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# Franklin & Marshall College Poll: April 2023 *Summary of Findings*

For media or other inquiries:

Berwood Yost, Director [byost@fandm.edu](mailto:byost@fandm.edu) 717.358.3922

[@FandMPoll](#)  
[fandmpoll.org](http://fandmpoll.org)

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## Key Findings

The April 2023 Franklin & Marshall College Poll finds Pennsylvania’s registered voters are uneasy and mostly unmoved in their sentiments about the conditions of the state and its politics since last fall. Nearly half (46%) of respondents say they are “worse off” than a year ago while few (11%) say they are “better off” financially. One in three (33%) registered voters expects they will be “worse off” financially a year from now. These assessments of financial well-being are essentially unmoved since the 2022 midterms.

Concern about the economy (22%), including unemployment and higher gas and utility prices, continues as the most important and often mentioned problem facing the state, but fewer people mention it as the state’s top problem than did so last fall (34%). Concerns about crime are more common now, rising to 19% from about 10% last fall. Democrats (23%) and independents (24%) are more likely than Republicans (13%) to say crime is a problem.

The survey also includes notable findings about state-level issues on the death penalty, education, and elections:

- More registered voters support (62%) than oppose (34%) the death penalty, consistent with prior data.
- Similar proportions of registered voters believe their local school districts have enough funding to prepare their students for life after high school (47%) as believe they do not have sufficient funding (44%). Similarly, voters are divided in their support for school vouchers, with equal proportions strongly supporting (31%) and strongly opposing (32%) such programs. On the other hand, most voters (63%) do not believe books or novels should ever be banned from school libraries.
- Fewer registered voters favor the use of mail-in ballots (50%) than supported their use prior to the 2020 election (59%), although most (57%) voters are “confident” their ballot would be counted properly if they used mail-in voting in an upcoming election.

More than two in five (43%) registered voters believe Josh Shapiro is doing an “excellent” or “good” job as governor. This is the highest initial approval ratings for a governor since Governor Rendell had a 46% positive approval rating early in his first term. Governor Shapiro has more positive ratings among Democrats (76%) and Independents (35%) than either Senator Casey or President Biden.

About one in four (29%) registered voters in Pennsylvania believe Bob Casey is doing an “excellent” or “good” job as their US Senator. Senator Casey’s ratings are a bit lower than his ratings in October 2018, prior to his last election, when he had a 43% positive job approval rating, although they are the same as his ratings in March 2011 (29%), about one year prior to his first re-election campaign. Despite his job approval ratings, Senator Casey leads prospective Republican candidates David McCormick and Doug Mastriano in head-to-head matchups. Casey leads McCormick 42% to 35%, while he leads Mastriano by a larger margin, 47% to 31%.

About one in four (27%) registered voters in Pennsylvania believe President Biden is doing an “excellent” or “good” job as president, although the President’s current rating is lower than President Trump’s and President Obama’s ratings in Pennsylvania at the same point in their terms. Despite this, he still holds an advantage in a head-to-head matchup against the former president, 36% to 35%, although it is also clear that many voters are looking for an alternative to both candidates.

## Detailed Findings

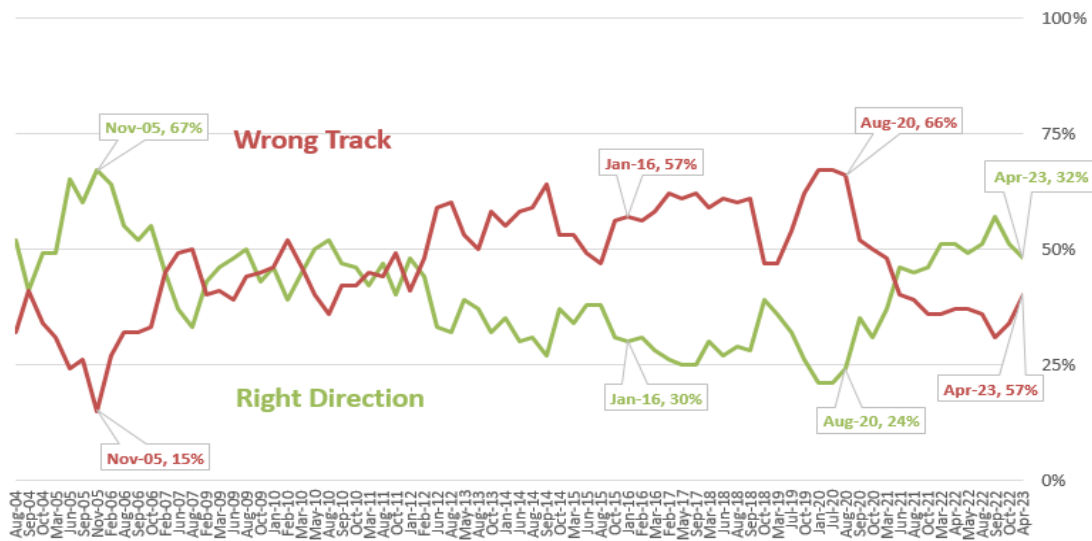
### *Direction of State and Personal Finances*

