

# targetsmart



DATE: July 24, 2019

TO: Nikkilia Lu, State Innovation Exchange

FROM: Ben Lazarus and Gabby Weisberg, TargetSmart

RE: SiX Pennsylvania 2019 Statewide Issues and Messaging Poll – Regional Analysis

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TargetSmart was commissioned by SiX to conduct a poll of registered voters in Pennsylvania on several key policy debates and issues that are percolating through the state legislature and will likely be on the forefront of voters' minds going into the 2020 elections. The findings suggest that voters are broadly open to progressive policies and ideas and that the electorate is ready for a more progressive agenda in Harrisburg, particularly as it relates to economic policy, criminal justice reform, democracy reforms, and environmental protection. This memo dives into regional-specific analysis to assess the similarities and differences in public opinion across the state.

## Northwest Analysis

*Sample size: 121 unweighted interviews, 65 weighted interviews*

*Counties: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, Warren*

*Political Environment:* Voters in the Northwest express the most pessimism about the direction Pennsylvania is heading in – 60 percent of voters here believe the state is heading down the wrong track, when just 30 percent of voters believe that the state is heading in the right direction. Furthermore, Northwestern voters strongly back a generic Republican candidate for state house (35 percent Democratic candidate, 61 percent Republican candidate), and half of the electorate here rates President Trump favorably (49 percent warm, 41 percent cool, 52 degree mean). Overall, Northwestern voters prioritize education (17 percent) and taxes (16 percent) as top issues they would like the General Assembly to address.

*Economic Policies:* A majority of voters in the Northwest oppose a \$15/hour minimum wage in Pennsylvania (41 percent support, 53 percent oppose), with the most vehement opposition stemming from men (29 percent support, 63 percent oppose) and blue collar voters (30 percent support, 62 percent oppose). When it comes to Governor Wolf's overtime policy, Northwestern voters are on par with the statewide trend – eight-in-ten support this policy while just 11 percent oppose it. Women (85 percent support, 15 percent oppose) and voters over 50 (82 percent support, 11 percent oppose) express the strongest support for this policy.

*Criminal Justice Reform:* Seventy-two percent of Northwestern voters support reforming Pennsylvania's criminal justice system, however, voters' intensity is much softer than we see statewide. And while a plurality of voters believes the primary purpose of incarceration is to rehabilitate, a strong majority (58 percent) initially believes that the General Assembly should focus on maintaining law and order, rather than on reforms. That said, after the presentation of messaging, voters here start to move towards the reform mentality. When it comes to the effectiveness of the criminal justice message

frames tested, the Northwest region is on par with the statewide trend – voters here are most persuaded by arguments on taxpayer expenses, bail reform, and mental health and addiction services.

*Democracy, Politics, and Elections:* The Northwest follows the statewide trend of prioritizing accessible voter registration, ballot box protection, controlling big money in politics, and investing in election tech. That said, some of the strongest disagreement we see on the proposals tested in this poll originate in the Northwestern region, particularly as it pertains to early voting (32 percent disagree), automatic voter registration (21 percent disagree), and accessible voter registration (20 percent disagree).

*Climate Change and the Environment:* Voters here tend to back the economic argument for climate change intervention and their top environmental priority matches that of the entire state – investing in renewable energy and conservation. The Northwest differs from the rest of the state in the high priority voters here place on green jobs and economic growth – 12 percent of Northwesterners place this as their top priority, while just 6 percent prioritize this statewide. Though majorities of Northwesterners express concerns about the environmental risks tested in the poll, this region lacks some of the intensity we see statewide – fewer than half of voters here are very concerned about greedy oil and gas companies, ground water contamination, and the negative impacts on rural communities.

