2024 Ram Poll

Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education

Election Survey

Summary of Findings

Prepared by:

WCU Election Poll Team

Laura Pyott, M.S.   Shannon McQueen, Ph.D.

Student Researchers:

Nicole Blackburn   Ezana Rivers

Molly Groff   Nicholas Cantando Jackson Lauter

Jeff Smarkola   Michael Thais   May Boucher

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KEY Findings

(OCTOBER 7-16, 2024, N=1048)

The 2024 Ram Poll received 1048 responses from undergraduate students attending ten universities at 14 campuses in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). In all, 95% of the responding students indicate that they are registered to vote. Of those who are registered, 31% are Republican, 53% are Democrat and 14% are non-affiliated. (Throughout the report, we will refer to these students as Independent.) PASSHE students are enthusiastic about this election with nearly 95% stating that they will probably or certainly vote, or that they have already voted. This is the highest enthusiasm metric the Ram Poll has ever seen (89% in 2022,[1] 86% in 2020.[2])

We asked students who they would be voting for in the upcoming election. We allowed students who said they were not registered to respond, in the hope that they would register and vote. For President, 60% of PASSHE undergraduate students favor Democrat Vice President Kamala Harris, 33% chose the Republican Donald Trump , 3% choose "other" and 4% said "do not know". We challenged students who replied "do not know" to choose a candidate. The results change to 62% for Harris, 33% for Trump, and 3% "other" with 2% still undecided. In 2020, PASSHE students chose Biden with 58% over Trump with 31%, with 7% undecided (see Footnote 1).

For the U.S. Senator election, 53% of students chose the incumbent senator Bob Casey, 26% of students chose Republican Dave McCormick, and 19% of students do not know. Again, we pressed students who replied "do not know" to choose a candidate. The results change to 56% for Casey, 29% for McCormick, with 13% still undecided. This is similar to previous Ram Polls; students are unfamiliar with candidates for U.S. Senate. The undecideds were 22% in the 2018 Casey/Barletta race and 18% in the 2022 Fetterman/Oz race.

Regarding voting mode, 66% of students said they would vote in person. Additionally, 84% will vote at their home address.

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[1] 2022 Ram Poll Report: https://www.wcupa.edu/sciences-mathematics/mathematics/documents/Ram%20Poll%20Report%202022.pdf

[2] 2020 Ram Poll Report: https://www.wcupa.edu/sciences-mathematics/mathematics/documents/RamPollReport492021.pdf

Election integrity

Students were asked about their confidence in the integrity of the 2024 election, specifically that the votes will be accurately counted. Eighty percent of students reported feeling somewhat (42%) or very confident (38%) in that election outcome, while 16% of students were not too confident in election outcomes, and around 4% of students expressed no confidence. These responses are associated with party identity as 96% of Democrats are somewhat or very confident, compared to 56% of Republicans who are somewhat or very confident.

Student debt

As student debt is a particularly salient topic in the media throughout 2024 and is a topic relevant to the college student population, students were asked about their own experience and preferences for student debt policies and candidates. The majority of students will have some debt when they graduate, with 52% expecting to have more than $10,000 and 17% with less than $10,000. 21% of students will have no debt when finished with college, and only 10% are not sure what their debt status will be. When asked if they would be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who supports policies to cancel student debt, about 57% are more likely to vote for the candidate compared to 9% who are less likely. For 28% of students, this would not impact their vote and only 6% of students are unsure. Relatedly, 58% of students believe the government should do more to help students pay off debt, while 21% believe addressing student debt is not under the government's purview.

Issues

Finally, students were asked how important certain issues are to them when making Election Day choices. The response options were "very important", "somewhat important", "not too important", and "not important at all" for a list of 16 issues. The top issues that students found "very important" were education (74%), healthcare (69%), the economy (68%), and abortion (65%). Meanwhile, the policies at the bottom of the list were vaccine mandates (21%), energy policies (35%), and the Electoral College (36%).

When asked to rank their three most important issues, students most frequently chose the economy (22%), then abortion (17%), education (9%), health care (9%), and climate change (8%) as their top priority. The issues that were most frequently ranked in the top three were the economy, with 47% of students choosing it as their first, second, or third priority, and abortion at 44%.

Interesting crosstabulations
Vote Choice by Region-U.S. President

Each respondent's county of permanent residence was recorded and aggregated to its respective region of Pennsylvania. Regions are described in Appendix table A3.