Voters are dissatisfied with their personal finances. Nearly half (46%) of respondents say they are “worse off” than a year ago while few (11%) say they are “better off” financially. One in three (33%) registered voters expects they will be “worse off” financially a year from now. Most Republicans and conservatives say they are “worse off” than last year, but a third of Democrats (29%) and half of independents (48%) also say they are worse off financially (see Table A-1).

Pennsylvania voters remain pessimistic about conditions in the state, although perhaps less so than last fall (see Figure 1). Only one in three (32%) registered voters believes the state is “headed in the right direction” which is higher than the one in four (27%) who felt that way last fall, with the same partisan differences evident.

#### ***Direction of State Over Time, Pennsylvania Residents 1995-2023***

*All in all, do you think things in Pennsylvania are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are off on the wrong track?*



*Note: Beginning in 2012, question asked only of registered voter, prior surveys included all adults.*

**Figure 1.** This figure shows how Pennsylvania’s registered voters assess the state’s general direction. Voters have not expressed net positive feelings about the direction of the state since August 2020.

## *State Issues*

Concern about the economy (22%), including unemployment and higher gas and utility prices, continues as the most important and often mentioned problem facing the state, but fewer people mention it as the state's top problem than did so last fall (34%). Concerns about crime are more common now, rising to 19% from about 10% last fall. Concerns about government and politicians (17%) has held steady. Democrats (21%) and independents (23%) are more likely than Republicans (12%) to say crime is a problem. Related to crime, more registered voters support (62%) than oppose (34%) the death penalty, consistent with prior data (see Table A-5 for demographic comparisons).

## *Education*

Similar proportions of registered voters believe their local school districts have enough funding to prepare their students for life after high school (47%) as believe they do not have sufficient funding (44%), although this differs by party and ideology and, most interesting, by region of the state (see Table A-2). Similarly, voters are divided in their support for school vouchers, with equal proportions strongly supporting (31%) and strongly opposing (32%) such programs. On the other hand, most voters (63%) do not believe books or novels should ever be banned from school libraries, although more Republicans and conservatives favor such bans (see Table A-3).

### *Mail Ballots*

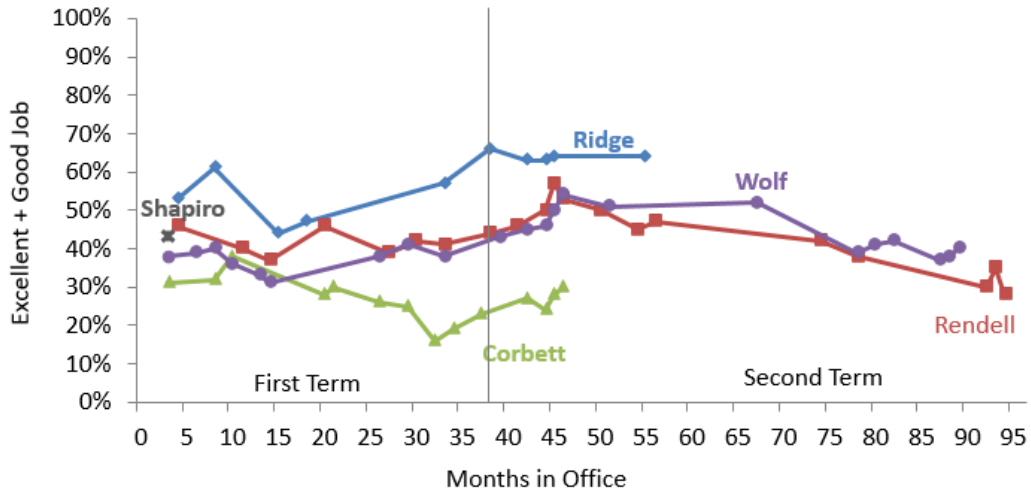
Fewer registered voters favor the use of mail-in ballots (50%) than supported their use prior to the 2020 election (59%), although most (57%) voters are “confident” their ballot would be counted properly if they used mail-in voting in an upcoming election. Respondents are evenly divided about whether the state’s vote would be accurate if mail-in voting is widely used in the next general election: 53% say they are confident the state vote would be counted correctly while 47% would not be confident (see Table A-4). Republicans and conservatives are least likely to have confidence in the state’s vote count.

