

targetsmart



DATE: July 24, 2019  
TO: Nikkilia Lu, State Innovation Exchange  
FROM: Ben Lazarus and Gabby Weisberg, TargetSmart  
RE: SiX Pennsylvania 2019 Statewide Issues Poll – Democracy Reform

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## Political Environment

Pennsylvania currently presents an advantageous environment for Democrats and progressive policy priorities. President Trump is largely disliked by voters, receiving a chilly 40-degree mean rating, as measured on a 0 to 100 scale. The president is rated unfavorably (0 to 49 degrees) by over half of the electorate (54 percent), while he receives warm, favorable ratings (52 to 100 degrees) from just 2-in-5 voters (38 percent).

In comparison, Governor Wolf's personal standing is much stronger than Trump's, receiving a warm 55-degree mean rating on the same 0-100 scale. The governor is rated favorably by almost half of the electorate (47 percent), while fewer than 1-in-3 voters rate him unfavorably (30 percent).

A generic Democratic candidate for state house also leads a generic Republican candidate by 8-points in this poll (48 percent to 40 percent), representing a net gain of 4-points since 2018, when the generic ballot was essentially tied (47 percent to 43 percent).<sup>1</sup>

In an open ended exercise that probes voters on the issues on which they'd like to see the General Assembly focus, we find that voters gravitate towards taxes (16 percent), education (15 percent), and health care affordability (11 percent) as their top priorities. Democrats are more likely to prioritize education and schools (20 percent), while independents (20 percent) and Republicans (23 percent) place the highest priority on taxes. Issues that rank relatively lower in voters' priorities list, though still salient, include jobs and the economy (9 percent), infrastructure improvements (7 percent), immigration (6 percent), and climate change (5 percent).

## Democracy Reforms

The democracy, politics, and election reform agenda<sup>2</sup> tested in this survey is broadly popular among Pennsylvania voters. As seen in Figure 1, strong majorities of voters agree with the assertions behind each reform. We find that voters are just as drawn to an argument about fraud and protecting the sanctity of the ballot box as they are about more reforms that open up voting access. Although voter registration accessibility isn't the most agreed upon policy, it receives a 9.1 mean agreement ranking, indicating that those who agree with this proposal rate it very highly. Likewise, protecting the ballot box from voter fraud (8.9 mean agreement rating), controlling big money and lobbyists (8.9 mean

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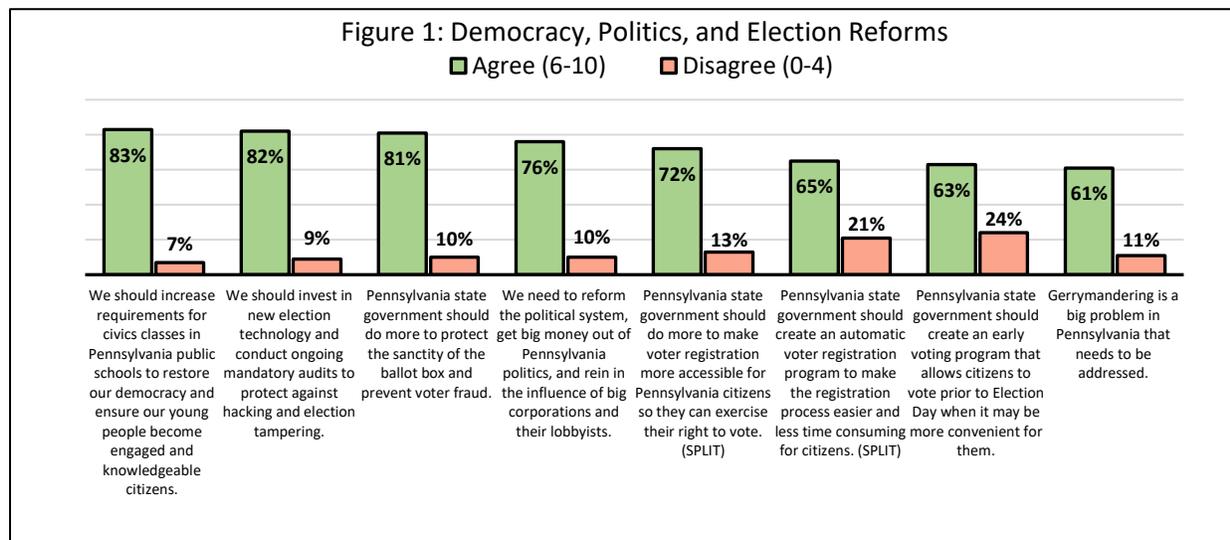
<sup>1</sup> The 2018 SiX Pennsylvania Statewide Issues and Messaging poll was conducted from June 13-17, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix B for full text of statements tested in the Democracy reform section of the survey.

agreement rating), and investing in election technology (8.9 mean agreement rating) are also highly prioritized and ranked by voters.

