



Mercyhurst Center  
for Applied Politics

*Race for Governor of  
Pennsylvania and the  
Use of Force Against ISIS*

*A Survey of 479 Registered  
Voters in Pennsylvania*

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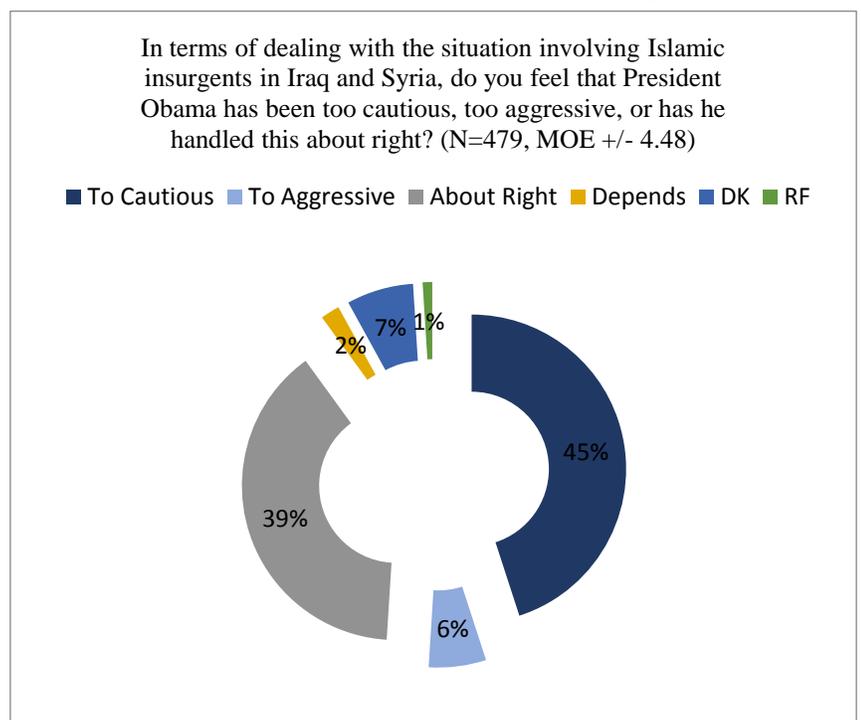
## Summary of Findings

A Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics poll of 479 (MOE +/-4.48) registered voters in Pennsylvania conducted between September 15 and September 24, 2014 finds widespread support for the use of American air power against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). A majority of voters believes that ISIS poses an immediate terrorist threat to the United States, and three out of four say that the group will pose a threat in the future if it is left unchecked by American military action. In spite of the fact that a plurality of voters believes that President Obama has been too cautious in dealing with ISIS, a majority of voters say they are opposed to committing American combat troops to the fight. The relative consistency between voters' preference for limited American involvement in the conflict and the administration's actions has not translated into higher approval ratings for the President, which remain dismal.

Closer to home, voters express a modestly more positive assessment of the state of the nation's economy, the job market, and their own personal financial situation than they did in 2011. In spite of offering more positive evaluations of the economy, voters offer less-than-positive evaluations of Tom Corbett's performance as governor. While it appears that the race for the governor's office is tightening, Tom Wolf still maintains a sizeable double-digit lead.

## Obama and World Affairs, ISIS

In spite of the fact that a plurality of Pennsylvania voters (37%) believes that the United States should be less involved in world affairs, they voice strong support for President Obama's decision to authorize air strikes against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Three out of four Pennsylvania voters (75%) say that they approve of the air strikes, and only a handful (15%) say that they disapprove. The support for Obama's decision to authorize air strikes against ISIS stems from the perception that the group poses an immediate and future threat to the homeland. When asked whether ISIS poses an immediate terrorist threat to the United States, a solid majority (63%) said they believed it did. An even larger majority (70%) says that US military action against ISIS is necessary to prevent a future terrorist attack on America. Indeed, a plurality of voters (45%) says that Obama has been too cautious in dealing with the situation in Iraq and Syria; however, a sizable minority of voters (39%) says that he has neither been too cautious nor too aggressive in dealing with the threat, but has handled things about right. Voters' concern that Obama has been too cautious when dealing with ISIS appears to be

