



Mercyhurst Center
for Applied Politics

*Pennsylvania's Female Voters
And the 2012 Presidential Election*

Prepared by: The Mercyhurst Center
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University

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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 Hammermill Library, is comprised of sixteen 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.

Methodology

This report summarizes the results of a survey of female registered voters in Pennsylvania which was conducted between Monday, January 16 and Wednesday, January 25, 2012. During the 10 day field period interviewers called weekday evenings between the hours of 6:00 and 9:00 PM; Saturdays between the hours of 12:00 and 5:00 PM; and between 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM on selected weekdays. For each working phone number, interviewers made no fewer than eight 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 female voters obtained from Marketing Systems Group (<http://www.m-s-g.com/home.aspx>).

A total of 598 subjects were interviewed. For a sample size of 598, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.01 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 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

female voters in Pennsylvania is no different than most polls: No fewer than eight 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. As a result of these efforts, our study obtained a response rate of 23%.

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, the data was weighted on age, race and party. Simply stated, weighting is when data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample was drawn.

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 University. 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 University, 501 E. 38th Street, Erie, PA, 16546, (814) 824-2154, jmorris@mercyhurst.edu.

Summary of Findings

Key Findings

- Although female voters in Pennsylvania indicate that the United States and its economy is on the wrong track, those who voted for Barack Obama in 2008 feel that they made the right choice (79 %, 265 responses, +/-6.02 margin of error).
- Roughly equal percentages of female voters indicate that they blame the Obama Administration (28%), Bush Administration (26%), and the collective decisions (25%) of the Obama Administration, Bush Administration, Republicans in Congress, and Democrats in Congress (N=407, +/-5% margin of error).
- When asked to provide a letter grade for the Obama Administration's performance, a plurality of female voters (26%) assign a "B;" however, the average grade assigned to the Obama Administration is a "C."
- Female voters agree that it is essential that the next President possess a wide range of qualities, but having experience running a business is not one of them.
- In a head-to-head match-up between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in 2012, female voters in Pennsylvania prefer Barack Obama (44% Obama, 36% Romney, 598 responses, 4.01 margin of error); and a solid majority (73%) indicates that adding Hillary Clinton to the ticket would not affect their decision in 2012 (478 responses, 4.4% margin of error).
- The most frequent word used by female voters to describe Mitt Romney is "rich," while the most frequent word used to describe Barack Obama is "intelligent."

Performance of Obama Administration

A solid majority (64%) of female voters in Pennsylvania say things in the United States are on the wrong track, and only a small minority (27%) says things are headed in the right direction. Female voters' opinion of the direction of the economy is nearly identical, with 68% saying it is on the wrong track and 25% saying it is headed in the right direction. Of those who say the economy is headed in the right direction, a majority (58%) give credit to the Obama Administration for this accomplishment. A roughly equal number of female voters blame the Obama

Administration (28%) and Bush Administration (26%) for the economy being off on the wrong track (N=407, +/-5% margin of error). About the same number of female voters (25%) place equal blame on the combined actions of the Obama Administration, Bush Administration, Republicans in Congress, and Democrats in Congress.

In spite of female voters' concern about the direction of the United State and the economy, 79% of those who voted for Barack Obama in 2008 believe they made the right choice (N=287, +/-6% margin of error). When asked evaluate the performance of the Obama Administration by providing a letter grade, a plurality of female voters assign a grade of B. In other words, the most frequent response (mode) was a B. When letter grades are recoded into grade point average, the Obama Administration earns a 2.11, or C for its performance (see Table 1).

Table 1: Letter Grades for the Obama Administration (Q. 26. *If you had to give Barack Obama a letter grade for his performance as President, what letter grade would it be? I can accept A, B, C, D, and F, and pluses and minuses*)

Letter Grade (Grade Points)	Percent
A/A+ (4.0)	5
A- (3.7)	2
B+ (3.3)	6
B (3.0)	26
B- (2.7)	7
C+ (2.3)	4
C (2.0)	17
C- (1.7)	8
D+ (1.3)	1
D (1.0)	10
D- (0.7)	2
F/F- (0.0)	12
Overall Grade (Grade Point Average)	
C (2.11)	

Percent based on 589 valid cases. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

The 2012 Presidential Election

Looking ahead to the 2012 presidential election, a solid majority of Pennsylvania’s female voters believe that it is essential for the next president to be a decisive leader, in-touch with the common person, capable of inspiring the nation, willing to work with members of the other party, and have good moral character, a focus on unifying the country and experience with foreign policy. Female voters are evenly divided on whether having a consistent position on the issues is essential or important, but not essential; and a plurality indicate that it is important, but not essential that a candidate have experience running a business (see Table 2).

