

# Chicagoans' Views on Expanding Legalized Gambling in Illinois

Barry Rundquist and Gerald Strom

Department of Political Science  
University of Illinois at Chicago

A Great Cities Institute Working Paper



**UIC**



# Chicagoans' Views on Expanding Legalized Gambling in Illinois

Barry Rundquist and Gerald Strom

Department of Political Science  
University of Illinois at Chicago

**A Great Cities Institute Working Paper**

---

**October 1995**



## The Great Cities Institute

The Great Cities Institute is an interdisciplinary, applied urban research unit within the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Its mission is to create, disseminate, and apply interdisciplinary knowledge on urban areas. Faculty from UIC and elsewhere work collaboratively on urban issues through interdisciplinary research, outreach and education projects.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Derik Gold, Brian Krepps, Ron Lake, and Brian White for helping to conduct the survey reported here, our colleagues in the Political Science Department for use of their computers and offices during the survey, our students for helping out as telephone interviewers, and the support of UIC's Great Cities Institute and the office of Social Science Research.

### Additional Copies

Great Cities Institute (MC 107)  
College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
412 S. Peoria Street, Suite 400  
Chicago IL 60607-7067  
Phone: 312-996-8700  
FAX: 312-996-8933

**Great Cities Institute Publication Number: GCP-95-3**

The views expressed in this report represent those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the Great Cities Institute or the University of Illinois at Chicago.

# Chicagoans' Views on Expanding Legalized Gambling in Illinois

Legalized gambling is controversial. Some say it is an economic boon to an area. Others say it brings problems. In an effort to determine how people in Chicago feel about the expansion of legalized gambling in Illinois and especially its expansion to Chicago, the Religious Task Force to Oppose Increased Gambling commissioned the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Political Science Poll to conduct a random telephone survey of 640 Chicago residents over the age of 18 between October 4 and October 8, 1995. The survey included twenty questions about expanding legalized gambling in Illinois.<sup>1</sup>

## Method

It is difficult to estimate public opinion on gambling. In part this is because gambling is not the most salient problem to people. In Chicago, crime, education, jobs, and taxes are the problems that people consistently rank as most important (for example, see Rundquist, Fox, Strom, and Cartright, 1995). Because gambling is less important to them, people may be less attentive to information about gambling and therefore more likely to respond to gambling questions in terms of incomplete and probably recently obtained information. Therefore, surveys at different points in time may produce different views on gambling. In part, also, opinion on gambling is difficult to estimate because, by simply asking whether respondents favor expanding legalized gambling without asking what they think about the various costs and benefits of gambling, an analyst cannot tell whether, at the time of the interview, the respondents happened to be concentrating on benefits (say gambling's attraction for tourists) or costs (say its effect on the poor). If respondents are framing their consideration of gambling policy in cost terms, they are likely to oppose the expansion of gambling, but if the framing is in benefit terms, their preference will tend toward expanding gambling. And one cannot know that respondents' preference would remain the same if something stimulated them to start thinking in terms of costs rather than benefits, or vice versa. (For a discussion of the effects of such framing, see Zaller, 1993.)

Finally, the way survey questions are phrased and the order in which they are presented to respondents may exacerbate the problem of identifying public opinion about gambling. If, for example, one starts off an interview with a series of questions about the possible benefits of gambling (e.g., attracting tourists, creating jobs, etc.), then asked whether gambling should be expanded, one would tend to find more people favoring expansion. But if one starts with a series of questions about the possible costs of gambling (more crime, hurts the poor, gambling addiction, etc.), one would likely find more opposition to expansion.

To deal with these problems, the UIC team created a questionnaire in which people were first asked a general question about whether they thought the benefits of gambling outweighed its costs, or vice versa, followed by a series of questions about particular costs and benefits. The cost and benefit questions were alternated so that a cost question was followed by a benefit question which was then followed by another cost question. By the end of the whole series of cost and benefit questions, people had responded to questions on both sides of the gambling issue. At that point, we asked whether the respondent favored the expansion of legalized gambling in Illinois and in Chicago and whether he or she favored expansion of particular types of legalized gambling such as riverboat, land-based, and video poker gambling. We think that this question order produces an unbiased assessment of whether people are for or against the expansion of legalized gambling, as well as their affinity for a full range of arguments for and against legalized gambling.

