Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics

2012 Presidential Election-Pennsylvania

A Survey of 522 Likely Voters in Pennsylvania

Prepared by: The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics at Mercyhurst University

Joseph M. Morris, Director
Rolfe D. Peterson, Methodologist
Jake Jaskiewicz, Project Manager
Brooke Miller, Project Manager

Table of Contents

Summary of Findings

A Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics poll of 522 likely voters (MOE +/- 4.29%) in Pennsylvania finds that the Democratic Party's candidates for president and US Senator enjoy comfortable leads over their Republican Party opponents. In the presidential race relatively few voters remain undecided. Although most Pennsylvania voters are aware of Mitt Romney's affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon Church), most dismiss myths and negative stereotypes associated with the church as false and say that candidates' religion is not an important factor in their choice in presidential elections. Most of Pennsylvania's voters say that they are aware of the state's new voter identification law, and most are generally supportive of the legislation. However, Republicans are far more likely to see voter ID laws as necessary and beneficial than are Democrats. Finally, less than a majority of voters have heard of super PACs. Those who have heard of them have a negative view of their impact on the 2012 elections.

The Presidential and US Senate Races in Pennsylvania

In the two high-profile races of this fall, Democratic Party candidates enjoy comfortable leads over their Republican opponents among likely voters in Pennsylvania. If the election was held today, 48% of likely voters in Pennsylvania say they would vote for Barack Obama, 40% for Mitt Romney and only 6% say that they remain undecided. The 8-point gap reaffirms Obama's grip on the Keystone state. Of those who say they are voting for Barack Obama, 91% indicate that they are very certain to vote for the candidate, while an additional 9% are somewhat certain.

Among those who say they will vote for Barack Obama, 63% say they will do so because they strongly support him, 19% because they support him with reservations, and 17% because they oppose Mitt Romney. Among those who will vote for Mitt Romney, 91% indicate that they are very certain to vote for the candidate, while an additional 9% are somewhat certain. Looking at the reasons for supporting Romney, 43% say they will do so because they strongly support him, 18% because they support him with reservations, and 39% because they oppose Barack Obama. This suggests that more of Mitt Romney's support may be

the result of voters' dissatisfaction with Barack Obama than satisfaction with Romney.

In terms of the race for US Senate, Pennsylvania's likely voters express a clear preference for Democratic incumbent Bob Casey over the Republican challenger Tom Smith. If the election was held today, 31% say they would vote for Casey, 21% for Smith, though a sizeable 44% say they remain undecided. When the undecided voters are pushed to make a decision, Casey's10-point advantage increases to 14 points. With less than seven weeks until the election, the opportunity for Tom Smith to close gap with Bob Casey is quickly diminishing.

Religion and the Presidential Election
Like Barack Obama in 2008, Mitt Romney has faced questions about his religious affiliation. News reports and political scientists have explored the possibility that Romney's affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or Mormon Church, would hinder his effort to win the Republican Party nomination and, ultimately, the general election. In an effort to further explore this possibility, we asked Pennsylvania voters a number of questions about religion and the presidency. One set of questions, which were administered at the outset of the 15 minute interview, asked respondents to identify Barack Obama and Mitt Romney's religious affiliation and weigh-in on whether religion mattered in their evaluation of a candidate. In a second set of questions, which were administered at the end of the interview, we asked several questions intended to gauge voters' perception of Mormonism, which included both positive and negative stereotypes commonly held about the religion. At no time did we identify Mitt Romney as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

A sizeable majority of voters in Pennsylvania are aware of Mitt Romney's religious affiliation, but say religious affiliation does not matter in their evaluation of a candidate. In response to an open-ended question that asked voters to identify Mitt Romney's religious affiliation, roughly 3 out of 4 (74%) correctly identified the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or Mormon Church. An additional 5% of voters identified him as a Christian and 21% said they did not know his religious affiliation. Most (68%) of Pennsylvania's voters say that they are somewhat or very familiar with Mormonism and that their feelings about the

religion are neutral (62%). Only 13% say that their feelings about Mormonism are negative. Solid majorities of voters say that Mormons are Christians (60%), believe in the Bible (55%), believe in Heaven (63%), and have strong family values (87%). In spite of the news media's attention to the basic tenets the Mormon Church, many of Pennsylvania's voters are uncertain about the veracity of myths associated with the faith. When asked whether Mormons believe that women are inferior to men (a common myth), only 43% say "no." Less than a majority (49%) knew that Mormons do not practice polygamy, and most voters (59%) were unsure if Mormons prohibited interracial marriage (another common myth). In the end, a large majority of voters (77%) indicate that religion does not matter them when evaluating a candidate's suitability for the office of President. A smaller, but still solid majority (55%) say that religion does not matter for the decisions presidents make while in office.

