Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics

*Erie County and
the Trump Administration*

*A Survey of 409 Registered
Voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania*

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

Joseph M. Morris, Director
Maggie Hackney, Project Manager
Alex Yacobozzi, Project Manager

Context of the Poll

The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics' Fall 2017 poll is the second of eight polls of voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania. The polls will be conducted annually or biannually and include a standard battery of questions addressing a wide range of issues related to the public's perception of Donald Trump and his performance as president. The goal of the project is to provide an accurate account of the evolution of public opinion in Erie County for the duration of the Trump administration in service of the democratic process. All poll results will be made available to the public via the Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics webpage.
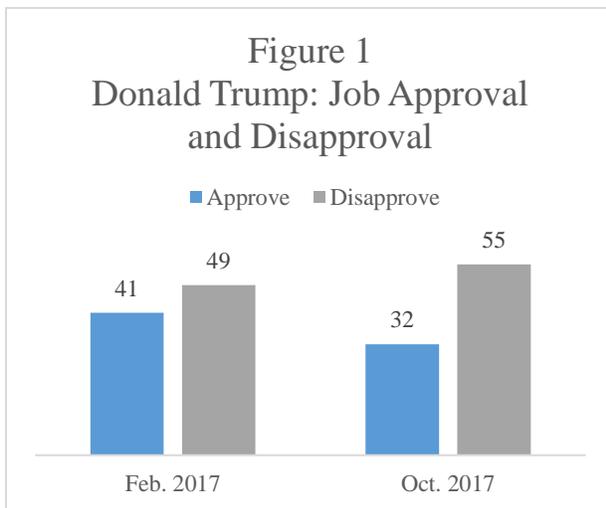
Summary of Findings

A Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics poll of 409 registered voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania, (MOE +/-4.9, October 16 – October 24, 2017, live interviewers) finds that the President, Congress and news media have reasons for concern. A majority (55%) of the county's voters disapprove of the President's job performance, and six in ten (60%) have an unfavorable opinion of him. These numbers contrast sharply with those obtained in a February 2017 poll, which found higher job performance and approval ratings. In addition, more than two-thirds of voters (64%) say the nation is off on the wrong track (29% say right direction), and pluralities or majorities of voters disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling eleven of fourteen issues facing the nation. When it comes to Congress, Erie County voters are also displeased. A majority of voters (68%) say they have an unfavorable opinion of Congress (48%=somewhat unfavorable, 20%=strongly unfavorable) compared to only twenty-seven percent who say they have a favorable opinion (26%=somewhat favorable, 1%=strongly favorable). These numbers are similar to those obtained in February 2017 (34%=favorable, 64%=unfavorable). Finally, Erie County voters give low marks to news media. Today, a majority (56%) of voters say they have "not much" trust or "none at all" in the veracity of news reporting, which is up three points (53%) from eight months ago.

The bright spot in MCAP's October 2017 poll is voters' perception of the national economy. A plurality of Erie County voters say that the state of the nation's economy is "good" (45%) as opposed to "excellent" (5%), "not so good" (38%), or "poor" (11%). This is a modest improvement from eight months ago. Voters' perceptions of the local economy, however, are less positive. About half (47%) of

voters describe the state of Erie County's economy as "not so good," as opposed to "excellent" (2%), "good" (16%), or "poor" (30%). This is a slightly more positive perception than was expressed by voters in February. Despite the fact that voters are slightly more optimistic about the availability of jobs in their community, a majority (56%) say they are "making just enough" to maintain their standard of living and 19% say they are falling behind (23%=getting ahead).
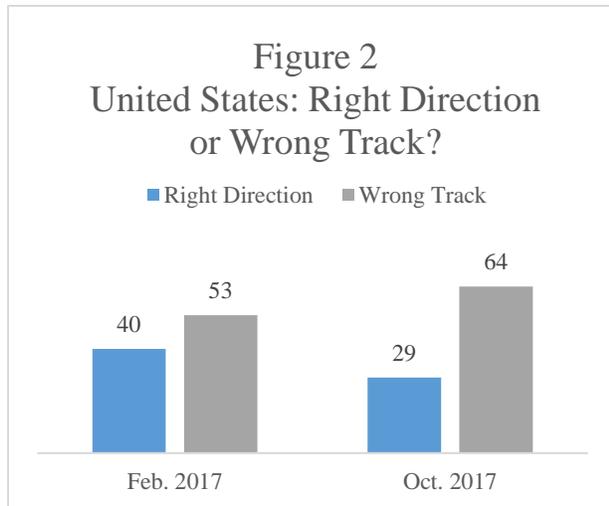
Donald Trump and the Issues

