



Mercyhurst Center  
for Applied Politics

*2016 Pennsylvania  
General Election*

*A Survey of 420 Likely  
Voters in Pennsylvania*

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## Summary of Findings

A Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics (MCAP) poll of 420 registered voters in Pennsylvania (MOE +/-4.8, September 12 – 23, 2016, live interviewers) finds Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and Republican candidate Donald Trump in a tight race for Pennsylvania's 20 electoral college votes (Clinton 42%, Trump 41%, Johnson 4%, Stein 3%). In the Pennsylvania Senate race Republican Pat Toomey leads the Democratic candidate Katie McGinty by a single point (Toomey, 43%; McGinty, 42%). Both Clinton's and Toomey's leads are well within the margin of error for this poll.

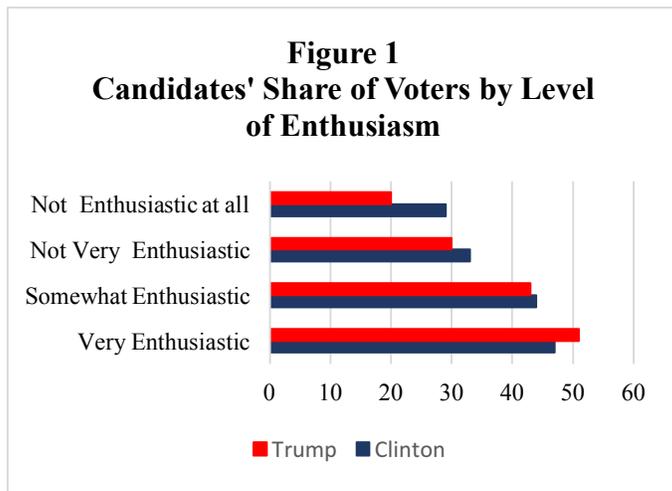
For both Clinton and Trump, the road to the White House travels through Pennsylvania. In fact, the commonwealth is among the most important battlegrounds of the 2016 presidential election. Given the competitiveness of the presidential contest, MCAP's 2016 presidential election poll explored two important factors voters consider when casting their vote for president: the state of the economy and retrospective evaluations of the incumbent party's performance in the White House. In terms of the state of the economy, Pennsylvania voters express greater satisfaction with the nation's economy than at any time in the past five years. Today 42% of voters describe the nation's economy as "excellent" (2%) or "good" (40%) compared to only 5% in 2011 ("excellent," 0%; "good," 5%). Similarly, 21% of voters say that there are plenty of jobs in their community (compared to 7% in 2011), and 24% say they are getting ahead financially (compared to 17% in 2011). Voters' relatively positive perception of the nation's economy, job situation in their communities, and their personal financial situation is a positive sign for the Clinton campaign.

Voters' retrospective evaluations of the Obama administration, however, are a positive sign for the Trump campaign. Pluralities of voters disapprove of the way President Obama has handled the economy (47% approve; 49% disapprove), trade with other nations (39% approve; 47% disapprove), healthcare policy (39% approve; 57% disapprove), immigration (41% approve; 54% disapprove), race relations (44% approve, 49% disapprove), foreign affairs (43% approve; 51% disapprove), situation in Iraq (35% approve; 58% disapprove), situation in Afghanistan (35% approve; 58% disapprove), issue of terrorism (41% approve; 53% disapprove), and ISIS (35% approve; 60% disapprove). A majority of voters (63%) say the nation is on the wrong track and only 30% say it is headed in the right direction. When asked whether they approve or disapprove of the job Obama has done as President during the past eight years, 50% say they disapprove and 48% say they approve. Pennsylvania voters give the president a grade of "C" for his performance over the past eight years. This relative displeasure with the Obama administration is a positive sign for the Trump campaign, which has sought to tie Clinton directly to Obama's policies and overall approach to leadership.