Table 2: Qualities that are essential for a candidate for president in 2012

(Q. 5-14. As you may be aware, there is a presidential election this fall. I'm going to read you a short list of qualities that you may or may not be looking for in a president. Please tell me whether each of the qualities is absolutely essential; important, but not essential; or not that important as you decide which candidate you will vote for in the 2012 presidential election.)

	Essential	Important, but not essential	Not that important
Be a decisive leader	70%	26%	4%
Have good moral character	68%	30%	2%
Have a focus on uniting the country	68%	30%	2%
Having a consistent position on the issues	52%	42%	4%
Have experience dealing with foreign policy	68%	30%	2%
Be in touch with the common person	67%	31%	2%
Be able to inspire the nation	63%	33%	4%
Be able to work with the other party	78%	28%	1%
Have experience running a business	30%	46%	23%
Being a Christian	21%	31%	46%

Row totals may not equal 100% due to rounding or a small percentage of “don’t know” or “refuse” responses.

The survey results show that vote intention is closely split for and against Obama, with large segments still undecided. Nearly equal numbers of Pennsylvania’s female voters say that they “certain” (20%) or “likely” (18%) to vote for Barack Obama in 2012 as say they are “certain not to” (33%) or “unlikely” (7%) to vote for Barack Obama in 2012; however, a substantial number of women (21%) remain unsure about their vote. In a head-to-head match-up between the two candidates 44% of women say that they would vote for Barack Obama and 36%

for Mitt Romney, while 12% say they are unsure and 7% say they would vote for someone else or neither candidate.

Recently, some in the media have suggested that adding Hillary Clinton as Obama's vice presidential running mate may improve his 2012 electoral prospects. This suggestion does not seem to sway over registered Pennsylvanian female voters. Among women who are anything other than certain to vote for Barack Obama (n=478, 4.4% margin of error), 73% say that replacing Joe Biden with Hillary Clinton will have no effect on their vote in 2012. Roughly 17% of female voters say that adding Hillary Clinton to the ticket will make it more likely that they will vote for Barack Obama, while 8% say it will make it less likely.

One-Word Descriptions of Mitt Romney and Barack Obama

The survey attempts to ascertain the general feeling female voters have toward the likely presidential candidates by asking respondents to choose one word to describe Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. When asked to choose a single word to describe Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, female voters in Pennsylvania provided a wide range of adjectives. Respondents most frequently described Mitt Romney as "rich" (n=21), "businessman" (n=19), "business" (n=18), "Mormon" (n=17), or "arrogant" (n=15); while they most frequently described Barack Obama as "intelligent" (n=27), "President" (n=15), "leader" (n=15), "trying" (n=14), or "honest" (n=14). Table 3 identifies those words that were used to describe Mitt Romney or Barack Obama by at least five individuals.

Table 3: Top One-Word Descriptions of Mitt Romney and Barack Obama*
(Q. 21 and 22. If you had to choose one word to describe Mitt Romney [Barack Obama], what word would that be? I can only record one word.)

Mitt Romney (n=464)		Barack Obama (n=525)	
	n		n
Rich	21	Intelligent/smart	27
Businessman	19	President	15
Business	18	Leader	15
Mormon	17	Trying	14
Arrogant	15	Honest	14
Intelligent/smart	14	Inexperienced	13
Honest	11	Disappointing/Disappointment	11
Conservative	10	Liar	10
Leader	9	Arrogant	9
Wealthy	9	Charismatic	8
Unsure	8	Indecisive	8
Governor/former governor	7	Liberal	8
Experienced	6	Inspirational/Inspiring	7
Greedy	5	Good	6
Inconsistent	5	Idiot	6
Okay	5	Clueless	5
		Likeable	5
		Socialist	5

**Top one-word descriptions of Mitt Romney and Barack Obama include only words that were used by a minimum of 5 respondents. Results are based on unweighted data.*

Of the 464 respondents who offered a word to describe Mitt Romney, 140 (30%) chose a positive word, compared to 147 (32%) who chose a negative word. Of the 525 respondents who offered a word to describe Barack Obama, 233 (44%) chose a positive word compared to 222 (42%) who chose a negative word (see Table 4).

