Regional Science, Ph.D. in Physics, MPA, MA Sociology and MS Geography, and one blank answer.

The survey received responses from a variety of economists and public policy academics by research interest. The five most common research interests include macroeconomics (22.3%), labor economics (21.3%), microeconomics (19.1%), poverty and inequality (19.1%), and public economics or finance (18.1%). Contacts were informed that they did not need to be an expert on Illinois to participate in the survey. However, eight academics (8.5%) consider “Illinois’ economy, policies, and/or budget” to be one of their primary areas of study.

Most of the economics and policy academics are registered to vote in the State of Illinois (76.6%) and most generally vote Democratic (60.6%). The ratio of Democratic-voting academics to Republican- or Libertarian-voting academics in the sample is 3.0:1. This means that there are about three Democratic voters for every one Republican or Libertarian voter among Illinois’ economics and public policy faculty. This ratio roughly aligns with national academic voting behavior. Klein and Stern (2006), for instance, report that the Democratic:Republican/Libertarian ratio is 2.2:1 among U.S. economists and 5.1:1 among U.S. political scientists. Note that, in the

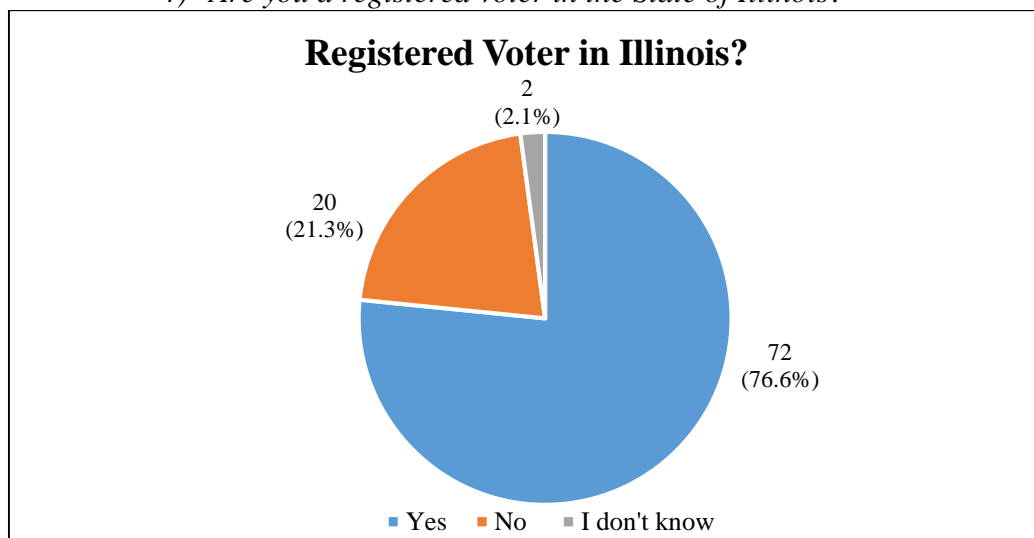
PIE<sup>2</sup> Illinois sample, economics and policy academics actually lean slightly more Democratic at private universities than at public universities (Figure 2).

3) Please select your primary research interest(s).



\*Respondents were limited to selection of three (3) areas of study.

4) Are you a registered voter in the State of Illinois?



5) *To which political party have the candidates you have voted for in the past ten years mostly belonged?*

Democratic	57	60.6%
Republican	14	14.9%
Libertarian	5	5.3%
Write-In: Doesn't vote/N.A./None	15	16.0%
Write-In: Democratic/Republican mix	2	2.1%

*Figure 2: Democratic to Republican/Libertarian ratio by employment sector*

<b>Employment</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D:R/L ratio</b>
Public university	38	2.8:1
Private university	35	3.4:1
Total	76	3.0:1

\*Among academics who did not check “Other” and write-in a response.

### General Public Policy Issues

Respondents were asked eight questions about general public policy issues. The first five queries were uniformly formatted, following the approach in Klein and Stern (2006). Responses were weighted from 1 to 5, designed to “elicit and overall judgement of support or opposition” for the entire sample (Klein & Stern, 2006). The 1 through 5 weights did not appear in the survey (Figure 3). The following question illustrates the format:

*Figure 3: Which of the following levels of support BEST describes your view of: [6] Minimum wage laws?]*

Support strongly	1
Support mildly	2
I have mixed feelings	3
Oppose mildly	4
Oppose strongly	5
I have no opinion	

For each question, results are combined into index (or mean value). An index that is closer to 1.0 indicates a high level of support among economics and policy academics, while an index that approaches 5.0 suggests a high degree of opposition among respondents. Figure 4 presents findings for the five general public policy questions.

Illinois’ top economics and policy academics are wildly in support of government action in three areas: transportation infrastructure, anti-discrimination protections, and k-12 public education (Figure 4). With 89 academics in support (94.7%) of the government investing in roads, bridges, and public transportation infrastructure compared to just one opposed (1.1%)– and an index of 1.2– infrastructure investment garners the strongest consensus among economics and policy academics. Well over four-fifths also support both anti-discrimination laws in employment and consumption and the government producing elementary and secondary schooling, with respective indices of 1.4 and 1.6.

The academics’ support for minimum wage laws and labor unions is much more mixed. On minimum wage, economics and policy academics are at odds, although there is a slight edge (with an index of 2.5) in support of minimum wage laws. This finding parallels previous national surveys of economists (Klein & Stern, 2006; Fuchs et al., 1998) and may echo the 2014 petition by over 600 Ph.D. economists urging the President and U.S. Congress to raise the federal minimum

wage (EPI, 2014). Labor unions prompted the most divided response, but once again the results suggest that more of Illinois’ economics and policy academics support unions (45.2%) than oppose them (26.9%), amounting to an index of 2.7.