Most of the questions about gambling were worded so that the intensity with which people held their opinion could be assessed. For example, regarding whether gambling should be expanded in Illinois, we asked whether they strongly agreed that it should be expanded, agreed somewhat that it should be expanded, were indifferent to whether or not it was expanded, disagreed somewhat that it should be expanded, or disagreed strongly that it should be expanded.

The questionnaire we developed also included a series of questions about the respondent's own gambling behavior. The idea here was to get an estimate of the frequency with which Chicagoans gamble currently and to determine the extent to which gamblers and non-gamblers favor the expansion of legalized gambling. Respondents were also asked about their race, education, income, and whether they considered themselves liberals or conservatives.

How can opinion on gambling be characterized? In this report we assess public opinion in three ways. First, we report the percentage of respondents who gave a particular response to a particular question. Second, in order to facilitate the interpretation of these percentages, we classify responses in terms of a consensus/near consensus/disagreement scheme developed in an earlier paper on public opinion in Chicago (Rundquist and Miranda, 1990). According to this scheme, "consensus" is said to exist if 60 percent or more of respondents with an opinion (i.e., who are not indifferent) favor or disagree with a particular question. "Near consensus" exists if 45 percent to 60 percent of those with an opinion favor or disagree with a question. "Disagreement" exists if less than 45 percent of those with an opinion agree or disagree with a question.

Note that "indifferents" might reasonably be treated in three ways here, each of which has implications both for defining whether a consensus, near consensus, or disagreement exists, and even for how a Chicago referendum on gambling might come out. First, one might leave indifferents in the denominator when one calculates the percentage agreeing and disagreeing with a question. This approach makes it harder to reach 60 percent for or against something and implicitly assumes that indifferents would find a way of voting in a referendum that would express their indifference. This assumption would, of course, be unrealistic if there were only two alternatives on the referendum. Second, one might drop the indifferents and calculate the percentages of those with an opinion. This approach lowers the denominator, thus making it easier to reach 60 percent. It also implicitly assumes that indifferents would not vote on a gambling referendum. Third, one might assume that indifferents would vote on a gambling referendum but that their decision on how to vote would essentially consist of flipping a coin. In this case, half of the indifferents could be counted as favoring one alternative and half could be counted as favoring the other alternative. Dividing indifferents equally among the alternatives keeps the denominator as the sum of pros, cons, and indifferents and therefore makes it somewhat harder for a consensus to be identified. In this report we will use all three approaches to dealing with indifferents and report when a consensus, near consensus, and disagreement occurs by each approach.

Finally, we characterize responses in terms of the intensity with which respondents agreed or disagreed with a question. Thus if respondents say that they "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree" with a question, we describe their response as intense. This allows us to report whether more of those who feel intensely about a question tend to be pro or con.

## **Findings**

**Should Legalized Gambling be Expanded?**

The UIC gambling survey shows that more Chicagoans oppose than favor expanding legalized gambling in Illinois (see Table 1). To the question, do you agree or disagree that legalized gambling should be expanded in Illinois, 31 percent responded that they agree, 14 percent said they were indifferent, and 55 percent said they disagree. Does this spread constitute a consensus against gambling? By our first consensus measure, which includes the indifferents, there is a "near consensus" against expanding legalized gambling. By our second consensus measure, which excludes the indifferent responses when calculating the percentages, there is a clear "consensus" of 63 percent against expanding gambling. By our third consensus measure, which divides the indifferent responses equally between the expand and do not expand gambling alternatives, a consensus of 62 percent against expansion is again apparent. Thus, this analysis suggests the conclusion that there is a consensus among Chicagoans against the expansion of legalized gambling in Illinois.