### *Governor Shapiro: Job Performance*

More than two in five (43%) registered voters believe Josh Shapiro is doing an “excellent” or “good” job as governor. This is the highest initial approval ratings for a governor since Governor Rendell had a 46% positive approval rating early in his first term (see Figure 2). Governor Shapiro has more positive ratings among Democrats (76%) and Independents (35%) than either Senator Casey or President Biden.

### Ratings of Gubernatorial Job Performance

*How would you rate the way that Josh Shapiro is handling his job as Governor? Would you say he is doing an excellent job, a good job, only a fair job, or a poor job as Governor?*



*Figure 2. This figure compares the job approval ratings of Pennsylvania Governors at similar points in their terms. Governor Shapiro’s initial approval rating is higher than his most recent predecessors.*



### President Biden: Job Performance

About one in four (27%) registered voters in Pennsylvania believe President Biden is doing an “excellent” or “good” job as president. President Biden’s current rating is lower than President Trump’s and President Obama’s ratings in Pennsylvania at the same point in their terms. A majority of Democrats (55%) rate the President’s performance positively, while fewer Republicans (4%) or independents (15%) do so.

In addition to assessing President Biden’s overall approval ratings, voters were also asked to rate how his administration is performing within specific policy areas. President Biden receives his highest relative ratings for helping to create new jobs and handling foreign policy, but scores poorly on handling immigration and inflation. Ratings of the President’s performance within specific policy areas have changed little since last fall (see Figure 3).

#### Ratings of Presidential Administration Performance on Selected Issues, Biden Administration

The following is a list of problems and issues. For each one, indicate how well President Biden's administration has performed, using an A for excellent, B for very good, C for average, D for below average or F for failing. How well has President Biden's administration performed...