Vice President Harris leads with a majority in every region except for the Central. The Central region has the closest margin, where Donald Trump's advantage is 2%. **These values include leaners.** Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

REGION (N)	HARRIS	TRUMP	OTHER	DON'T KNOW
ALLEGHENY *(53)*	69%	26%	2%	3%
PHILADELPHIA *(16)*	82%	14%	0%	4%
SOUTHEAST *(253)*	65%	30%	5%	1%
NORTHEAST *(145)*	66%	25%	7%	3%
DUTCH *(240)*	65%	31%	2%	3%
WEST *(154)*	56%	41%	2%	1%
CENTRAL *(187)*	47%	49%	2%	2%

Vote Choice by Region-U.S. Senator

Senator Bob Casey leads in every region, with a majority in every region except for the Central. Many students are unsure of their choice, with "Don't know" response ranging from 11% to 21%. The Central region has the closest margin, where the differential is 3%. **These values include leaners.** Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

REGION (N)	CASEY	MCCORMICK	OTHER	DON'T KNOW
ALLEGHENY *(53)*	62%	23%	2%	13%
PHILADELPHIA *(16)*	60%	14%	6%	21%
SOUTHEAST *(253)*	59%	27%	1%	13%
NORTHEAST *(145)*	63%	18%	1%	18%
DUTCH *(240)*	58%	28%	2%	12%
WEST *(154)*	50%	37%	2%	11%
CENTRAL *(187)*	45%	42%	0%	12%

Party support for candidates

Students who are registered to a political party generally support their party's candidate. Only 1% of students who say they are registered Democrats voice support for Trump. Meanwhile, 6% of Republican students voice support for Harris. Independents break for Harris 66% to 21%.

CANDIDATE	DEMOCRATIC	REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT
HARRIS	97%	6%	66%
TRUMP	1%	91%	21%
OTHER/DNK	2%	3%	13%

Voting mode by party

Pennsylvania passed a law in 2019 allowing individuals to cast a mail ballot without needing an excuse. In the 2020 election, over 2.6 million votes were cast by mail and counted in the Commonwealth[3]. That number fell to about 1.2 million for the 2022 election[4]. We asked students about 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. Vote by mail (VBM) held a higher percentage with Democratic students (42%) than Republican students (24%), perhaps not surprising given the emphasis placed on VBM by the Democrats and negative rhetoric and complaints of "fraud" by Republicans.

Most students have stated that they will vote in person. However, Independent and Democratic students are more likely to vote by mail. We have seen a difference in mail voting by party in previous surveys: 41% D vs. 14% R in 2022 and 52% D vs. 18% R in 2020.

METHOD OF VOTING	DEMOCRATIC	REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT
BY MAIL	42%	24%	30%
IN PERSON	58%	76%	70%

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[3] Pennsylvania Department of State website: https://www.dos.pa.gov/VotingElections/BEST/Pages/BEST-Election-Stats.aspx

[4] PA Statewide 2022 Early & Absentee Vote Report https://targetearly.targetsmart.com/g2022?state=PA&view_type=state

Confidence in election integrity by party

We ask students their opinion of election integrity. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, "false claims of fraud are driving attempts to interfere with the independent, nonpartisan counting of votes and certification of election results."[5] Specifically, we asked the question: *How confident are you that, across the country, the votes will be accurately cast and counted in this year's election?* The crosstabulation below examines the association between confidence in election integrity and party.

CONFIDENCE	DEMOCRATIC (N=516)	REPUBLICAN (N=332)	INDEPENDENT (N=128)	GREEN (N=6)	LIBERTARIAN (N=7)
VERY CONFIDENT	58%	11%	30%	16%	42%
SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	38%	45%	50%	69%	11%
NOT TOO CONFIDENT	4%	36%	17%	0%	21%
NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT	0%	8%	3%	15%	26%

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[5] *Election Integrity*: https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/defend-our-elections/election-integrity

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."[6] Over 68,000 students currently attend PASSHE schools as undergraduates, and approximately 90% of them are Pennsylvania residents.[7] 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, all universities agreed to participate in the 2024 Ram Poll. They are listed in Table A1 the Appendix. **The target population of the Ram Poll is undergraduate students who are permanent Pennsylvania residents who are at least 18 years old.**

Survey

The survey findings in this report are based on a web-based survey conducted from October 7 to October 16, 2024. We obtained random samples of email addresses from each participating university through 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 20,000 students received an email on Monday, October 7 with a link to the Qualtrics survey. Three reminder emails were sent on Thursday, October 10, Sunday, October 14 and Tuesday, October 15. Each email explained that the survey was about the upcoming election and contemporary issues and that it would take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. The survey closed at 11:59PM on Wednesday, October 16.

Sample size and margin of error

The resulting sample size was N=1048 students. Our response rate was 6%. Our sample of 1048 students represent 1.7% of the target population. The margin of error is ±3%.

