



Mercyhurst Center
for Applied Politics

*Politics and Policy:
Erie County, Pennsylvania*

*A Survey of 426 Registered
Voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania*

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Summary of Findings

A Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics (MCAP) poll of 426 (MOE +/-4.75) registered voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania finds that after three months in office, a plurality of voters (37%) approve of the job Kathy Dahlkemper is doing as Erie County Executive, with a quarter (24%) disapproving and 11% saying that it is too soon to tell. A sizeable minority (23%) says they don't know how she's doing as Erie County Executive. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett, on the other hand, receives poor marks for his job performance. A majority (52%) disapproves of the job Corbett is doing as governor, and only 29% approve. As context, a MCAP poll conducted one month ago found that a plurality of Pennsylvania voters (44%) disapproved of the job Corbett was doing as governor, and only 30% approved. Corbett's low approval ratings in Erie County are reflected in its voters' preferences in the race for governor Pennsylvania. If the election was held today, only 25% of voters say they would vote for Corbett. An unnamed candidate from the Democratic Party, in contrast, would garner 52% of the vote.

The Democratic Party, however, must nominate a candidate before it challenges the governor in November. With less than two months before the primary, it appears that most Erie County voters have not yet tuned-in to the race for the Democratic Party's nomination. Majorities of voters don't recognize the name Katie McGinty (79%), Rob McCord (56%), or Allyson Schwartz (76%). Among the candidates, McCord is viewed most favorably, with 34% (11% strong favorable, 23% somewhat favorable) having a favorable opinion, and only 4% (3% somewhat unfavorable, 1% strongly unfavorable) having an unfavorable opinion. An equal number of Erie County voters have a favorable opinion of McGinty (11%) and Schwartz (11%), and very small minorities have unfavorable opinions of the candidates (4% McGinty, 5% Schwartz).

On two important social issues, Erie County voters' opinions are in-line with those of the nation as a whole. When asked whether they favored allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally in Pennsylvania, 55% say they favor (34% strongly favor, 21% somewhat favor) the change and only 36% oppose (13% strongly oppose, 23% somewhat oppose). Similarly, 75% (37% strongly favor, 28% somewhat favor) favor making it legal for patients to use marijuana that was prescribed by a doctor, while only 23% (11% strongly oppose, 12% somewhat oppose) oppose. A MCAP poll released on February 28, 2014 found that a large majority of registered voters in Pennsylvania (85%) favor legalizing the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

When it comes to the state of Erie County's Economy most voters (54%) say things are staying about the same. Roughly a quarter (27%) say that the county's economy is getting worse, and only 17% say it is getting better. Nevertheless, voters are optimistic about Erie County's future in general. When asked to think about Erie County's future and report what one word comes to mind, a plurality said "hopeful" (55/411).

Frequency Report

Interviews were completed with 426 registered voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 426, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.75 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, race and gender 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.

Q.1 To begin, Erie County Executive, Kathy Dahlkemper, took office less than three months ago. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Kathy Dahlkemper has done so far as Erie County Executive?

Approve	37%
Disapprove	24%
Depends (volunteered)	4%
Too Soon (volunteered)	11%
DK	23%
RF	0%

Q.2 Do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as President?

Approve	39%
Disapprove	50%
Depends (volunteered)	9%
DK	2%
RF	0%

Q.3 Do you approve or disapprove of the job Tom Corbett is doing as governor of Pennsylvania?

Approve	29%
Disapprove	52%
Depends (volunteered)	9%
DK	11%
RF	0%

Q.4 As you may know, this year Pennsylvania will be electing a governor. If the election was held today and the Republican Party's candidate was Tom Corbett, would you vote for Republican Tom Corbett or the Democratic Party's candidate?

Corbett	25%
Democratic Candidate	52%
Depends	13%
DK	10%
RF	0%

Now I'm going to read you a list of candidates seeking the Democratic Party's nomination for Governor of Pennsylvania. For each candidate, please tell whether your opinion of them is strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat **un**favorable, or strongly **un**favorable. If you do not recognize the candidates name, just let me know and we'll move on.

Q.5 Is your opinion of **Tom Wolf** strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable.