## Northeast Analysis

*Sample size: 219 unweighted interviews, 221 weighted interviews*

*Counties: Berks, Bradford, Carbon, Clinton, Columbia, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Lycoming, Monroe, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Pike, Schuylkill, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Union, Wayne, Wyoming*

*Political Environment:* Voters in the Northeast follow the statewide trend closely when it comes to the direction Pennsylvania is heading in – 51 percent of voters believe the state is heading in the right direction, and 43 percent believe it is heading off on the wrong track. Northeastern voters support a generic Republican candidate for state house by a small margin (40 percent Democratic candidate, 47 percent Republican candidate, and they rate President Trump divisively (45 percent warm, 46 percent cool, 47 degree mean). Voters here prioritize taxes (21 percent) above all other policy areas when it comes to what they want the General Assembly to focus on.

*Economic Policies:* Northeastern voters follow the statewide trends when it comes to a \$15/hour minimum wage in Pennsylvania – 58 percent support it, while just 39 percent oppose it. The strongest support for this proposal comes from Democrats (74 percent support, 21 percent oppose), women (63 percent support, 34 percent oppose), and blue-collar voters in this region (65 percent support, 36 percent oppose). Furthermore, voters here are almost unanimous in support for Governor Wolf’s overtime policy (83 percent support, 15 percent oppose), and this policy has steady cross-party appeal in the region – similar margins of Democrats and Republicans support it (86 percent and 83 percent, respectively).

*Criminal Justice Reform:* Eight-in-ten Northeastern voters support reforming Pennsylvania’s criminal justice system. A plurality of voters here also believe incarceration should be used to rehabilitate individuals, rather than to punish them, however 51 percent of voters believe maintaining law and order should be the General Assembly’s priority, rather than enacting reforms. That said, after hearing information and messaging, voters become evenly divided (36 percent reform, 38 percent law and order), and one-in-four voters believe both should play a role. Northeastern voters find the messaging frame on mental health and addiction treatment to be most persuasive (49 percent very persuasive), outpacing the statewide trend. Closely following access to treatment are bail reform (45 percent very persuasive) and the expense argument (37 percent very persuasive).

*Democracy, Politics, and Elections:* Northeastern voters mirror the statewide trends very closely when it comes to democracy, politics, and election reforms – the most strongly agreed upon proposals among voters in this region are accessible voter registration (73 percent agree, 9.3 mean), investing in election technology (82 percent agree, 9.2 mean), protecting the ballot box from voter fraud (80 percent agree, 9.1 mean), and controlling big money in politics (79 percent agree, 9.1 mean). While Northeastern voters broadly agree with all proposals tested in the survey, they are most likely to disagree with creating an early voting program (27 percent disagree, 1.6 mean).

*Climate Change and the Environment:* Northeastern voters are evenly divided on why the general assembly should act on climate change, with around 1-in-4 voters backing each the economic, increased danger, and natural resources arguments. That said, when it comes to environmental priorities, Northeasterners follow the statewide trend of placing the highest priority on investing in renewable energy sources (29 percent), followed by protection and conservation (16 percent), passing a severance tax (14 percent), and reducing pollution (12 percent). When it comes to environmental concerns, voters here express the most intensity about the lack of regulations on greedy oil and gas companies (52 percent very concerned), and six-in-ten rural voters here are very concerned about adverse effects on their communities.

## East Central Analysis

*Sample size: 204 unweighted interviews, 150 weighted interviews*

*Counties: Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry, York*

*Political Environment:* A strong majority of East Central voters believe the state is heading in the right track (56 percent), while just one-in-three voters believe the state is heading down the wrong track (33 percent). East Central voters back a generic Republican for state house (37 percent Democratic candidate, 51 percent Republican candidate), however, President Trump is a rather divisive figure among this electorate (45 percent warm, 44 percent cool, 47 degree mean). Similar to the rest of the state, voters here prioritize taxes (20 percent) and education (13 percent).