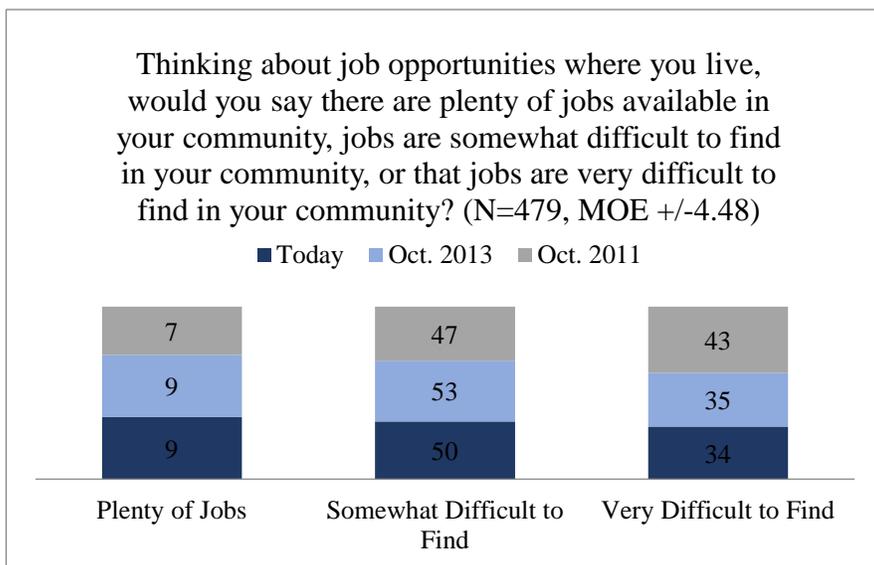
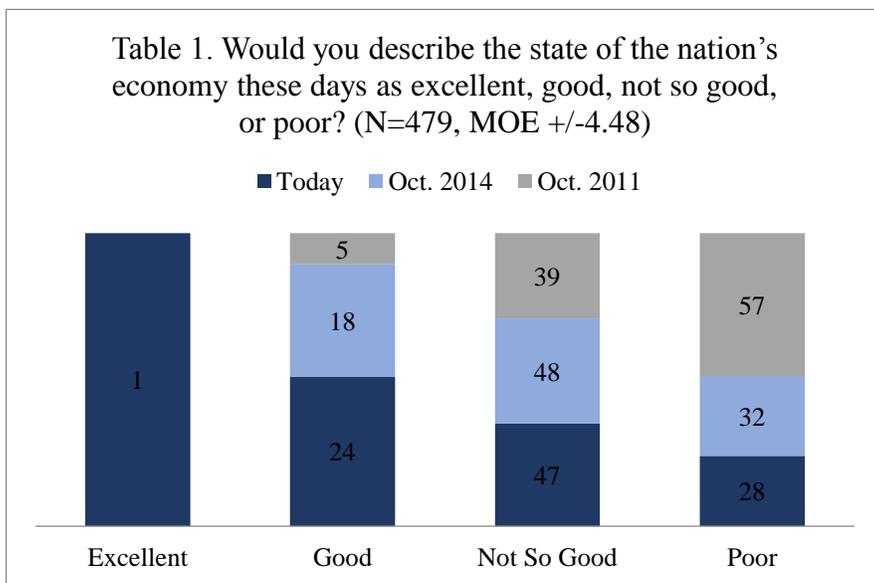


insufficient to warrant support for the use of American ground troops to combat the group. A solid majority (61%) says it would oppose committing American combat troops to the fight against ISIS, and only 31% would favor such a move.

Despite the relative consistency between Pennsylvania voters' beliefs about how to deal with ISIS and Obama's actions, a majority (55%) disapproves and only one-third (31%) approves of the job he is doing as President.

## State of the Nation's Economy

Pennsylvania voters' perceptions about the state of the nation's economy, job opportunities in their communities, and their personal financial situation are moderately more positive than in 2011, but only slightly more positive than one year ago. When asked in October 2011 to describe the state of the nation's economy, a majority of Pennsylvania voters (57%) said that it was "poor" and only a small minority (5%) described it as "good." Today, however, only 28% of voters describe the economy as poor and roughly one out of four (24%) say that that it is "good." Similarly, when asked in 2011 about the availability of jobs in their communities, 43% of voters in the commonwealth said jobs were "very difficult to find." Today, only 34% say that jobs are "very difficult to find." In spite of their perception of modest improvements in the economy since 2011, today most voters still say they are making just enough money to maintain their standard of living.



## Race for Governor

In the election for governor of Pennsylvania, the race between the Democratic Party's candidate Tom Wolf and Republican incumbent Tom Corbett is tightening. Wolf, however, still enjoys a very comfortable lead among the state's registered voters. When voters were asked for whom they would vote if the election was held today, 43% said Wolfe, 28% said Corbett, and 22% remained undecided.

The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics September 2014 poll finds Wolf leading Corbett by a comfortable 15-point margin. These results reflect widespread disapproval of the job Corbett is doing as governor of the keystone state. When asked whether they approve or disapprove of the job Corbett is doing as governor, only 31% said that they approved, while a majority 51% said they disapproved.

