Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics

2014 Midterm Election, Congress's Performance, and Concern about Ebola

A Survey of 503Registered Voters in Pennsylvania 3rd Congressional District

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Summary of Findings

A Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics poll of 503 (MOE +/-4.37, October 13 – October 21, 2014) registered voters in Pennsylvania's 3rd congressional district (PA-3) finds Republican incumbent Congressman Mike Kelly with a very comfortable twenty point lead over the Democratic challenger, Dan LaVallee. Among likely voters, Kelly's lead is slightly larger. With congressional elections just nine days away, nearly three out of four registered voters in PA-3 report that they do not recognize LaVallee's name compared to only 15% saying the same of Kelly. While it appears that PA-3 voters are on the threshold of awarding Kelly another term in Congress, they are anything but satisfied with the performance of Congress as an institution. Two out of three voters say Congress is doing a poor job, and three out of four say that during the past year it has not passed any legislation that will significantly improve life in America or their lives in particular. President Obama fares no better – nearly two out of three voters in PA-3 disapprove of the job he is doing as president. In terms of the race for governor of Pennsylvania, the Democratic Party's candidate Tom Wolf enjoys a seven point lead over Republican governor Tom Corbett among registered *and* likely voters in PA-3.

The poll also finds substantial concern about the spread of the Ebola virus. Nearly half of all registered voters in PA-3 express a lack of confidence in our nation's ability to prevent new cases of Ebola within our borders, and strong majorities express concern that the disease will spread to other parts of the nation and even to their own community within the next year.

Race for Congress in PA-3/Governor of Pennsylvania

Republican Party candidate Mike Kelly holds a substantial twenty point lead over Democratic Party challenger Dan LaVallee among registered voters (50%-30%). Among likely voters, Kelly's lead grows by two points (52%-30%). Among the relatively small percentage (17%) of voters that remain undecided, more are leaning toward Kelly (14%) than LaVallee (8%). Support for Kelly is reflected in voters' opinions of him. Nearly half (49%) of all registered voters have a strongly (17%) or somewhat (32%) favorable opinion of him, compared to only 24% with a strongly (11%) or somewhat (13%) unfavorable opinion. One reason for Kelly's sizeable lead is that very few registered voters in the district recognize the name of his opponent. When asked about their opinion of LaVallee, nearly three out of four (73%) respondents said they did not recognize his name, and 12% said they simply did not know.

Name recognition is not, however, a problem for the Democratic Party's candidate for governor of Pennsylvania as he attempts to unseat Republican Tom Corbett. When asked their opinion of Wolf, only a small fraction (12%) said they did not recognize his name, while nearly a majority (46%) had as somewhat (33%) or strongly (13%) favorable opinion of him. When the same question was asked about Corbett, nearly half (48%) of PA-3's voters had a somewhat (22%) or strongly (26%) unfavorable opinion of him. Voters' opinions of the candidate are reflected in their preference for governor. Among registered (40%-47%) and likely (41%-48%) voters in PA-3, Wolf enjoys a comfortable seven point lead.

Government Performance

In spite of voters' apparent desire to see Kelly return to Congress to serve another term, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of Congress as an institution. When asked to rate the way Congress is doing its job, less than 5% of PA-3 voters say "excellent" (<1%) or "good" (4%). Nearly all voters in PA-3 (94%) give Congress bad marks, with one out three (32%) rating the performance of Congress as "fair" and two out of three (62%) rating it as "poor." Three out of four voters (74%) say that over the past year Congress has passed no legislation that will significantly improve life in America, and 86% say the same of legislation that will improve their lives in particular. This dissatisfaction with the performance of government extends to the executive branch as well. A sizeable majority of voters (61%) have a somewhat (16%) or strongly (45%) unfavorable opinion of Barack Obama, and only 37% have a somewhat (25%) or strongly (12%) favorable opinion of the president. Nearly two out of three (61%) voters disapprove of the job Obama is doing as president, and fewer than one out of three approve (29%).