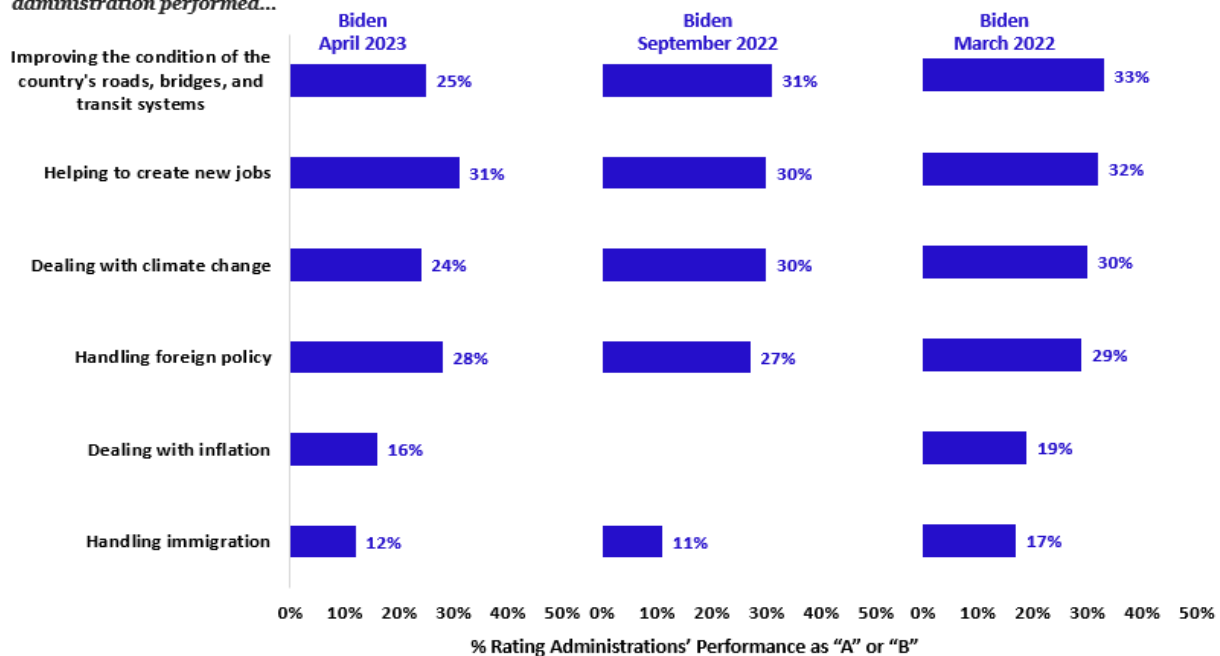


Figure 3. This figure shows how Pennsylvania’s registered voters have judged the performance of President Biden’s administration on selected issues over the past year.

### *US Senator Casey: Job Performance*

About one in four (29%) registered voters in Pennsylvania believe Bob Casey is doing an “excellent” or “good” job as their US Senator. Senator Casey’s ratings are a bit lower than his ratings in October 2018, prior to his last election, when he had a 43% positive job approval rating, although they are the same as his ratings in March 2011 (29%), about one year prior to his first re-election campaign. A majority of Democrats (57%) rate Casey’s performance positively, while fewer Republicans (9%) or independents (21%) do so.

Despite his job approval ratings, Senator Casey leads prospective Republican candidates David McCormick and Doug Mastriano in head-to-head matchups.<sup>1</sup> Casey leads McCormick 42% to 35%, while he leads Mastriano by a larger margin, 47% to 31%.

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<sup>1</sup> Poll participants were randomly assigned to a question that pitted either David McCormick or Doug Mastriano against Senator Casey. Statistical tests of the randomization process showed no significant differences between the assigned groups on party registration or demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, or region of the state.

## Methodology

The survey findings presented in this release are based on the results of interviews conducted March 27 – April 7, 2023. The interviews were conducted at the Center for Opinion Research at Franklin & Marshall College. The data included in this release represent the responses of 643 registered Pennsylvania voters, including 287 Democrats, 266 Republicans, and 90 independents.<sup>2</sup> The sample of voters was obtained from Aristotle. All sampled respondents were notified by mail about the survey. Interviews were completed over the phone and online depending on each respondent’s preference. Survey results were weighted (age, gender, education, geography, vote history, and party registration) using an iterative weighting algorithm to reflect the known distribution of those characteristics. Estimates for age, geography, and party registration are based on active voters within the PA Department of State’s voter registration data. Gender and education is estimated using data from the November 2018 CPS Voter Registration Supplement.<sup>3</sup>

The sample error for this survey is +/- 4.9 percentage points when the design effects from weighting are considered. The sample error for questions based on subgroups is larger.<sup>4</sup> An alternative means of calculating the variation in a sample is to take a series of bootstrap samples from the original sample and to use those bootstrapped samples to produce an estimate of sampling error.<sup>5</sup> The procedure involves resampling a data set, calculating a statistic for each bootstrapped sample, accumulating the results of these samples and calculating a sample

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<sup>2</sup> The data reported here is voter REGISTRATION and is consistent with past reporting practices. The survey also asked about self-reported voter IDENTIFICATION, which shows a slightly different partisan split: 45% identify as Republican (n=275), 10% as Independent (n=62), and 41% as Democrat (n=261) and the balance not offering a response. Partisan comparisons in this summary show self-reported registration.

<sup>3</sup> Data downloaded from IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org), accessed 12/31/2021.

<sup>4</sup> The SE for the Casey v McCormick question is +/- 6.6%, SE for the Casey v Mastriano question is +/- 7.3%, and SE for the Republican primary question is +/- 8.2%.

