

Pursuing Pennsylvania

A Look into What Gives in the Keystone State (October 2021)



SUMMARY



1. We have a fragile coalition in PA. We're losing men of color who often sound like Republicans (e.g. freedom, success, prosperity and wealth building) and feel that the Democratic party takes them for granted.
2. Pennsylvania voters feel stuck when it comes to being heard and getting things done. They're tired of old systems and old ways of doing things (e.g. red lining, unresponsive government, PennDot and the *&!*@ potholes) and want to build new roads to the future.
3. Voters' patience is running thin with the admin's lack of progress. They're tired of paying too much and waiting too long, creating opportunities for Republicans. They want the admin to deliver, take off the kid gloves and fight.
4. We need to speak to and make policies around the two big dreams our voters hold - accessible, affordable healthcare for all and being financially free and able to thrive.
5. PA voters prioritize family and education, and have a lot of lingering anxiety about COVID and paying the bills - all areas Democrats could tap into.



CRITICAL WATCHOUT FOR DEMOCRATS

It would be remiss of us not to mention that **men of color are spending a lot of time talking about wealth building, financial prosperity and success and talk about freedom from government.** They express a desire to be free of things that slow them down (which includes racism, red lining, poor educational opportunities and excess regulation), they want to be invested in and they want to be given the same opportunities as everyone.

They also **talk a lot about a Democratic Party that takes them for granted and wants the party to deliver for them, but doesn't.**



CRITICAL OPPORTUNITY FOR DEMOCRATS

The importance of freedom to Americans has been well-established, and the current systems in place in **Pennsylvania are keeping people from being free with old roads, old systems, and old ideas holding people back and holding them down.**

Democrats have an opportunity to deliver **freedom of opportunity** by improving PA's roads and bridges by improving its educational system from pre-K on up, and by addressing red lining, ensuring a better future for all Pennsylvanians. They also have an opportunity to deliver **financial freedom**, by increasing the minimum wage, by reducing or eliminating the threat of financial ruin that's just one cancer diagnosis away with healthcare reform, and by finding a way to reduce or eliminate the burden of student loans. Finally, they have the opportunity to deliver **freedom to thrive** by making the justice system fair for everyone and eliminate the undue burden put on voters of color to be treated equally.



What Pennsylvanians Want

Critical Issues and Ideal Leaders

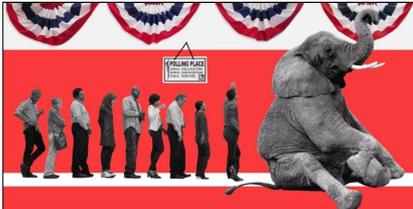


Keeping PA Moving

By and far, the biggest gripe Pennsylvanians have with their government is poor infrastructure management. Citing roads in terrible shape, tolls for that should be making roads better but aren't, high parking permits, the nation's second highest gas tax, and the inability to accommodate increased traffic, all in the midst of climate-induced flooding and hail storms, our voters couldn't stop talking about how it should be so much better, but isn't. And how we should be prepared for the future, but aren't. Keeping PA moving wasn't just about smooth roads, but also the ability to access smooth, fast broadband that could help them access better opportunities. The desire for meaningful infrastructure that helps keep Pennsylvanians moving is real.



What Pennsylvanians Want



Dynamic, Responsive Government



With Philadelphia known as the cradle of US democracy, one would think that the Pennsylvania government would feel and be representative, however, according to our voters, it is anything but.

Voters expressed deep frustrations at the calcified state of things in PA, highlighting the “backwards thinking,” and “broken political system” where rural areas were overrepresented, where corruption, waste and fraud ruled and where politicians were not held accountable.

This also showed up in conversations about taxes (you should get something for them) and the legacy of red lining, highlighting the inheritance of bad systems that clogged democracy, inhibited opportunity, and held the state (and its people) back.

What Pennsylvanians Want



A Healthier Pennsylvania

Like everywhere else in America, the pandemic was a source of deep irritation and frustration for our voters who spoke passionately about taking definitive action to end the pandemic, even it meant getting a little aggressive with vaccinations and mandatory mask wearing. (NOTE: this did not include shutting down the economy which was a HUGE worry for our voters).