Table 1 also shows that 43 percent of the respondents said that they strongly disagreed that legalized gambling should be expanded, whereas only 22 percent strongly agreed that it should be expanded. In other words, among people who felt intensely about this issue (i.e., were strongly in favor of or opposed to expanding gambling), two-thirds strongly opposed expansion.

**Table 1**

Q16	<i>Favor Expanding Gambling in Illinois</i>		
	Agree	22	
	Somewhat Agree	9	
	Indifferent	14	
	Somewhat Disagree	12	
	Disagree	43	Valid Cases 604

In sum, a majority of Chicagoans, and by two measures a Chicago consensus, opposes expanding legalized gambling in Illinois. Moreover, two-thirds of those who feel most strongly about this issue are opposed to expanding gambling.

We also asked people whether they favored or opposed the expansion of particular types of gambling in Illinois. Regarding expanding gambling to Chicago specifically, 32 percent are in favor, 25 percent are indifferent, and 43 percent are opposed (See Table 2). By our various consensus measures, these numbers represent either "disagreement" (less than 45 percent favor or oppose) or "near consensus" (when indifferents are excluded, 57 percent oppose expansion; when indifferents are divided equally between pros and cons, 55 percent oppose gambling).<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2**

Q18	<i>Favor or Oppose Legal Gambling for Chicago</i>		
	Favor	32	
	Indifferent	25	
	Oppose	43	Valid Cases 584
Q19	<i>Favor or Oppose Legal Gambling for Illinois</i>		
	Favor	29	
	Indifferent	32	

**Chicagoans' Views on Expanding  
Legalized Gambling in Illinois**

	Oppose	39	Valid Cases 581
Q20	<i>Favor or Oppose Riverboats in Illinois</i>		
	Favor	29	
	Indifferent	25	
	Oppose	41	Valid Cases 625
Q21	<i>Favor or Oppose Riverboats in Chicago</i>		
	Favor	36	
	Indifferent	21	
	Oppose	43	Valid Cases 598
Q22	<i>Land-based in Illinois</i>		
	Favor	28	
	Indifferent	24	
	Oppose	45	Valid Cases 623
Q23	<i>Land-based in Chicago</i>		
	Favor	28	
	Indifferent	19	
	Oppose	50	Valid Cases 621
Q24	<i>Paying Video Poker Machines</i>		
	Favor	26	
	Indifferent	23	
	Oppose	52	Valid Cases 582

Regarding expanding riverboat gambling in Illinois, 29 percent are in favor, 25 percent are indifferent, and 41 percent are opposed. Again, this constitutes "disagreement" by one consensus measure and "near consensus" by the other two.

Regarding riverboats in Chicago, 36 percent are in favor, 21 percent are indifferent, and 43 percent are opposed. This too is either "disagreement" or "near consensus," depending on the consensus measure relied upon. Regarding land-based casinos in Illinois, 28 percent favor them, 24 percent are indifferent, and 45 percent are opposed, which makes for a "near consensus" on all three consensus measures.

Regarding land-based casinos in Chicago, 28 percent favor, 19 percent are indifferent, and 50 percent oppose; this is a "near consensus" by all three measures. Regarding video poker, 26 percent favor, 23 percent are indifferent, and 52 percent oppose. This is a "near consensus" by all three of our consensus measures.

Thus, on questions about particular locations and specific forms of gambling, all questions revealed a plurality, usually a "near consensus" opposed to expansion.

***Frequency of Gambling***

We asked three questions about how often people tend to gamble. As Table 3 shows, to the most general question, "how often do you gamble in Illinois," 4 percent said, "often," 12 percent

said, "sometimes," 31 percent said, "not often," and 53 percent said, "never."

To the question, how often do you buy lottery tickets in Illinois, 17 percent responded, "often," 20 percent said, "sometimes," 28 percent said, "not often," and 35 percent said, "never." To the question, have you gambled in states other than Illinois 64 percent responded that they had not. Thus, although two-thirds of Chicagoans report that they have bought Illinois state lottery tickets, over half say they never gamble and the largest group of self-reported gamblers say they gamble infrequently.