Figure 4: Views of Illinois’ Economics and Policy Academics on General Public Policy Issues

Question Number and General Policy Issue Addressed	Support strongly (1)	Support mildly (2)	Have mixed feelings (3)	Oppose mildly (4)	Oppose strongly (5)	Mean value
6) Minimum wage laws	32 (34.0%)	19 (20.2%)	19 (20.2%)	15 (16.0%)	9 (9.6%)	2.5
7) Labor unions	22 (23.7%)	20 (21.5%)	26 (28.0%)	13 (14.0%)	12 (12.9%)	2.7
8) Anti-discrimination laws in employment and consumption	65 (69.9%)	18 (19.4%)	9 (9.7%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1.4
9) The government producing elementary and secondary schooling (i.e., k-12 public education)	68 (72.3%)	8 (8.5%)	11 (11.7%)	4 (4.3%)	3 (3.2%)	1.6
10) The government investing in roads, bridges, and public transportation infrastructure	84 (90.3%)	5 (5.4%)	3 (3.2%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1.2

The views of Illinois’ economics and policy academics on climate change tend to reflect those held by scientists connected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) (Funk & Rainie, 2015). Fully 87% of American scientists think that climate change is occurring due to human activity and another 9% say that it is occurring but is due to natural patterns. Similarly, 84.0% of respondent economics and policy academics report that they think climate change is a problem that economic policy needs to address. This suggests that respondents believe that humans can impact– or at least mitigate the effects of– global climate change. The views of American scientists and Illinois’ economics and policy academics contrast starkly with public attitudes: only 50% of U.S. adults say they think climate change is occurring mostly because of human causes (Funk & Rainie, 2015).

11) Which of these statements best reflects your view about climate change?

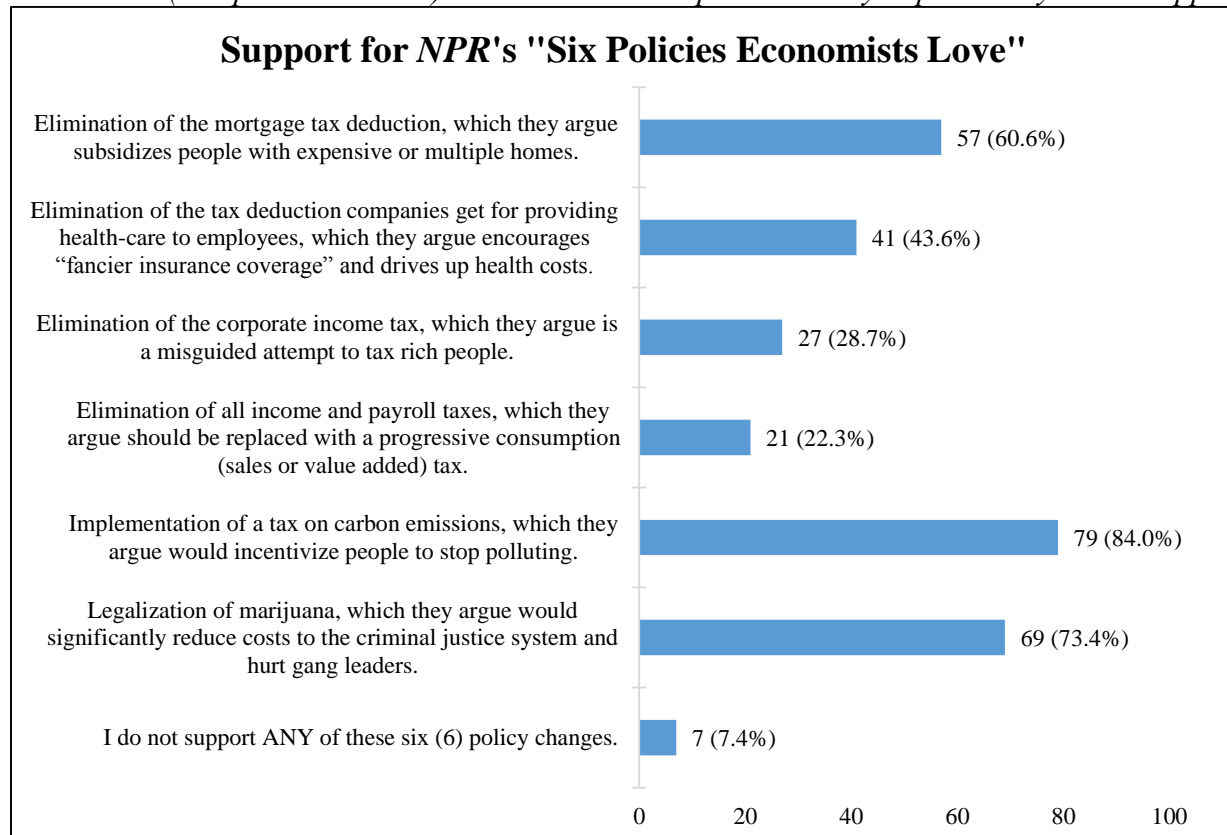
Statement	N	Sample %	AAAS % <sup>¥</sup>
Climate change is a problem that economic policy needs to address	79	84.0%	87%
Climate change is a problem but is a natural event that economic policy cannot impact	3	3.2%	9%
There is no solid evidence that climate change is occurring	3	3.2%	3%
I don’t know or prefer not to respond	9	9.6%	1%

<sup>¥</sup>The pew survey of AAAS scientists (9/11/2014-10/13/2014) did not include the phrases “that economic policy needs to address” and “that economic policy cannot impact.” Otherwise, the questions are nearly identical.

In 2012, *National Public Radio*’s Planet Money podcast proposed “six policies economists love (and politicians hate)” (Francis, 2012). The economic plan was crafted using input from five economists, including two who state they are left-leaning, two who say they are right-leaning, and one who *NPR* considers a centrist. *NPR* reported that the six policies “have broad agreement, at least among economists” (Francis, 2012). In this PIE<sup>2</sup> survey, Illinois economics and policy academics were asked to select the policies they personally would support.