Pennsylvanians' lack of knowledge of Barack Obama's religious affiliation offers further evidence that a candidate's religious affiliation is of little importance to most voters this year. When asked in an open-ended question to identify Barack Obama's religious affiliation (Christian), a plurality of voters (48%) said, simply, they did not know. Twelve percent of voters identified him as a Muslim.

Pennsylvania's Voter ID Law
While a majority of registered voters overall favor voter ID laws (57%), views on the merits of voter ID laws vary dramatically by the individual's partisanship. It is clearly a partisan issue among the registered voters in our survey. Democratic and Republican voters have very different opinions about whether the laws are necessary and what impact the ID laws have on elections, with Republicans being far more supportive of the laws than Democrats.   Four out of five Pennsylvania voters (84%) are aware of the voter ID law in PA, and majorities (57%) favor ID laws and believe they make elections less corrupt (52%). Opponents of ID laws often argue that the laws are too burdensome on voters, but a majority of registered voters polled feel the laws will not make it too difficult to vote (58%), and do not believe they unfairly target disadvantaged groups of people. They are, however, evenly divided as to whether voter ID laws are essential for fair elections, with 48% saying they are essential and 45% saying they are not. As Table 1 indicates,

Republicans are far more likely to have a positive view of voter ID laws than are Democrats.

Table 1: Opinions on Voter ID Law by Party Affiliation

Question	Democrats	Republicans
Favor laws requiring voters to bring photo ID to vote.	31%	90%
Believe voter ID laws make elections less corrupt.	35%	77%
Believe voter ID laws make it too difficult to vote.	53%	4%
Believe voter ID laws unfairly target disadvantaged people.	64%	9%
Believe voter ID laws are essential for fair elections.	26%	79%
Believe the benefits of voter ID laws outweigh the cost.	35%	87%

Super PACs

With the ability to spend unlimited amounts of money (a result of the *Citizens United* decision), Super PACs are a controversial phenomenon in the 2012 election cycle. Because they are exempt from many of the campaign finance laws in place previously, media and political observers are interested in understanding the influence of Super PACs and how voters view their activity. Despite the media attention given to Super PACs in the primary and general election campaigns, less than a majority (49%) of Pennsylvania voters say they have heard media and others talking about Super PACs. Due to the low awareness of Super PACs, the survey instrument asked voters who were aware of Super PACs three specific questions regarding their current activities activities . Of voters who have heard of Super PACs (N=255), most (68%) do not believe they should be allowed to raise and spend unlimited amounts of money to influence elections and should be required to disclose the names of donors (71%). A solid majority (63%) say that Super PACs have had a negative effect on the presidential campaign.

Frequency Report

Interviews were completed with 522 likely voters in Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 522, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.29 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 gender to correct for discrepancies between sample and population. Due to rounding, column totals may not equal 100 percent. Bracketed text was intended for the use of the programmer, while bolded, italicized or parenthetical text was intended as instruction for the interviewer.

Q.1 In the election for the U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania. If the senate election were held today, which candidate would you vote for? Would you vote for Bob Casey, Tom Smith, someone else, or are you unsure?

Bob Casey	31%
Tom Smith	21%
Someone else	3%
Unsure	44%
Refused	1%

[BRANCH]

Q.2 I realize you are unsure about who you will vote for in the senate election, but what if you had to cast your vote today? Would you vote for Bob Casey, Tom Smith, or someone else?

Bob Casey	27%
Tom Smith	17%
Someone else	13%
Don't Know	38%
Refused	4%

[BRANCH]

Q.3 How certain are you that you will vote for Bob Casey on election day? Would you say that you are very certain, somewhat certain, or uncertain that you will vote for Bob Casey on election day?

Very Certain	67%
Somewhat Certain	30%
Uncertain	2%
Don't Know	1%
Refused	-

[BRANCH]

Q.4 How certain are you that you will vote for Tom Smith on election day? Would you say that you are very certain, somewhat certain, or uncertain that you will vote for Tom Smith on election day?

Very Certain	89%
Somewhat Certain	11%
Uncertain	0%

[BRANCH]

Q.5 How certain are you that you will vote for someone else on election day? Would you say that you are very certain, somewhat certain, or uncertain that you will vote for someone else on election day?

Very Certain	57%
Somewhat Certain	12%
Uncertain	32%

Q.6 If the presidential election were held today, which candidate would you vote for? Would you vote for Mitt Romney, Barack Obama, Someone Else, or are you unsure?

Mitt Romney	40%
Barack Obama	48%
Someone else	5%
Unsure	6%
Refused	1%

Q.7 I realize you are unsure about who you will vote for in the presidential election, but what if you had to cast your vote today? Would you cast your vote for Mitt Romney, Barack Obama, or Someone Else?