Concern About Ebola

Nearly every registered voter (99%) in Pennsylvania's Third Congressional District has heard about the cases of Ebola that were discovered in Texas, and most are concerned about the virus spreading to other parts of the nation. Roughly three out of four (78%) voters are somewhat (34%) or very (44%) concerned about Ebola spreading to other parts of the United States within the next year, and a majority (60%) are somewhat (29%) or very concerned (31%) about it spreading to their community. In spite of this concern, voters in our region express confidence in our nation's ability to prevent the spread of the virus. In spite of their concern about Ebola, a majority (52%) of voters say they are somewhat (34%) or very (18%) confident that our nation can prevent the spread of the virus.

Frequency Report

Interviews were completed with 503 registered voters in Pennsylvania 3rd Congressional District. For a sample size of 503, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.37 points (the margin of error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. For subsamples the margin of error is larger (depending on the size of the subsample).The data were weighted on age, gender and race to correct for minor discrepancies between the sample and population. Question order was randomized whenever possible. Due to rounding, column totals may not equal 100 percent.

To begin, I am interested in learning your opinion of some people in politics. For each person, I would like to know if your opinion is strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable. If you don't recognize the name, then you can simply tell me and we will move to the next one.

[Questions 1-5 Randomized]
Q.1   Is your opinion of Tom Corbett strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

Strongly favorable	10%
Somewhat favorable	31%
Somewhat unfavorable	22%
Strongly unfavorable	26%
Do not recognize	6%
DK	5%
RF	0%

Q.2   Is your opinion of Tom Wolf strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

Strongly favorable	13%
Somewhat favorable	33%
Somewhat unfavorable	17%
Strongly unfavorable	16%
Do not recognize	12%
DK	9%
RF	0%

Q.3   Is your opinion of Barack Obama strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

Strongly favorable	12%
Somewhat favorable	25%
Somewhat unfavorable	16%
Strongly unfavorable	45%
Do not recognize	0%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.4   Is your opinion of Mike Kelly strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

Strongly favorable	17%
Somewhat favorable	32%
Somewhat unfavorable	13%
Strongly unfavorable	11%
Do not recognize	15%
DK	11%
RF	0%

Q.5   Is your opinion of Dan LaVallee strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

Strongly favorable	1%
Somewhat favorable	7%
Somewhat unfavorable	4%
Strongly unfavorable	2%
Do not recognize	73%
DK	12%
RF	1%

Q.6   Now I would like you to turn your attention to this year's elections.   As you may know, this November Pennsylvania voters will elect a governor and a representative to the US Congress.

So far as you know right now, how likely is it that you will vote in these elections this November?   Would you say it is very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, very unlikely that you will vote this November?

Very likely	75%
Somewhat likely	15%
Somewhat unlikely	4%
Very unlikely	6%
One but not other (volunteered)	1%
DK	0%
RF	0%

[Questions 7 and 9 Randomized]
Q.7   If the election for Governor of Pennsylvania was held today, would you vote for the Republican Party's candidate Tom Corbett, or the Democratic Party's candidate Tom Wolf. (RV *N*=503, MOE=4.37; LV *N*=440, MOE=4.67)

	RV	LV
Tom Corbett	40%	41%
Tom Wolf	47%	48%
Other (volunteered)	1%	1%
Undecided (volunteered)	8%	8%
DK	4%	3%
RF	1%	0%

Q.8   As of today do you lean more toward the Republican Tom Corbett, the Democrat Tom Wolf or are you leaning

toward some other candidate?

Tom Corbett	22%
Tom Wolf	10%
Some other candidate	16%
DK	51%
RF	2%

Q.9   If the election for US Congress was held today, would you vote for the Republican Party's candidate Mike Kelly, or the Democratic Party's candidate Dan LaVallee? (RV *N*=503, MOE=4.37; LV *N*=440, MOE=4.67)

	RV	LV
Mike Kelly	50%	52%
Dan Lavallee	30%	30%
Other (volunteered)	1%	1%
Undecided (volunteered)	12%	11%
DK	7%	6%
RF	1%	1%

Q.10   As of today, do you lean more toward the Republican Mike Kelly, the Democrat Dan Lavallee or are you leaning toward some other candidate?