Only three of *NPR*'s six policies produce a consensus among Illinois' economics and policy academics. Mirroring the findings of the previous climate change question, 79 out of 94 economists and policy academics (84.0%) would support the implementation of a tax on carbon emissions. A total of 69 respondents (73.4%) would support the legalization of marijuana and 57 of those surveyed (60.6%) would support eliminating the mortgage tax deduction. On the other hand, less than half of the sample supports eliminating the tax deduction that employers get for providing health-care to employees (43.6%), eliminating the corporate income tax (28.7%), and replacing all income and payroll taxes with a consumption tax (22.3%).

12) In 2012, National Public Radio's Planet Money podcast proposed "six policies economists love (and politicians hate)." Please select the policies that you personally would support.



The final general public policy question asked to Illinois' economics and policy academics pertained to the essential functions of government. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith outlines four basic reasons for government's existence. According to Smith, government is instituted to protect the rights of the individual, to instill fairness in society through a legal code to mediate disputes and enforce contracts, to provide public goods "which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain," and to correct market activities that generate "externalities"<sup>3</sup> (Smith, 1776).

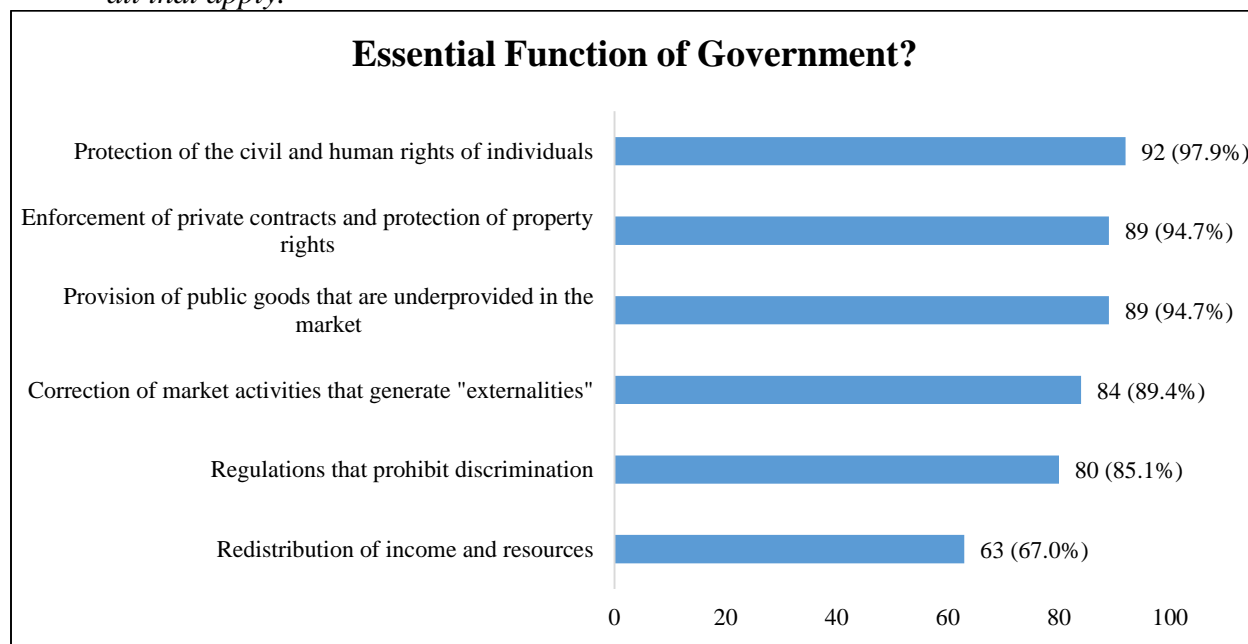
Illinois economists and policy academics concur with Adam Smith. Nearly every respondent believes that an essential function of government is the protection of the civil and

<sup>3</sup> "Externalities" are outcomes that are under-provided or over-provided by the private market because individual actors do not have enough of an incentive to factor social costs or benefits into their own personal decisions. The primary example of a "negative externality" is pollution.

human rights of individuals (97.9%). The enforcement of private contracts and protection of property rights (94.7%), the provision of public goods that are underprovided in the market (94.7%), and the correction of market activities that generate “externalities” (89.4%) are all considered essential functions of government by nine-in-ten economics and policy academics.

ILEPI also inquired about the roles of the public sector in prohibiting discrimination and redistributing income and resources. A significant portion of respondent academics (85.1%) believe that it is an essential function of government to implement regulations that prohibit discrimination. Perhaps surprisingly, two-thirds of economics and policy academics (67.0%) also consider the redistribution of income and resources to be an essential function of government.

*13) Which of the following do you consider an essential function of government? Please select all that apply.*



**Illinois-Specific Public Policy Issues**

Respondents were subsequently asked nine queries about Illinois-specific public policy issues. The first three questions followed the uniform, 1 through 5 format. Results from these three questions are reported in Figure 5.

Thinking specifically about Illinois, 75.0% of economics and policy academics are in support of making necessary cuts in spending as well as raising new revenues through tax increases to resolve the state’s budget problems, while only 9.8% are opposed. Half of those responding (50.0%) say they think the Illinois state government should adopt policies that work to substantially reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor, while about one-fourth (27.2%) are opposed to such measures. Additionally, a sizeable majority (87.1%) support the statement that the state should increase transportation infrastructure investment to improve the quality of roads and bridges, grow the economy, and put Illinois residents to work. As indices, Illinois’ economic and policy academics have the greatest level of support for increasing transportation infrastructure investment (1.7), followed by an approach to balancing the budget that includes both spending



cuts and revenue increases (1.8). Respondents were more mixed on— but marginally in favor of— adopting policies to reduce inequality (2.7).

