

IssuesPA Workforce Poll Political Questions: 5 Major Findings (9/28/05)

1. **Pennsylvanians increasingly cite rising gas prices when asked to name the top problem facing their state.**

<i>Most Important Problem Facing P.A. Today</i>	%		
	Current	May 2005	
Gas Prices	11	6	+5
Government/Politics	11	8	+3
Jobs	21	18	+3
Healthcare	8	7	+1
Education	8	8	0
Taxes	19	20	-1

About half (52%) of Keystone State residents cite one or more economic issues as the most important problem. The two specific economic issues mentioned most often continue to be jobs (21%) and taxes (19%). Another 11 percent statewide now name gas or fuel prices, about double the number recorded last May (6%). Concerns related to government and politics have also moved up the priority list over the past few months. In the current poll, 11 percent define the most important problem in these terms, making it the non-economic area of concern cited most often. This 11 percent includes three percent who specifically made reference to the recent pay increase for state legislators.

Regional Highlights: Jobs continue to be the clear number one problem in the eyes of Northeastern Pa. residents, cited by 35 percent, twice the number who name any other problem area. Southwestern Pa. residents name jobs (26%) and taxes (26%) equally. In the mostly small town and rural "Rest of State," opinion divides three ways, with mentions of jobs (23%), slightly above taxes (16%) and gas prices (15%). Specific mentions of the state legislature's pay increase are most common in the South Central region (7%), where the state capital is located.

Demographic Highlights: Gas prices are most often cited as the top problem by those with lower annual incomes. Twelve percent of those with incomes under \$75,000 mention gas prices as the most important problem, compared with six percent of those with larger annual incomes.

2. **Unhappiness with government and politics, including criticism of the recent pay increase for state legislators, appears to be driving dissatisfaction with the direction of the state more than concerns about higher gas prices.**

<i>Most Important Problem Facing P.A. Today</i>	%		
	Total	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Jobs	21	19	23
Taxes	19	13	26
Gas Prices	11	11	11
Government/Politics	11	3	19

Pennsylvanians now divide about equally in their opinions on the direction of their state (48% satisfied vs. 45% dissatisfied). Those who are displeased with the state of their state tend to focus on different problems than those who are generally satisfied. As seen in the graphic above, those who are dissatisfied with the state's direction are no more likely than those who are satisfied to name gas prices as the top problem. In contrast, the dissatisfied are much more likely than the satisfied to see government and politics as the number one problem. Taxes is another issue that resonates more with the dissatisfied. This convergence of economic and political discontent generally spells trouble for incumbent politicians up for re-election. These are the kind of issues that fueled Ross Perot's anti-establishment campaigns for President in 1992 and 1996.

Regional Highlights: The percent who say they are dissatisfied with Pennsylvania's direction is higher in Southwestern Pa. (57%) than in any other region. This finding is consistent with past IssuesPA/Pew surveys, which since 2003 have shown the Southwest registering high dissatisfaction. More than a third (37%) of residents of this region name either taxes or government and politics as the biggest problem facing the state.

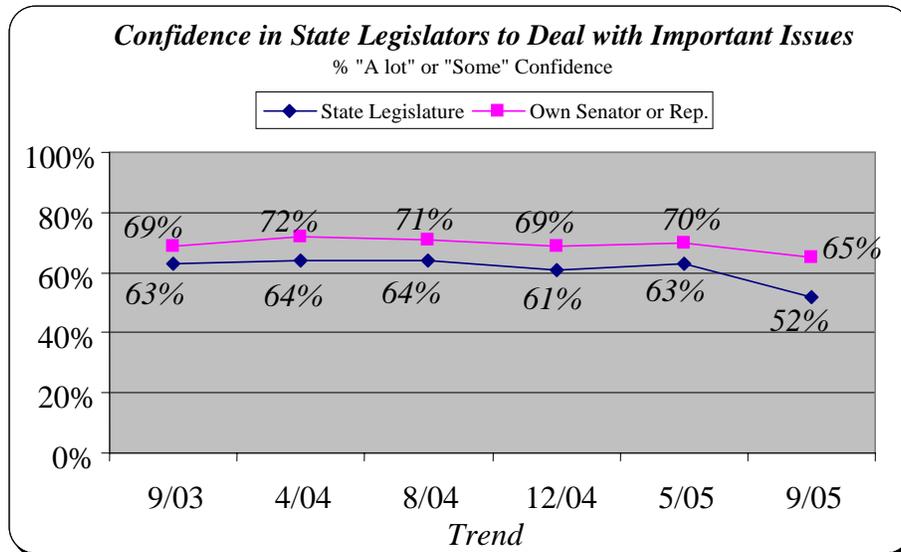
3. **In the first IssuesPA poll conducted since state legislators gave themselves a pay raise last July, Pennsylvanians' confidence in the state government is at its lowest point.**

<i>Overall Job of State Government In Handling Important Issues</i>	%					
	9/05	5/05	12/04	8/04	4/04	9/03
Excellent/Good	20	24	23	23	28	28
Only fair	49	51	52	54	49	47
Poor	28	23	22	20	20	20

When asked to rate the job their state government is doing in dealing with important issues, a plurality (49%) of state residents say "only fair." More Pennsylvanians today are harshly critical and give state government a "poor" rating (28%), than credit state government with doing an "excellent" or a "good" job (20%). These are the lowest scores for state government since the IssuesPA/Pew poll first asked this question in September 2003. While other factors may also contribute to the declining ratings, the legislative pay increase would certainly appear to be an important factor. Twenty percent of those who rate state government's performance as "poor" cite concerns about government and politics as the top problem facing the state. Franklin & Marshall College's most recent Keystone poll reported that roughly three-quarters (77%) of Pennsylvanians are aware of the legislative pay increase and that more than three-quarters (79%) felt the pay increase was undeserved.