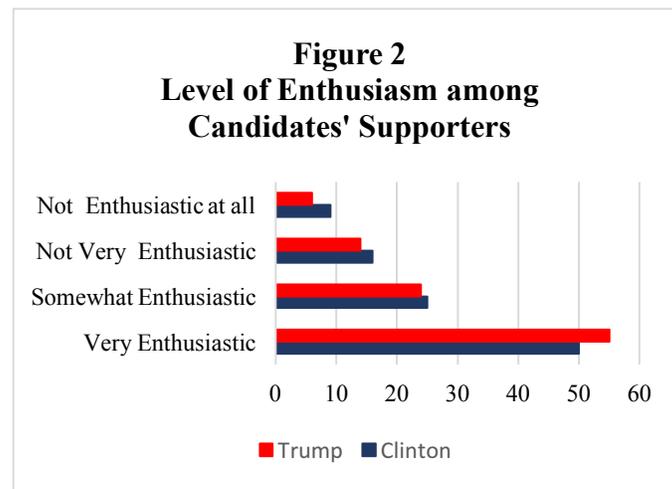
## 2016 Presidential and Senate Elections

Hillary Clinton's once sizable – perhaps even double-digit – lead over Donald Trump has evaporated. The Mercyhurst Center for Applied Politics September poll finds Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in a tight race for Pennsylvania's 20 Electoral College votes (Clinton 42%, Trump 41%, Johnson 4%, Stein 3%). Clinton's lead, however, is well within the margin of error, and 18% of voters say they remain undecided about whom they will vote for on election day – a fact that ensures Pennsylvania will remain a battleground in the weeks leading up to the general election. In this race, like all close races, the outcome will likely hinge on voter turnout.

In recent weeks, many observers have noted an apparent “enthusiasm gap” between Clinton and Trump supporters, where Trump supporters express far more enthusiasm about voting for their



candidate. This enthusiasm gap may translate as higher turnout among Trump supporters on Election Day. There is some evidence that an enthusiasm gap among Pennsylvania voters does, in fact, exist. As Figure 1 indicates, of those voters who are most enthusiastic to vote in the 2016 presidential election, 51% say they will vote for Donald Trump and 47% for Hillary Clinton. Of those who are least enthusiastic to vote only 19% say they will vote for Donald Trump, while 29% say they plan to vote for Hillary Clinton. In other words, Trump supporters account for a larger portion of the pool of enthusiastic voters, while Clinton supporters account for a larger portion of the pool of unenthusiastic voters.



In terms of the level of enthusiasm among each candidates' supporters, Trump appears to hold a small advantage over Clinton (see Figure 2). Among Trump supporters 55% say they are “very enthusiastic” about voting compared to 50% of Clinton supporters. Similarly, 6% of Trump supporters say they are “not enthusiastic at all” about voting in the election compared to 9% of Clinton supporters. While voters' level of enthusiasm is by no means the only or best predictor of turnout, in an extremely close race –

which the race for president in Pennsylvania appears to be – this enthusiasm gap may make all of the difference.

Like the race for president, the contest for Pennsylvania's Senate seat is very close. Toomey's one-point lead over McGinty (Toomey, 43%; McGinty, 42%) is well within the poll's margin of error. The sizable number of voters who say they remain undecided means that poll numbers will likely change – perhaps significantly – as voters make the final decision about how they will cast their votes.

## Retrospective Evaluations of Obama’s Performance as President

Donald Trump has on many occasions drawn comparisons between Clinton and Obama. In fact, his campaign has made a concerted effort to tie Clinton to the policies of the Obama Administration and its approach to leadership. In a close election such as this presidential election, voters will likely engage in a retrospective evaluation of Obama’s performance as president. For Clinton, this is not necessarily helpful in Pennsylvania. Majorities of Pennsylvania voters disapprove of how Obama has handled most key issues including the economy, trade with other nations, healthcare policy, immigration, race relations, foreign affairs, situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorism, and ISIS (see Table 1).