Figure 5: Views of Illinois’ Economics and Policy Academics on Illinois-Specific Public Policy Issues

Question Number and General Policy Issue Addressed	Support strongly (1)	Support mildly (2)	Have mixed feelings (3)	Oppose mildly (4)	Oppose strongly (5)	Mean value
14) Resolving Illinois’ state budget problems should include making any necessary cuts in spending AND raising new revenues through tax increases	54 (58.7%)	15 (16.3%)	14 (15.2%)	3 (3.3%)	6 (6.5%)	1.8
15) The Illinois state government should adopt policies that work to substantially reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor	22 (23.9%)	24 (26.1%)	21 (22.8%)	8 (8.7%)	17 (18.5%)	2.7
16) The State of Illinois should increase transportation infrastructure investment to improve the quality of roads and bridges, grow the economy, and put Illinois residents to work	43 (46.2%)	38 (40.9%)	10 (10.8%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	1.7

A fourth question adhering to the uniform format was asked regarding a policy change to how the state funds road and bridge infrastructure investment. A large share of funds are currently derived from motor fuel taxes. The outlook on this method of funding road improvements, however, is negative: cars are becoming more fuel efficient and are thus contributing less and less to the revenue base. An alternative that has been presented is to implement a per-mile charge using modern measuring technologies, rather than the per-gallon gas tax. Proponents of this approach argue that a vehicle miles traveled fee is fairer, because only the people who actually use roads would pay for them.

*17) A new bill is introduced in the Illinois General Assembly that changes how the state funds its road and bridge construction. With funding primarily coming from motor fuel taxes right now, drivers of fuel-efficient cars pay less or nothing compared to the average motorist, even though their vehicle causes the same amount of damage to the infrastructure. The new bill aims to make funding more equitable under a “user pays” principle. The new bill would use modern technology to charge all vehicles PER MILE, replacing the motor fuel tax per gallon.*

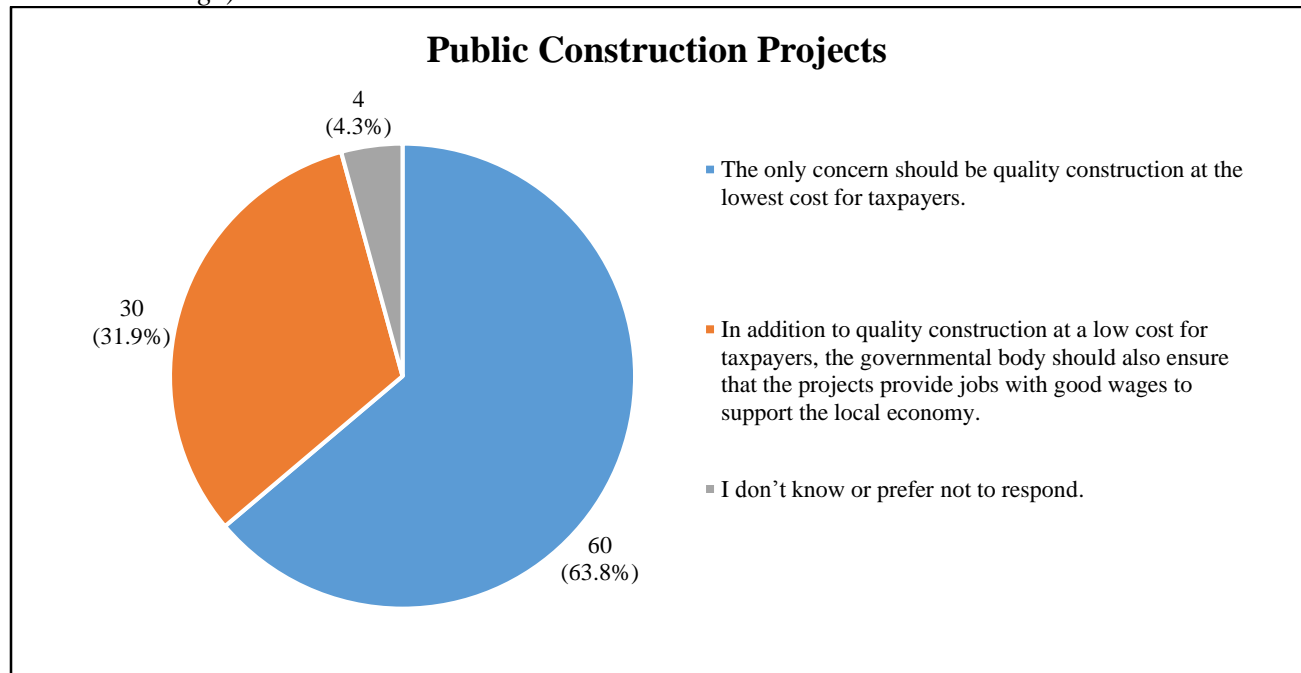
Support strongly (1)	Support mildly (2)	Have mixed feelings (3)	Oppose mildly (4)	Oppose strongly (5)	Mean value
23 (25.3%)	24 (26.4%)	26 (28.6%)	4 (4.4%)	14 (15.4%)	2.6

Surveyed economists and policy experts have mixed opinions about switching to this type of system in Illinois. While 51.6% of respondents would support the policy change, 19.8% would oppose the change and 28.6% report that they have mixed feelings. The index yields a value of 2.6, suggesting that economics and policy academics in Illinois have slightly more positive than

negative views of a vehicle miles traveled charge. Vehicle miles traveled may be a feasible way to raise revenues for an increase in transportation infrastructure investment.

However, when awarding road, commuter rail, school building, and other public construction projects, Illinois economics and policy academics say the only concern should be quality construction at the lowest cost for taxpayers (63.8%). Only about one-third of the sample (31.9%) thinks that the projects should provide jobs with good wages to support the local economy in addition to factoring in a low cost.

