



2020 Ram Poll

Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education

Presidential Election Survey

Summary of Findings

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KEY FINDINGS

(OCTOBER 12-18, 2020, n=1676)

The 2020 Ram Poll received 1676 responses from undergraduate students attending 13 universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. In all, 94% of the undergraduate students indicate that they are registered to vote. Of those who are registered, 33% are Republican, 50% are Democrat and 14% are Independent. PASSHE students are very enthusiastic about this election with 86% stating that they will certainly vote or have already voted.

For the presidential election, 58% of PASSHE undergraduate students favor Vice President Joe Biden, with 31% choosing President Trump. About 7% of the students in the sample are undecided and 4% chose “other.” At 7%, this proportion is nearly the same as the most recent NY Times/Siena Poll of Pennsylvania that had “Don’t know/Undecided” at 8%.¹ One intrepid student entered Kanye West as their preferred candidate, even though he is not on the ballot in Pennsylvania.

Students were asked to rate the job performance for both Governor Tom Wolf and President Donald Trump. Governor Wolf fared much better, with 46% rating his performance as “excellent” or “good.” Meanwhile, 56% of students feel that President Trump has done “a poor job.” While Wolf’s approval rating is split, his administration has recently proposed legalizing

¹ <https://scri.siena.edu/2020/10/03/the-new-york-times-siena-college-battleground-polls-florida-and-pennsylvania/>



recreational marijuana in Pennsylvania. A large majority of students (74%) believe it should be legal. This overwhelming support among young people may help in his efforts to change the policy.

Finally, in the battle for Best Convenience Store in Pennsylvania, Sheetz (50%) beat Wawa (34%). Thirteen percent of students like both stores, and 3% like neither. Perhaps one of those “like neither” students is the same individual supporting Kanye West.

INTERESTING CROSSTABULATIONS

VOTE CHOICE BY CAMPUS (N=1502)

This is the inaugural PASSHE-wide Ram Poll, so it only makes sense that we would share responses by campus. Vice President Joe Biden maintains a lead at all campuses except Lock Haven University. Sample sizes per campus are included in the table. It should be noted that many sample sizes are small.

CAMPUS (<i>N</i>)	BIDEN	TRUMP	OTHER/DON'T KNOW
BLOOMSBURG (<i>156</i>)	55%	37%	8%
CALIFORNIA (<i>111</i>)	59%	32%	9%
CLARION (<i>45</i>)	49%	42%	9%
EAST STROUDSBURG (<i>83</i>)	60%	24%	16%
EDINBORO (<i>62</i>)	50%	32%	18%
INDIANA (<i>150</i>)	62%	28%	10%
KUTZTOWN (<i>103</i>)	62%	23%	19%
LOCK HAVEN (<i>38</i>)	34%	53%	13%
MANSFIELD (<i>29</i>)	45%	35%	20%
MILLERSVILLE (<i>171</i>)	57%	32%	11%
SHIPPENSBURG (<i>135</i>)	58%	32%	10%
SLIPPERY ROCK (<i>143</i>)	53%	39%	8%
WEST CHESTER (<i>276</i>)	68%	23%	9%

VOTE CHOICE BY REGION (N=1502)

Each respondent's county of permanent residence was recorded and aggregated to its respective region of Pennsylvania. Regions are described in Appendix table A2. Former Vice President Joe Biden leads in every region. One in five PASSHE students hail from the Dutch region, and 59% of these students support Biden, with only 30% supporting the incumbent President Trump.

While Biden's share in Philadelphia is the highest at 71%, only 31 students make up the Philadelphia sample. The Central region is the closest margin, where the vote differential is less than the margin of error.

	BIDEN	TRUMP	OTHER	DON'T KNOW
ALLEGHENY (108)	57%	33%	3%	7%
PHILADELPHIA (31)	71%	13%	7%	10%
SOUTHEAST (310)	68%	24%	3%	5%
NORTHEAST (219)	60%	25%	6%	9%
DUTCH (372)	59%	30%	4%	7%
WEST (234)	54%	35%	6%	6%
CENTRAL (228)	45%	44%	4%	8%

MODE OF VOTING BY PARTY (N=1502)

In 2016, 57.2 million voters either voted early or by mail.² That number has increased considerably this year, both nationally and in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania passed a law in 2019 allowing individuals to cast a mail ballot without needing an excuse. This, along with the concerns of in-person voting during a global pandemic, is driving the VBM choice in our state. We asked students to disclose their method of voting, which is cross tabulated by party in the table below. We considered “By mail” to be either mailing a ballot or submitting a mail ballot in person at an Election Center. VBM held a higher percentage with Democratic students (52%) than Republican students (18%), perhaps not surprising given the emphasis placed on VBM by the Democrats as well as Republican negative rhetoric, such as President Trump’s claims of potential fraud.

