



Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics

The Mercyhurst Poll Cyber Bullying, Crime and Justice in Pennsylvania

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Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of adult residents of Pennsylvania that was conducted between September 19 and October 7. During the 19 day field period interviewers called weekday evenings between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00 PM, and between 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM on selected weekdays. For each working phone number, interviewers made no less than six attempts to contact the residents of households for which landline numbers were generated. Respondents categorized as refusals were frequently called back to further insulate against bias in our sample. To minimize selection bias, interviewers were instructed to not administer the questionnaire to the first person in the household to whom they spoke, but to “the adult in the household with the most recent birthday.”

Calls were generated by CATI software and relied on a list of randomly generated landline telephone numbers (cell only households were not included in the population from which the sample was drawn). In this study, 426 adults were interviewed. For a sample size of 426, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.75 percentage points (the margin of sampling error) of the actual population distribution for any given question. Aside from the margin of sampling error, there are several factors that prevent the results obtained through a probability sample from being a perfect representation of those that would be obtained if the entire population was interviewed. This non-sampling error is the result of a variety of factors including, but not limited to, response rates 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. 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 adult residents of Pennsylvania is no different than most polls: Up to six attempts were made to contact hard-to-reach individuals. These attempts occurred during weekday mornings, afternoons and evenings. To ensure a high rate of cooperation, interviewers received training on conversion techniques that are consistent with research ethics as defined by the Mercyhurst College Institutional Review Board. As a result of these efforts, our study obtained a response rate of 24%, which is within the range of what was expected.

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.

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, sometimes data is weighted. Simply stated, weighting is when data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample was drawn. In this study, the variables “age” and “gender” were weighted in order to adjust for differences between the population and the sample (see Table 1).

Pennsylvania Population Characteristics v. Sample

	Pennsylvania	Sample
Adult Population	9,910,224	428
Sex		
Female	52%	61%
Male	48%	39%
Age		
18-29 years	21%	4%
30-59 years	52%	47%
60 and older	27%	49%
Race		
White	82%	89%
Black	11%	6%
Latino	6%	2%
Other	2%	3%
Region		
Northeast	9%	9%
Southeast	43%	42%
Central	22%	22%
Southwest	21%	23%
Northwest	5%	6%

The survey was conducted by the Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics (polisci.mercyhurst.edu/mcap) under the direction of Dr. Joseph M. Morris (Director), Dr. Rolfe D. Peterson (Methodologist) and Sean Fedorko (Project Manager). It may be used in whole or in part, provided the survey is attributed to the Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics at Mercyhurst College. Data will be available for free download at the center's website thirty days after the release of this report. Direct questions to Dr. Joseph M. Morris, Director, Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics, Mercyhurst College, 501 E. 38th Street, Erie, PA, 16546.

Summary of Findings

The Society and Education Unit of *The Mercyhurst Poll* finds that Pennsylvania residents view cyber bullying as more harmful than bullying that has occurred in the past and that not enough attention is being given to the problem.

Pennsylvanians believe that the parents of cyber bullies are most responsible for stopping it, and that the parents of cyber bullies should be held legally responsible for their child's bullying if it leads to serious harm.

The Crime and Justice Unit of *The Mercyhurst Poll* finds that Pennsylvanians, for the most part, is fair in its treatment of people accused of committing a crime.

Pennsylvanians also recognize that juvenile offenders should not be treated the same as adult offenders, even in the case of homicide. While supporting punishment, the public also supports treatment for youthful offenders. These competing perspectives – punishment and treatment – reflect expectations that juvenile offenders will be held accountable while also receiving treatment to reduce the likelihood of repeat offending.

Cyber Bullying

Respondents were given a brief definition of cyber bullying before being asked about the phenomenon. A strong majority of Pennsylvanians believe that cyber bullying makes today's bullying "more harmful" than bullying in the past (70%), and that more needs to be done to prevent it (69%). A clear majority agrees that "people aren't paying enough attention" to the issue of cyber bullying. When given the choice between schools, police, children themselves, and parents, most Pennsylvanians (63%) believe that parents of cyber bullies are most responsible for preventing bullying. And finally, a strong majority believe that the parents of

bullies should be held legally responsible for their child's action if it leads to serious harm. Of note, respondents were not asked to specify what 'legally responsible' would entail.