18) Which of the following statements comes CLOSEST to your view? When Illinois governments find public construction projects (such as roads, commuter rail, and school buildings):

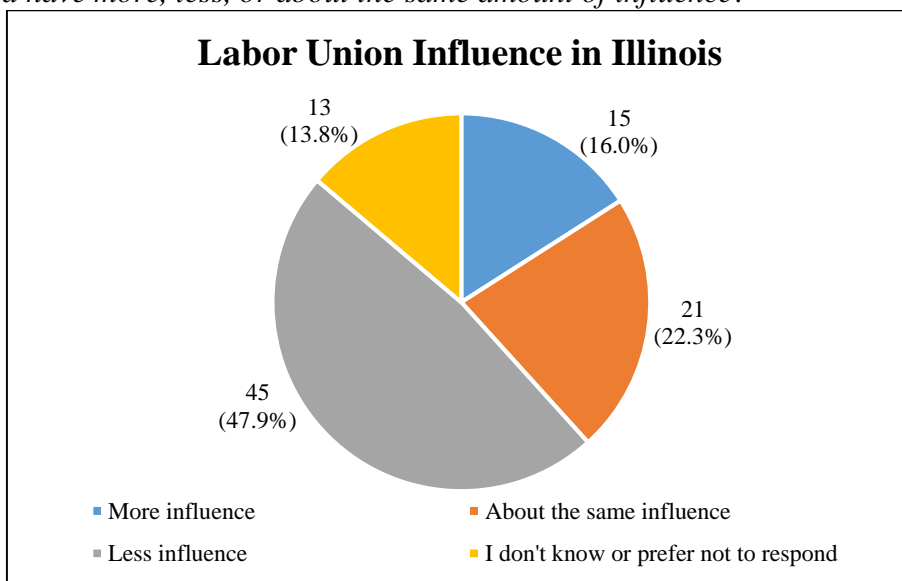


While more survey-takers support labor unions than oppose them in general, Illinois economics and policy academics tend to think unions should have less influence in the state. Nearly half (47.9%) say they believe that labor unions should have less influence in Illinois. In comparison, slightly less than two-fifths say they believe unions should have more (16.0%) or about the same influence (22.3%) in the state.

Respondent academics were also asked about the minimum wage in Illinois. Survey participants were requested to provide the per-hour dollar amount that they believe the minimum wage should currently be Illinois. Economics and policy academics who believe there should not be a minimum wage at all were asked to enter \$0.

Of the 81 academic economists and policy professors responding to the question, 51 individuals (62.9%) report that they think the minimum wage should be above its current rate of \$8.25 per hour. A subset of respondents in favor of a higher minimum wage (17.3% of the total sample) say that it should be \$15.00 an hour or greater, while a slightly smaller number of academic economists and policy instructors (12.3%) believe the minimum wage should be \$0.00 per hour. On average, top economics and policy academics at universities in Illinois report that they think the minimum wage should be \$9.45 per hour in the state. The median response was \$10.00 per hour.

19) Thinking about the influence of labor unions in Illinois, do you believe that labor unions should have more, less, or about the same amount of influence?



20) As you may know, the minimum wage is \$8.25 per hour in Illinois. What do you think the minimum wage should currently be in Illinois?

Dollar Response	N	Value
Average value	81	\$9.45
Median value	81	\$10.00
Above \$8.25 per hour	51	62.9%
\$15.00 per hour or more	14	17.3%
\$0.00 per hour	10	12.3%

\*Not a required question. Values are for the 81 academics who chose to respond. One respondent wrote “\$8.25 and indexed for inflation,” which is counted as \$8.25 and is not included in the “Above \$8.25 per hour” group. Another respondent wrote “less.” This response was assumed to mean *less than* \$8.25 and was changed to \$0.00 per hour to provide a conservative estimate.

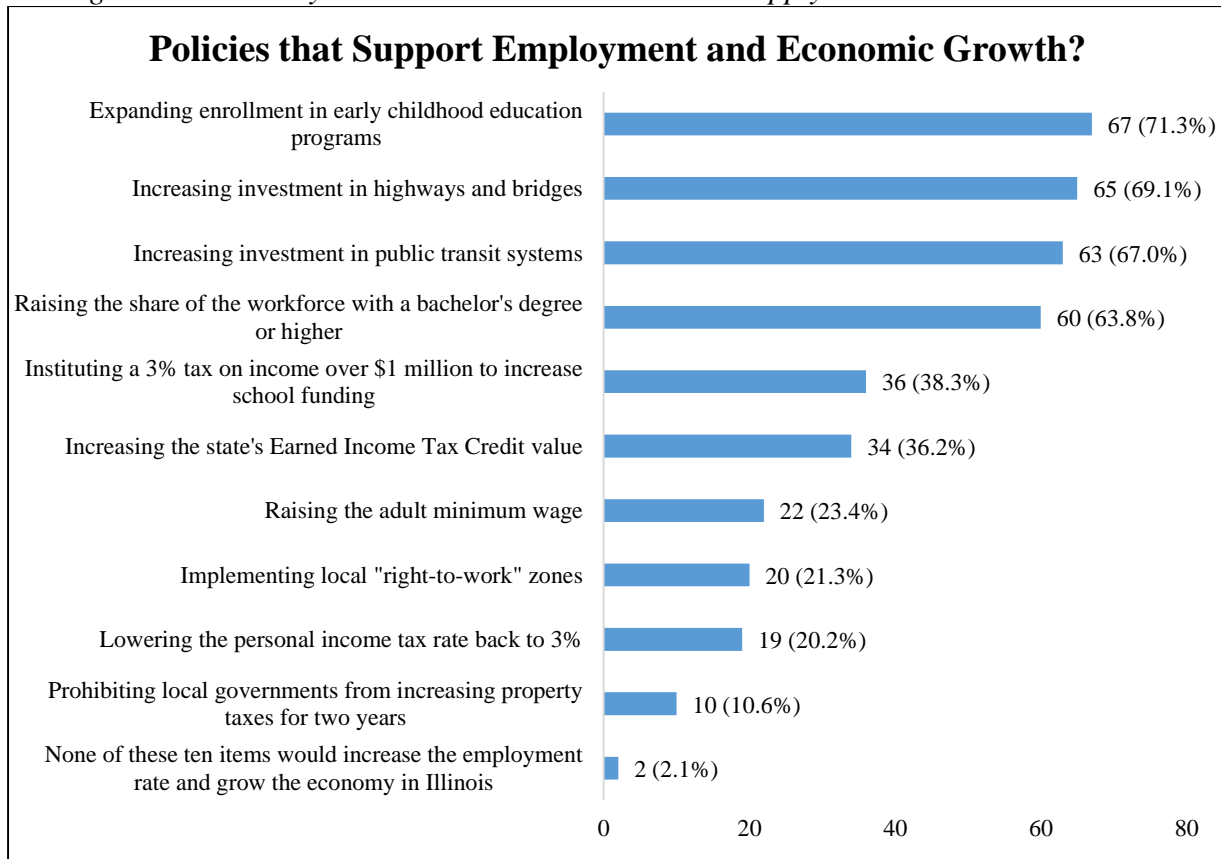
Respondent economics and policy academics were next presented with a list of ten items or policy changes and asked which ones they thought would improve the employment rate and grow the economy in Illinois. Ultimately, there is only a strong consensus on four of the ten policies. Over three-fifths of the respondents say that expanding enrollment in early childhood education programs (71.3%), increasing investment in highways and bridges (69.1%), increasing investment in public transit systems (67.0%), and raising the share of the workforce with a bachelor’s degree or higher (63.8%) would improve the state’s employment rate and grow the economy. Each of these policy changes involves investments in either physical capital or human capital.