**Table 3**

<i>Q27</i>	<i>How Often Gamble in Illinois</i>		
	Often	4	
	Sometime	12	
	Not Often	31	
	Never	53	Valid Cases 603
<i>Q28</i>	<i>Bought Lottery Ticket</i>		
	Often	17	
	Sometime	20	
	Not Often	28	
	Never	35	Valid Cases 602
<i>Q29</i>	<i>Gambled Elsewhere</i>		
	Yes	36	
	No	64	Valid Cases 604

***Advantages and Disadvantages of Gambling***

We asked nine questions about the extent to which Chicagoans agree or disagree with various arguments about the costs and benefits of gambling. We also asked respondents to indicate which of the various arguments about the benefits of gambling and which of the arguments about the costs of gambling they considered most significant. Table 4 shows the extent of agreement and disagreement with the various arguments for and against gambling. Note that "indifferent" in these tables refers to the number 3 response on a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In other words, people who marked "indifferent" chose this response rather than "strongly agree, "somewhat agree, "somewhat disagree, or "strongly disagree."

**Table 4**

	1	2	3	4	5	N
Q7 Costs Too High	34	11	21	13	22	597
Q8 Increases Economic Development	28	12	15	10	35	618
Q9 Gambling Makes Addicts	43	11	15	8	23	619
Q10 Keeps Taxes Low	22	11	19	9	39	580
Q11 Gambling Brings Crime	38	14	16	10	23	607
Q12 Brings Tourist Dollars	42	15	12	7	24	602
Q13 Gambling Hurts the Poor	42	12	14	9	23	600
Q14 Gambling is Good Entertainment	40	12	14	8	26	606
Q15 More Poor Gamble	41	11	19	9	21	585

Note: 1=Agree 2=Somewhat Agree 3=Indifferent 4=Somewhat Disagree 5=Disagree

More than half of the respondents said that they agreed with two of the pro-gambling arguments and three of the anti-gambling arguments. The pro-gambling arguments that got more than 50 percent agreement were that legalized gambling helps Illinois compete for tourist and convention dollars against other states and that legalized gambling should be viewed as entertainment. The antigambling arguments getting more than 50 percent agreement were that legalized gambling a) contributes to gambling addiction, b) brings more crime to an area, and c) hurts the poor more than the middle class. A majority of respondents also agreed that more poor than middle and upper class people tend to gamble.

On other arguments about gambling, pro- and anti-gambling sentiment was split more evenly. This was true for the pro-gambling arguments that gambling helps to keep local taxes low and increases local economic development and creates jobs. It was also true of the anti-gambling argument that legalized gambling tends to bring more illegal gambling.

In response to the question, "which do you consider the most significant advantage of legalized gambling in Illinois," Table 5 shows that the largest number (36 percent) said, "it brings local economic development and jobs." Twenty-three percent said that it helps the state compete for tourists.

**Table 5**

*Q30 Biggest Advantage From Gambling*

Economic Development	36
Lowers Taxes	15
Attracts Tourists Dollars	23
Good Entertainment	15
Something Else	11

To the question, "Which do you consider the most significant disadvantage of legalized gambling in Illinois, Table 6 shows that 32 percent responded that it hurts the poor more than the middle and upper classes, 24 percent said it increases gambling addiction, and 22 percent said it brings crime to an area.

**Table 6**

*Q31 Biggest Disadvantage of Gambling*

Creates Addicts	24
Brings Crime	22
Hurts the Poor	32
Is Immoral	6
Hurts Other Businesses	9
Something Else	10

***How Should Decisions on Gambling Expansion Be Made?***

When asked how they thought questions about gambling should be decided in Illinois," Table 7 shows that 43 percent favored a local referendum, 27 percent favored a statewide referendum,

22 percent favored a decision by local government, and only 8 percent wanted the General Assembly to decide. Adding together those who wanted a local referendum and those who wanted a statewide referendum indicates that 70 percent would like to see gambling questions decided by the public rather than by government officials.