*Economic Policies:* A majority of voters in the East Central region support a \$15/hour minimum wage (53 percent support, 34 percent oppose), although the intensity behind their support is a bit softer than the statewide trend – just 30 percent of East Central voters strongly support the policy, while statewide, 42 percent of voters strongly support it. That said, we see heightened support among Democrats (85 percent support, 15 percent oppose) and women (61 percent support, 38 percent oppose) in this region. When it comes to Governor Wolf’s overtime policy, the East Central is on par with the rest of the state – 79 percent of voters support it, while just 18 percent oppose it.

*Criminal Justice Reform:* Voters in the East Central region are broadly supportive of reforming Pennsylvania’s criminal justice system (79 percent support, 13 percent oppose), and over half of voters here believe incarceration should be used to rehabilitate inmates (52 percent rehabilitate, 25 percent punish). When it comes to the General Assembly’s focus on criminal justice, voters here initially back maintaining law and order (35 percent reform, 43 percent law and order), but the presentation of information leads to a sharper division among this electorate (38 percent reform, 41 percent law and order). East Central voters are most persuaded by the top messages we see in the statewide dataset – 46 percent find access to mental health and addiction treatment to be very persuasive, 42 percent find the taxpayer expense argument to be very persuasive, and 41 percent find the bail reform argument to be very persuasive. That said, when it comes to bottom tier messages, voters here are much softer in their reactions, particularly when it comes to the treatment of incarcerated women – just 27 percent of East Central voters find this messaging frame to be very persuasive.

*Democracy, Politics, and Elections:* East Central voters follow the statewide trend of agreeing strongly with protecting the ballot box from voter fraud (82 percent agree, 8.9 mean), and investing in election technology (82 percent agree, 8.8 mean). Similar to what we see statewide, voters here are softer in their agreement for accessible voter registration (69 percent agree), however, those who agree with it rate it very highly (8.9 mean). Likewise, the East Central region follows the statewide trend when it comes to policies voters disagree with – voters here are most likely to disagree with early voting programs (25 percent disagree) and automatic voter registration (22 percent disagree).

*Climate Change and the Environment:* A plurality of East Central voters believe the General Assembly should take action to preserve and conserve natural resources (34 percent). Furthermore, voters in this region follow the statewide trends of prioritizing investments in renewable energy (30 percent) and protection and conservation (22 percent) over other actions to combat climate change. When it comes to environmental concerns, voters here are a bit softer in their intensity across the board— 46 percent of East Central voters are very concerned about ground water contamination (compared to 53 percent statewide), and 42 percent are very concerned about greedy oil and gas companies (compared to 54 percent statewide).

## Philadelphia County Analysis

*Sample size: 103 unweighted interviews, 136 weighted interviews*

*Counties: Philadelphia*

*Political Environment:* A majority of Philadelphians believe things in Pennsylvania are heading in the right direction (53 percent), while just 43 percent of voters here believe things are going down the wrong track. Furthermore, three-in-four voters here support a generic Democratic candidate for state house (77 percent Democratic candidate, 13 percent Republican candidate), outpacing statewide Democratic support by 29-points. Philadelphia voters loathe the president, with eight-in-ten voters rating him unfavorable (12 percent warm, 81 percent cool, 18 degree mean). Voters here place prioritize education and schools (21 percent) over other policy issues the General Assembly could focus on.

*Economic Policies:* Philadelphia voters show little opposition to the progressive economic policies tested in this poll. Philadelphians are almost unanimous in their support for a \$15/hour minimum wage (88 percent support, 11 percent oppose), exceeding the support from the rest of the state. This strong support is driven by voters over 50 (91 percent support, 9 percent oppose) and college graduates (87 percent support, 11 percent oppose). Voters here are also overwhelmingly supportive of Governor Wolf's overtime policy – 89 percent support it, while just 7 percent oppose it.