Among economics and policy academics, a majority is not reached for the six remaining items. While economics and policy academics express marginal support of minimum wage laws and report that the state’s minimum wage should be \$9.45 per hour on average, only 23.4% believe that raising the adult minimum wage would improve the employment rate and grow the economy. Similarly, while respondents are slightly more supportive of labor unions than not but tend to say

that they think unions should have less influence in Illinois, only 21.3% believe that implementing local “right-to-work” zones in Illinois would improve the employment rate and grow the economy.

The remaining items are all related to the state’s tax code. The “millionaire’s tax” (38.3%), allowing the temporary income tax hike to completely expire (20.2%), increasing Earned Income Tax Credits (36.2%), and prohibiting local governments from increasing property taxes (20.2%) would not be expected to improve the employment rate or grow the economy, according to economics and policy academics across Illinois.

21) Which of the following ten items do you think would IMPROVE the employment rate and grow the economy in Illinois? Please select all that apply.

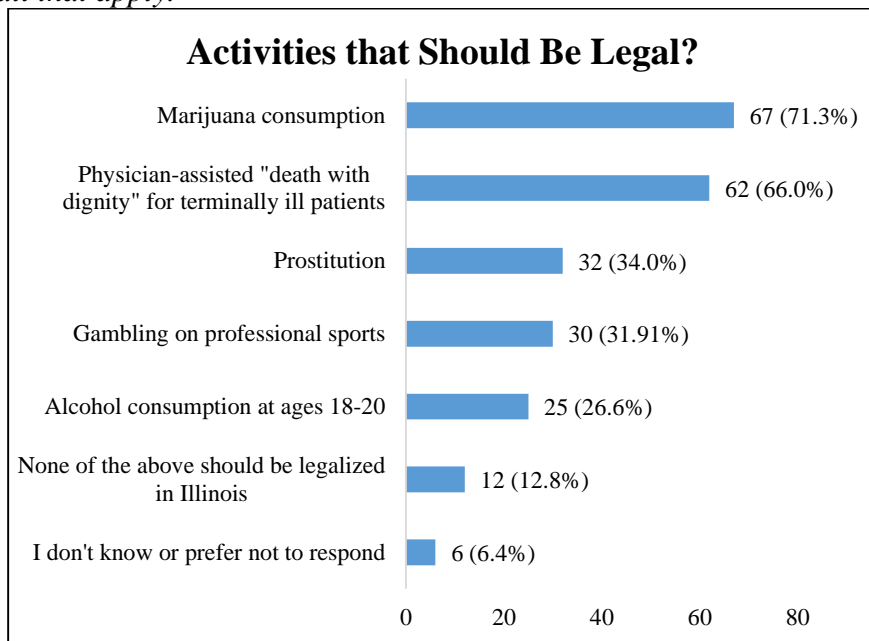


\*Responses are sorted by descending frequency.

The final Illinois-specific public policy question asked to academics focused on social issues. Respondents were presented with a list of five activities and asked which ones they thought should be legalized in Illinois, assuming that each activity would be permitted by the federal government.

On social issues, a majority of Illinois’ economics and policy professors agree that two of the five activities should be legalized in the state. More than three-fifths of respondents believe that marijuana consumption (71.3%) and physician-assisted “death with dignity” for terminally ill patients (66.0%) should be legalized. Prostitution (34.0%), gambling on professional sports (31.9%), and alcohol consumption at ages 18-20 (26.6%) all garner support from around three-in-ten respondents. Only 12.8% of economics and policy academics say that none of the five activities should be legalized in Illinois.

22) Which of the following activities do you believe should be LEGALIZED in Illinois? Please select all that apply.



\*Respondents were told to assume that each activity would be permitted by the federal government.

### The Field of Economics

The last section of the PIE<sup>2</sup> survey concerned the field of economics as a whole. In three questions, economics and policy professors were asked about elected officials’ understanding of economic principles, the goals of economics as a professional discipline, and the difficulties they face in conducting research today. At the conclusion of the section, respondents were allowed to provide any feedback on the PIE<sup>2</sup> survey. Note that every one of the feedback comments is presented, unmodified, in the Appendix.

A considerable majority of economics and policy professors do not think elected officials understand economics. When presented with the sentence “politicians and elected officials generally have a strong understanding of economic principles,” only seven respondents (7.5%) support the statement. A total of 73 academic economists and policy professors (78.5%) oppose the statement, while 13 individuals (14.0%) have mixed feelings. The responses translate into an index value of 4.2, reflecting significant opposition to the statement.

23) *Politicians and elected officials generally have a strong understanding of economic principles.*

Support strongly (1)	Support mildly (2)	Have mixed feelings (3)	Oppose mildly (4)	Oppose strongly (5)	Mean value
4 (4.3%)	3 (3.2%)	13 (14.0%)	28 (30.1%)	45 (48.4%)	4.2

Respondents are a bit more mixed on the issue of economics as an academic field of study. Survey-takers were presented with the following statement: “A goal of economists should be to bring the field of economics closer to a ‘hard’ science (like physics or biology), with testable and

falsifiable theories and reproducible results.” The index value of 2.4 indicates that respondents are somewhat divided, but that economics and policy academics do tend to support the claim. While 61.5% of those surveyed support the statement, 20.9% have mixed feelings and 17.6% oppose the goal of trying to bring economics closer to a “hard” science.