<sup>5</sup> Canty, Angelo. 2002. “Resampling Methods in R: The boot Package.” R News 2/3 (December): 2-7.

distribution. The standard deviation of the mean of 10,000 bootstrapped samples for the estimated positive job approval for President Biden was 1.8% and 95% of the samples fell within a range of 24% and 31%.

In addition to sampling error, this poll is also subject to other sources of non-sampling error. Generally speaking, two sources of error concern researchers most. Non-response bias is created when selected participants either choose not to participate in the survey or are unavailable for interviewing. Response errors are the product of the question and answer process. Surveys that rely on self-reported behaviors and attitudes are susceptible to biases related to the way respondents process and respond to survey questions.

## Table A-1: Financial Status

*Pennsylvania registered voters, April 2023*

*We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you and your family are better off, worse off, or about the same financially as you were a year ago?*

	Better off	Worse off	About the same	Do not know
<b>Party*</b>				
Republican	8%	63%	28%	1%
Democrat	14%	29%	57%	0%
Independent or something else	12%	48%	36%	4%
<b>Ideology*</b>				
Liberal	17%	23%	59%	0%
Moderate	12%	41%	46%	1%
Conservative	5%	68%	26%	0%
<b>Gender*</b>				
Male	14%	50%	36%	1%
Female	7%	43%	49%	1%
<b>Age*</b>				
Under 35	20%	29%	47%	4%
35-54	10%	50%	40%	0%
Over 55	7%	50%	43%	0%
<b>Education*</b>				
HS or less	13%	50%	37%	0%
Some college	6%	57%	35%	2%
College degree	13%	35%	52%	0%
<b>Race</b>				
White	10%	47%	42%	1%
Nonwhite	13%	39%	48%	0%
<b>Race &amp; Education, White Voters*</b>				
White, no college degree	7%	58%	33%	2%
White, college degree	14%	33%	53%	0%
<b>Employment*</b>				
Full-time	13%	48%	38%	1%
Other	14%	38%	45%	2%
Retired	4%	48%	48%	0%
<b>Income*</b>				
Under \$35,000	13%	46%	39%	2%
\$35,000-\$75,000	5%	54%	41%	0%
Over \$75,000	15%	38%	45%	1%
<b>"Born-again" or evangelical Christian*</b>				
Yes	11%	51%	34%	3%
No	11%	44%	45%	0%
<b>Region**</b>				
Philadelphia & Southeast	15%	39%	46%	0%
Northeast	8%	54%	38%	0%
Allegheny & Southwest	8%	50%	42%	0%
Northwest	7%	52%	41%	0%
Central	9%	47%	41%	3%
<b>Urban-Rural Classification*</b>				
Large Central Metro	15%	38%	47%	0%
Large Fringe Metro	11%	45%	44%	0%
Medium Metro	9%	45%	45%	1%
Small Metro	4%	55%	34%	7%
Micropolitan	6%	67%	27%	0%
Noncore	22%	43%	36%	0%
* p<0.01    ** p<0.05				

## Table A-2: School Funding

Pennsylvania registered voters, April 2023

*A Commonwealth Court judge recently ruled that Pennsylvania's school funding system violates the state constitution because it underfunds poor school districts. Do you think the public schools in your community have enough funding to properly prepare their students for college and the workplace, or not?*

