

The 2013 Illinois Rural Life Poll: Growing Concerns, Glimmers of Optimism

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Presentation Outline

- **Introduction to the Illinois Rural Life Poll**
 - **Unique Aspects of the 2013 Poll**
- **Perceptions of Rural Life and Life in Illinois**
- **Growing Concerns**
- **Glimmers of Optimism**
- **The Future of Downstate**

Introduction to the Poll

- **The Illinois Rural Life Poll**
 - **Began in 1989 as a panel survey**
 - **In 2000 the panel was replaced with a Poll of randomly selected households across rural (downstate) Illinois**
 - **We do not include residents of Cook County or the collar counties**
 - **Omnibus survey that includes a number of issues and topics**

The 2013 poll was funded by the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, Rural Partners™, and the Provost's Office at Western Illinois University

What was unique to the 2013 Poll

- **The economic, political, and social context of Illinois and the country following the Great Recession**
 - **Illinois had the second largest financial deficit of any state**
 - **Polarized political climate**
 - **State of Illinois was slower to recover than other states**
- **The Population/Sample**
 - **Still random but we used a deliberate strategy to include:**
 - **Households with children/teens between the ages of 12 to 17**
 - **Communities with fewer than 5,000 residents**

The Sample

- **51 percent of respondents lived in a community with fewer than 5,000 people**
- **63 percent of households had at least one child under the age of 18 at home**
 - **36 percent of persons 40 to 49 years old had one child at home**
 - **49 percent of persons 40 to 49 years old had two or more children at home**
 - **35 percent of persons 50 to 59 years old had one child at home**
 - **24 percent of persons 50 to 59 years old had two or more children at home**

The Sample

- **Response Rate**
 - **Initial mailing**
 - 12,300 surveys were sent out, received 1,208 back
 - **Second mailing households in communities with populations of 5,000 or less**
 - 4,500 surveys were sent out, received an additional 258 completed surveys
 - **N=1,466 or 11.9%**

Quality of Life

Community Participation

Local Priorities, State Priorities

PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL LIFE AND LIFE IN ILLINOIS

Quality of Life (in percent)

Question	Worse (1)	Stayed the Same (2)	Better (3)	Mean
During the last 5 years, the QOL in your community has become (N=1,457)	47	42	11	1.64
During the last 5 years, the QOL of your family has become (N=1,448)	29	39	32	2.03

Quality of Life (in percent)

Question	Worse (1)	Stayed the Same (2)	Better (3)	Mean
In the next 5 years, the QOL of your community will become (N=1,404)	43	36	21	1.78
In the next 5 years, the QOL of your family will be (N=1,388)	19	38	43	2.24
In the next 5 years, the overall economic prospects for IL families will be (N=1,424)	73	16	11	1.37

How do you rate Illinois and your community...

Question	Poor (1)	Fair (2)	Good (3)	Mean
How do you rate Illinois as a place to live? (N=1,454)	49.5	34.5	26	1.67
How do you rate your community as a place to live? (N=1,423)	20	36	44	2.24

What are three things you...

Like *best*

- Rural aspects (space, no traffic, small size, can do what you want)
- Family, friends, neighbors
- Community aspects (close knit, church, friendly, values, good place to raise kids)

Like *least*

- High taxes/cost of living
- Lack of jobs/Poverty
- Other
- Poor infrastructure

Community Participation

Which of the following community activities do you participate in?

Response	Frequency	Percent*
...Local church	993	69
...Volunteer at sports and or school	877	61
...Booster's Club	354	25
...Fraternal Organization	212	15
...Professional Business Group	145	10
...Veteran's Organization	139	10
...Chamber of Commerce	128	9

Community Participation: Number of Activities

Number Activities	Frequency	Percent
No activities	204	14
One	385	26
Two	400	28
Three	282	19
Four or more	186	13
Total	1,457	100

Other Community Participation

Question	Yes	No
POLITICAL OFFICE		
Have you ever run for a county, town/village, or school board? (N=1,428)	12.5	87.5
Have you ever considered running for a local office? (N=1,428)	26.8	73.2
LOCAL BUSINESS		
Have you ever owned a local business? (N=1,430)	29.5	70.5
Have you ever wanted to open a business locally? (N=1,361)	45.7	54.3

What Prevents Community Participation?

Question/Responses	Frequency	Percent*
What prevents you from being able to participate in local activities?		
Other	425	35.5
Work non-standard hours	308	25.7
Young children at home	256	21.4
I'm not a joiner	247	20.6
Work out of town	219	18.3
Too old	115	9.6
Don't know how	71	5.9
Lack of transportation	37	3.1
Too young	12	1.0

What Prevents Community Participation?

- **Other (35.5%)**
 - 1. Lack of interest/not interested**
 - 2. Participate in other activities in the community**
 - 3. Family**
 - 4. Job/Work**
 - 5. Too cliquish, good ol' boys, "the people," don't feel welcome**
 - 6. Not enough time**
 - 7. Too political**
 - 8. Too busy**
 - 9. These groups don't exist**
 - 10. Work and family**

Prioritizing Issue Areas and Items

ISSUE AREAS	NUMBER 1 – ITEM FOR EACH ISSUE	PERCENT
Infrastructure (N=1,045)	Adequacy and quality of drinking water	57
Education (N=1,054)	Adequacy of school funding	52
Recreation (N=1,029)	Recreation and services for families	51
Health and well-being (N=1,045)	Local access to health care	50
Local economy (N=1,042)	Jobs that match residents' education	38
Agriculture (N=1,017)	Availability of locally produced food	38
Public services (N=1,013)	Responsiveness of state government to local needs	31

Responses to: Question 21. Of all the issues/items listed which ONE is most important to you?