*Criminal Justice Reform:* Nine-in-ten Philadelphia voters support reforming Pennsylvania's criminal justice system, and the intensity behind this support surpasses that of the rest of the state – 68 percent of Philadelphia voters strongly support reforms, while just 43 percent of voters statewide strongly support reforms. Moreover, three-in-four voters here believe that the primary purpose of incarceration should be to rehabilitate individuals, and unlike the rest of the state, voters here believe that the state government should focus on reforms rather than maintaining law and order (64 percent reforms, 22 percent law and order). Philadelphia voters are more strongly persuaded by the criminal justice reform message frames tested in this poll than the rest of the state. The bail reform argument (71 percent very persuasive) and the taxpayer argument (69 percent very persuasive) are the most effective among Philadelphia voters, although, access to mental health and addiction services (63 percent very persuasive) is close behind. Furthermore, the arguments on racial inequities in incarceration and the treatment of incarcerated women pop more in Philadelphia than in any other region across the state (57 and 55 percent very persuasive, respectively).

*Democracy, Politics, and Elections:* Philadelphia voters are broadly supportive of all reforms tested in this poll, and we see near unanimity in their agreement for accessible voter registration (90 percent agree, 9.1 mean), investments in election technology (89 percent agree, 9.0 mean), and civics class requirements (89 percent agree, 8.9 mean). Voters here differ from the rest of the state in their strong agreement for automatic voter registration (85 percent agree, 9.3 mean) as well as early voting programs (77 percent agree, 9.0 mean).

*Climate Change and the Environment:* A majority of Philadelphia voters are likely to contact the state legislature regarding climate change concerns (63 percent very or somewhat likely), outpacing the rest of the state. When it comes to why the general assembly should act on climate change, voters here evenly cite economic impacts and increased danger as the primary reasons for intervention (32 percent cite each). Philadelphia follows the statewide trend of prioritizing investments in renewable energy (28 percent) as a top environmental priority, however, the region differs from the rest of the state in how high voters prioritize reducing pollution as well (26 percent). Furthermore, voters in Philadelphia express heightened concerns about the adverse effects of climate change we tested in this survey – 79 percent are very concerned about greedy oil and gas companies (54 percent statewide), 77 percent are very concerned about risks climate change poses on minority communities (69 percent statewide), and 75 percent are very concerned about ground water contamination (53 percent statewide).



## Philadelphia Suburbs Analysis

*Sample size: 230 unweighted interviews, 222 weighted interviews*

*Counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery*

*Political Environment:* Voters in the Philadelphia suburbs are the most optimistic among the state as 59 percent of voters here believe Pennsylvania is heading in the right direction, while just 32 percent believe the state is heading down the wrong track. A majority of suburban Philadelphia voters back a generic Democratic candidate for state house (54 percent Democratic candidate, 34 percent Republican candidate), and two-in-three voters here rate President Trump unfavorably (32 percent warm, 62 percent cool, 33 degree mean). Education and schools surfaces as voters' top priority here (20 percent), followed by taxes (11 percent).

*Economic Policies:* Voters living in the Philadelphia suburbs are broadly supportive of a \$15/hour minimum wage but are less intense in their support than their urban neighbors – 68 percent of voters here support the policy overall, but just 43 percent strongly support it (31 percent oppose, 15 percent strongly oppose). The support from this region is driven by Democrats (90 percent support, 9 percent oppose), women (74 percent support, 24 percent oppose), and blue-collar voters (70 percent support, 29 percent oppose) in this area. Overall, suburban Philadelphia voters are very supportive of Governor Wolf's overtime policy (81 percent support, 17 percent oppose) with half of the electorate here strongly supporting it.

*Criminal Justice Reform:* A strong majority of suburban Philadelphia voters support reforms to Pennsylvania's criminal justice system (83 percent support, 7 percent oppose), which is on par with the statewide trend. Suburban Philadelphia voters also tend to side with the rehabilitation argument for incarceration over the punishment argument (43 percent rehabilitate, 23 percent punish). Voters here initially believe that the General Assembly should focus on maintaining law and order rather than on reforms (29 percent reforms, 44 percent law and order), however, voters move 18 points in the direction of reform after being exposed to criminal justice messaging frames (38 percent reforms, 34 percent law and order). The taxpayer burden messaging frame pops more among suburban Philadelphia voters (52 percent very persuasive) when compared to the rest of the state (46 percent very persuasive), however, the rest of the messaging frames receive similar reactions from suburban Philadelphia voters as they do statewide.