	Yes, definitely	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, definitely not	Do not know
<b>Party*</b>					
Republican	26%	34%	17%	12%	10%
Democrat	15%	22%	25%	32%	6%
Independent or something else	18%	27%	23%	23%	10%
<b>Ideology*</b>					
Liberal	16%	19%	26%	32%	7%
Moderate	17%	29%	23%	23%	9%
Conservative	28%	32%	16%	17%	8%
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	23%	26%	22%	20%	10%
Female	17%	28%	21%	27%	8%
<b>Age*</b>					
Under 35	11%	17%	25%	32%	14%
35-54	18%	27%	19%	28%	7%
Over 55	25%	30%	22%	15%	8%
<b>Education**</b>					
HS or less	14%	22%	24%	27%	13%
Some college	18%	31%	22%	23%	5%
College degree	25%	26%	19%	22%	9%
<b>Race*</b>					
White	22%	29%	20%	19%	9%
Nonwhite	12%	15%	24%	44%	6%
<b>Race &amp; Education, White Voters</b>					
White, no college degree	19%	30%	22%	19%	9%
White, college degree	26%	28%	18%	19%	9%
<b>Employment*</b>					
Full-time	21%	24%	22%	26%	7%
Other	14%	25%	21%	31%	10%
Retired	24%	33%	20%	13%	10%
<b>Income*</b>					
Under \$35,000	10%	15%	28%	33%	15%
\$35,000-\$75,000	15%	34%	20%	25%	6%
Over \$75,000	23%	27%	22%	23%	5%
<b>"Born-again" or evangelical Christian</b>					
Yes	21%	31%	20%	19%	8%
No	19%	26%	22%	24%	9%
<b>Region</b>					
Philadelphia & Southeast	23%	23%	17%	29%	9%
Northeast	21%	22%	31%	19%	7%
Allegheny & Southwest	21%	32%	20%	19%	7%
Northwest	15%	33%	16%	34%	2%
Central	18%	27%	23%	20%	12%
<b>Urban-Rural Classification*</b>					
Large Central Metro	16%	13%	19%	43%	8%
Large Fringe Metro	27%	35%	14%	15%	9%
Medium Metro	20%	28%	26%	18%	8%
Small Metro	12%	28%	24%	27%	9%
Micropolitan	19%	25%	29%	20%	7%
Noncore	0%	23%	27%	40%	10%

\* p<0.01 \*\* p<0.05

## Table A-3: Book Bans

*Pennsylvania registered voters, April 2023*

*Do you think a book or novel should ever be banned from public school classrooms or school libraries?*

	Yes	No	Do not know
<b>Party*</b>			
Republican	55%	38%	6%
Democrat	10%	84%	6%
Independent or something else	18%	78%	4%
<b>Ideology*</b>			
Liberal	7%	89%	4%
Moderate	19%	73%	8%
Conservative	66%	29%	5%
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	35%	58%	6%
Female	27%	67%	6%
<b>Age*</b>			
Under 35	16%	78%	6%
35-54	25%	68%	7%
Over 55	40%	54%	5%
<b>Education</b>			
HS or less	32%	62%	6%
Some college	34%	61%	5%
College degree	28%	65%	7%
<b>Race*</b>			
White	33%	62%	5%
Nonwhite	23%	66%	12%
<b>Race &amp; Education, White Voters</b>			
White, no college degree	36%	60%	4%
White, college degree	28%	65%	6%
<b>Employment</b>			
Full-time	28%	66%	6%
Other	27%	66%	8%
Retired	39%	56%	5%
<b>Income</b>			
Under \$35,000	22%	70%	8%
\$35,000-\$75,000	32%	61%	6%
Over \$75,000	32%	63%	6%
<b>"Born-again" or evangelical Christian</b>			
Yes	51%	42%	7%
No	25%	69%	6%
<b>Region</b>			
Philadelphia & Southeast	29%	65%	6%
Northeast	37%	59%	4%
Allegheny & Southwest	30%	63%	7%
Northwest	28%	66%	6%
Central	33%	61%	6%
<b>Urban-Rural Classification*</b>			
Large Central Metro	20%	72%	8%
Large Fringe Metro	36%	57%	7%
Medium Metro	30%	65%	5%
Small Metro	38%	52%	9%
Micropolitan	30%	68%	2%
Noncore	53%	47%	0%
* p<0.01    ** p<0.05			

## Table A-4: Election Confidence

*Pennsylvania registered voters, April 2023*

*How confident are you that the tabulated vote count in Pennsylvania will be accurate if mail-in voting is widely used in the next general election?*

