

Executive Summary

Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvanians, 2019

By:

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Introduction

This research surveyed rural and urban Pennsylvanians in 2019 to provide policymakers with up-to-date information on resident attitudes of current issues, and to compare rural and urban attitudes on these issues. The results indicate several areas of consensus in rural and urban attitudes, and also identify a few differences. Based on the information obtained in the survey, the researchers offered several considerations for policymakers.

Methodology

In 2019, the research team, which included the Penn State Harrisburg Center for Survey Research (CSR), developed a survey questionnaire using questions from a similar survey conducted in 2008 as well as questions addressing new, more recent topics. Marketing Systems Group (MSG) of Horsham, PA, recruited survey respondents who had previously signed up to participate in web panel surveys in exchange for nominal compensation. Respondents who opted in were sent a link directly to the web survey. To ensure that the survey results were not biased toward any particular location, age, or sex, CSR programmed quotas into the web survey platform to guarantee that the final dataset would be representative of Pennsylvania's rural and urban county populations, and, separately, by age/sex combined categories. The survey was administered from March 19 through April 8, 2019. Data were collected from a total of 2,008 eligible respondents (Pennsylvania residents aged 18 or older) (1,202 rural and 806 urban). The margin of error for the survey is +/- 2.2 percentage points, with the conventional 95 percent degree of confidence.

The analysis compared rural and urban respondents' views on community issues, statewide issues, and government assessments. Where questions were available and comparable in both 2008 and 2019, the researchers examined changes in responses. They also compared differences in responses across sociodemographic groups (i.e. age, race, gender, etc.) as well as those with different

personal characteristics, such as homeownership status, employment status, and financial situation, for several of the attitudes examined.

Results

The rural and urban Pennsylvanians surveyed generally exhibited similar attitudes about their communities, communities across Pennsylvania, and the institutions and officials that govern these. There were some important differences, however. There were also several factors that impacted respondents' basic assessments of communities and government, including: length of

Table 1

Present Quality of Community Attributes						
<i>Please rate the quality of your present community as it is today:</i>						
	Rural			Urban		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Neighborliness	72 (17.31 %)	212 (50.96 %)	132 (31.73 %)	301 (18.92 %)	832 (52.29 %)	458 (28.79 %)
Natural environment*	50 (11.99 %)	171 (41.01 %)	196 (47.00 %)	318 (19.97 %)	786 (49.37 %)	488 (30.65 %)
Place to raise children	52 (12.47 %)	175 (41.97 %)	190 (45.56 %)	231 (14.51 %)	625 (39.26 %)	736 (46.23 %)
Place to retire*	108 (25.90 %)	179 (42.93 %)	130 (31.18 %)	525 (33.00 %)	658 (41.36 %)	408 (25.64 %)
Schools*	63 (15.11 %)	208 (49.88 %)	146 (35.01 %)	260 (16.34 %)	697 (43.81 %)	634 (39.85 %)
Job opportunities*	218 (52.28 %)	164 (39.33 %)	35 (8.39 %)	487 (30.61 %)	843 (52.99 %)	261 (16.40 %)
Recreation*	150 (36.06 %)	175 (42.07 %)	91 (21.88 %)	333 (20.93 %)	751 (47.20 %)	507 (31.87 %)
Health care*	88 (21.10 %)	240 (57.55 %)	89 (21.34 %)	209 (13.14 %)	837 (52.61 %)	545 (34.26 %)
Available housing*	83 (19.95 %)	250 (60.10 %)	83 (19.95 %)	223 (14.02 %)	941 (59.15 %)	427 (26.84 %)
Freedom from crime	67 (16.07 %)	227 (54.44 %)	123 (29.50 %)	327 (20.55 %)	811 (50.97 %)	453 (28.47 %)
Citizen involvement	110 (26.44 %)	236 (56.73 %)	70 (16.83 %)	371 (23.32 %)	913 (57.39 %)	307 (19.30 %)

*Most common responses for each question in bold. * = statistically significant rural-urban difference*

time living in the community; status as homeowners or renters; whether they had internet access at home; household income; financial situation and outlook; age; gender; race or ethnicity; marital status; educational attainment; employment status; and voter registration status.