**Table 1. “As you may be aware, Barack Obama’s second term as president of the United States is coming to a close. I’m interested in learning whether you approve or disapprove of how he’s handled some key issues. Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of the way he’s handled the…”**

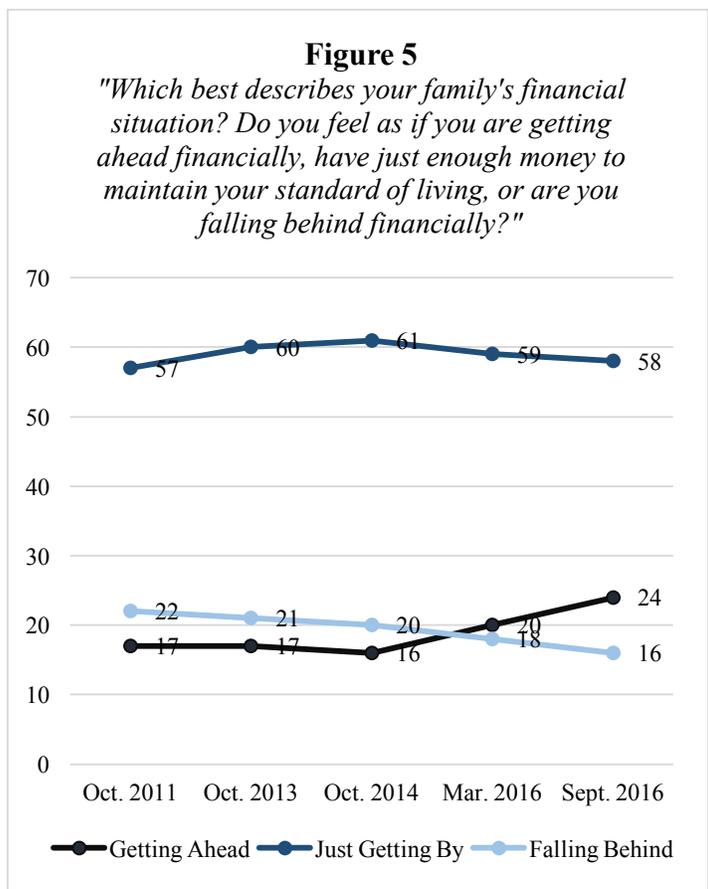
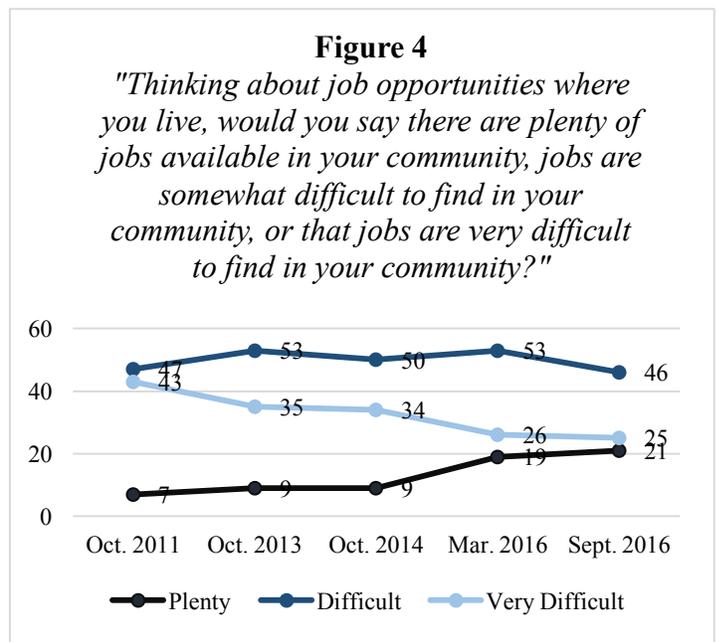
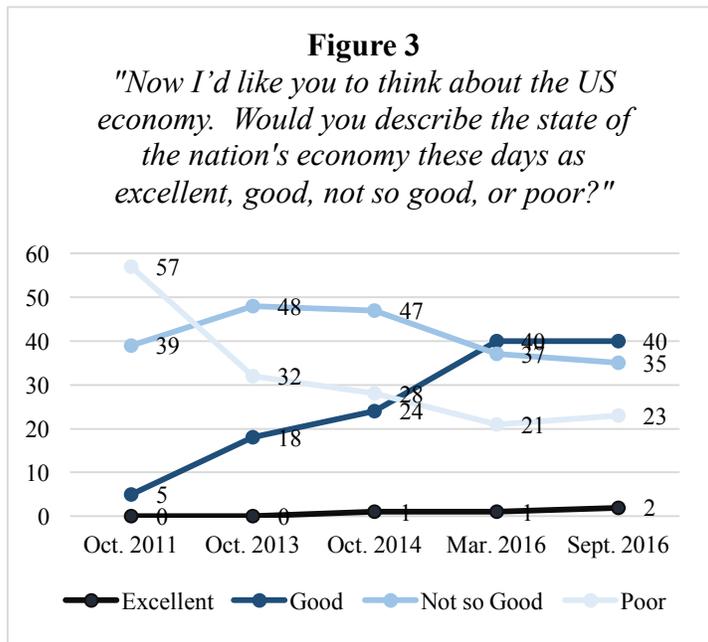
	Approve (%)	Disapprove (%)	Don’t Know (%)	Refused (%)
Economy	47	49	4	1
Trade with other nations	39	47	13	1
Healthcare policy	39	57	4	1
Immigration	41	54	5	0
Race relations	44	49	7	1
Climate change	49	36	14	1
Foreign affairs	43	51	5	1
Situation in Iraq	35	58	7	1
Situation in Afghanistan	35	58	7	1
Terrorism	41	53	5	2
ISIS	35	60	5	1