Nearly a year after helping Donald Trump win a narrow victory over Hillary Clinton in the race for President of the United States, registered voters in Erie County give him poor marks for his job performance. Only 32% of voters approve of the job he is doing as President, while a solid majority (55%) say they disapprove. These numbers contrast sharply with those obtained in a MCAP poll conducted February 2017, which found 41% approving and 49% disapproving of his job performance (see Figure 1). Likewise, today only 40% of voters have a favorable opinion of the President (14% = strongly favorable, 26% = somewhat favorable) compared to 47% (20% = strongly favorable, 27% = somewhat

Figure 1
Donald Trump: Job Approval and Disapproval

favorable) in February 2017. Today, six of every ten voters (60%) say they have a somewhat (19%) or strongly (41%) unfavorable opinion of him compared to 52% (13%=somewhat unfavorable, 39%=strongly unfavorable) eight months ago.

Erie County voters' dissatisfaction with the President's job performance and unfavorable opinion of him may be at least partly due to their perception of the trajectory of the nation. When asked whether they believe the nation is headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track, 64% say they believe it is off on the wrong track and only 29% say it is headed in the right direction. These numbers, again, contrast sharply with those obtained in February 2017 when 53% said the nation was off on the wrong track and 40% said it was headed in the right direction (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
United States: Right Direction
or Wrong Track?

Why do Erie County voters express such dissatisfaction with the trajectory of the nation? Table 1 may provide some answers. When asked whether they approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling more than a dozen issues, a plurality of voters disapprove of the way he is handling six of them and a majority of voters disapprove of the way he is handling five of the issues. A plurality of voters disapprove of the way he is handling taxes (49%), trade with other nations (47%), America's infrastructure (48%), social security (42%), illegal drugs (43%), and gun control (48%); while a majority disapprove of the way he is handling relations with other nations (68%), immigration (61%), healthcare (62%), gun violence (58%), and the environment (58%). Pluralities of voters do, however, give the President high marks for his handling of the economy (47%=approve), terrorism (46%=approve), and national defense (48%=approve).

	February 2017		October 2017		**Change Feb.-Oct. 2017**	
	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	**Approve**	**Disapprove**
The economy	49	36	47	45	**-2**	**+9**
Taxes	38	40	33	49	**-5**	**+9**
Relations w/other nations	32	60	26	68	**-6**	**+8**
Trade w/other nations	42	48	36	47	**-6**	**-1**
America's infrastructure	45	35	32	48	**-13**	**+13**
Immigration	37	58	32	61	**-5**	**+3**
Healthcare	36	51	30	62	**-6**	**+11**
Social Security	28	37	25	42	**-3**	**+5**
Terrorism	49	44	46	44	**-3**	**0**
National defense	49	41	48	43	**-1**	**+2**
Illegal drugs	39	31	35	43	**-4**	**+12**
Gun control	43	39	38	48	**-5**	**+9**
Gun violence	42	39	26	58	**-16**	**+19**
The environment	29	55	29	58	**0**	**+3**

Table 1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling…

The fact that a plurality of voters approve the President's handling of these three issues should not detract from the overall picture painted by the results of MCAP's

February and October 2017 polls. Since February of 2017 the percentage of Erie County voters expressing disapproval of the President's handling of nearly every one of the fourteen issues they were asked about has increased, while the percentage of voters expressing approval has decreased in nearly every case. In some cases, the increase in voters who disprove of the President's handling of and issue have been sizeable. For example, voters' disapproval of the President's handling of healthcare has increased by eleven points; America's infrastructure by thirteen points; illegal drugs by twelve points; and gun violence by nineteen points.

Congress and News Media

If this poll offers any positive news for Donald Trump it is that when it comes to the national government, he is not the only source of dissatisfaction for Erie County. A majority of voters (68%) say they have an unfavorable opinion of Congress (48%=somewhat unfavorable, 20%=strongly unfavorable) compared to only twenty-seven percent who say they have a favorable opinion (26%=somewhat favorable, 1%=strongly favorable). These numbers are similar to those obtained in February 2017 (34%=favorable, 64%=unfavorable). Six of every ten (60%) voters say Congress is doing a "poor job," while 35% say "fair" job, and only 5% say Congress is doing an excellent (1%) or good (4%) job.