When asked about their local communities, both rural and urban respondents generally rated them as desirable and felt they were unlikely to change. Urban respondents were slightly more positive than rural respondents in their communities' desirability rating but were also more likely to expect future change. Respondents also felt that their cost of living was about average but urban respondents were more likely to see the cost of living as high. Respondents generally felt safe in their communities, but rural respondents were more likely to rate their communities as safe. Both rural and urban respondents rated almost every aspect of their local communities as "medium" or "high" quality. One key rural-urban difference was that most rural respondents rated job opportunities as "low" quality while most urban residents rated them as "medium." Community ratings were often like those provided in 2008. However, respondents today were less likely to see their communities as "very desirable" in comparison, but also less likely to believe that their communities would "become less desirable." They were also less likely to have provided "high" quality ratings on their community's neighborliness (among rural respondents); its quality as a place to raise children; and its quality as a place to retire (See Table 1).

Rural and urban respondents also had similar views on the prioritization of several specific issues. Most felt that repairs of local streets and roads should receive "higher priority." Both rural and urban respondents also had similar views concerning family and human service issues, with most agreeing that these issues should be given a "higher priority," or at least the "same priority." A majority of both rural and urban re-

spondents felt that strengthening programs to deal with drug and alcohol abuse should receive "higher priority." Key differences were that rural respondents were more likely to give "higher priority" on strengthening programs to combat drug and alcohol abuse, combating domestic violence and abuse, providing shelters for the temporarily homeless, and increased services for senior citizens. Another important rural-urban difference was that rural respondents said they would like the addition of retail and service businesses to receive "higher priority," while urban respondents rated this and all other issues concerning community facilities as needing the "same priority." In comparison to 2008, the prioritization of repair of local streets and roads and the addition of retail and service businesses (among rural respondents) increased. Prioritization decreased or remained similar for other community facilities issues.

When asked about family and human services issues, both rural and urban respondents generally felt the following should be given "higher priority": increasing services for senior citizens, strengthening programs to deal with drug and alcohol abuse, and combating domestic violence and abuse (See Table 2).

Rural and urban respondents surveyed were both generally not involved in their communities. Most indicated they had not: participated in one or more community clubs or organizations; served on a local government commission, committee, or board; or planned to leave part of their estate to a community

Table 2

	Rural				Urban			
	Don't Know	Lower Priority	Same Priority	Higher Priority	Don't Know	Lower Priority	Same Priority	Higher Priority
Increase services for senior citizen (meals, transportation, home health, etc.)*	11 (2.63 %)	20 (4.78 %)	169 (40.43 %)	218 (52.15 %)	65 (4.09 %)	105 (6.60 %)	680 (42.74 %)	741 (46.57 %)
Strengthen programs to deal with drug and alcohol abuse*	17 (4.08 %)	28 (6.71 %)	121 (29.02 %)	251 (60.19 %)	60 (3.77 %)	158 (9.94 %)	549 (34.53 %)	823 (51.76 %)
Combat domestic violence and abuse	21 (5.04 %)	32 (7.67 %)	168 (40.29 %)	196 (47.00 %)	94 (5.91 %)	149 (9.37 %)	662 (41.61 %)	686 (43.12 %)
Provide emergency food (food banks, food pantry)	10 (2.40 %)	30 (7.21 %)	207 (49.76 %)	169 (40.62 %)	56 (3.52 %)	163 (10.24 %)	787 (49.43 %)	586 (36.81 %)
Provide shelters for the temporarily homeless*	22 (5.28 %)	50 (11.99 %)	160 (38.37 %)	185 (44.36 %)	86 (5.40 %)	273 (17.15 %)	618 (38.82 %)	615 (38.63 %)
Provide affordable day care for children	23 (5.53 %)	39 (9.38 %)	173 (41.59 %)	181 (43.51 %)	79 (4.97 %)	192 (12.07 %)	678 (42.61 %)	642 (40.35 %)
Attract additional health care providers (specialists, family doctors, nurses, etc.)*	13 (3.12 %)	42 (10.10 %)	166 (39.90 %)	195 (46.88 %)	56 (3.52 %)	201 (12.63 %)	790 (49.62 %)	545 (34.23 %)

*Most common responses for each question in bold. * = statistically significant rural-urban difference*

foundation or organization. One notable rural-urban difference was that more rural respondents indicated they “occasionally” volunteered to help others in their communities. Compared to 2008, respondents generally did not participate in their communities as much as they did years ago.