Our voters also wanted to open up access to high quality, free/affordable healthcare and RX to everyone and to tackle health issues on an environmental level to ensure a healthier environment to live in (e.g: industrial pollution that impact air quality and health, climate change issues which impact food supply and public health, and issues with clean, lead-free water).

What Pennsylvanians Want





The PA Pocketbook



While it wasn't **all about the money**, for our voters, it certainly was up there among their key concerns. Voters cited concerns with **the high cost of living**, including **the cost of healthcare, housing and vehicle prices, and high student loans**, as well as concerns with **property/state/local taxes (in particular, the gas tax) being too high**.

Voters also talked about **higher paying jobs**, wanting places where they could work, **make a decent living and have more rights** on the job. They wanted to see their **tax dollars used right**, citing the state pension bankruptcy, and the **lack of social safety net in the state**, and the feeling that gambling revenues should be offsetting taxes but seemed to be disappearing.

What Pennsylvanians Want



A More Just Justice System

Voters expressed a strong desire for a more just and effective justice system, indicating the lack of accountability and presence of corruption that made it hard to get the justice they deserved.

Many indicated the desire for better policing, expressing frustration over increases in crime (in Philly) and in gun violence, in bad treatment of African-Americans by the police, and in the presence of “junkies on the street.”

On this issue, with some advocating for better funding of the police, whereas for others, better training to deal with people from different backgrounds. Many wanted some form of police reform.





A Better Educated PA



Lastly, voters expressed a keen desire for better education across the state, not just for kids, but for the population-at-large.

A number of voters bemoaned the susceptibility of their fellow citizens to misinformation (caused by, they perceived, their lack of education), and shared that without a better educated populace and critical thinking skills, Pennsylvania would be held back and unable to tackle the tough problems it faced.

Voters were looking for a way to secure a better future for themselves and their kids through education, and wanted the ability to obtain that and make it easier to access (through vouchers and free lunch for kids).

What Pennsylvanians Want

Reflecting on your own financial situation, which statement best reflects you and your current situation:

I'm **keeping pace**, **ahead**, or **falling behind** the current cost of living.

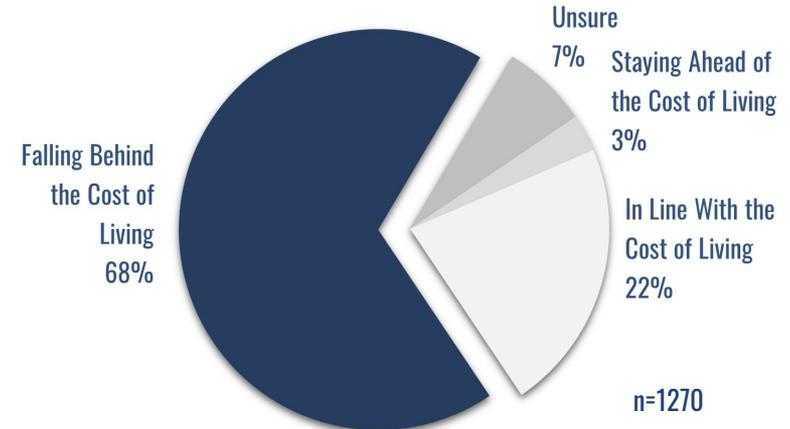
63% of participants said they are **keeping pace** with the current cost of living.

11% of participants said they are **ahead of** the current cost of living.

26% of participants said they are **falling behind** the current cost of living.

FEELINGS ON THE CURRENT COST OF LIVING

NOTE: This finding conflicts with our polling, which suggests that 68% of PA voters indicate they are falling behind the cost of living. July 2021, n=1270



WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK OF PENNSYLVANIA IN THE TIME OF COVID?

While all our participants felt the impact of the pandemic, many lauded Gov. Wolf and the state's imperfect, but largely effective approach to keep them safe.

Wolf Kept Us Safe

"In the early days of COVID our state worked hard to provide necessary aid for everyone, including Food Banks, Clothing, and updates to vaccine availability. It was very encouraging to see state and local governments come together."

- Carol, Small College Town

"He tried to keep everything together during COVID. How he tried to make communities aware of what was going on, and was consistent even with the backlash he received. People were more worried about their money than they were about people's lives."