When it comes to news media, today Erie County voters are slightly less trusting that news media will report the news fully, accurately, and fairly than they were in February of 2017 (see Table 2). Today, a majority (56%) of voters say they have "not much" trust or "none at all" in the veracity of news reporting, which is up three points (53%) from eight months ago. In terms of whether reporting on Donald Trump has been too hard (38%), not hard enough (21%), or about right (36%), there has been virtually no change since February. When asked whether the President's criticism of news media has been fair and justified or unfair and unjustified, a majority (51%) say it has been unfair and unjustified. This is an eight point increase from February. The results of MCAP's October 2017 poll suggest that while a majority of Erie County voters remain skeptical of the ability of news media to present the news fully, accurately and fairly, a majority also see the President's criticism of news media as unfair and unjustified.

Table 2. News Media

	February 2017		October 2017		**Change Feb.-Oct. 2017**	
	Great deal/fair amount	Not much/none at all	Great deal/fair amount	Not much/none at all	Great deal/fair amount	Not much/none at all
Trust and confidence that news will be reported fully, accurately, and fairly	47	53	43	56	**-4**	**+3**

	February 2017			October 2017			**Change Feb.-Oct. 2017**		
	Too Hard	Not Hard Enough	About Right	Too Hard	Not Hard Enough	About Right	Too Hard	Not Hard Enough	About Right
News media reporting on Trump	37	23	37	38	21	36	**+1**	**-2**	**-1**

					Change Feb.-Oct. 2017	
	Fair and Justified	Unfair and Unjustified	Fair and Justified	Unfair and Unjustified	Fair and Justified	Unfair and Unjustified
Donald Trump's criticism of news media	41	43	41	51	**0**	**+8**

The National and Local Economy

A plurality of Erie County voters say that the state of the nation's economy is "good" (45%) as opposed to "excellent" (5%), "not so good" (38%), or "poor" (11%). This is a modest improvement from eight months ago (see Table 3). When it comes to the local economy, however, voters are less positive. About half (47%) of voters describe the state of Erie County's economy as "not so good," as opposed to "excellent" (2%), "good" (16%), or "poor" (30%). This is a slightly less negative perception than was expressed by voters in February. Despite the fact that voters are slightly more optimistic about the availability of jobs in their community, a plurality (56%) say they are "making just enough" to maintain their standard of living; nineteen percent say they are falling behind.

Table 3
Erie Voters' Perception of the National and Local Economy

	February 2017	October 2017	**Change Feb.-Oct. 2017**
State of Nation's economy			
Excellent	2	5	**+3**
Good	40	45	**+5**
Not so good	42	38	**-4**
Poor	16	11	**-5**
State of Erie's economy			
Excellent	1	2	**+1**
Good	10	16	**+6**
Not so good	52	47	**-5**
Poor	34	30	**-4**
Jobs where you live			
Plenty	9	15	**+6**
Somewhat difficult to find	56	52	**-4**
Very difficult to find	33	29	**-4**
Family's financial situation			
Getting ahead	21	23	**+2**
Just keeping up	62	56	**-8**
Falling behind	15	19	**+4**

Frequencies

Interviews were completed with 409 registered voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 409, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.9 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 gender, 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.

Q.1 To begin, do you approve or disapprove of the job Donald Trump is doing as president?

approve	32
disapprove	55
neither (volunteered)	3
depends (volunteered)	7
DK	3
RF	0

Q.2 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 job	1
good job	4
fair job	35
poor job	60
DK	3
RF	0

I'm going to read you a short list of issues and I would like you to tell me whether you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling each one.

[Randomize Q.3 – Q.16]

Q.3 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling the economy?

approve	47
disapprove	45
neither (volunteered)	2
depends (volunteered)	4
DK	2
RF	0

Q.4 How about taxes?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

```
approve                 33
disapprove              49
neither (volunteered)    4
depends (volunteered)  5
DK                       8
RF                       0
```

Q.5 How about America's relationship with other nations?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

```
approve                 26
disapprove              68
neither (volunteered)    2
depends (volunteered)  3
DK                       1
RF                       0
```

Q.6 How about trade with other nations?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

```
approve                 36
disapprove              47
neither (volunteered)    5
depends (volunteered)  3
DK                       8
RF                       0
```

Q.7 How about America's infrastructure?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

```
approve                 32
disapprove              48
neither (volunteered)    7
depends (volunteered)  4
DK                       9
```

