

Pennsylvania 2018 Pre-Election Survey on Policy and Governance



PennState
Harrisburg

School of Public Affairs

Public Administration

Pennsylvanians maintain positive perceptions of the performance of the federal and state governments

Summary: Most Pennsylvanians feel that their state and federal governments are doing a good job in delivering public services, but some groups of citizens are less positive. These groups require attention by policymakers and agency administrators.

Introduction

Pennsylvania voted for Democratic candidates in every presidential election between 1992 and 2012, but favored the Republican candidate in the 2016 election. The Democratic presidential vote of Pennsylvania in the last seven national elections has been driven by the more urban and densely populated cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The 2016 presidential election was not an exception: the Democratic candidate outperformed the Republican candidate in these two metropolitan areas. However, in other areas of the state that had leaned Democratic in the last 30 years (Erie county in the Northwest, Luzerne and Lackawanna counties in the Northeast), the Republican candidate captured more votes, and, thus, secured Pennsylvania twenty electoral votes. With the 2018 mid-term and Pennsylvania gubernatorial elections only a few weeks away, how will Pennsylvanians cast their votes?

One way we can understand citizens' voting behavior is by assessing their perceptions of government performance—whether they think government is doing a good job or not in delivering services. These perceptions are often interpreted

as a reflection of trust in government and have been found to make a difference for the incumbent in electoral outcomes, with voters often punishing those perceived as poor performers. From a management perspective, gauging citizen satisfaction is not only an accountability tool but also a feedback mechanism that could potentially help to improve programs and policies.

In this research brief we report on Pennsylvanians' perceptions of the performance of the federal government and their state government. The purpose is to get a sense of the mood of Pennsylvanians prior to the elections and to provide a feedback loop for policy-makers.

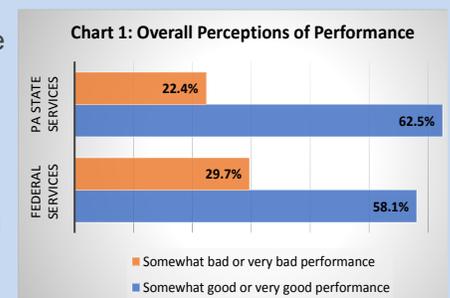
The data consist of responses from 1,047 randomly selected adult Pennsylvania residents who were asked two versions of the same question, one about the federal government and one about the state government: "Please think about the job the [federal/state] government is doing in delivering services. Examples of services include transportation, parks and recreation, responding to natural disasters, and keeping people safe. Is the [federal/state] government doing a very good, somewhat

bad job?" These questions were asked in the 2016 edition of the survey and, thus, we also present a comparison with previous results.

Results

Overall Positive Perceptions

As was the case with participants in the 2016 edition of the survey, in this edition most Pennsylvanians maintain positive views about the overall performance of the federal and the state governments, but the favorable view of the federal government has dropped significantly. As shown below in Chart 1, overall, 58.1 percent of Pennsylvanians rated somewhat good or very good the performance of the federal government in delivering public services. A higher percentage of Pennsylvanians (62.5 percent) had the same perception for the services provided by the state.



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Compared to the responses in 2016, the numbers represent approximately 11 percent decrease (from 69.2 percent) in the percentage holding a positive view about the performance of the federal government and two percentage points decrease (from 64.7 percent) about the performance of the Commonwealth in delivering services.

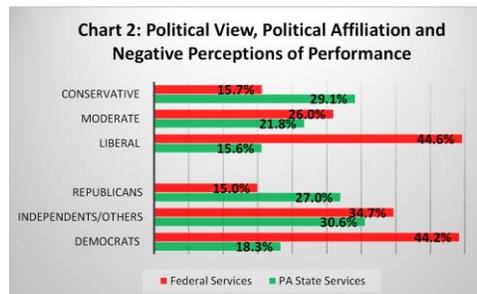
Subgroup Analysis

Some groups of respondents were notable for their less positive assessments, as shown in Chart 2 (only significant differences reported in the text).

With regard to the performance by the federal government in delivering services, minorities and those living in the Northern counties of the state (e.g., Erie, Potter, and Susquehanna) had a more negative perception than whites and residents of other regions (e.g. Central Pennsylvania), (about 22.2 and 19.4 percentage points difference, respectively). Those with graduate studies also had a more negative perception than those less educated (about 15 percentage points difference).

Regarding the performance of the state government, men had more negative perceptions than women (about six percentage points difference) and those between 35 and 64 years old also had more negative views than the 18-34 year old residents (six percentage points difference). Pennsylvania residents who self-identified as liberals and affiliated with the Democratic Party had more negative perceptions about the delivery of public services by the federal government than those who self-identified as conservatives and non-Democratic Party affiliates (44.2 percent of Democratic Party affiliates perceived the performance of the federal government as very bad or bad). At the state level, those who self-identified as conservatives and non-Democratic party affiliates, including independent voters, had more negative perceptions about the delivery of public services by the State (about 10 percentage points

between Republican and Democratic party affiliates). In contrast, in 2016, Northwestern Pennsylvanians, non-Democratic party affiliates and those with some college were the groups notable for their less positive assessment of the federal government services. In addition, when evaluating the performance of the Commonwealth in delivering services, the same groups (the 35-64 year olds, men, and non-Democratic party affiliates) that seemed to be more dissatisfied in 2016 have not changed their perception, according to the results of the 2018 survey.



Conclusions

This research brief provides policy-makers a glimpse of the mood of Pennsylvanians prior to the 2018 mid-term and Pennsylvania gubernatorial elections. Although the mood is overall positive regarding the performance of both federal and state levels of government, with the Commonwealth perceived as doing better than the federal government, the analysis also shows that there are segments of the population who are less satisfied with this performance. Compared to the findings of the 2016 survey, the data suggests that perceptions of performance differ along party lines, political ideology, and other socio-demographic characteristic such as education level. This is particularly noticeable with perceptions of performance of the federal government. On the other hand, the groups that were less satisfied in 2016 with the performance of the services delivered by the Commonwealth have not changed their perceptions. Thus, Pennsylvania policy-makers and agency administrators should seek to understand and address the concerns of these groups of Pennsylvanians.

Methodology

Data consists of responses from 1,047 randomly selected adult Pennsylvania residents, who participated in the School of Public Affairs' Pennsylvania Pre-election Poll on Policy and Governance. This was an omnibus self-administered web survey through the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg between August 1 and September 2, 2018. The Center employed a quota-based invitation system to produce a final dataset that is representative of Pennsylvania's population by region and, separately, by age/sex combined categories. The survey response rate was calculated using the American Association of Public Opinion Research's Response Rate (RR3) formula. The final survey response rate was 1.4 percent. Responses were not weighted. Margin of error is +/- 3.0 percentage points with 95 percent degree of confidence.

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