*24) A goal of economists should be to bring the field of economics closer to a “hard” science (like physics or biology), with testable and falsifiable theories and reproducible results.*

Support strongly (1)	Support mildly (2)	Have mixed feelings (3)	Oppose mildly (4)	Oppose strongly (5)	Mean value
27 (29.7%)	29 (31.9%)	19 (20.9%)	7 (7.7%)	9 (9.9%)	2.4

The three biggest problems economics and policy academics report facing in conducting quality research today are lack of funding (52.7%), political or agenda-driven pressure biasing results (50.5%), and the fact that there is not enough replication to confirm or challenge published results (47.3%). Insufficient data, difficulty in performing experiments, and the lack of public interest in economics are each considered problems by about 3-in-10 respondents. Conflict of interest rules in publications (14.3%) and visa problems (11.0%) are both smaller-scale obstacles to conducting quality research.

*25) Please indicate problems facing economics and policy academics in conducting QUALITY research today. Please select all that apply.*

Statement	N	Percentage
Lack of funding for basic research	48	52.7%
Political or agenda-driven pressure biasing results	46	50.5%
Not enough replication of published results	43	47.3%
Not enough data	32	35.2%
Too much difficulty in performing experiments	25	27.5%
Lack of public interest in economics	24	26.4%
Conflict of interest rules in publications	13	14.3%
Visa problems for international workers and study	10	11.0%
Other	7	7.7%
Total	91	100.0%

\*Responses are sorted by descending frequency. “Other” responses include “predatory journals and conferences,” “professional insularity and the narrow interests of referees and editors,” “rent seeking economists,” and simply “it’s hard.”

## Conclusions

Results from this inaugural survey of approximately 100 professors, instructors, and faculty members at 34 accredited academic institutions in Illinois reveal areas of broad agreement among the state’s top economics and policy academics. Although the sample size limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions, it can be stated with relative confidence that a majority of the state’s top economics and policy academics hold a particular position when the results show strong consensus.

The clearest example of consensus among economics and policy academics is in infrastructure investment. There are at least 89 economics and policy academics (95%) in Illinois

who support the government investing in roads, bridges, and public transportation infrastructure. Furthermore, at least 81 economics and policy academics (87%) think Illinois should increase transportation infrastructure investment. A majority also say that increasing investment in highways and bridges (69%) and in public transit systems (67%) would improve the state's employment rate and grow the Illinois economy.

Anti-discrimination is a second area of broad agreement among Illinois' top economics and policy academics. At least 83 economics and policy academics (88%) in Illinois support laws prohibiting discrimination in employment and consumption. A considerable majority further believe that it is an essential function of government to implement regulations that prohibit discrimination (85%). In addition, nearly every respondent reports that he or she believes protection of the civil and human rights of the individual (98%) is an essential function of government.

A third area of general consensus among Illinois' top economics and policy academics involves public education— especially for children. At least 74 economics and policy academics (81%) in Illinois support the government producing elementary and secondary education. A majority also say that expanding enrollment in early childhood education programs (71%) and raising the share of the workforce with a bachelor's degree or higher (64%) would improve the state's employment rate and grow the Illinois economy.

Other policy areas generally agreed upon by Illinois' top economics and policy academics concern climate change, marijuana legalization, and the thoughts of Adam Smith. Over eight-in-ten respondents consider climate change a problem that economic policy needs to address and would support a carbon tax at the national level. Similarly, over seven-in-ten respondents support the legalization of marijuana consumption. Finally, about nine-in-ten respondents agree with the four functions of government articulated by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*: Protecting individual rights, enforcing contracts, providing public goods, and correcting market externalities.

Policies and institutions that address income inequality are perhaps the most contentious issue among Illinois' top economics and policy academics. Half of those responding (50%) say they think the Illinois state government should adopt policies that work to substantially reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor, while the other half is either opposed (27%) or has mixed feelings (23%). Economics and policy academics express marginal support of minimum wage laws (54% support; 26% oppose) and think, on average, that Illinois' minimum wage should be \$9.45 per hour. Only a small minority, however, say that raising the minimum wage would improve the employment rate and grow the economy in Illinois (23%). Similarly, respondents express marginal support of labor unions (45% support; 27% oppose) but tend to think unions should have less influence (48%) rather than more influence (16%) in Illinois. Only a small minority, however, say that implementing local "right-to-work" zones in Illinois would improve the employment rate and grow the economy in Illinois (21%).

Finally, a majority of Illinois' top economics and policy academics (75%) support making necessary cuts in spending as well as raising new revenues through tax increases to resolve the state's budget problems. However, at least 73 economic and policy academics in Illinois (78%) do not think that politicians and elected officials generally have a strong understanding of economic principles. It is therefore possible that many respondents may not have confidence in Illinois' political leaders to effectively balance the budget and enact strong public policies that improve the state's economy.