Table 4: Positive and Negative One-Word Descriptions of Mitt Romney and Barack Obama* (Q. 21 and 22. *If you had to choose one word to describe Mitt Romney [Barack Obama], what word would that be? I can only record one word.*)

	Mitt Romney (n=464)	Barack Obama (n=525)
Positive	140	233
Negative	147	222
Neutral/Not Classified	177	70
Don't Know/No Response	134	73

“Positive” and “negative” terms were identified by four independent coders. Only terms that were coded “positive” or “negative” by all four coders were included in positive/negative categories. Neutral/Not Classified responses include words that were not clearly identified as positive or negative by the coders. The results are based on unweighted data.

Frequency Report

Interviews were completed with 598 female registered voters in Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 598, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.01 percentage 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). 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.

1. Generally speaking, do you feel things in the United States are headed in the **right direction**, or do you feel that things are **off on the wrong track**?

Right Direction .	27%
Wrong Track	64%
Depends	7%
DK	2%
RF	0%

2. Generally speaking, do you feel that the **United States economy** is headed in the right direction, or do you feel that the **economy** is off on the wrong track?

Right Direction .	24%
Wrong Track	68%
Depends	7%
DK	1%
RF	0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 4]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 5, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 4]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 8, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 4]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 4]

3. Who do you believe deserves the most credit for the economy going in the right direction? The Obama administration, the Bush administration, the Republicans in Congress, or the Democrats in Congress? (142 responses, +/- 8.22% margin of error)

Obama Administration	58%
Bush Administration	1%
Republicans in Congress	6%
Democrats in Congress	11%
None of them	14%
All of them	2%
DK	9%
RF	0%

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

4. Who deserves the most blame for the economy being off on the wrong track? The Obama administration, Bush administration, Republicans in Congress, Democrats in Congress? (407 respondents, +/-5% margin of error)

Obama Administration	28%
Bush Administration	26%
Republicans in Congress	7%
Democrats in Congress	7%
None of them	4%
All of them	25%
DK	4%
RF	1%

As you may be aware, there is a presidential election this fall. I'm going to read you a short list of qualities that you may or may not be looking for in a president. Please tell me whether each of the qualities is **absolutely essential; important, but not essential;** or **not that important** as you decide which candidate you will vote for in the 2012 presidential election.

5. Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important that a candidate be a **decisive leader**?

Absolutely essential 70%
Important, but not essential 26%
Not that important 4%
DK 0%
RF 0%

6. Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important that a candidate have **good moral character**?

Absolutely essential 68%
Important, but not essential 30%
Not that important 2%
DK 0%
RF 0%

[ASK QUESTIONS 8 TO 15 IN RANDOM ORDER]

7. How about having a focus on **uniting the country**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential 68%
Important, but not essential 30%
Not that important 3%
DK 0%
RF -

8. How about having a **consistent position on the issues**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential 52%
Important, but not essential 43%
Not that important 4%
DK 1%
RF 1%

9. How about having **experience dealing with foreign policy**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential	60%
Important, but not essential	38%
Not that important	2%
DK	0%
RF	0%

10. How about being **in touch with the common person**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential	67%
Important, but not essential	31%
Not that important	2%
DK	0%
RF	-

11. How about being able to **inspire the nation**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential	63%
Important, but not essential	33%
Not that important	4%
DK	1%
RF	-

12. How about being **willing to work with members of the other political party**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential	71%
Important, but not essential	28%
Not that important	1%
DK	0%
RF	-

13. How about having **experience running a business**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential	30%
Important, but not essential	46%
Not that important	23%
DK	0%
RF	1%

14. How about **being a Christian**?

(Is it essential, important but not essential, or not that important...)

Absolutely essential	21%
Important, but not essential	31%
Not that important	46%
DK	1%
RF	1%

15. In the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama ran against John McCain. Some people voted in that election, while others were unable to vote or chose not to. Did you vote in the 2008 presidential election?

Yes, did vote	93%
No, did not vote	6%
DK	0%
RF	0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 18]

16. Which presidential candidate did you vote for in 2008?

Barack Obama	48%
John McCain	39%
Other/Someone else	2%
DK	1%
RF	10%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2-3 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 18]

17. How do you feel about your decision **to vote for Barack Obama instead of John McCain** in 2008? Would you say that you made the right choice, the wrong choice or are you unsure? (265 responses, +/-6.02 margin of error)

Right choice	79%
Wrong choice	2%
Unsure	18%
DK	0%
RF	-

18. How likely is it that **you will vote for Barack Obama in 2012**? Would you say that you are **certain** that you will vote for him, that you **most likely will** vote for him, that you are **unlikely** to vote for him, that you are **certain you won't** vote for him, or are you unsure?