**Table 7**

*Q25 Who Should Decide on Expanding Gambling*

The General Assembly	8
Local Government	22
Local Referendum	43
State Wide Referendum	27

Not surprisingly, people for and against expanding gambling differ on the locus of decision-making about gambling. Table 8 shows that a local referendum is preferred by over 40 percent of both people who favor and people who oppose expanding gambling in Chicago. But 32 percent of those in favor and only 12 percent of those opposed want local government to make the decision on expansion. Thirty-eight percent of those opposed to expanding gambling favor a statewide referendum as compared with only 19 percent of those in favor of expanding gambling. Thus, gambling opponents distrust government to make gambling decisions, while gambling proponents want these decisions made by government rather than the public. Distrust of government on the gambling issue is also indicated by Table 9, which shows that a plurality of Chicagoans do not believe that a fair share of the revenue produced by expanding gambling in Chicago would be used to benefit people in Chicago. Forty-seven percent said they did not believe that the money would come back to Chicago from Springfield, 28 percent said it would, and 25 percent said they were not sure.

**Table 8**

*Q16 Favor Expanded Gambling by Where Decide Issue*

	1	2	3	4	5
General Assembly	11	4	4	5	45
Local Government	29	30	28	18	17
Local Referendum	38	46	48	46	42
Statewide Referendum	22	20	20	31	33
Valid Cases	117	54	75	67	219

1=Agree 2=Somewhat Agree 3=Indifferent 4=Somewhat Disagree 5=Disagree

**Table 9**

*Q26 Will Chicago Get a Fair Share Back From State*

Yes	28
No	47
Not Sure	25

***Some Demographics of Support For and Opposition To Gambling***

Who in Chicago is most opposed to and most in favor of gambling? There are several demographic and religious differences.

As Table 10 shows, those most in favor tend to be older caucasians who are Catholics and live on the southwest side. Those opposed tend to be 30 to 40 year-old evangelical Protestants in all three racial groupings (African American, caucasian, and Latino), who live on the north, west, or south sides.

**Table 10**  
*Q16 Favor Expanded Gambling by Demographics*

	1	2	3	4	5	N
<b>Where Live</b>						
North	23	8	15	16	39	192
Northwest	16	11	16	11	47	132
Loop	21	21	14	21	14	
West	29	6	9	6	52	35
Southwest	38	12	15	5	30	66
South	15	10	11	12	50	142
<b>Race</b>						
Black	22	8	9	12	50	177
White	23	12	15	12	35	277
Hispanic	22	6	15	16	41	73
<b>Religion</b>						
Catholic	24	9	19	15	34	213
Lutheran/Methodist/Presb.	21	15	10	10	45	62
Baptist	24	6	8	9	53	87
Jewish	18	23	14	9	36	22
Other Protestant	16	7	19	7	51	43
<b>Income</b>						
00-10	28	4	14	4	50	50
10-20	21	6	13	13	49	72
20-30	26	10	22	6	36	88
30-40	20	12	8	16	44	84
40-50	16	12	16	15	41	61
50-75	21	9	20	14	36	70
75+	22	20	12	14	32	50
<b>Age</b>						
18-25	24	14	16	13	32	142
26-30	19	10	18	21	32	78
31-40	19	7	13	11	50	119
41-50	26	11	10	12	42	112
51-60	19	10	17	9	45	58
61-70	18	3	3	3	73	33

1=Agree 2=Somewhat Agree 3=Indifferent 4=Somewhat Disagree 5=Disagree

***Gamblers vs. Non-Gamblers***

The survey indicates that gamblers tend to favor expanding legalized gambling and non-gamblers tend to oppose it. Table 11 shows that from 40 to 50 percent of those who gamble frequently (as indicated by answers to either the question "How often do you gamble" or the question, "How often do you play the Illinois state lottery") favor expanding gambling. They were also more likely to say that economic development and attracting tourists are the most important benefits of gambling. About half of those who never gamble said they opposed expansion of gambling. Non-gamblers were also most likely to say that hurting the poor was the most significant disadvantage of gambling.