*Democracy, Politics, and Elections:* Voters in the Philadelphia suburbs prioritize the same reforms as the rest of the state – civics class requirements (86 percent agree, 8.7 mean), investments in election technology (85 percent agree, 8.9 mean), protecting the ballot box from voter fraud (81 percent agree, 8.8 mean), and controlling big money and lobbyists (75 percent agree, 8.9 mean). Accessible voter registration is also quite widely agreed upon here (74 percent agree) and receives a very high rating (8.9), and despite the softer support automatic voter registration receives (68 percent), it is ranked quite highly as well (9.1 mean). Notably, suburban Philadelphia voters are more likely to support early voting programs than the rest of the state – 69 percent of suburban Philadelphia voters agree with early voting programs, when just 63 percent agree with it statewide.

*Climate Change and the Environment:* When it comes to why the General Assembly should act on climate change, voters here are more likely to side with the economic and danger arguments, over the natural resources argument. Furthermore, suburban Philadelphia voters place the highest priority on investments in renewable energy sources (29 percent), following the statewide trend. Lower priorities, though still salient, are reducing pollution (17 percent) and conservation (15 percent). Voters' s concerns here mirror those of the entire state – 60 percent are very concerned about ground water contamination, 56 percent are very concerned about greedy oil and gas companies, and 68 percent of urban voters are concerned about dangerous conditions for minority communities.

## Southwest Analysis

*Sample size: 161 unweighted interviews, 105 weighted interviews*

*Counties: Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Washington, Westmoreland*

*Political Environment:* By a small margin, Southwestern voters believe things in Pennsylvania are heading in the right direction (49 percent right direction, 39 percent wrong track). This region is atmospherically very competitive in a contest for state house as 40 percent back a generic Democratic candidate and 46 percent back a generic Republican candidate. President Trump is a very divisive figure in the Southwest as 46 percent of voters rate him favorably, and 45 percent of voters rate him unfavorably (47 degree mean). When it comes to issues for the general assembly to focus on, one-in-four Southwestern voters cite taxes (25 percent) and one-in-five voters cite education (17 percent).

*Economic Policies:* Although a majority of Southwestern voters support a \$15/hour minimum wage, this region lacks some of the intensity that the rest of the state has on the issue (54 percent support, 47 percent oppose). That said, Democrats (78 percent support, 22 percent oppose) and voters over 50 (63 percent support, 37 percent oppose) show some heightened intensity compared to other audiences in this region. When it comes to Governor Wolf's overtime policy, the Southwest is on par with the rest of the state – 79 percent support it, while just 19 percent oppose it.

*Criminal Justice Reform:* More than 3-in-4 Southwestern voters support reforming Pennsylvania's criminal justice system. And by a small margin, voters here believe that incarceration should be used to rehabilitate individuals rather than to punish them (46 percent rehabilitate, 36 percent punish), however, they are also consistent in their belief that the General Assembly should focus on maintaining law and order rather than on reforms. In regard to messaging frames, voters here are most persuaded by increasing access to mental health and addiction services (48 percent very persuasive) and the taxpayer burdens of incarceration (44 percent very persuasive). However, this region differs from the rest of the state in their diminished reaction to the incarcerated women messaging frame – just 29 percent of Southwestern voters find this argument to be very persuasive, when 35 percent of voters statewide find it very persuasive.