Certain to vote Obama	20%
Most likely vote Obama	18%
Unlikely to vote Obama	7%
Certain won't vote Obama	33%
Unsure	21%
DK	0%
RF	1%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 20]

19. There has been some talk in the media that Hillary Clinton could potentially replace Vice President Joe Biden for the next presidential election. If Hillary Clinton ran as Barack Obama's Vice Presidential candidate, would it make you **more likely** to vote for Obama, **less likely** to vote for Obama, or have **no effect** on your decision?

More Likely	17%
Less Likely	8%
No Effect	73%
Depends	1%
DK	1%
RF	0%

20. As you may know, the Republican Party is currently deciding which candidate to nominate for president. One of the candidates seeking the nomination is Mitt Romney. Have you heard of Mitt Romney?

Yes 96%
No ... 4%
DK ... 0%
RF ... 0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 2 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 22]

23. If the 2012 presidential election was held today and Mitt Romney was the Republican Party's nominee, would you be **more likely** to vote for Barack Obama or Mitt Romney?

Obama 44%
Romney 36%
Someone else/Neither 7%
DK 12%
RF 1%

24. How **enthusiastic** are you about voting in the 2012 election? Would you say that you are very enthusiastic, somewhat enthusiastic, somewhat unenthusiastic, or not at all enthusiastic?

Very enthusiastic 35%
Somewhat enthusiastic 34%
Somewhat unenthusiastic 15%
Not at all enthusiastic 15%
DK 1%
RF 0%

25. Would you say you are **more enthusiastic**, **less** enthusiastic or have about the same level of enthusiasm for voting for president in 2012 as you had in 2008?

(If needed: In 2008, Barack Obama was running against John McCain.)

More enthusiastic	20%
Less enthusiastic	30%
Same level of enthusiasm	49%
DK	0%
RF	1%

26. If you had to give Barack Obama a letter grade for his performance as President, what letter grade would it be? I can accept A, B, C, D, and F, and plusses and minuses.

27. In 2010, President Obama signed health care reform into law. Have you noticed a **positive** effect, a **negative** effect, both **positive and negative** effects, or **no effect** of health care reform on your **family's** health care?

Positive effect	10%
Negative effect	18%
No effect	50%
Both positive and negative	18%
DK	3%
RF	0%

28. Does the passing of health care reform by President Obama make you **more likely** or **less likely** to vote for him this fall or will it not affect your decision?

More Likely	15%
Less Likely ..	27%
No Effect	55%
DK	3%
RF	0%

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

Republican 31%
Democrat 42%
Independent .. 23%
Other 1%
DK 1%
RF 2%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 3-4 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 32]
[IF THE ANSWER IS 2, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 31]

30. Would you call yourself a **strong Republican** or a **not very strong Republican**?

Strong Republican 57%
Not very strong Republican 42%
DK 1%
RF -

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1-2 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 33]

31. Would you call yourself a **strong Democrat** or a **not very strong Democrat**?

Strong Democrat 60%
Not very strong Democrat 37%
DK 3%
RF 0%

[IF THE ANSWER IS 1-2 OR 8-9, THEN SKIP TO QUESTION 33]

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

Republican Party ...	39%
Democratic Party ..	29%
Niether	15%
DK	7%
RF	10%

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

Liberal	17%
Conservative	26%
Moderate	25%
Have not thought much about it	30%
DK	2%
RF	0%

34. In what year were you born? (recoded into age categories)

18-24	8%
25-34	17%
35-44	14%
45-54	20%
55-64	18%
65 and older	20%
DK	-
RF	3%

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

Less than high school	1%
High school	24%
Some college/associates/certificate	32%
Four year degree	26%
Graduate degree	18%
DK	-
RF	1%

36. What is your religious affiliation?

37. What is your marital status?

Single	19%
Married	65%
Domestic Partnership	1%
Divorced	6%
Widowed	8%
DK	0%
RF	1%

38. 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 categories]

Less than \$30,000	14%
\$30,000 - \$50,000	18%
\$50,000 - \$100,000	27%
\$100,000 - \$150,000	15%
Greater than \$150,000	9%
DK	2%
RF	16%

39. What is your race?

(Read categories if necessary).

White/Caucasian	88%
Black/African American ...	6%
Hispanic/Latino	3%
Asian American	1%
Native American	1%
Other	-
dk	0%
rf	2%

[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 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 East 38th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania 16546, Telephone (814) 824-3372