

Quinn's Numbers Are Strong, but Support Could Be Shallow

Written by Rich Miller
Friday, 17 April 2009 18:05

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Pat Quinn is the most popular Illinois governor in more than a decade.

A new statewide poll conducted by Rasmussen Reports found that Governor Quinn has a 61-percent job approval rating. The poll of 500 likely Illinois voters conducted on April 14 claims that Quinn's job-approval rating is five points higher than U.S. Senator Dick Durbin's 56-percent "favorable" rating, and six points lower than President Barack Obama's home state 67-percent job-approval rating. The poll's margin of error was plus or minus three percentage points.

That's pretty darned good for a guy who has been widely denounced for proposing a "50-percent income tax increase."

Drill into the numbers, though, and Quinn's support is a bit soft, or "shallow," as the case may be.

The vast majority of voter opinion is in the muddled middle, which isn't surprising considering that he's only been governor for less than three months and wasn't elected on his own. Forty-four percent of likely voters "somewhat" approve of his job performance (compared to 16 percent who said the same about Obama) and 23 percent "somewhat" disapprove (9 percent for Obama).

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Quinn's "strongly" approve and "strongly" disapprove numbers are both fairly low - 17 and 14 percent, respectively. Few truly love or hate him at this point.

The governor's "somewhat approve" numbers are near or above 40 percent in almost every single demographic, including Republicans. An impressive 41 percent of Republicans "somewhat" approve of Quinn's job performance. Just 21 percent of GOP voters said the same about Obama. Almost half, 47 percent, of Democrats somewhat approve of his performance (13 percent for Obama), while 37 percent of conservatives, 46 percent of whites, 45 percent of blacks, 39 percent of married people, and 53 percent of unmarried folks all "somewhat" approve of Quinn's performance in office.

That softness might mean things could change in a hurry if voters decide he isn't living up to expectations. His tax hike proposals, especially, could move numbers fast. So far, though, they haven't, despite widespread reporting on the tax hike plan and lots of angry commentary against it. That's incredibly good news for Quinn, at least for now.

Quinn's "somewhat disapprove" numbers follow about the same sort of pattern. Thirty percent of Republicans, 19 percent of Democrats, 21 percent of whites, and 24 percent of blacks all "somewhat" disapproved of Quinn's job performance. Always keep in mind, of course, that margins of error in these subgroups will be substantially higher than the entire sample.

These appear to be the highest job approval ratings of any Illinois governor we've had since Jim Edgar left the governor's office in January of 1999 with job approval ratings in the high 60s to mid 70s.

Former Governor George Ryan's numbers dropped like a rock soon after he was inaugurated because of the quickly expanding federal investigation and his flip-flop on a sales tax hike. Rod Blagojevich topped out at 55 percent in a January, 2004, *Tribune* survey, although he bragged at the time that his own polling showed he had a 66-percent approval rating.

People are obviously pleased with this new change in leadership, if understandably hesitant to give Quinn a full-throated endorsement.

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This will also be welcome news for Illinois Democrats in general, who have been pummeled by scandal after scandal the past few years and are attempting to deal with a gigantic state budget deficit. The result will also likely embolden Quinn and possibly strengthen his hand in dealings with the General Assembly this spring.

But, like I said above, he has to be careful here.

For instance, the governor has spent a whole lot of time pointing fingers at everyone else for their ethical lapses, but has yet to issue any sort of mea culpa for his own role in Blagojevich's rise to power. Quinn was blatantly used by Blagojevich in 2002 and in 2006 to help boost his own reformer bona fides and Quinn seemed always happy to comply.

Quinn repeatedly defended Blagojevich against charges of corruption and happily went along with the program in both the 2002 and 2006 campaigns. When it was evident to just about everyone that Blagojevich was a criminal, Quinn cheered almost every move.

He's been able to get away with it because people (myself included) are so happy to finally be rid of the criminal ogre that we've been willing to cut Quinn extra slack. That may not last forever.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax, a daily political newsletter, and TheCapitolFaxBlog.com