METHOD OF VOTING	DEMOCRATIC	REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT	OTHER	OVERALL
BY MAIL	52%	18%	33%	33%	34%
IN PERSON	48%	82%	67%	68%	66%

² www.eac.gov/documents/2017/10/17/eavs-deep-dive-early-absentee-and-mail-voting-data-statutory-overview.

VOTE CHOICE BY SEX (N=1502)

PASSHE undergraduate women in our poll prefer Biden to Trump by 40 percentage points (65%-25%). This gap exceeds the gap in the most recent CNN/SSRS Pennsylvania Poll. CNN found a Biden 59%-39% advantage among women.³ President Trump's strongest support is among undergraduate men, who still prefer Biden by 6%.

	BIDEN	TRUMP	OTHER	DON'T KNOW
WOMEN	65%	25%	3%	7%
MEN	47%	41%	7%	6%
OVERALL	58%	31%	4%	7%

³ http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2020/images/10/21/rella_pa.pdf

VOTE CHOICE BY FIRST-GEN (N=1502)

Many state polls missed in 2016 because results were not weighted by education. Clinton received strong support from college-educated voters, while non-college voters chose Trump. Pollsters at the time found more college graduates answering phones, so their results skewed toward Clinton. We cannot investigate the education divide with Ram Poll data, as all of our respondents are college students. But we can look for difference of candidate choice between students who are “first-generation” college students and those who are not. A “First-gen” (FG) student is defined as the first member of the family to attend college.⁴ They are the children of non-college graduates. From our data, we see a slight difference. First-generation college students prefer Biden by 23%, while non-FG students prefer Biden by 28%.

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT?	BIDEN	TRUMP	OTHER	DON'T KNOW
YES-FG	57%	34%	4%	8%
NO-FG	59%	31%	4%	6%
OVERALL	58%	31%	4%	7%

⁴ <https://firstgen.naspa.org/blog/defining-first-generation>

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY BY SEX (N=1605)

Each student was asked about their political ideology. Few students (10%) were unsure about where they stand. Overall, the proportions are close with liberal and moderate both at 35% and conservatives at 20%. Females lean more liberal (42%) and moderate (31%). Most male students say they are ideologically moderate (42%); the remaining male students are split between liberal and conservative at 24% and 28% respectively.

	LIBERAL	MODERATE	CONSERVATIVE	DON'T KNOW
FEMALE	42%	31%	15%	12%
MALE	24%	42%	28%	6%
OVERALL	35%	35%	20%	10%

TRUST IN POLLS BY PARTY (N=1676)

The 2016 presidential election shook voters' faith in election polls. Many forecasters predicted a Clinton win. Combine this with recent rhetoric from candidates about polls being "phony"⁵ and "unfair"⁶ and it stands to reason that trust in election polls would be low. We asked the question, "How much do you trust public opinion polls?" The responses to this question are cross tabulated with Party in the table below. When combining the categories "A great deal" and "A good amount," trust in polls is higher with Democratic students (63%) than Republican students (39%), indicating that the opinions of Republican students may have been influenced by the rhetoric of their candidate.

TRUST IN POLLS	DEMOCRATIC	REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT	OTHER	OVERALL
A GREAT DEAL	3%	3%	4%	5%	3%
A GOOD AMOUNT	60%	36%	49%	38%	50%
NOT VERY MUCH	35%	51%	39%	45%	41%
NOT AT ALL	2%	11%	9%	13%	6%

⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/10/politics/trump-campaign-cnn-poll/index.html>

⁶ <https://americanindependent.com/donald-trump-polls-2020-election-joe-biden-white-house-cnn/>



METHODOLOGY

POPULATION OF INTEREST

Our intention is to capture the opinions of Pennsylvania college students. The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) is comprised of 14 universities across the state. The PASSHE system universities “enroll the largest number of Pennsylvania residents among all four-year colleges and universities in the Commonwealth.”⁷ Over 80,000 students currently attend PASSHE schools. Students who attend and graduate from PASSHE schools are likely to be lifetime Pennsylvania residents, so capturing their political opinions may give an indication of which direction the state is moving. This year, 13 of the 14 universities agreed to participate in the 2020 Ram Poll. They are listed in Table A1 the Appendix. **Our target population was undergraduate students who are permanent Pennsylvania residents above the age of 18.**

SURVEY

The survey findings in this report are based on a web-based survey conducted between October 12, 2020 and October 18, 2020. We obtained random samples of email addresses from each participating university from the PASSHE Advanced Data Analytics Office. All email addresses were taken from our target population; the sample excluded out-of-state and international students as well as any students not of voting age.