When asked whether, generally speaking, they approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama has done as president during the past eight years, Pennsylvania voters are split evenly (50% disapprove, 48% approve). When asked to grade Obama’s performance as president just like a teacher grades a student, Pennsylvania voters give him a “C.”

## The Economy, Jobs and Personal Financial Situation of Pennsylvania Voters

Although retrospective evaluations of the Obama Administration will likely help Trump’s effort to win Pennsylvania’s electoral votes, voters’ evaluation of the nation’s economy, job availability in their communities, and their personal financial situation offer hope for Clinton. Economic indicators are arguably the single most important variable for forecasting the outcome of presidential elections, and voters in Pennsylvania say that their perception of the state of the nation’s economy, availability

of jobs in their communities, and their personal financial situation is improving. When asked whether they would describe the state of the nation's economy as "excellent," "good," "not so good," or "poor," a plurality (40%) say "good" (see Figure 3). This number is identical to that of March 2016,



which marked the first time a plurality of voters described the state of the economy this way since we began asking the question in October 2011. While few voters say the economy is "excellent" (2%), fewer voters than at nearly any time since October 2011 say that it is "poor" (23% today, 57% in 2011).

In terms of the availability of jobs in their communities, a plurality of voters (46%) say that "jobs are somewhat difficult to find" (see Figure 4). Importantly, today voters are more likely to say that there are "plenty" of jobs in their community than they were just six months ago (21% today; 19% in March 2016) and less likely to say that jobs are "very difficult to find" (25% today; 26% in March 2016). Similarly, voters' perceptions of their financial situation has also seen some improvement since 2011 (see Figure 5). Today a majority of

voters (58%) say they "have just enough money to get by" (57% in 2011) and fewer voters say that they are "falling behind financially" (16% today; 22% in 2011). The number of voters saying they are "getting ahead financially" is higher than in 2011 (24% today; 17% in 2011).

## Frequency Report

*Interviews were completed with 420 likely voters in Pennsylvania. For a sample size of 420, there is a 95 percent probability that our survey results are within plus or minus 4.8 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 and age 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.*

How enthusiastic are you about voting in this year's presidential election? Would you say you are very enthusiastic, somewhat enthusiastic, not very enthusiastic, or not enthusiastic at all?

Very enthusiastic	44
Somewhat enthusiastic	23
Not very enthusiastic	20
Not enthusiastic at all	13
DK	0
RF	0

If the presidential election was held today, which candidate would you vote for? Would you vote for the Democrat Hillary Clinton, the Republican Donald Trump, the Libertarian Gary Johnson, the Green Party candidate Jill Stein, some other candidate, or are you unsure?