## Frequency Report

*Interviews were completed with 479 registered voters in Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 479, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.48 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 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. Bracketed or italicized text are instructions to interviewers.*

1. Would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good, or poor?  
(N=479, MOE +/-4.48)

	Today	Oct. 2013	Oct. 2011
	%	%	%
Excellent	1	0	0
Good	24	18	5
Not So Good	47	48	39
Poor	28	32	57
DK	0	1	0
RF	0	0	0

2. Thinking about job opportunities where you live, would you say there are plenty of jobs available in your community, jobs are somewhat difficult to find in your community, or that jobs are very difficult to find in your community? (N=479, MOE +/-4.48)

	Today	Oct. 2013	Oct. 2011
	%	%	%
Plenty of Jobs	9	9	7
Jobs Somewhat difficult to find	50	53	47
Jobs Very Difficult to Find	34	35	43
DK	6	2	4
RF	0	0	0

3. Which best describes your family's financial situation? Do you feel as if you are getting ahead financially, have just enough money to maintain your standard of living, or are you falling behind financially? (N=479, MOE +/-4.48)

	Today	Oct. 2013	Oct. 2011
	%	%	%
Getting Ahead	16	17	17
Just Enough Money	61	60	57
Falling Behind	20	21	22
DK	2	2	1
RF	1	1	2

4. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Tom Corbett is doing as Governor of Pennsylvania?

Approve	31%
Disapprove	51%
DK	17%
RF	2%

5. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as President of the United States?

Approve	36%
Disapprove	55%
DK	7%
RF	2%

6. Now I have just a few questions on world affairs. When it comes to world affairs, do you believe the United States should be more involved, less involved or continue its current level of involvement?

More involved	27%
Less involved	37%
Continue current level of involvement	30%
Depends	4%
DK	2%
RF	0%

7. As you may be aware, a group known as ISIS, ISIL or Islamic State is presently in control of parts of Syria and Iraq. On September 10th, Barack Obama gave a speech where he announced that he would authorize US air strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Do you approve or disapprove of President Obama's decision to authorize air strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria?

Approve	75%
Disapprove	15%
Depends (Iraq not Syria etc.)	3%
DK	6%
RF	2%

8. Given that the current plan does not involve having combat troops on the ground, would you favor or oppose sending American combat troops into Iraq and Syria to combat ISIS?

Favor	31%
Oppose	61%
Depends (Iraq not Syria etc.)	4%
DK	5%
RF	0%

9. Some believe ISIS poses an immediate terrorist threat to the United States, while others do not. Do you believe ISIS poses an immediate terrorist threat or does it not pose an immediate terrorist threat to the United States?

Yes, poses immediate threat	63%
No, no immediate threat	28%
Depends	3%
DK	6%
RF	0%

10. Some believe that United States military action against ISIS is necessary to prevent a future terrorist attack on America, while others do not.

Do you believe US military action against ISIS is necessary or unnecessary to prevent a future terrorist attack on America?

Yes, necessary	70%
No, unnecessary	17%
Depends	5%
DK	7%
RF	1%

11. In terms of dealing with the situation involving Islamic insurgents in Iraq and Syria, do you feel that President Obama has been too cautious, too aggressive, or has he handled this about right?

Too cautious	45%
Too aggressive	6%
Handled things about right	39%
Depends	2%
DK	7%
RF	1%

Finally, I would like to return to an issue closer to home. You may be aware that this November Pennsylvania is holding an election for governor.

12. If the election for governor of Pennsylvania was held today, would you vote for the Republican candidate Tom Corbett, the Democratic candidate Tom Wolf or are you unsure?

Republican, Tom Corbett	28%
Democrat, Tom Wolf	43%
Some other candidate	3%
None/would not vote	3%
DK/Unsure	22%
RF	2%

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.

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

Republican	33%
Democrat	38%
Independent	26%
Other	1%
DK	1%
RF	1%

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

Republican Party	37%
Democratic Party	38%
Neither	19%
DK	5%
RF	1%

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

Liberal	17%
Conservative	27%
Libertarian	4%
Moderate	21%
Haven't thought much about this	28%
DK	3%
RF	1%

16. What is your age?

18-29	14%
30-39	14%
40-49	17%
50-69	38%
70 and older	16%

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

Less than high school	4%
High school	30%
Some college/associates degree	25%
Four year degree	21%
Graduate degree	19%
DK	1%
RF	0%

18. What is your marital status?

Single	18%
Married	62%
Domestic Partnership	0%
Divorced	7%
Widowed	12%
Other	0%
DK	0%
RF	1%

19. 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?

[read categories]

Less than \$30,000	18%
\$30,000-\$50,000	18%
\$50,000-\$100,000	25%
\$100,000-\$150,000	10%
Greater than \$150,000	7%
DK	5%
RF	18%

20. What is your race or ethnicity?

[read if necessary]

White/Caucasian	86%
Non-White//Caucasian	14%
DK	0%
RF	0%

21. Respondent's Gender (do not read)

Male	46%
Female	54%

## Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of registered voters in Pennsylvania, which was conducted between Monday, September 15 and Wednesday, September 24, 2014. During the 8 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 479 individuals were interviewed. For a sample size of 479, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.48 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 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](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 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 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 ([polisci.mercyhurst.edu/mcap](http://polisci.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. 38<sup>th</sup> Street, Erie, PA, 16546, (814) 824-2154, [jmorris@mercyhurst.edu](mailto:jmorris@mercyhurst.edu).

*The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics was established with a generous gift from Erie Insurance.*