

*The Morning Call/*  
Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion

SURVEY OF PENNSYLVANIANS ON  
THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

**KEY FINDINGS REPORT**

March 22, 2004

## KEY FINDINGS:

1. Slightly over seven months before election day Pennsylvania voters are strikingly divided in their preferences for president, with state residents offering equal support for George Bush and John Kerry.
2. Pennsylvania voters identify improving the economy as the most important issue in the upcoming election, far surpassing preventing terrorism.
3. Among Keystone State residents identifying terrorism as their greatest concern, President Bush is the overwhelming choice for president, while among state residents most concerned about the economy, Kerry is strongly favored.
4. The President's handling of the war in Iraq appears to be a major factor in shaping the election preferences of state voters.
5. President Bush is viewed favorably by a slight majority of voters in the commonwealth, with Senator Kerry receiving similar statewide ratings.

**METHODOLOGY:** The following key findings report summarizes data collected in a telephone survey of 410 registered voters in the state of Pennsylvania between March 14 and 22, 2004. The sample of phone numbers used in the survey was generated by Genesys Sampling Systems of Ft. Washington, PA. Interviewing was conducted by the staff of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion. This number of completions results in a margin of error of +/- 4.8% at the 95% confidence interval. However the margin of errors for sub groups such as registered Democrats and Republicans is larger due to smaller sample size. Percentages throughout the survey have been rounded upward at the .5 mark, thus many totals in the results will not equal 100%. The survey questionnaire was designed by Christopher Borick, Ph.D. of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion in consultation with staff members of the *Morning Call*. Analysis and report writing were completed by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion under the direction of Dr. Borick.

### SECTION ONE: THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

With approximately seven months left before the 2004 presidential election, Pennsylvanians are extremely divided in their preferences for president, with state residents offering equal support for President George Bush and Senator John Kerry. The results of the most recent *Morning Call*/Muhlenberg College Poll indicate a dead heat between the President and his Democratic challenger. Among a sample of 410 registered voters in the state, Kerry was supported by only one more individual than the President, providing evidence of an extremely tight race emerging for Pennsylvania's crucial 21 electoral votes. Overall, both Bush and Kerry receive the support of 45% of state registered voters, with 5% supporting another candidate and 6% unsure at this time.

These results closely reflect a recent survey of Pennsylvanians by Quinnipiac College, and are indicative of recently released national surveys. For example, A Newsweek Poll of 838 registered voters (March 18-19) had the candidates tied nationally, with both Bush and Kerry drawing 48% support.

The closeness of the race can be seen across a number of demographic categories in the state. While in the past gender has played a significant role in determining presidential preferences, this year there is no statistical difference between Pennsylvania men and women in terms of their choice for the White House. In terms of income, Kerry holds a slight lead (50% to 40%) among individuals with household income under \$40,000 per year, while Bush holds a slim lead (50% to 43%) residents with income over \$60,000. However, in the crucial middle income demographic of \$40,000 to \$60,000, the candidates each received exactly 46% support from commonwealth voters.

As may be expected, party preference is playing a key role in determining early preferences in the race, with rank-and-file party members maintaining strong support for their party's standard bearer. More specifically 3 out of 4 Republicans (76%) expressed intent to vote for the President, while 2 out of 3 (66%) support Kerry at this time. Democrats were more likely to be undecided or support a third party or independent candidate than Republicans (11% to 6%), possibly demonstrating the impact of Ralph Nader's entry into the race.

## **SECTION TWO: ISSUES AND THE ELECTION**

While the candidates draw strikingly equal support across various demographic groups, positions on key issues appear to be dividing Pennsylvanians. When asked to identify the most important issue among the choices of improving the economy, preventing terrorism, or lowering taxes, a majority (53%) of Pennsylvanians identified the economy as their highest priority. Among the 53% most concerned with improving the economy, Kerry leads Bush by a margin of 61% to 28%. However, when preventing terrorism or lowering taxes is the highest priority of the voter, Bush dominates Kerry by a margin of 67% to 23%.

Yet, the issue most sharply separating voters appears to be the president's handling of the war in Iraq. Among Pennsylvanians who approve (47%) of President Bush's handling of the war, 83% would currently vote for the President, while among the 44% who disapprove of the commander-in-chief's handling of the conflict, 85% plan to vote for Massachusetts's junior Senator. Thus issues appear to be a particularly important factor in determining the positions of Pennsylvanians on the upcoming election.

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# MORNING CALL/MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

## 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SURVEY

Fielded March 14 –22, 2004

Statewide Sample of Registered Voters –

N = 410 +/- 4.8% at .95 level of confidence.

What political party are you currently registered with?

	November 03	March 04
Democrat	45%	43%
Republican	41%	40%
Independent	9%	10%
Other	1%	3%
Not sure/refuse	5%	4%

For each candidates name that I read please tell me if your impression of them is favorable or unfavorable.

### George W. Bush

	November 03	March 04
Favorable	54%	51%
Unfavorable	37%	44%
Neutral/Not Sure	9%	5%

### John Kerry

	November 03	March 04
Favorable	31%	45%
Unfavorable	28%	39%
Haven't heard of	24%	2%
Neutral/Not Sure	17%	14%

If the Presidential election was held today and the race was between George Bush and John Kerry, whom would you vote for?

	November 03	March 04
George Bush	47%	45%
John Kerry	40%	45%
Other/neither	2%	5%
Not sure/refused	12%	6%

Which of the following issues would you say is most important in deciding whom to vote for in the 2004 Presidential election?

	<b>November 03</b>	<b>March 04</b>
Improving the economy	43%	53%
Preventing terrorism	51%	28%
Lowering taxes	6%	8%
Not sure/refused	1%	11%