Over 13,000 students received an email on Monday, October 12 with a link to the Qualtrics

⁷ <https://www.passhe.edu/About/Pages/About.aspx>



survey. The initial email and all reminder emails are contained in a separate document and are available upon request. Each email explained that the survey was about the upcoming Presidential election, that it would take no longer than 3 minutes to complete, and that upon completion they would be entered into a raffle for a chance to win a \$25 Amazon gift card. The incentive was funded by a research grant from the West Chester University Provost office. The survey closed at 12:00 pm on Sunday, October 18.

SAMPLE SIZE

The resulting sample size was $n = 1676$ students. Our response rate was 12.6%. Our sample of 1676 students represent 2.3% of the target population.

STUDENTS NOT REGISTERED TO VOTE

At the beginning of the survey, students were asked if they are registered to vote. If they answered no, they were not permitted to answer the questions about voting (candidate, party and voting mode). As a result, the sample sizes for those questions are less than $n=1676$, but 94% of the students said that they are registered to vote, so the reduction in sample size is minimal.

WEIGHTING

The purpose of weighting survey data is to rectify an imbalance between the target population and the sample data. If the sample does not match the population for variables that are suspected to affect responses (like sex and race), weighting can fix that imbalance. However, weighting is not “free.” The cost of weighting survey data is larger margins of error and reduced accuracy.



For the 2020 Ram Poll, we considered weighting based on sex, race, and region of the state of permanent residence because we believed that these variables might influence a respondent's choices. In calculating our sample proportions for these variables and comparing them to the population values though, we found that the disparities were minimal. Our sample, in fact, closely matches our population. As a result, we chose not to weight the data. The population and sample proportions for region, sex, and race are found in the Appendix in tables A2 through A4. All demographic data for the population were obtained from Dr. Kate Akers' team in the PASSHE Data Analytics Office.

MARGIN OF ERROR CALCULATIONS

QUESTIONS	N	MARGIN OF ERROR
REG, TRUST	1676	+/- 2.44%
RATEGOV, RATEPRES, IDEO, WAWA, CANNABIS	1605	+/- 2.50%
VOTENOV, MODE, VOTEPRES	1502	+/- 2.58%

MARGINAL FREQUENCIES

TRUST – How much do you trust public opinion polls?

3%	<i>A great deal</i>
49%	<i>A good amount</i>
41%	<i>Not very much</i>
7%	<i>Not at all</i>

REG - Some people are registered to vote in Pennsylvania, and many others are not. Are you currently registered to vote in Pennsylvania?

94%	<i>Yes</i>
6%	<i>No</i>

PARTY - Are you currently registered as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else?

33%	<i>Republican</i>
50%	<i>Democrat</i>
14%	<i>Independent</i>
3%	<i>Something else</i>

VOTENOV - What would you say are the chances that you will vote in the November election?

86%	<i>Certain to vote or already voted</i>
12%	<i>Probably vote</i>
1%	<i>Will probably not vote</i>
0%	<i>Will not vote</i>
1%	<i>Do not know</i>

ADDRESS - At which address are you registered to vote?

9%	<i>School residence</i>
89%	<i>Permanent residence</i>
2%	<i>Other address</i>



MODE - If you intend to vote, how will you vote?

62%	<i>In person</i>
38%	<i>By mail</i>

VOTEPRES – If the 2020 election for President of the United States were being held today, for whom would you vote?

31%	<i>Donald Trump (R)</i>
58%	<i>Joe Biden (D)</i>
7%	<i>Do not know</i>
4%	<i>Other</i>

RATEGOV - How would you rate the way that Tom Wolf is handling his job as Governor?

11%	<i>Excellent job</i>
35%	<i>Good job</i>
24%	<i>Only a fair job</i>
25%	<i>A poor job</i>
6%	<i>Do not know</i>

RATEPRES - How would you rate the way that Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

12%	<i>Excellent job</i>
17%	<i>Good job</i>
14%	<i>Only a fair job</i>
56%	<i>A poor job</i>
1%	<i>Do not know</i>

IDEO - Politically speaking, do you consider yourself to be a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative?

35%	<i>Liberal</i>
35%	<i>Moderate</i>
20%	<i>Conservative</i>
10%	<i>Do not know</i>

CANNABIS – Do you think the Pennsylvania state legislature should pass a law to make marijuana legal, or not?

74%	<i>Yes</i>
15%	<i>No</i>
12%	<i>I don't know</i>

WAWA- Pick one: Sheetz or Wawa.

34%	<i>Wawa</i>
50%	<i>Sheetz</i>
13%	<i>I like both</i>
3%	<i>I don't like either</i>

FIRSTGEN - Are you a first-generation college student?