**Table 11***Q16 Favor Expanded Gambling By How Often Gamble*

	1	2	3	4	5	N
Gamble Often	50	8	4	8	29	24
Sometimes Gamble	33	17	19	7	23	69
Gamble Not Often	21	10	17	14	38	184
Never Gamble	19	8	11	12	51	308

1=Agree 2=Somewhat Agree 3=Indifferent 4=Somewhat Disagree 5=Disagree

Table 12 shows that about 45 percent of the frequent gamblers believed that the money the state would earn from legalized gambling in Chicago would come back to Chicago, whereas about half of the non-gamblers said it would not.

**Table 12***Q26 Chicago Get Fair Share Back by Gambling Behavior*

	Yes	No	Not Sure	N
Gamble Often	52	36	12	25
Sometimes Gamble	39	36	26	70
Gamble Not Often	26	47	26	179
Never Gamble	25	51	24	285

## Discussion

In beginning this report we discussed the problem of identifying public opinion about gambling and the approach we have taken to doing so. The approach was to have people indicate at the beginning of the survey whether they thought the costs of gambling outweighed its advantages or vice versa, then ask them questions about particular arguments for and against gambling, then ask whether they favored the expansion of gambling. In essence, the approach asked them to give an overall evaluation of gambling in the absence of a balanced introduction to the pros and cons of gambling, then to evaluate gambling again after such an introduction. This approach has several advantages, not the least of which is that it identifies the choice people would make if they have the arguments on both sides.

We have seen that, after being exposed to arguments on both sides of the issue, the choice made by anywhere from a simple majority to an over 60-percent consensus is to oppose expansion of legalized gambling in Illinois. This is of course the major finding of the study.

But the design of the survey also allows us to address another question: would the effect of balanced exposure to arguments about gambling cause respondents to shift their position from opposing to favoring gambling, from favoring to opposing gambling, or would people be unaffected by the information provided by the pro and con arguments in the survey? There are two ways to answer this question: in the aggregate and at the level of individual respondents. In the aggregate the answer is clear: the shift was from 34 percent who assessed the costs of gambling as greater than the benefits to 55 percent who opposed expansion of gambling. Thus fewer people evaluated gambling negatively at the beginning of the interview than did so after exposure to the various pro and con gambling arguments. A more detailed analysis at the individual level shows the same thing. Thus, 70 (35 percent) of the 202 respondents who said they thought the benefits of gambling outweighed its costs at the beginning of the survey opposed expansion of gambling after exposure to the various gambling arguments. In contrast,

only 52 (21 percent) of the 253 respondents who thought that the costs of gambling outweighed its benefits favored expansion of gambling after exposure to those arguments.<sup>3</sup>

In sum, this study of Chicagoans has identified a consensus against expanding legalized gambling in Illinois. It also suggests that exposure to a wide range of arguments about the pros and cons of gambling tends to increase opposition to the expansion of gambling.<sup>4</sup>

**References**

Rundquist, Barry, Sharon Fox, Gerald Strom, and Shari Cartright, 1995. "The Role of Issues in the 1994 Illinois Gubernatorial Election," Illinois Political Science Review, Vol. 1.

Rundquist, Barry and Rowan Miranda, 1990. Chicagoans, Views of Taxes and Spending, a Working Paper of the Office of Social Science Research.

Zaller, John R., 1992. The Nature of Mass Opinion, New York: Cambridge University Press.

## Notes

1. Telephone interviewers described the survey to respondents as a UIC survey, thus avoiding introducing a bias that might come from knowing the Task Force's position on gambling.
2. No intensity assessment was made for this question.
3. Note that the extent of shifting from pro- to anti-gambling responses and vice versa illustrates the point with which we began this report: gambling is a volatile issue in people's minds, making it difficult to get a valid estimate of opinion about gambling.
4. This suggestion could be put on even firmer social science ground if a control group in the sample was not given the balanced arguments for and against gambling, a design feature that might be added to a future study.