Mike Kelly	14%
Dan Lavallee	8%
Some other candidate	23%
DK	50%
RF	5%

Q.11   Now I would like you to think about politics in Washington, DC. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as President of the United States?

Approve	29%
Disapprove	61%
DK	8%
RF	2%

Q.12   Generally speaking, how do you rate the way that Congress is doing its job?   Would you say Congress is doing an excellent job, a good job, a fair job, or a poor job?

Excellent	0%
Good	4%
Fair	32%
Poor	62%
DK	1%
RF	1%

Q.13   Over the past year, do you believe that Congress has passed any legislation that will significantly improve life in America?

Yes	16%
No	74%
DK	9%
RF	1%

Q.14   Over the past year, do you believe that Congress has passed any legislation that will significantly improve your life in particular?

       Yes   7%
       No   86%
       DK   7%
       RF   1%

Q.16   I would like to turn briefly to an issue that has been in the news recently. You may have heard that a virus called Ebola is causing sickness and death in West Africa, and that a couple of cases of Ebola were discovered in Texas.

Have you heard about the Ebola cases discovered in Texas?

       Yes   99%
       No   1%
       DK   -
       RF   -

Q.17   How confident are you that our nation can prevent new cases of Ebola from occurring within the United States? Would you say that you are very confident, somewhat confident, not very confident, or not confident at all?

       Very confident   18%
       Somewhat confident   34%
       Not very confident   26%
       Not confident at all   20%
       DK   1%
       RF   -

Q.18   How concerned are you about Ebola spreading to other parts of United States within the next year? Would you say you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned, or not concerned at all?

       Very concerned   44%
       Somewhat concerned   34%
       Not very concerned   14%
       Not concerned at all   7%
       DK   0%
       RF   -

Q.19   How concerned are you about Ebola spreading to your community within the next year? Would you say you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, not very concerned, or not concerned at all?

       Very concerned   31%
       Somewhat concerned   29%
       Not very concerned   23%
       Not concerned at all   16%
       DK   0%
       RF   -

Q.20   The last few questions are used to make sure that our sample for this survey reflects the population as a whole. Again, your answers will be kept completely confidential.

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat or independent?

Republican	38%
Democrat	34%
Independent	26%
Other (volunteered)	1%
DK	2%
RF	0%

Q.21   Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?

Republican Party	37%
Democratic Party	40%
Neither	21%
Other (volunteered)	-
DK	3%
RF	-

Q.22   Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, conservative, moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	15%
Conservative	34%
Moderate	26%
Not thought much about it	25%
Other (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	-

Q.23   In what year were you born?

18-28	13%
29-38	13%
39-48	16%
49-68	39%
69 or older	18%

Q.24   What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school	2%
High school	29%
Some college/associates degree	29%
Four year degree	23%
Graduate degree	17%
DK	0%
RF	1%

Q.25   What is you marital status?

Single	20%
Married	67%
Partnership	0%
Divorced	6%
Widowed	6%
Other	-
DK	1%
RF	1%

Q.26   If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all of the members of your household for the past year, would the total be?

Less than $30,00	17%
$30,000-$50,000	20%
$50,000-$100,000	29%
$100,000-$150,000	11%
Greater than $150,000	6%
DK	4%
RF	12%

Q.27   What is your race or ethnicity?

White/Caucasian	91%
Non-white	9%

Q.28   Record Gender (do not ask)

Male	48%
Female	52%

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of registered voters in Pennsylvania's 3rd Congressional District, which was conducted between Monday, October 15 and Tuesday, October 21, 2014. During the 7 day field period interviewers called weekday evenings between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00 PM and between 11:00 AM and 6:00 PM on weekends. For each working phone number, interviewers made no fewer than six attempts to contact individuals selected to participate in the study. Calls were initiated by CATI software or manually dialed and relied on a list of randomly selected registered voters Pennsylvania obtained from Votermapping.com.