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[6] PASSHE Dashboard https://www.passhe.edu/About/Pages/About.aspx

[7] PASSHE Dashboard https://viz.passhe.edu/t/Public/views/Enrollment-PublicFinal/System?%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y

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 2024 Ram Poll, we weighted based on sex, race, and region of the state of permanent residence because we believe that these variables influence a respondent's choices. The responses were weighted using the SURVEY RAKE function in R. The population and sample proportions for region, sex, and race are found in the Appendix in tables A3-A5. All demographic data for the population were obtained from the PASSHE Data Dashboard.

Marginal Frequencies
Voting

REG - Are you currently registered to vote in Pennsylvania?

95%   Yes
5%   No

AUTO- Did you actively register to vote or were you automatically registered by the new Pennsylvania automatic voter registration program that was enacted in 2023?

91%   I registered myself
4%   I was registered by the automatic voter registration program
5%   I'm not sure

ADDRESS - At which address are you registered to vote?

14%   School residence
84%   Permanent residence
2%   Other address

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

66%   In person: I will visit a polling place on election day
34%   By mail: I will mail (or have already mailed) in my ballot, or I will submit
*   my mail ballot in person at an election center*

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

53%   Democrat
32%   Republican
<1%   Green
<1%   Libertarian
14%   None (no affiliation)/Independent
1%   Other

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

79%	*Certain to vote or already voted*
15%	*Will probably vote*
2%	*Will probably not vote*
1%	*Will not vote*
2%	*Do not know*

FREE ELECTION – How confident are you that, across the country, the votes will be accurately cast and counted in this year's election?

38%	*Very confident*
42%	*Somewhat confident*
16%	*Not too confident*
4%	*Not at all confident*

NUDGE - If you are not registered to vote, you can still do so until October 24th. Registering to vote online is easy. It takes only a few minutes. You will just need your driver's license or social security number. Knowing this, will you now register to vote?

94%	*I am already registered to vote.*
3%	*Yes! I will register to vote.*
1%	*No, I do not want to register.*
2%	*I'm still thinking about it.*

Candidate choices

VOTEPRES – If the 2024 election for President were being held today and you were eligible to vote, for whom would you vote?

60%	*Kamala Harris (D)*
33%	*Donald Trump (R)*
4%	*Do not know*
3%	*Other*

ALLPRES – Presidential vote, including leaners.

62%	*Kamala Harris (D)*
33%	*Donald Trump (R)*
2%	*Do not know*
3%	*Other*

VOTESEN – If the 2024 election for U.S. Senator for Pennsylvania were being held today and you were eligible to vote, for whom would you vote?

53%	*Bob Casey (D)*
26%	*Dave McCormick (R)*
19%	*Do not know*
1%	*Other*

ALLSEN – Senate vote, including leaners.

56%	*Bob Casey (D)*
29%	*Dave McCormick (R)*
13%	*Do not know*
1%	*Other*

Ideology and issues

SOCIAL- Thinking about social issues, what would you say your views on social issues are?

7%	*Very conservative*
16%	*Conservative*
21%	*Moderate*
24%	*Liberal*
30%	*Very liberal*
3%	*Not sure*

ECONOMIC- Thinking about economic issues, what would you say your views on social issues are?

13%	*Very conservative*
21%	*Conservative*
24%	*Moderate*
22%	*Liberal*
16%	*Very liberal*
5%	*Not sure*

ISSUES- How important are each of the following issues in making your election day decisions:

Abortion1

65%	*Very Important*
22%	*Somewhat Important*
9%	*Not Too Important*
5%	*Not At All Important*

The Economy2

68%	*Very Important*
27%	*Somewhat Important*
4%	*Not Too Important*
1%	*Not At All Important*

Climate Change3

50%	*Very Important*
29%	*Somewhat Important*
15%	*Not Too Important*
6%	*Not At All Important*

Health Care4

69%	*Very Important*
26%	*Somewhat Important*
5%	*Not Too Important*
<1%	*Not At All Important*

Racial and Ethnic Issues5

52%	*Very Important*
24%	*Somewhat Important*
16%	*Not Too Important*
8%	*Not At All Important*

Education6

74%	*Very Important*

22%	*Somewhat Important*
4%	*Not Too Important*
<1%	*Not At All Important*

Immigration7

49%	*Very Important*
32%	*Somewhat Important*
16%	*Not Too Important*
3%	*Not At All Important*

Gun Policy8

62%	*Very Important*
24%	*Somewhat Important*
11%	*Not Too Important*
3%	*Not At All Important*

U.S. Supreme Court Appointments9

41%	*Very Important*
33%	*Somewhat Important*
20%	*Not Too Important*
5%	*Not At All Important*

Energy Policy10

35%	*Very Important*
40%	*Somewhat Important*
21%	*Not Too Important*
4%	*Not At All Important*

Violent Crime11

52%	*Very Important*
32%	*Somewhat Important*
13%	*Not Too Important*
2%	*Not At All Important*

