Experts: 2% of voters decided elections
By Abdon M. Pallasch
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Experts say they are the 2 percent of Illinois voters who decided the election this year: ticket splitters who voted for Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn and Republican Sen.-elect Mark Kirk.

Why the split? "For both of them, character," Park Ridge Realtor Bob Ciarito said. "I've always liked Quinn. The [visits to] soldiers and military; he seems more genuine to me. I voted more for Kirk. It was more against [Democrat Alexi] Giannoulias. Kirk's OK. Giannoulias seemed a little too slick for my taste, his answers on the bank seemed a little too disingenuous. There was something about him I just didn't trust."

Some suburban women said they found Kirk palatable, but his Republican counterpart in the governor's race, Sen. Bill Brady, too conservative because of his opposition to abortion and his vote against requiring insurance carriers to cover mammograms.

And the suburbs showed the split most sharply. "The differences are greatest in suburban Cook and the collar counties. Brady did not do as well relative to Quinn" as Kirk did over Giannoulias, said Kent Redfield, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "You have to assume these are moderate swing voters in the suburbs who probably were not happy with the way things were going, and Kirk was attractive or certainly the lesser of two evils, but not scary. Those same voters, when they looked at Brady or Quinn, found they weren't happy with the way things were going, but found Brady scary. It could be his fiscal policy . . . or social issues."

Some Quinn-Kirk voters told the Sun-Times their votes for governor were more pro-Quinn than anti-Brady while their votes for senator were more anti-Giannoulis than pro-Kirk.

Kirk's attack ads successfully ingrained an image of state Treasurer Giannoulis as a sleazy "mob banker" more effectively than Giannoulis' attack ads against Kirk portrayed him as a serial embellisher, they said.

"It did feel like it was a vote against Giannoulis," said one suburban mom.

Then there are the 65,000 families, many of them Dems, who lost money in the Bright Start college savings program managed by Giannoulis' office. "I really, personally, got affected by his Bright Start issue," accountant Rick Wilkins said. "It hurts me, but I know it's hurting others more. I really didn't feel like he was coming out like he was accountable. I don't feel . . . he was apologetic. Kirk seemed to be more middle of the road than right."

Illinois is a middle-of-the-road state, experts say.

"Kirk was close to the mainstream of what Republicans traditionally look like in Illinois; Brady was, by every measure, a deep and abiding conservative," said Alan Gitelson, a Loyola University political science professor.
“It’s character and issue positions,” Redfield said. “If abortion and gay rights were a big deal for you, there was a clear distinction between Kirk and Brady.”

Some ticket splitters may have been Republicans taken with Quinn's attending the funerals of every Illinois soldier killed in Afghanistan and Iraq, the experts said.

The 2 percent figure for ticket splitters is an estimate. Kirk got about 70,000 more votes than Giannoulias -- 1.9 percent. Quinn got about 19,000 more votes than Brady -- about .5 percent. Some voters may have split between major party and third-party candidates, but Redfield said an estimate that 2 percent of Illinoisans voted for Quinn and Kirk is a "reasonable assumption."

There could be more in that camp if there were an equal and opposite number voting for Giannoulias and Brady. But Redfield, Gitelson and two other political scientists doubted many voters would pick both the very conservative Brady and the liberal Giannoulias. Voters split more on the lower statewide offices with 73 percent backing Democrat Jesse White for secretary of state, and 53 percent for Republican Judy Baar Topinka for comptroller.