

The Morning Call/
Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion

SURVEY OF PENNSYLVANIANS ON
THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

KEY FINDINGS REPORT

May 18, 2004

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1. While remaining a very close race, John Kerry appears to have become the front-runner in the race for Pennsylvania's crucial electoral votes for president.
2. Pennsylvanians remain very divided in their views on the president, with a significant decline in his favorability rating over the past six months.
3. Senator Kerry, while improving his position among Pennsylvania voters, maintains unfavorable ratings similar to those of President Bush.
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 400 registered voters in the state of Pennsylvania between May 5 and 14, 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 +/- 4.9% 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%. Due to a higher number of completions from the Lehigh Valley region the data was weighted to more accurately represent the distribution of voters throughout the commonwealth. 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 just over 5 months left before the 2004 presidential election, Pennsylvanians remain highly divided in their preferences for president, with the race remaining within the margin of error. The results of the most recent *Morning Call*/Muhlenberg College Poll indicate Senator Kerry has emerged with a slight lead over President Bush in the campaign for the White House, but the race continues to be very tight in the keystone State. Among a sample of 400 registered voters in the state, Kerry was supported by 48% of registered voters, with 43% supporting the President and 6% unsure at this time. These results closely reflect recently released national surveys which place Senator Kerry slightly ahead of the president among American voters. For example, A Time/CNN

Poll of 563 voters (March 12-13) had Kerry leading Bush 51% to 46%. When Ralph Nader is added to the list of choices given to voters, the race tightens moderately, with Kerry receiving 44% support, the president garnering 42% of votes, and Nader taking 5% of the electorate. Overall, the race remains extremely tight.

One interesting demographic trend that has begun to emerge since our last survey in March involves gender. More specifically, Pennsylvanian men and women gave equal support to the two major candidates when asked about the race two months ago. However, the most recent results indicate that men remain evenly split between Kerry and Bush (45% each), women have begun to move to Kerry over Bush (50% to 40%) as their preferred candidate. While early in the race this may be an important factor, as the “gender gap” played an important role in propelling Bill Clinton to victory in the 1990’s, and the lack of a substantial gender divide hurt Al Gore’s chances of victory in 2000.

While both candidate’s continue to do very well among voters of their party, Kerry appears to be tightening his hold on Democrats since our last survey in March. More specifically, while Kerry was supported by 66% of Democrats in March, 77% of Pennsylvania Democrats now support the presumed party standard bearer.

SECTION TWO: ISSUES AND THE ELECTION

Positions on key issues appear to be dividing Pennsylvanians and playing a substantial role on support for the candidates for the presidency. When asked to identify the most important issue among the choices of improving the economy, preventing terrorism, or lowering taxes, a majority (52%) of Pennsylvanians identified the economy as their highest priority. This level of concern is almost identical (53%) to the level expressed by voters in our March survey. Among the 52% most concerned with improving the economy, Kerry leads Bush by a margin of 65% to 26%. Conversely, when preventing terrorism is the highest priority of the voter, Bush outpaces Kerry by a margin of 67% to 26%. Perhaps most interesting, among voters who identified lowering taxes as their greatest concern, Bush leads Kerry by a relatively slim margin of 55% to 49%.

As in March, the president’s handling of the situation in Iraq is playing a very significant role in voter’s preferences. More specifically, 85% of state voters who approve of President Bush’s handling of the war would vote for him if the election were held today. Conversely, 85% of the commonwealth’s registered voters who disapprove of the chief executive’s war management indicate that they currently would vote for Senator Kerry. These findings are very similar to the results in the March survey, and indicate the importance of the war in shaping voter preferences.

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MORNING CALL/MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SURVEY

Fielded May 5 –14, 2004

Statewide Sample of Registered Voters –

N = 400 +/- 4.9% at .95 level of confidence.

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	May 04
Favorable	54%	51%	47%
Unfavorable	37%	44%	49%
Neutral/Not Sure	9%	5%	4%

John Kerry

	November 03	March 04	May 04
Favorable	31%	45%	42%
Unfavorable	28%	39%	45%
Haven't heard of	24%	2%	<1%
Neutral/Not Sure	17%	14%	13%

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	May 04
George Bush	47%	45%	43%
John Kerry	40%	45%	48%
Other/neither	2%	5%	3%
Not sure/refused	12%	6%	6%

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

	November 03	March 04	May 04
Improving the economy	43%	53%	52%
Preventing terrorism	51%	28%	28%
Lowering taxes	6%	8%	9%
Not sure/refused	1%	11%	10%