Juvenile Offenders in the Justice System

A clear majority (66%) of Pennsylvanians believe the criminal justice system is "fair" or "somewhat fair;" however, roughly a majority (51%) believe that courts in Pennsylvania do not deal "harshly enough" with criminals. A substantial number (49%) of Pennsylvanians say that juvenile offenders should be "treated the same as adults," but an equal number say that they should receive "more lenient treatment" (34%) or that it depends on the circumstances (14%). Pennsylvanians are generally opposed to handling juveniles "in the same system used for adults" (69%), and generally disagree with holding juvenile offenders "in adult jails and prisons with adult offenders." When asked "what is the youngest age" someone should be tried as an adult rather than juvenile, the mean response was 15 years of age (median 16).

Incarceration and Treatment of Juvenile Offenders

A clear majority of Pennsylvanians either strongly agree or somewhat agree that "punishing juvenile offenders is the only way to stop them from engaging in more crimes in the future" (65%), but that "rehabilitation programs should be available even for juvenile offenders who have been involved in a lot of crime" (88%). Pennsylvanians are evenly divided (49% strongly or somewhat agree, 50% strongly or somewhat disagree) on whether "sending young offenders to jail will stop them from committing crimes, but a very strong majority (94% strongly or somewhat agree) believe that the best way to rehabilitate juvenile offenders is to

try to help them “change their values” and deal with “emotional problems.” In the end, a strong majority (81%) of Pennsylvanians believe that the justice system should “focus less on locking-up juvenile offenders” and more on “programs and treatments” that will help them become better citizens.

Frequency Report

Finally, I would like to get your opinion on a few issues facing Pennsylvania.

Recently there has been a lot of media attention about cyber bullying; Cyber bullying is when school children are teased, harassed, or threatened through the use of email, cell phones, text messaging, instant messaging, or other electronic methods.

[ASK QUESTIONS 35 TO 39 IN RANDOM ORDER]

Q.31 Would you say that cyber bullying makes today’s bullying more harmful, about the same, or less harmful than in the past?

More Harmful	70%
About the Same	24%
Less Harmful	3%
DK	3%
RF	-

Q.32 Is cyber bullying so harmful that more needs to be done to prevent it or is it just a normal part of growing up today?

More needs to be done	69%
Normal part of growing up	25%
Depends (volunteered)	4%
DK	3%
RF	1%

Q.33 Would you say that people are making too big of a deal about cyber bullying, people are paying the right amount of attention, or people aren't paying enough attention to this issue?

Too big of a deal	8%
Not enough attention	61%
Depends (volunteered)	2%
The right amount of attention	25%
DK	3%
RF	1%

Q.34 If cyber bullying leads to serious harm, should the parents of the bully be held legally responsible for their kid's bullying?

Yes	74%
No	17%
Depends (volunteered)	6%
DK	3%
RF	0%

Q.35 Given that cyber bullying does not necessarily take place at schools, who would you say is most responsible for preventing cyber bullying: the kids, the schools, the police, the parents of bullies or the parents of kids who get bullied?

Kids	14%
Schools	2%
Police	3%
Parents of bullies	63%
Parents of kids who get bullied	12%
DK	6%
RF	1%

Q.36 In general, do you think the criminal justice system is fair, somewhat fair, somewhat unfair, or unfair in its treatment of people accused of committing crime?

Fair	29%
Somewhat Fair	37%
Somewhat Unfair	18%
Unfair	13%
DK	3%
RF	0%

Q.37 In general, do you think the courts in Pennsylvania deal too harshly, about right or not harshly enough with criminals?

Too Harshly	5%
About Right	35%
Not Harshly Enough	51%
DK	8%
RF	1%

Q.38 In your view, how should juveniles between the ages of 14 and 17 who commit violent crimes be treated in the criminal justice system?

Should they be treated the same as adults or should they be given more lenient treatment in a juvenile court?

[respondents may volunteer tougher and depends]

Same as Adults	49%
More Lenient Treatment	34%
Tougher (volunteered)	0%
Depends (volunteered)	14%
DK	2%
RF	1%

Q.39 In your opinion, what is the youngest age that someone should be allowed to be tried as an adult rather than juvenile offender?

Mean=15.5; Max=22; Min=0; Median=16

Q.40 Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that rehabilitation programs should be available even for juvenile offenders who have been involved in a lot of crime in their lives.

Strongly Agree	57%
Somewhat Agree	31%
Somewhat Disagree	4%
Strongly Disagree	6%
DK	2%
RF	-

Q.41 Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that punishing juvenile offenders is the only way to stop them from engaging in more crimes in the future.

Strongly Agree	33%
Somewhat Agree	32%
Somewhat Disagree	17%
Strongly Disagree	15%
DK	3%
RF	0%

Q.42 Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that sending young offenders to jail will stop them from committing crimes.