*Democracy, Politics, and Elections:* The Southwest is similar to the rest of the state in their strong agreement with protecting the ballot box from voter fraud (81 percent agree, 9.1 mean), controlling big money and lobbyists (75 percent agree, 8.9 mean), and investing in election technology (77 percent agree, 8.8 mean). Despite that only 45 percent of voters here agree with creating an early voting program, those that agree with it rate it higher than any other policy tested (9.1 mean). Similarly, just 66 percent of Southwestern voters agree with accessible voter registration, however, those that agree with it do so strongly (9.1 mean). Finally, this region strays from statewide trends when it comes to civics class requirements – 83 percent of voters statewide agree with these requirements when just 71 percent of Southwestern voters agree with them.

*Climate Change and the Environment:* Southwestern voters are evenly split between the economic, danger, and natural resources arguments for climate change intervention. While 35 percent of Southwestern voters cite investments in renewable energy as their top environmental priority, another 25 cite protection and conservation of Pennsylvania’s nature as a top priority, far surpassing rankings from any other region. Voters in this region express the most concern over the adverse effects climate change will have on rural communities (55 percent very concerned), while greedy oil and gas companies (46 percent very concerning) and groundwater contamination (46 percent very concerning) fall into a second tier of concerns for this region.

## Allegheny County Analysis

*Sample size: 133 unweighted interviews, 115 weighted interviews*

*County: Allegheny*

*Political Environment:* A majority of voters in Allegheny county believe things in Pennsylvania are heading in the right direction (54 percent right direction, 42 percent wrong track). Voters here also back a generic Democratic candidate for state house (50 percent Democratic candidate, 33 percent Republican candidate), and a majority of voters here rate President Trump unfavorably (33 percent warm, 57 percent cool, 39 degree mean). Allegheny county voters cite taxes (17 percent) as the top issue they would like the General Assembly to focus on.

*Economic Policies:* Allegheny county mirrors the statewide trend when it comes to a \$15/hour minimum wage in Pennsylvania – 68 percent of voters here support it, while 32 percent oppose it. Voters here are also very supportive of Governor Wolf’s overtime policy – 81 percent support it, while just 18 percent oppose it.

*Criminal Justice Reform:* Over eight-in-ten Allegheny county voters support reforming Pennsylvania’s criminal justice system, and by a small margin, voters here believe the purpose of incarceration should be to rehabilitate offenders, rather than to punish them. Initially, Allegheny voters believe the General Assembly should focus on maintaining law and order (28 percent reform, 49 percent law and order), however, voters move 12 points in the direction of reform after being exposed to messaging. In regard to messaging frames, voters are most persuaded by the arguments for bail reform (41 percent very persuasive) and taxpayer expenses (41 percent very persuasive).

*Democracy, Politics, and Elections:* Voters in Allegheny county follow the statewide trend of agreeing with and prioritizing accessible voter registration (69 percent agree, 9.1 mean), controlling big money and lobbyists (72 percent agree, 9.1 mean), protecting the ballot box from fraud (84 percent agree, 8.9 mean), and investing in election technology (77 percent agree, 8.9 mean). Although Allegheny county voters express similar levels of agreement on automatic voter registration as we see statewide (64 percent agree), they prioritize it a bit lower than the statewide trend shows (8.4 mean).

*Climate Change and the Environment:* Allegheny county voters are split on why the General Assembly should act on climate change – about one-in-five voters support the economic impact, increased danger, and natural resources arguments. However, compared to the rest of the state, Allegheny county has far more voters who believe all three arguments have a role (26 percent in Allegheny county, 16 percent statewide). Voters here put slightly higher priorities on reducing pollution (18 percent) and passing a severance tax (17 percent) than they do on investing in renewable energy (16 percent), breaking from the statewide trend. When it comes to messaging frames, Allegheny county mirrors the statewide trend very closely – voters over express the most intense concerns over greedy oil and gas companies (53 percent very concerning), ground water contamination (53 percent very concerning), and the adverse effects climate change has on minority communities (55 percent very concerning).