Moving to their assessment of the Commonwealth as a whole, most rural and urban respondents surveyed were “more or less satisfied” with the way things are going in Pennsylvania today. Rural respondents were more likely than urban to have said they were “not satisfied.” However, satisfaction improved among both rural and urban respondents since 2008, when many said they were “not satisfied.”

When asked to prioritize issues affecting communities across Pennsylvania, rural and urban respondents again provided similar responses. Both rural and urban respondents said that almost every issue should receive a “higher priority.” No issues needed “lower priority.”

Rural respondents were more likely than urban to have said that availability of jobs, preservation of farmland, drug and alcohol abuse and prevention, and care of the elderly should receive higher priority. In contrast, there were no issues for which urban respondents reported higher priority than rural. Compared to 2008, either a similar or lower proportion of respondents felt that these issues should have “higher priority.” Exceptions were access to telecommunications/internet and maintenance of roads and bridges, which higher proportions of both rural and urban respondents said should receive “higher priority” (See Table 3).

While relatively few respondents identified expanding broadband internet access as needing to receive a “higher priority” from state government, the proportion who said this nearly doubled in comparison to the 2008 survey. Meaning, its importance has increased among respondents. Furthermore, access to the internet was significantly related to attitudes on many issues. Those

without internet access at home felt that their communities were less desirable, were less satisfied with the way things are going in Pennsylvania today, and had less trust in government officials and institutions.

As a follow-up question, the respondents were asked which of these issues was most important or most in need of higher priority. Responses between rural and urban respondents differed here. Rural respondents were most likely to have said availability of jobs, while urban respondents were most likely to have said maintenance of roads and bridges. These priorities were different than those reported in 2008. At that time, very few respondents, rural or urban, indicated that maintenance of roads and bridges or drug and alcohol abuse