Election laws and policies12

45%	*Very Important*

34%	*Somewhat Important*
17%	*Not Too Important*
4%	*Not At All Important*

Electoral college13

36%	*Very Important*
32%	*Somewhat Important*
24%	*Not Too Important*
8%	*Not At All Important*

LGBTQIA+ issues14

44%	*Very Important*
18%	*Somewhat Important*
14%	*Not Too Important*
23%	*Not At All Important*

Foreign policy15

44%	*Very Important*
39%	*Somewhat Important*
14%	*Not Too Important*
3%	*Not At All Important*

Vaccine mandates16

21%	*Very Important*
31%	*Somewhat Important*
26%	*Not Too Important*
21%	*Not At All Important*

TOP 3 – Of the issues above which would you consider the top three you care about the most? First % top priority, then % in the top three.

22%	*44%*	*The economy*
17%	*41%*	*Abortion*
9%	*31%*	*Education*
9%	*29%*	*Health Care*
7%	*27%*	*Gun Policy*
6%	*25%*	*Immigration*
8%	*22%*	*Climate Change*

Student debt

DEBTAMT - About how much student loan debt will you have when you finish college?

21%	*I will have no student debt when finished with college*
17%	*I expect to have less than $10,000*
52%	*I expect to have more than $10,000*
10%	*I am not sure*

DEBTCANDIDATE - Would you be more or less likely to vote for a candidate who supports policies to cancel student debt?

57%	*More likely*
9%	*Less likely*
28%	*It wouldn't impact my vote choice*
6%	*Not sure*

DEBTPOLICY – Which comes closer to your view?

58%	*The government should do more to help students pay off student loan debt*
21%	*It's not the government's job to help people pay for college*
9%	*Not sure*

Demographics

FIRSTGEN - Are you a first-generation college student?

35%	*Yes*
65%	*No*

GENDER – To which gender identity do you most identify?

52%	*Female*
37%	*Male*
1%	*Transgender female*
3%	*Transgender male*
5%	*Gender Variant/Non-conforming*
1%	*Not Listed*
1%	*Preferred Not to Answer*

SEX- What is your sex assigned at birth on your birth certificate?

59.5%   Female
40.5%   Male

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

5%   Hispanic
85%   White
5%   Black or African American
2%   Asian
4%   Other

REGION - In which county is your permanent residence? (regions defined in Appendix Table A3)

5%   Allegheny
2%   Philadelphia
24%   Southeast
14%   Northeast
23%   Dutch
15%   West
18%   Central

Appendix

Table A1 Participating PASSHE Universities

PASSHE CAMPUS	TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT (PA RES)	PROPORTION OF TOTAL PASSHE ENROLLMENT
CHEYNEY	637	1%
COMMONWEALTH	9020	14.7%
EAST STROUDSBURG	3786	6.2%
INDIANA	6993	11.4%
KUTZTOWN	5565	9.1%
MILLERSVILLE	5170	8.4%
PENNWEST	7450	12.1%
SHIPPENSBURG	3983	6.5%
SLIPPERY ROCK	5980	9.7%
WEST CHESTER	12891	21%

Table A2 Campus Email requests and response rates

PASSHE CAMPUS	STUDENTS INVITED	RESPONSE COUNT
CHEYNEY	208	0
COMMONWEALTH	2940	196
EAST STROUDSBURG	1232	68
INDIANA	2276	103
KUTZTOWN	1811	128
MILLERSVILLE	1682	108
PENNWEST	2424	148
SHIPPENSBURG	1296	77
SLIPPERY ROCK	1946	112
WEST CHESTER	4194	274
OVERALL	20,000	1214*

*This includes students who chose "I disagree" to the informed consent.

Table A3 Region Assignment

REGION	COUNTIES	POPULATION PROPORTION	SAMPLE PROPORTION
ALLEGHENY	*Allegheny*	*6%*	*5%*
PHILADELPHIA	*Philadelphia*	*5%*	*2%*
SOUTHEAST	*Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery*	*23%*	*24%*
NORTHEAST	*Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne, Wyoming*	*15%*	*14%*
DUTCH	*Adams, Berks, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry, York*	*20%*	*23%*
WEST	*Beaver, Butler, Cambria, Crawford, Erie, Fayette, Greene, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland*	*15%*	*15%*
CENTRAL	*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*	*16%*	*18%*

Table A4 Sex Distribution

SEX	POPULATION PROPORTION	SAMPLE PROPORTION
FEMALE	*58.4%*	*59.5%*
MALE	*41.6%*	*40.5%*

Table A5 Race Distribution

RACE	POPULATION PROPORTION	SAMPLE PROPORTION
ASIAN	2%	2%
BLACK	10%	5%
HISPANIC	8%	5%
OTHER	8%	4%
WHITE	73%	85%