- **Single most important ISSUE**
 1. **LOCAL ECONOMY**
 2. **EDUCATION**
- **Single most important ITEM**
 1. **Adequacy of school funding**
 2. **Attracting high paying local jobs**



GROWING CONCERNS

Community Decline

- **The Economy:**
 - **Different perceptions of community life based on social class, tenure, marital status, employment, and age**
 - **Loss of businesses and organizations**
- **Social Connections:**
 - **Polarization (haves and have-nots)**
 - **Social and community attachments change once children are gone**
 - **A certain percentage of the population are not involved in community life and they have no interest in being involved**

Loss of Local Schools and School Funding

- **The Economy**
 - **Cuts to staff and teachers leads to a loss of middle-class wages and middle class employment opportunities**
 - **The reputation of schools and school districts impact where families with live**
- **The Social**
 - **Diminishes rural schools ability to offer courses students need (Advanced Placement, Foreign Language, Technology, Ag. Science, Art, Music)**
 - **Loss of auxiliary services such as counseling and transportation**
 - **Loss of extra-curricular activities**

From Business as Usual to Morally Bankrupt

- **The Political – Local Level**
 - **Partisan politics and more**
 - “Good old boys,” business as usual
 - Stifled opposition, lack of alternatives
 - Lack of transparency
 - **Anti-tax, anti- “big” government (local vs. state)**
 - Disinvestment and underinvestment in rural Illinois has deepened the problems rural Illinois faces
 - Poorly equipped to address priority issues without state and federal funding

From Business as Usual to Morally Bankrupt

- **The Social Context – Local Level**
 - **Attitudes that limit community engagement**
 - **Us versus Them**
 - **Insiders versus Outsiders**
 - **Virtuous versus Vile**
 - **Actions that limit community engagement**
 - **Confusing self-interest with altruism (my kid, my family, my church...)**
 - **Perception of decline leads to a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

From Business as Usual to Morally Bankrupt

- **The State Context**
 - **Loss of trust**
 - **Cuts in funding to schools, hospitals, and social services**
 - **Austerity and “Spiral of Decline” (Davidson 1990)**

What happens when rural children and adults cannot compete in the global economy because they are not prepared?



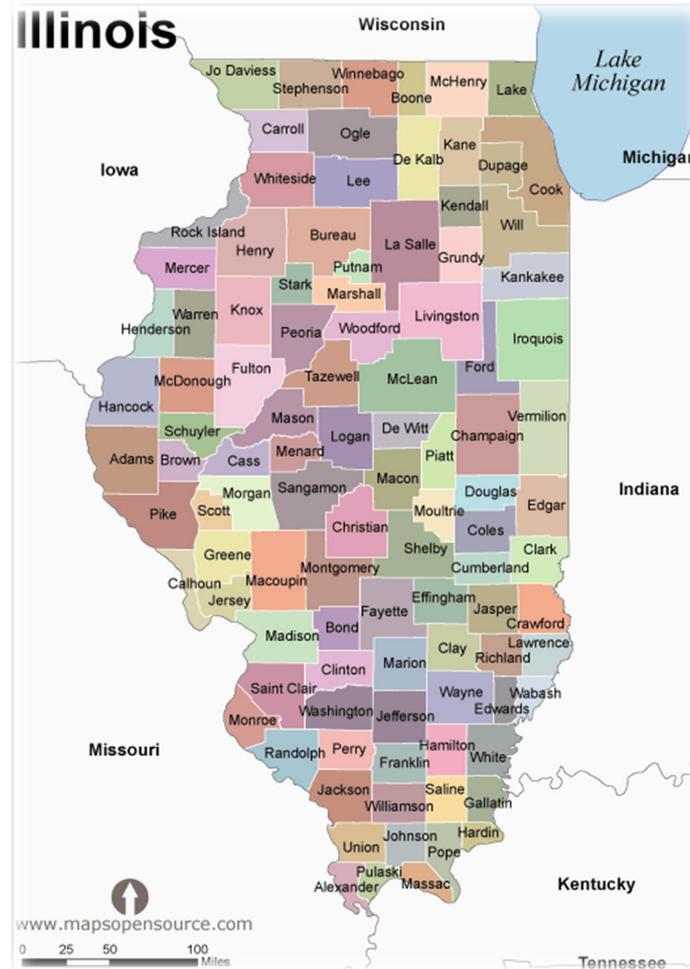
GLIMMERS OF OPTIMISM

Enduring Places

- **Rural communities are family-centered**
- **Church and schools are anchor institutions**
- **Twenty-seven percent of respondents have considered running for office**
 - **Evidence of civic engagement?**
 - **What can be done to facilitate this interest?**
- **Forty-seven percent of respondents have some interest in opening a local business**
 - **Opportunities for small business development and entrepreneurship?**

Enduring Places

- **Making it Work for Everybody**
 - **Those who are married, employed, and have children at home are doing fine**
 - **The challenge is to extend support and opportunities to all rural residents**
 - **Start with what you have rather than clinging to the past or being blinded by a future not rooted in reality**
 - **Rural areas are *good places* to raise children, we need to invest in them (prenatal care to college or career)**
 - **Long-time residents are part of our rural legacy, we need to take care of them**



THE FUTURE OF DOWNSTATE

Moving Forward

- **Identify Downstate Champions**
- **Develop strategic partnerships**
- **Develop a unified voice**
- **Advocate for rural Illinois**

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