**Appendix**

*Final question: Feel free to provide any feedback on this survey!*

<b>Unmodified Feedback on the Survey</b>	<b>ILEPI Comment</b>
<p>Do I support minimum wage "strongly" or "mildly"? I strongly support the idea of a minimum wage, but does your question mean to ask how high I think the minimum wage should go? If "strong" means \$15 per hour nationwide, then no. But I strongly support a nationwide minimum of about \$10 per hour, and would support higher minimums in higher-cost places - perhaps \$12 per hour in Chicago. The rough rule of thumb is about 50% of the median wage before the adverse employment effects become significant. While I believe labor unions have too much power in Illinois and are a detriment to economic growth, given that power -- I do not support union-busting or right-to-work zones. I do think the state would be wise to weaken union power at the margin, for example by eliminating union requirements (or union-comparable pay requirements for employers receiving contracts from the state. I suggest that future polls ask about business incentive programs, TIF districts, tax abatements, and other economic development programs, as well as the plethora of independent local taxing districts.</p>	<p>In general, this respondent's feedback seems to reflect the average (index) views of the sample of economics and policy academics.</p> <p>ILEPI hopes to make the PIE<sup>2</sup> survey an annual poll and will likely ask about detailed business incentive programs (rather than more general policy issues) in the future.</p>
<p>Good start. Might have included something on pensions.</p>	<p>Likely will in future editions.</p>
<p>I would have included some questions concerning immigration</p>	<p>Likely will in future editions.</p>
<p>I would prefer the results not be used for any political arguments. Otherwise, interesting survey. Cheers</p>	<p>To the reader: The best that can be said about these results is that "Illinois' top economics and policy academics generally support/oppose [item]."</p>
<p>I'm not sure the general public will care much about what economists thing but I'm a bit curious. Would be interested in seeing how results would compare if you gave the same survey to the general public.</p>	<p>To the reader: ILEPI is actually seeking funding to ask Illinois adults about the same issues (as well as a few others). Contact the author at <a href="mailto:fmanzo@illinoisepi.org">fmanzo@illinoisepi.org</a> if your organization may be able to assist. \$6,000 for 1,200 responses.</p>
<p>Question asking about income equality should perhaps also ask about after-tax income/consumption inequality.</p>	<p>Like it! Will try for next time. This version was intended to reflect a similar CNN/ORC (2014) question.</p>
<p>Raising taxes is an invitation for more government spending (unchecked and uncharted) and more corruption. It has been proven too many times in Illinois. Cut spending and keep taxes constant with the objective of lowering taxes and allowing workers and businesses to keep more of their hard earned income and profits. Then watch the economy and the private sector grow and the government shrink. The level of taxes in a state are a correlated gauge of corruption.</p>	<p>The correlation between taxes and corruption is interesting. The big concern is how exactly corruption is quantified into a numerical value. FiveThirtyEight, for instance, finds that Louisiana and Mississippi are two most corrupt states <i>per capita</i> (Enten, 2015).</p>
<p>The survey is not very well designed, as some questions are framed in a manner which leads the respondent towards a</p>	<p>Only significantly critical comment received. Q11, the climate change</p>



particular answer or a question may not provide all of the like alternatives (e.g., questions 11 and 12). In addition, it would be better if more of these questions were liker scale questions capturing the degree of response rather than an absolute response. Thus, your survey reflects question 23, which basically includes your staff in not being able to understand economics and how to frame economic questions for the best results. You should have had an economist, social scientist, and a statistician review your survey before submitting for responses	question, was designed to mirror a Pew (2015) question asked of AAAS scientists. Q12 merely paraphrases the NPR (2012) summary of the platform. Finally, degree/intensity is important, but ILEPI wanted to utilize the uniform weighting index applied previously by social scientists Klein and Stern (2006).
Why not a question about the type of tax Illinois and other states need. IL, for example, should institute a progressive income tax to boost state budget to support (1) educational institutions, preK-12 as well as higher, and (2) improve infrastructure.	Interesting. Initial (Q21) results find that respondents do not widely think tax changes (including a “millionaire’s tax” to fund schools) would improve employment or economic growth.
Would love to see the results. How will they be published.	In ILEPI Economic Commentary #27!

*Full disclosure: How the author would respond to his own survey*

#	Question	Answer	Comment
6	Minimum wage laws	Support mildly	Up to a point (Marginal benefit of higher incomes $\geq$ marginal costs)
7	Labor unions	Support strongly	Freedom of association in private organizations, incl. unions.
8	Anti-discrimination	Support strongly	Discrimination is economically inefficient
9	k-12 public education	Support strongly	Education + infrastructure + science = economic growth
10	Road, bridge, public transit investment	Support strongly	Education + infrastructure + science = economic growth
11	Climate change	Problem economic policy needs to address	The data is conclusive; the inaction is embarrassing
12	Six policies economists love	No mortgage deduction, no health-care deduction, no corporate tax, yes carbon tax, yes marijuana legalization	Replace corporate tax w/ higher gradual income tax; simplify by eliminating deductions and loopholes
13	Essential function of government	Protection of rights, enforcement of contracts, provision of public goods, correction of market activities, regulations that prohibit discrimination	Redistribution is not essential... until inequality causes economic inefficiency and fosters plutocracy (Manzo, 2014)
14	Budget cuts and raising tax revenues	Support mildly	Civic Federation (2015) proposal is sensible
15	Policies to reduce Illinois’ income gap	Support mildly	Inequality has gotten economically burdensome
16	Infrastructure investment to grow economy	Support strongly	Education + infrastructure + science = economic growth

17	Vehicle miles traveled replacing motor fuel tax	Support strongly	I-RIDE policy proposal (Manzo & Poulos, 2015)
18	Public construction projects	The government should also ensure projects provide jobs and good wages	Prevailing wages support local economies (Dickson Quesada et al., 2013)
19	Influence of labor unions in Illinois	More influence	State of Illinois' Unions (Manzo et al., 2015)
20	Value of minimum wage in Illinois	\$10.00	\$10 minimum wage (Bruno & Manzo, 2014)
21	Policies that would improve employment rate	Bachelor's degree, ECE enrollment, road investment, public transit investment	Interestingly, data in upcoming report with UIUC lead to this conclusion independently
22	Social issues: activities that should be legalized	Marijuana consumption, 18-20 alcohol consumption, sports gambling, prostitution, death with dignity	Black market activity is harmful and costly; all are safer in free (but regulated and taxed) markets
23	Politicians understand economic principles	Oppose strongly	N/A
24	Goal to bring economics to "hard" science	Support strongly	Null hypothesis should always be 0 impact until data convinces otherwise
25	Problems conducting quality economic research	Not enough replication, difficulty in performing experiments, not enough data, lack of public interest, political or agenda-driven pressure	In that order

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[Note: a publicly available spreadsheet with full respondent results is available online at: <https://goo.gl/vczgdm>.]

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