Strongly Agree	16%
Somewhat Agree	33%
Somewhat Disagree	28%
Strongly Disagree	22%
DK	2%
RF	1%

Q.43 Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that the best way to rehabilitate juvenile offenders is to try to help them change their values and to help them with the emotional problems that caused them to break the law.

Strongly Agree	61%
Somewhat Agree	33%
Somewhat Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	1%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.44 Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that in responding to juvenile crime, efforts should focus less on locking up juvenile offenders and more on programs and treatments that will help them become law-abiding citizens.

Strongly Agree	45%
Somewhat Agree	36%
Somewhat Disagree	9%
Strongly Disagree	6%
DK	4%
RF	-

[ASK QUESTIONS 49 TO 50 IN RANDOM ORDER]

Q.45 Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that sentences of “life without the possibility of parole” should be prohibited for youth under the age of 18 who commit homicide offenses.

Strongly Agree	19%
Somewhat Agree	27%
Somewhat Disagree	20%
Strongly Disagree	25%
DK	9%
RF	-

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1-4 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 47]

Q.46 The United States Supreme Court ruled that sentences of life without the possibility of parole imposed on young offenders convicted of nonhomicide offenses was unconstitutional.

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that sentences of “life without the possibility of parole” should be prohibited for youth under the age of 18 who commit homicide offenses.

Strongly Agree	31%
Somewhat Agree	30%
Somewhat Disagree	17%
Strongly Disagree	19%
DK	2%
RF	0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1-4 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 47]

Q.47 Currently, most juvenile offenders are handled in the juvenile justice system.

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that this system should be eliminated and all juvenile offenders should be handled in the same system used for adults.

Strongly Agree	13%
Somewhat Agree	17%
Somewhat Disagree	24%
Strongly Disagree	45%
DK	2%
RF	0%

Q.48 Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree that juvenile offenders ages 14-17 should be held in adult jails and prisons with adult offenders.

Strongly Agree	6%
Somewhat Agree	10%
Somewhat Disagree	19%
Strongly Disagree	65%
DK	0%
RF	-

Our last few questions are used to ensure that our sample for this survey reflects the population as a whole. Again, all information will be kept confidential.

Q.49 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

Republican	29%
Democrat	30%
Independent	39%
Other	1%
DK	0%
RF	1%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 51]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 3, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 4, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 52]

Q.50 Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

Strong Republican	52%
Not Very Strong	44%
DK	2%
RF	1%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

Q.51 Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

Strong	58%
Not Very Strong	41%
DK	1%
RF	0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 53]

Q.52 Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

Closer to Republican	37%
Closer to Democratic	34%
Neither	12%
DK	13%
RF	4%

Q.53 Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	14%
Conservative	32%
Moderate	25%
Have not thought much about this	23%
DK	4%
RF	2%

Q.54 In what year were you born?

[Record Year]

Q.55 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than High School	3%
High School/GED	29%
Some College	15%
2-Year College (Associates) or Professional	13%
4-Year College Degree (BS or BA)	23%
Masters Degree	14%
Doctoral Degree	3%
DK	0%
RF	1%

Q.56 What is your religious affiliation?

Protestant	29%
Catholic	37%
Jewish	3%
Muslim	0%
Other	17%
Not affiliated with a religion	11%
DK	1%
RF	1%

Q.57 What is your race?

White or Caucasian	89%
Black or African American	6%
Asian or Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic or Latino	2%
Arabic	0%
DK	0%
RF	2%

Q.58 What is your marital status?

Single, never married	15%
Married	62%
Separated	2%
Divorced	10%
Widowed	9%
Other	0%
Partnership	0%
DK	0%
RF	1%

Q.59 If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all the members of your household for the past year, would the total be...

[Read all Categories]

Less than \$30,000	22%
\$30,000 to \$60,000	25%
\$60,000 to \$90,000	17%
\$90,000 to \$120,000	10%
Greater than \$120,000	11%
DK	2%
RF	12%

Q.60 What is your current employment status?

Employed	49%
Unemployed	10%
Laid off / Furloughed	0%
Retired	36%
Disabled	3%
DK	0%
RF	1%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 62]

[IF THE ANSWER IS 4, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 62]

Q.61 Are you currently seeking employment?

Yes	39%
No	58%
DK	0%
RF	3%

Q.63 Gender.

Male39%
Female	...61%

[DEBRIEF]

We are at the end of the survey. I want to thank you for your participation and let you know that: Research at Mercyhurst College which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Mr. Timothy Harvey: Institutional Review Board Chair, Mercyhurst College, 501 East 38th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania 16546. Telephone (814) 824-3372