Although civics class requirements receive near unanimous agreement from the electorate, it receives an 8.8 mean agreement rating, indicating that voters broadly agree with it, but probably don't prioritize it as highly as they do other proposals. Furthermore, more than 6-in-10 voters across the state agree that gerrymandering is a big problem (8.7 mean agreement rating), and that we should pursue automatic voter registration (8.7 mean agreement rating) and creation of an early voting program (8.7 mean agreement rating), but these are less consensus positions.

Automatic voter registration is also broadly popular among Pennsylvania voters. Two-in-three voters agree that the General Assembly should create an automatic voter registration program for the state (65 percent agree), however, it is not prioritized as highly as some of the other proposals tested in the survey (8.7 mean agreement rating).



## Appendix A – Survey Methodology

TargetSmart designed this multi-modal survey. Eight-hundred and fifty interviews were conducted via professional telephone agents (453 wireless respondents, 397 landline respondents), and 406 interviews were conducted online among panelists who were matched to the TargetSmart voter file from six opt-in panel providers. The survey was conducted from June 15-20, 2019. All respondents indicated they were 18 years or older and registered to vote in Pennsylvania. Quotas were designed to reflect the demographic and geographic distribution of registered voters in Pennsylvania. The data were weighted by age, race, party registration, TargetSmart High School Only Score, and region by county to ensure an accurate reflection of the population.

A representative statewide base sample of 1,106 respondents was augmented by oversamples of 50 respondents residing in the state’s Northwest<sup>3</sup> region, Southwest<sup>4</sup> region, and East Central<sup>5</sup> region. The oversamples were weighted into the base such that the overall effective sample size is 1,100. No margin of sampling error is calculated for this survey as online data collection relies on non-representative opt-in panels. However, a fully randomized study with a sample size of 1,100 interviews carries with it a margin of error of +/- 2.95% at a 95% confidence level. Percentage totals may not add up precisely due to rounding.

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<sup>3</sup> The Northwest region is defined by Erie, Crawford, Mercer, Lawrence, Venango, and Warren counties.

<sup>4</sup> The Southwest region is defined by Armstrong, Indiana, Westmoreland, Fayette, Washington, Greene, Beaver, and Butler counties.

<sup>5</sup> The East Central region is defined by Dauphin, Lebanon, Lancaster, York, Adams, Cumberland, and Perry counties.

## Appendix B – Full Text of Tested Democracy Reform Messages

**Q.17** Switching gears a bit, I'm going to read you some statements about democracy, politics, and elections in Pennsylvania. Please rate each statement on a scale from zero to ten in which ten means you AGREE, and zero means you DISAGREE. The higher the number, the more you AGREE with the statement, the lower the number the more you DISAGREE with it. The number five means you neither agree nor disagree. So again, to be clear, six through ten means you agree and zero through four means you disagree.

A. (SPLIT A) Pennsylvania state government should do more to make voter registration more accessible for Pennsylvania citizens so they can exercise their right to vote.

B. Pennsylvania state government should do more to protect the sanctity of the ballot box and prevent voter fraud.

C. We need to reform the political system, get big money out of Pennsylvania politics, and rein in the influence of big corporations and their lobbyists.

D. Gerrymandering is a big problem in Pennsylvania that needs to be addressed.

E. We should invest in new election technology and conduct ongoing mandatory audits to protect against hacking and election tampering.

F. (SPLIT B) Pennsylvania state government should create an automatic voter registration program to make the registration process easier and less time consuming for citizens.

G. Pennsylvania state government should create an early voting program that allows citizens to vote prior to Election Day when it may be more convenient for them.

H. We should increase requirements for civics classes in Pennsylvania public schools to restore our democracy and ensure our young people become engaged and knowledgeable citizens.