Strongly favorable	3%
Somewhat favorable	21%
Somewhat unfavorable	3%
Strongly unfavorable	1%
Do not recognize	64%
DK	7%
RF	0%

Q.6 How about Katie McGinty?

[Is your opinion of _____ strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable]

Strongly favorable	2%
Somewhat favorable	9%
Somewhat unfavorable	3%
Strongly unfavorable	1%
Do not recognize	79%
DK	6%
RF	0%

Q.7 How about **Rob McCord**?

[Is your opinion of _____ strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable]

Strongly favorable	11%
Somewhat favorable	23%
Somewhat unfavorable	4%
Strongly unfavorable	1%
Do not recognize	56%
DK	5%
RF	0%

Q.8 How about **Jack Wagner**?

[Is your opinion of _____ strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable]

Strongly favorable	1%
Somewhat favorable	16%
Somewhat unfavorable	4%
Strongly unfavorable	2%
Do not recognize	70%
DK	6%
RF	0%

Q.9 How about **Allyson Schwartz**?

[Is your opinion of _____ strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable]

Strongly favorable	2%
Somewhat favorable	9%
Somewhat unfavorable	3%
Strongly unfavorable	2%
Do not recognize	76%
DK	8%
RF	0%

Q.10 Now I have just a few questions about issues facing our nation and region.

Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally in Pennsylvania?

Strongly favor	34%
Somewhat favor	21%
Somewhat oppose	13%
Strongly oppose	23%
Depends	3%
DK	5%
RF	1%

Q.11 Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose making it legal for patients to use marijuana that was prescribed by a doctor.

Strongly favor	37%
Somewhat favor	38%
Somewhat oppose	11%
Strongly oppose	12%
Depends	2%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.12 How would you describe the state of Erie County's economy these days? Would you say that Erie County's economy is getting better, getting worse, or staying about the same?

Getting Better	17%
Getting Worse	27%
About the same	54%
Depends (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.13 In the past 12 months, have you taken part in any sort of activity with people at a social club or bar where you pay for membership?

Yes	27%
No	72%
DK	0%
RF	0%

Q.14 Thinking about Erie County's future, what one word comes to mind? (n=411)

Hopeful	55
Jobs	22
Tourism	16
Bleak	15
Promising	13
Stagnant	13

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.

Q.15 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat or independent?

Republican	28%
Democrat	43%
Independent	27%
Other (volunteered)	1%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.16 Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?

Republican	45%
Democratic	35%
Neither	16%
DK	3%
RF	0%

Q.17 Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, conservative, libertarian, moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	17%
Conservative	26%
Moderate	22%
Libertarian	5%
Other (volunteered)	2%
Not thought much about this	27%
DK	1%
RF	0%

Q.18 What is your age?

18-28 years old	15%
29-38 years old	13%
39-48 years old	14%
49-58 years old	18%
59-68 years old	25%
68 years or older	15%

Q.19 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school	2%
High school	25%
Some College/associates degree	33%
College 4 Year Degree	25%
Masters Degree	13%
Doctorate	2%
DK	0%
RF	0%

Q.20 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	19%
\$30,00 to \$50,000	21%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	32% %
\$100,000 to \$150,000	10%
Greater than \$150,000	5%
DK	3%
RF	10%

Q.21 What is your race or ethnicity? [read if necessary]

White	85%
Black (African American)	8%
Hispanic	1%
Asian	1%
Other	4%
DK	0%
RF	1%

Q.22 Gender [DO NOT read unless necessary]

Male	50%
Female	50%

We are at the end of the survey. I want to thank you for your participation and let you know that: Research at Mercyhurst University 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 University, 501 E. 38th Street, Erie, PA. Telephone (814) 824-3372.

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of registered voters in Pennsylvania, which was conducted between Monday, March 24 and Monday, February 31, 2014. During the 8 day field period interviewers called weekday evenings between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00 PM. For each working phone number, interviewers made no fewer than six attempts to contact individuals selected to participate in the study. Calls were generated by CATI software or manually dialed and relied on a list of randomly selected registered voters Pennsylvania obtained from VoterMapping.com.

A total of 426 individuals were interviewed. For a sample size of 495, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.75 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); 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, mornings 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 gender, race and age. 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). 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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