Mitt Romney	25%
Barack Obama	32%
Someone Else	14%
unsure (volunteered)	17%
Don't Know	13%
Refused	-

[BRANCH]

Q.8 How certain are you that you will vote for Romney on election day? Would you say that you are Very certain, Somewhat certain, or Uncertain that you will vote for Romney?

Very Certain	91%
Somewhat Certain	9%
Uncertain	0%
Don't Know	-
Refused	-

[BRANCH]

Q.9 How certain are you that you will vote for Obama on election day? Would you say that you are Very certain, Somewhat certain, or Uncertain that you will vote for Obama?

Very Certain	91%
Somewhat Certain	9%
Uncertain	0%
Don't Know	-
Refused	-

[BRANCH]

Q.10 How certain are you that you will vote for Someone else on election day? Would you say that you are Very certain, Somewhat certain, or Uncertain that you will vote for Someone else?

Very Certain	38%
Somewhat Certain	35%
Uncertain	27%
Don't Know	0%
Refused	-

[BRANCH]

Q.11 Would you say you are voting for Barack Obama because you strongly support him, support him with reservations, or because you oppose Mitt Romney?

Strongly Support	63%
Support with Reservations	19%
Oppose Mitt Romney	17%
Other Reason/Neither (volunteered)	1%
Don't Know	0%
Refused	0%

[BRANCH]

Q.12 Would you say you are voting for Mitt Romney because you strongly support him, support him with reservations, or because you oppose Barack Obama?

Strongly Support Romney	43%
Support with Reservations	18%
Oppose Barack Obama	39%
Other Reason/Neither (volunteered)	1%
Don't Know	0%
Refused	0%

Q.13 For some individuals, religion is an important factor in their choice in presidential elections. Does a candidate's religion matter to you in voting or does it not matter?

       Yes, matters   20%
       No, doesn't matters   77%
       Depends (volunteered)   3%
       Don't Know   0%
       Refused   0%

Q.14 Do you believe religious affiliation matters or doesn't matter for the decisions presidents make in office?

       Yes, matters   34%
       No, doesn't matter   55%
       Depends (volunteered)   9%
       Don't Know   1%
       Refused   1%

Q.15 A number of states have passed laws that require voters to present photo identification before voting. Did Pennsylvania enact a voter ID law for the fall election?

       Yes   84%
       No   5%
       Don't Know   12%
       Refused   0%

Q.16 Do you favor or oppose laws requiring voters to bring photo ID to vote?

       Favor   57%
       Oppose   33%
       Depends (volunteered)   6%
       Don't Know   3%
       Refused   0%

[BRANCH]

Q.17 Do you believe voter ID laws make elections less corrupt?

Yes, less corrupt	52%
No	39%
Depends (volunteered)	4%
Don't Know	5%
Refused	1%

Q.18 Do you believe voter ID laws make it too difficult to vote?

Yes	31%
No	58%
Depends (volunteered)	10%
Don't Know	1%
Refused	-

Q.19 Do you believe that voter ID laws unfairly target disadvantaged groups of people?

Yes	41%
No	58%
Don't Know	2%
Refused	-

Q.20 Do you believe voter ID laws are essential for fair elections?

Yes, essential	48%
No	45%
Depends (volunteered)	4%
Don't Know	3%
Refused	-

Q.21 Supporters argue that voter ID laws prevent voter fraud and reduce corruption. Opponents of Voter ID laws argue that the laws are a partisan attempt to prevent minority people and the elderly from voting.

In the end, do you believe that the benefits of Voter ID laws outweigh the costs placed on voters?

Yes, benefits outweigh costs	57%
No, costs outweigh	35%
Depends (volunteered)	3%
Don't Know	5%
Refused	1%

Q.22 This election, you may have heard candidates or news reporters talking about Super PACs. Have you heard anyone talking about Super PACs?

Yes	49%
No	45%
Unsure/Don't Know	5%
Refused	0%

[BRANCH]

I'd like to ask you a few questions about Super PACs.

Q.23 Under current regulations, Super PACs can raise unlimited amounts of money from individuals and corporations and spend it in support of candidates.

Do you believe that Super PACs should be able to raise and spend unlimited amounts of money influencing elections? (N=255)

Yes	28%
No	68%
Don't Know/Unsure	4%
Refused	-

Q.24 Do you believe that Super PACs should have to disclose the names of donors when advertising in elections or do you believe donations should be kept confidential? (N=255),

Should Disclose Names	71%
Should Remain Confidential	25%
Depends (volunteered)	2%
Don't Know	1%
Refused	0%

Q.25 Do you believe Super PACs have had a positive effect, negative effect, or have had no effect on this presidential campaign? (N=255),

Positive Effect	14%
Negative Effect	63%
No Effect	11%
Both (volunteered)	4%
Depends (volunteered)	3%
Don't Know	5%
Refused	1%

Q.26 I have just a few more questions for you, then I'll let you go. Some people are very familiar with religious beliefs and practices of Mormons, but other people are not familiar with them at all. How about you?