Regional Highlights: State government's ratings are most negative in the northern and western parts of Pennsylvania. More people give state government a "poor" rating than an "excellent" or "good" rating in Southwestern Pa. (33% vs. 15%), Northeastern Pa. (29% vs. 15%), and "Rest of State" (29% vs. 18%).

4. **Confidence ratings for the Pennsylvania state legislature as a whole have suffered the biggest decline, but people’s ratings of their own state senators and representatives have also dropped.**

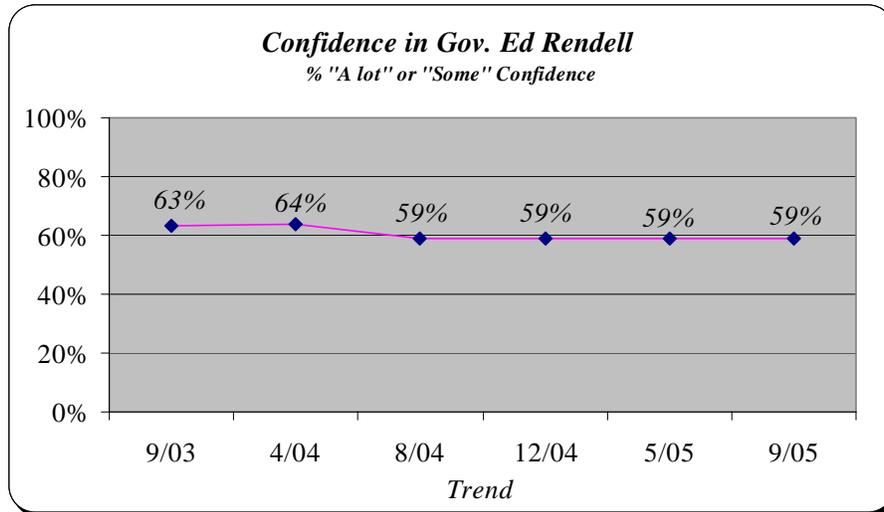


Over the past two years, Pennsylvanians’ confidence ratings for the state legislature as a whole had not varied by more than a few percentage points – until now. Since the last IssuesPA poll conducted last May, the proportion who say they have “a lot” or “some” confidence in the legislature to deal with important issues has declined by double digits, from 63 percent to 52 percent. Today, more than four in 10 (44%) adults statewide say they have “not too much” or “no confidence” in the state legislature.

Survey research shows that people generally feel more positively about their own representatives in government than they do about government officials in general. That holds for Pennsylvania state legislature, but people’s own state senators and representatives have not completely avoided the post-pay raise fallout. About two-thirds (65%) of Pennsylvanians now have “a lot” or “some” confidence in their own state senators and representatives, while about a third (32%) have “not much” or “no confidence” in them. While those ratings seem quite positive, they are down from a 70 percent confident/23 percent not confident division of opinion in May.

Regional Highlights: Since May, state government’s ratings have suffered the most erosion in Northeastern Pa. and the “Rest of State.” In the Northeast region, the percent confident (combined “a lot” or “some”) in the legislature as a whole has dropped by 17 points (68% vs. 51%) and the percent confident in their own representatives has dropped by 10 points (74% vs. 64%). In “Rest of State,” confidence in the legislature as whole is down 14 points (69% vs. 55%) and confidence in their own representatives is down by 15 points (80% vs. 65%).

5. Up to this point, Governor Ed Rendell appears to have avoided the post-pay raise fallout. His ratings are statistically unchanged.



About six in 10 (59%) Pennsylvanians now say they have “a lot” or “some” confidence in Governor Ed Rendell to deal with important issues, while less than four in 10 (37%) have “not too much” or “no confidence” in him. Rendell’s current confidence ratings are statistically the same as those recorded last May. For the first time, the ratio of positive to negative ratings is better for the Governor than it is for the state legislature as a whole (59%/37%, +22 for the Governor vs. 52%/44%, +8 for the legislature).

The Governor’s confidence ratings have declined slightly in the past two years of surveying. He scored positive ratings above the 60 percent mark in April 2004 (64% “a lot” or “some” confidence) and September 2003 (63%).

Regional Highlights: Rendell continues to benefit from a solid base of public support in his home region of Southeastern Pa. In the Southeast region, three quarters (76%) of the residents give him a positive confidence rating, compared with roughly half in Southwestern Pa. (52%), South Central Pa. (50%), Northeastern Pa. (53%), and “Rest of State” (52%).