66%	<i>Yes</i>
34%	<i>No</i>

REGION - In which region of the state is your permanent residence?

7%	<i>Allegheny</i>
2%	<i>Philadelphia</i>
20%	<i>Southeast</i>
15%	<i>Northeast</i>
25%	<i>Dutch</i>
16%	<i>West</i>
15%	<i>Central</i>

MOBILITY – How long have you lived at your permanent residence?

1%	<i>less than 1 month</i>
4%	<i>1 to 6 months</i>
1%	<i>7 to 11 months</i>
8%	<i>1 to 2 years</i>
8%	<i>3 to 4 years</i>
77%	<i>5 years or longer</i>

1% *Don't know/refused to answer*

RACE – Which of the following categories best describes your racial or ethnic background?

4% *Hispanic*
 84% *White*
 6% *Black or African American*
 3% *Asian*
 3% *Other*

REL - What is your religious affiliation, if any?

18% *Catholic*
 36% *Christian*
 1% *Jewish*
 1% *Muslim*
 38% *No religion*
 4% *another religion*

SEX- What is your legal sex?

63% *Male*
 37% *Female*

NUDGE - If you are not registered to vote, you can still do so until October 19th. Registering to vote online is easy at VotesPA.com. It takes only a few minutes. You will need your driver's license or social security number. Knowing this, will you now register to vote?

93% *I am already registered to vote.*
 3% *Yes! I will register to vote.*
 2% *No, I do not want to register.*
 3% *I'm still thinking about it.*

APPENDIX

TABLE A1 PARTICIPATING PASSHE UNIVERSITIES

<i>PASSHE CAMPUS</i>	<i>TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT</i>	<i>PROPORTION OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT</i>
<i>BLOOMSBURG</i>	7992	9.94%
<i>CALIFORNIA</i>	4856	6.04%
<i>CLARION</i>	3776	4.69%
<i>EAST STROUDSBURG</i>	5417	6.74%
<i>EDINBORO</i>	3399	4.23%
<i>INDIANA</i>	8567	10.65%
<i>KUTZTOWN</i>	7204	8.96%
<i>LOCK HAVEN</i>	2752	3.42%
<i>MANSFIELD</i>	1660	2.06%
<i>MILLERSVILLE</i>	6794	8.45%
<i>SHIPPENSBURG</i>	5286	6.57%
<i>SLIPPERY ROCK</i>	7468	9.29%
<i>WEST CHESTER</i>	14637	18.20%

TABLE A2 SEX DISTRIBUTION

<i>SEX</i>	<i>POPULATION PROPORTION</i>	<i>SAMPLE PROPORTION</i>
<i>FEMALE</i>	59.9%	62.8%
<i>MALE</i>	40.1%	37.2%

TABLE A3 REGION ASSIGNMENT

<i>REGION</i>	<i>COUNTIES</i>	<i>POPULATION PROPORTION</i>	<i>SAMPLE PROPORTION</i>
<i>ALLEGHENY</i>	<i>Allegheny</i>	<i>6.7%</i>	<i>6.9%</i>
<i>PHILADELPHIA</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>5.5%</i>	<i>2.1%</i>
<i>SOUTHEAST</i>	<i>Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery</i>	<i>22.5%</i>	<i>20.1%</i>
<i>NORTHEAST</i>	<i>Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne, Wyoming</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>14.5%</i>
<i>DUTCH</i>	<i>Adams, Berks, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry, York</i>	<i>19.9%</i>	<i>25.3%</i>
<i>WEST</i>	<i>Beaver, Butler, Cambria, Crawford, Erie, Fayette, Greene, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland</i>	<i>16.1%</i>	<i>15.7%</i>
<i>CENTRAL</i>	<i>Armstrong, Bedford, Blair, Bradford, Cameron, Centre, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Columbia, Elk, Forest, Fulton, Huntingdon, Indiana, Jefferson, Juniata, Lycoming, McKean, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga, Union, Venango, Warren</i>	<i>15.3%</i>	<i>15.4%</i>

TABLE A4 RACE DISTRIBUTION

<i>RACE</i>	<i>POPULATION PROPORTION</i>	<i>SAMPLE PROPORTION</i>
<i>ASIAN</i>	<i>1.8%</i>	<i>2.6%</i>
<i>BLACK</i>	<i>7.4%</i>	<i>6.2%</i>
<i>HISPANIC</i>	<i>4.2%</i>	<i>4.3%</i>
<i>OTHER</i>	<i>8.3%</i>	<i>2.8%</i>
<i>WHITE</i>	<i>78.4%</i>	<i>84.1%</i>