RF   0

Q.8 How about immigration?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

    approve   32
    disapprove   61
    neither (volunteered)   2
    depends (volunteered) 3
    DK   3
    RF   0

Q.9 How about health care?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

    approve   30
    disapprove   62
    neither (volunteered)   3
    depends (volunteered) 2
    DK   4
    RF   0

Q.10 How about Social Security?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

    approve   25
    disapprove   42
    neither (volunteered)   10
    depends (volunteered) 5
    DK   17
    RF   0

Q.11 How about terrorism?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

    approve   46
    disapprove   44
    neither (volunteered)   3
    depends (volunteered) 2
    DK   5

RF   0

Q.12 How about national defense?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

        approve   48
        disapprove   43
        neither (volunteered) 3
        depends (volunteered) 2
        DK   4
        RF   0

Q.13 How about illegal drugs?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

        approve   35
        disapprove   43
        neither (volunteered) 7
        depends (volunteered) 3
        DK   13
        RF   0

Q.14 How about gun control?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

        approve   38
        disapprove   48
        neither (volunteered) 3
        depends (volunteered) 4
        DK   6
        RF   0

Q.15 How about gun violence?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

        approve   26
        disapprove   58
        neither (volunteered) 6
        depends (volunteered) 3
        DK   7

RF   0

Q.16 How about the environment?

(Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling...?)

```
approve                 29
disapprove              58
neither (volunteered)   3
depends (volunteered)   2
DK                       6
RF                       0
```

Q.17 Generally speaking, do you believe things in the United States are headed in the right direction, or that they're off on the wrong track?

```
right direction         29
wrong track             64
DK                       6
RF                       0
```

Q.18 Would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

```
excellent                5
good                    45
not so good             38
poor                    11
DK                       1
RF                       0
```

Q.19 Would you describe the state of Erie County's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

```
excellent                2
good                    16
not so good             47
poor                    30
DK                       4
RF                       0
```

Q.20 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?

plenty of job	15
somewhat difficult to find	52
very difficult to find	29
DK	3
RF	1

Q.21 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?

getting ahead	23
just enough money	56
falling behind	19
DK	1
RF	1

Q.22 In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the news media - such as newspapers, television and radio - when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly - a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?

great deal	9
fair amount	34
not very much	37
none at all	19
DK	1
RF	0

Q.23 Do you feel that news media's reporting has been too hard on Donald Trump, not hard enough, or about right?

too hard	38
not hard enough	21
about right	36
DK	5
RF	1

Q.24 Generally speaking, do you feel Donald Trump's criticism of the news media has been fair and justified or unfair and unjustified.

fair and justified	41
unfair and unjustified	51
DK	7
RF	0

Q.25 Is your opinion of the US Congress strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

strongly favorable	1
somewhat favorable	26
somewhat unfavorable	48
strongly unfavorable	20
DK	6
RF	0

Q.26 Is your opinion of Donald Trump strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or strongly unfavorable?

strongly favorable	14
somewhat favorable	26
somewhat unfavorable	19
strongly unfavorable	41
DK	1
RF	0

Q.27/29 Now I have just a few questions that we'll be using for statistical purposes. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?

Republican	43
Democrat	51
Independent	5
other (volunteered)	1
DK	1
RF	0

Q.29 Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a liberal, conservative, or have you not thought much about this?

liberal	23
conservative	39
not though about	32
neither/other (volunteered)	6
DK	1
RF	0

Q.30 Age

18-29	18
30-39	13
40-49	14
50-69	40
70 or older	14

Q.31 What is your marital status?

single/divorced/widowed/separated	44
married	52
other (volunteered)	4
DK	0
RF	0

Q.32 If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all members of your household for the past year, would the total be...[read categories]

$0-30,000	18
$30,000-60,000	29
$60,000-100,000	22
$100,000-150,000	10
over $150,000	7
DK	6
RF	8

Q.33 What is your race?

white/Caucasian	85
non-white/Caucasian	12
DK	1

RF   2

Q.34 What is the highest level of education you completed?

grade school   0
some high school   1
high school   24
some trad/vocational school   2
trade/vocational certification 3
some college/2 year degree   29
college/4 year degree   24
some graduate school   3
masters degree   8
doctorate   4
DK   0
RF   0

Q.35 [do not ask - just record] Gender

male   49
female   51

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of registered voters in Erie County, Pennsylvania, which was conducted between October 16 and October 24, 2017. During the 9-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 L2.

A total of 409 individuals were interviewed. For a sample size of 409, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.9 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 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 gender. 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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