- Angela, Allegheny/Philadelphia

But it Wasn't All Roses

"I wish they gave out more stimulus checks. Especially for front line workers. Since I was furloughed, I was able to receive the assistance, but it sucked seeing people that were still working struggling." - Monika, Small College Town

"When Governor Wolf shut down Pennsylvania due to COVID-19, it did mean loss of income for me however at least my health and well-being was being taken into consideration." - Vicki, Small College Town

"Vaccination sites were easily accessible and easy to get in. I just wish more could have been done to push the non-believers. There are still too many non vaccinated." - Stephanie, Small College Town

AS I HEAD INTO THE 2022 ELECTION, I KEEP THINKING THAT **DEMOCRATS NEED TO DELIVER**

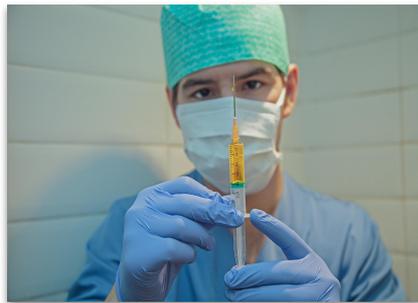
HEADING INTO 2022



On Pocketbook Issues

I would like to see someone who will **help cut the rising inflation and costs. Gas prices are ridiculous** and I don't see anyone even talking about this issue.”

- Debbie, Small College Town



On Healthcare Reform

“**Healthcare** is really, really, really big for me. **Too many people are going into debt and dying not being able to pay their health care bills.** That doesn't bode well for society.”- Kristina, Allegheny/Philadelphia



On the Environment

What's very important to me in the next election is... **cleaning up the environment.** Please, it's well needed. We do live here.”

- Maria, Allegheny/Philadelphia



On Reproductive Rights

“I want a candidate who will be pro-women's health and **fight for policies like Roe V. Wade.**”

- Carol, Small College Town

PENNSYLVANIA'S IDEAL LEADER

What they are calling out for...

01

A Human Bowling Ball

Someone born and bred in PA who gets and loves the state, but can disrupt the system, shake things up, and move PA forward.

03

A Level-Upper

Someone who treats PA as well as leaders in PA are treated. Builds equal opportunities for all Pennsylvanians and invests in their future.

05

A Pragmatist

Appreciates the broad swatch of experiences and governs not for some, but for all.

02

A Fixer-Upper

Someone who cares and attends to areas and issues of the state that need it (e.g., opiate addiction, build up of infrastructure including broadband and road conditions, fixing redlined areas).

04

An Agile, Responsive Leader

Someone who is transparent, does deep listening, authentically represents, and votes on behalf of constituent concerns. Someone who can restore, dynamic responsive government.



THE RESEARCH TEAM

GRETCHEN BARTON is the Research Director for Future Majority and Principal at Worthy Strategy Group, LLC. With a special interest in the psychology underpinning behavior change, Gretchen has designed and delivered a number of initiatives in the policy space, including hazing behavior and how to stop it, and most recently, poverty in America for the Gates Foundation.

She has led research and served as a behavioral science strategist for major organizations and campaigns (e.g. the NFL, NextGen, New Moral Majority, Ideas 42, Way to Win and others), uncovering key messaging insights to turn out the youth vote, revealing voters' deepest hopes and dreams for presidential campaigns, and unearthing deep insights for key organizers in the build up to the 2020 election. She recently researched and released "Winning the Future: A Deep Dive into the Unconscious Minds of Voters" in partnership with Wide Angle Research to help understand this strategic moment in American history,

Gretchen holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Communications and Planning Campaigns with distinction in research from Cornell University. She has written for the Journal of College Student Development and the American Journal of Health Behavior, and co-authored, "Prevalence and Profiling: Hazing Among College Students and Points of Intervention." She recently co-authored "The Science of Winning with Stories: Using Agency, Urgency, and Community," a reflection on the most effective messaging to engage and move a populace.

With a new approach, we have a pathway to winning in Pennsylvania. But it won't be easy.

This is just the one of many steps to better understand what's happening in our states. For more information and/or to get involved in future work, please email:

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