Clinton	42
Trump	41
Johnson	4
Stein	3
DK	9
RF	2

How about Pennsylvania's US Senator? If the Senate election was held today, which candidate would you vote for? Would you vote for the Republican Pat Toomey, the Democrat Katie McGinty, someone else, or are you unsure?

Toomey	43
McGinty	42
DK	15
RF	1

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 track	30
Wrong direction	63
DK	6
RF	1

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

Excellent	2
Good	40
Not so good	35
Poor	23
DK	0
RF	1

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 jobs	21
Somewhat difficult to find	46
Very difficult to find	25
DK	8
RF	0

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	24
Maintaining standard of living	58
Falling behind	16
DK	1
RF	1

Comparing your financial situation today to your financial situation in 2008, would you say you're better off today, worse off today, or in about the same financial situation as you were in 2008?

Better off	36
Worse off	26
In about the same financial situation	37
DK	1
RF	1

As you may be aware, Barack Obama's second term as president of the United States is coming to a close. I'm interested in learning whether you approve or disapprove of how he's handled some key issues.

Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of the way he's handled the economy?

Approve	47
Disapprove	49
DK	4
RF	1

How about the way he's handled trade with other nations?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	39
Disapprove	47
DK	13
RF	1

How about the way he's handled health care policy?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	39
Disapprove	57
DK	4
RF	1

How about the way he's handled immigration?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	41
Disapprove	54
DK	5
RF	0

How about the way he's handled race relations?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	44
Disapprove	49
DK	7
RF	1

How about the way he's handled climate change?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	49
Disapprove	36
DK	14
RF	1

How about the way he's handled foreign affairs?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	43
Disapprove	51
DK	5
RF	1

How about the way he's handled the situation in Iraq?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	35
Disapprove	58
DK	7
RF	1

How about the way he's handled the situation in Afghanistan?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	35
Disapprove	58
DK	7
RF	1

How about the way he's handled the issue of terrorism?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	41
Disapprove	53
DK	5
RF	2

How about the way he's handled the Islamic State, or ISIS?

[Generally speaking do you approve or disapprove of...]

Approve	35
Disapprove	60
DK	5
RF	1

Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama has done as President of the United States during the past eight years?

Approve	48
Disapprove	50
DK	3
RF	0

If you had to give Barack Obama a letter grade for the job he has done as president – just like the letter grades your teachers gave you when you were in school – what letter grade would that be?

Grade	Percent		Grade	Percent
A/A+	12		C	11
A-	5		C-	4
B+	6		D+	1
B	18		D	8
B-	5		D-	3
C+	2		F	26

Average Grade = C

Finally, I have a few questions that we'll be using for statistical purposes. Generally speaking, would you consider

yourself to be a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or have you not thought much about this?

Liberal	22
Conservative	30
Moderate	28
Have not thought much about it	17
DK	3
RF	0

Do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

Republican	41
Democrat	50
Independent	7
Other (volunteered)	3
DK	0
RF	0

In what year were you born?

18-29 years	14
30-39 years	13
40-49 years	15
50-69 years	40
70 and over	19

What is your marital status?

Single	21
Married	60
Divorced	7
Widowed	11
Other	0
DK	0
RF	0

If you add together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all the members of your household for the past year, what would the total be?

\$0-30,000	12
\$30,000-60,000	23
\$60,000-100,000	20
\$100,000-150,000	11
\$150,000 or more	10
DK	8
RF	15

What is your race?

White/Caucasian	88
Non-White	10
DK	0
RF	2

Gender [DO NOT ASK - JUST RECORD ANSWER]

Male	47
Female	53

## **Methodology**

This report summarizes the results of a survey of registered voters in Pennsylvania, which was conducted between September 12-23, 2016. During the 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 420 individuals were interviewed. For a sample size of 420, there is a 95 percent probability that the results are within plus or minus 4.8 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](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](http://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. 38<sup>th</sup> Street, Erie, PA, 16546, (814) 824-2154, [jmorris@mercyhurst.edu](mailto:jmorris@mercyhurst.edu).

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