Would you say that you are very familiar, somewhat familiar, somewhat unfamiliar or not familiar at all with Mormonism?

Very Familiar	9%
Somewhat Familiar	58%
Somewhat Unfamiliar	19%
Not at all Familiar	14%
Refused	-

[BRANCH]

Q.27 Generally speaking, are your feelings about Mormonism positive, negative, neutral, or are you uncertain how you feel about it? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

    Positive   15%
    Negative   13%
    Neutral   62%
    Uncertain 9%
    Refused   1%

[BRANCH]

Q.28 Do you believe Mormons are Christians? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

    Yes   60%
    No   22%
    Unsure/Don't Know   16%
    Refused   2%

Q.29 Do Mormons believe in the teachings of the Bible? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

    Yes   55%
    No   14%
    Unsure/Don't Know   29%
    Refused   2%

Q.30 Do you think Mormons believe in Heaven? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

    Yes   63%
    No   4%
    Unsure/Don't Know   31%
    Refused   2%

Q.31 Do you believe Mormons have strong family values? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

    Yes   87%
    No   3%
    Unsure/Don't KNkow   9%
    Refused   1%

Q.32 Is it against the teaching of the Mormon Church for its members to consume alcohol, coffee and tea, and use tobacco? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

Yes	54%
No	8%
Unsure/Don't Know	35%
Refused	3%

Q.33 Do you think Mormons believe women are inferior to men? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

Yes	30%
No	43%
Unsure/Don't Know	25%
Refused	2%

Q.34 Do you believe the Mormon church allows men to have more than one wife? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

Yes	33%
No	49%
Unsure/Don't Know	17%
Refused	1%

Q.35 Do Mormons permit interracial marriage? (N=438, MOE = 4.6)

Yes	15%
No	24%
Unsure/Don't Know	59%
Refused	2%

Q.36 Finally, I have a few questions that we'll be using for statistical purposes. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

Republican	42%
Democrat	52%
Independent	4%
Don't Know	1%
Refused	2%

Q.37 Would you consider yourself to be a Strong Republican or a not so Strong Republican?

      Strong   66%
      Not Strong   33%
      Don't Know   1%
      Refused   -

[BRANCH]

Q.38 Would you consider yourself to be a Strong Democrat or a not so Strong Democrat?

      Strong   69%
      Not so Strong   30%
      Don't Know   1%
      Refused   -

[BRANCH]

Q.39 Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or the Democratic party?

      Republican   40%
      Democratic   37%
      Neither (volunteered) 17%
      Don't Know   1%
      Refused   3%

Q.40 Generally speaking, would you consider yourself to be a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	19%
Conservative	30%
Moderate	29%
Haven't Thought Much	20%
Don't Know	2%
Refused	0%

[BRANCH]

Q.41 Would you consider yourself to be a strong conservative or not very strong conservative?

Strong Conservative	74%
Not Strong Conservative	23%
Other	2%
Don't Know	1%
Refused	-

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 50]

Q.42 Would you consider yourself to be a strong liberal or not very strong liberal?

Strong Liberal	60%
Not strong Liberal	36%
Other	1%
Don't Know	1%
Refused	1%

Q.43 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Less than high school	1%
High school	21%
Some college/associates/technical	23%
College	32%
Graduate degree	22%
Refulsed	1%
Refused	1%

Q.44 Do you consider yourself to be a Born Again Christian or Fundamentalist?

      Yes   34%
      No   52%
      Don't Know   10%
      Refused   4%

Q.45 What is your marital status?

      Married   69%
      Single   20%
      Divorced   6%
      Widowed   5%
      Partnership -
      Other   0%
      Don't Know   -
      Refused   1%

Q.46 If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all the members of your household for the past year, what would the total be?

      Less than $30,000   8%
      $30,000-$60,000   22%
      $60,000-$100,000   20%
      $100,000-$150,000   13%
      Greater than $150,000   8%
      Don't Know   6%
      Refused   22%

Q.47 What is your race?

      White   90%
      Non-White   7%
      Don't Know   0%
      Refused   3%

Q.48 [Do not read] Gender

Male   48%
Female   52%

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of likely voters in Pennsylvania that was conducted between Wednesday, September 12 and Thursday, September 20, 2012. 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 generated by CATI software or manually dialed and relied on a list of randomly selected registered voters in Pennsylvania obtained from Voter Contact Services.

A total of 522 subjects were interviewed. For a sample size of 522, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.29 percentage 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 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 with live interviewers 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 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 weekend 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 verbatim responses were impossible to capture due to their length or complexity, interviewers sought to clarify responses by using standard, question-specific probes. 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, partisanship, 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.