A total of 503 individuals were interviewed. For a sample size of 503, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.37 points (the margin of error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. For subsamples, the margin of error is higher (depending on the size of the subsample). Aside from sampling error, there are several factors that prevent the results obtained through a probability sample from being a perfect representation of the results that would be obtained if the entire population was interviewed. This non-sampling error may be caused by of a variety of factors including, but not limited to, response rate and question order. In this survey, a variety of techniques were employed to reduce common sources of non-sampling error.

Response Rate

Calculating a response rate for a particular study involves considering a number of variables (see http://www.aapor.org/Response_Rates_An_Overview.htm); but, simply stated, it refers to the percentage of individuals in a sample that, when contacted, elect to participate in a study by responding to an interviewer's questions. In recent years, researchers have documented a sharp decline in response rates. Today, a typical study that relies on telephone interviews can expect a response rate of between 20 and 30%. Although it is unclear if, or to what extent, response rate is a source of non-sampling error, most polls strive to maximize response rate by making multiple attempts to contact individuals and taking steps to secure their cooperation once they have been reached. In this way, our study of registered voters in Pennsylvania is no different than most polls: No fewer than six attempts were made to contact hard-to-reach individuals. These attempts occurred during weekday evenings and on Saturday afternoons. To ensure a high rate of cooperation, interviewers received training on conversion techniques that are consistent with research ethics as identified by the Mercyhurst University Institutional Review Board.

Questions

This report contains the questions as worded on the questionnaire and in the order in which they were asked. Some of the questions include bracketed information, which is, in every case, an instruction to the programmer or interviewer. Whenever possible, question order was randomized to ensure that respondents did not receive a set order of response options, which allowed response set bias to be minimized. For structured (close-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to probe for clarity when respondents' answers were not identical to the predefined response options. For unstructured (open-ended) questions, interviewers were trained to record verbatim responses whenever possible. In cases where a respondent asked that a question or response option be repeated, interviewers were careful to re-read the entire question or all response options.

Data

Data collected during this study was prepared for analysis by director and associate director of Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics. Data preparation included, but was not limited to, removing partial interviews (respondent-terminated interviews) from the dataset. To maximize the accuracy of our results and correct for discrepancies between our sample and the population, the data were weighted on age, gender and race. Simply stated, weighting is when data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample was drawn.

Mercyhurst Center
for Applied Politics

The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics (MCAP) began operations in July 2010. Inspired by the mission of Mercyhurst University and guided by the university's core values, the center promotes reasoned discourse about problems facing communities, states and nations. It accomplishes this objective by providing elected officials, government agencies, news organizations, and nonprofits with accurate and unbiased assessments of public opinion; and offering a nonpartisan forum for public debates and roundtable discussions that address pressing public problems.

The centerpiece of MCAP is the state of the art computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) facility. The facility, which is located in the Center for Academic Engagement, is comprised of thirty-one interviewer stations and staffed by well-trained research associates. The specialized computer software used to conduct telephone interviews generates random telephone numbers in a predefined geographic area or dials from a list, and allows research associates to accurately complete even the most complex interviews.

The center also has the ability to design and administer online surveys. This method of interviewing is ideal for organizations that have relatively up-to-date email addresses for their members. The software used by MCAP allows a researcher to administer a survey - whether short and simple or long and complex – to an unlimited number of email addresses. In addition, a researcher has the ability to monitor response rates and send out reminders, thereby ensuring that the study produces high quality results.

As the Northwestern Pennsylvania's only CATI facility whose primary purpose is to regularly and accurately gauge public opinion, the MCAP is an invaluable resource for community leaders. Each year the center conducts polls on issues of local, state and national interest. The results of these studies are made available to the public via the university's webpage (mercyhurst.edu/mcap). In addition to its annual polls, the center offers its services to private parties, nonprofits, news organizations, and government agencies for minimal cost.

Please direct questions about the center to Dr. Joseph M. Morris, Director, Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics, Mercyhurst University, 501 E. 38th Street, Erie, PA, 16546, (814) 824-2154, jmorris@mercyhurst.edu.

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