	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Not very confident	Not confident at all	Do not know
<b>Party*</b>					
Republican	8%	14%	23%	55%	0%
Democrat	75%	17%	2%	5%	1%
Independent or something else	33%	20%	16%	28%	3%
<b>Ideology*</b>					
Liberal	78%	13%	2%	6%	0%
Moderate	43%	20%	16%	20%	0%
Conservative	5%	13%	20%	61%	1%
<b>Gender*</b>					
Male	34%	13%	17%	35%	2%
Female	41%	19%	14%	26%	0%
<b>Age**</b>					
Under 35	41%	17%	18%	23%	0%
35-54	45%	10%	15%	30%	0%
Over 55	32%	19%	14%	34%	1%
<b>Education</b>					
HS or less	23%	16%	22%	37%	2%
Some college	34%	16%	15%	34%	0%
College degree	47%	16%	13%	24%	1%
<b>Race</b>					
White	37%	16%	15%	31%	1%
Nonwhite	41%	13%	19%	26%	1%
<b>Race &amp; Education, White Voters*</b>					
White, no college degree	28%	16%	16%	38%	1%
White, college degree	48%	17%	13%	22%	0%
<b>Employment**</b>					
Full-time	40%	11%	18%	30%	0%
Other	36%	20%	12%	32%	0%
Retired	35%	21%	13%	29%	2%
<b>Income**</b>					
Under \$35,000	41%	19%	17%	19%	4%
\$35,000-\$75,000	38%	17%	14%	31%	0%
Over \$75,000	43%	14%	11%	32%	0%
<b>"Born-again" or evangelical Christian*</b>					
Yes	18%	14%	17%	48%	2%
No	45%	17%	14%	23%	0%
<b>Region*</b>					
Philadelphia & Southeast	44%	19%	13%	24%	1%
Northeast	37%	19%	16%	28%	0%
Allegheny & Southwest	38%	15%	13%	34%	1%
Northwest	24%	14%	23%	33%	5%
Central	34%	13%	18%	35%	0%
<b>Urban-Rural Classification*</b>					
Large Central Metro	45%	13%	18%	22%	1%
Large Fringe Metro	40%	18%	10%	31%	1%
Medium Metro	35%	19%	18%	28%	0%
Small Metro	27%	7%	20%	46%	0%
Micropolitan	25%	18%	20%	32%	5%
Noncore	39%	4%	6%	50%	0%

\* p<0.01    \*\* p<0.05



## Table A-5: Death Penalty

Pennsylvania registered voters, April 2023

Now I'd like to ask you a few questions dealing with state issues. First...Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

	Strongly favor	Somewhat favor	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Do not know
<b>Party*</b>					
Republican	46%	36%	8%	5%	5%
Democrat	15%	31%	24%	29%	1%
Independent or something else	24%	28%	21%	18%	9%
<b>Ideology*</b>					
Liberal	10%	18%	29%	43%	0%
Moderate	25%	42%	18%	12%	3%
Conservative	47%	30%	9%	6%	9%
<b>Gender*</b>					
Male	37%	29%	16%	14%	4%
Female	22%	34%	17%	21%	6%
<b>Age</b>					
Under 35	19%	33%	23%	20%	5%
35-54	32%	31%	15%	17%	5%
Over 55	33%	32%	14%	17%	3%
<b>Education*</b>					
HS or less	42%	30%	12%	11%	5%
Some college	33%	32%	17%	12%	7%
College degree	20%	33%	19%	24%	4%
<b>Race*</b>					
White	30%	34%	15%	17%	4%
Nonwhite	27%	19%	23%	20%	10%
<b>Race &amp; Education, White Voters*</b>					
White, no college degree	38%	34%	13%	10%	5%
White, college degree	19%	35%	19%	25%	2%
<b>Employment</b>					
Full-time	32%	31%	16%	16%	6%
Other	27%	33%	19%	17%	3%
Retired	28%	33%	16%	18%	5%
<b>Income</b>					
Under \$35,000	31%	21%	24%	19%	6%
\$35,000-\$75,000	25%	37%	16%	18%	3%
Over \$75,000	31%	34%	15%	17%	3%
<b>"Born-again" or evangelical Christian*</b>					
Yes	33%	34%	15%	12%	6%
No	28%	33%	16%	19%	4%
<b>Region*</b>					
Philadelphia & Southeast	28%	23%	20%	25%	4%
Northeast	22%	45%	11%	13%	8%
Allegheny & Southwest	26%	37%	19%	11%	6%
Northwest	50%	26%	9%	10%	5%
Central	31%	34%	16%	16%	4%
<b>Urban-Rural Classification*</b>					
Large Central Metro	24%	24%	26%	21%	5%
Large Fringe Metro	31%	31%	14%	20%	5%
Medium Metro	22%	38%	15%	19%	6%
Small Metro	57%	23%	9%	8%	3%
Micropolitan	40%	31%	21%	3%	5%
Noncore	38%	53%	9%	0%	0%

\* p<0.01 \*\* p<0.05