Table 3

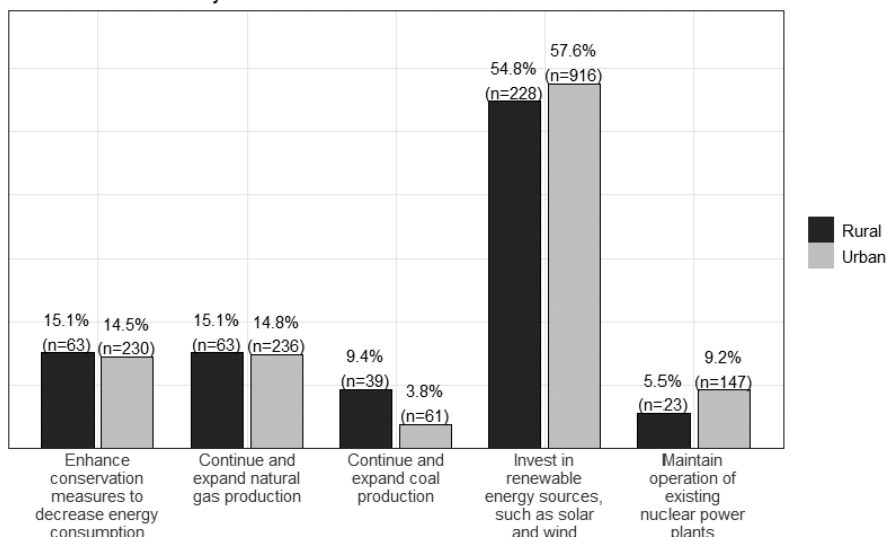
Future Priorities for the Commonwealth								
<i>Compared to what is being done now, what priority do you want each of the following to have in the future?</i>								
	Rural				Urban			
	Don't Know	Lower Priority	Same Priority	Higher Priority	Don't Know	Lower Priority	Same Priority	Higher Priority
Availability of jobs*	11 (2.64%)	12 (2.88%)	109 (26.14%)	285 (68.35%)	43 (2.70%)	62 (3.89%)	596 (37.44%)	891 (55.97%)
Preservation of farmland*	15 (3.60%)	21 (5.04%)	169 (40.53%)	212 (50.84%)	83 (5.21%)	191 (12.00%)	660 (41.46%)	658 (41.33%)
Crime and violence prevention	9 (2.15%)	13 (3.11%)	162 (38.76%)	234 (55.98%)	32 (2.01%)	67 (4.21%)	566 (35.58%)	926 (58.20%)
Drug and alcohol abuse treatment and prevention*	13 (3.12%)	26 (6.24%)	138 (33.09%)	240 (57.55%)	52 (3.27%)	170 (10.69%)	549 (34.51%)	820 (51.54%)
Safe drinking water	12 (2.88%)	23 (5.52%)	190 (45.56%)	192 (46.04%)	49 (3.08%)	95 (5.97%)	662 (41.58%)	786 (49.37%)
Health care access and availability	9 (2.16%)	12 (2.88%)	154 (36.93%)	242 (58.03%)	45 (2.83%)	87 (5.47%)	558 (35.09%)	900 (56.60%)
Education for youth/children	10 (2.40%)	16 (3.84%)	141 (33.81%)	250 (59.95%)	41 (2.58%)	57 (3.58%)	552 (34.70%)	941 (59.15%)
Protection and conservation of the natural environment	13 (3.12%)	28 (6.71%)	192 (46.04%)	184 (44.12%)	47 (2.95%)	118 (7.42%)	650 (40.85%)	776 (48.77%)
Care of the elderly*	12 (2.88%)	13 (3.12%)	141 (33.89%)	250 (60.10%)	41 (2.58%)	92 (5.78%)	626 (39.35%)	832 (52.29%)
Access to telecommunications/internet*	14 (3.36%)	52 (12.47%)	215 (51.56%)	136 (32.61%)	36 (2.26%)	243 (15.26%)	905 (56.85%)	408 (25.63%)
Reform Pennsylvania's local tax structure*	26 (6.24%)	21 (5.04%)	146 (35.01%)	224 (53.72%)	102 (6.41%)	139 (8.74%)	576 (36.20%)	774 (48.65%)
Homeland security/public safety	13 (3.12%)	27 (6.49%)	187 (44.95%)	189 (45.43%)	48 (3.02%)	151 (9.49%)	721 (45.32%)	671 (42.17%)
Maintenance of roads and bridges	8 (1.92%)	11 (2.64%)	98 (23.50%)	300 (71.94%)	41 (2.58%)	50 (3.14%)	359 (22.56%)	1141 (71.72%)
Development of alternative energy sources	16 (3.84%)	52 (12.47%)	179 (42.93%)	170 (40.77%)	44 (2.76%)	228 (14.32%)	621 (39.01%)	699 (43.91%)

*Most common responses for each question in bold. * = statistically significant rural-urban difference*

Figure 1

Options for Meeting Pennsylvania's Energy Needs

Which of the following options holds the greatest promise for addressing Pennsylvania's energy demands in the next 5 years?



were top priorities (the latter was a top rural priority in the current survey). Availability of jobs remained a top issue among rural respondents, while alternative energy development and healthcare fell in priority among urban respondents.

When asked to prioritize issues concerning protection and effective use of natural resources in the environment, rural and urban respondents generally agreed that most issues should be given the “same priority.” Exceptions were monitoring and regulating public drinking water quality and improving the water quality of streams and lakes, which urban respondents said should be given “higher priority.” In comparison to 2008, a similar or lower proportion of respondents felt these issues should be given “higher priority.” The one issue where more urban respondents felt should be given “higher priority” was reducing storm water run-off and flooding.

Rural and urban respondents also generally agreed that investing in renewable energy sources was the best of several options for addressing Pennsylvania’s energy demands in the

future. Among other options, urban respondents were more likely than rural to prefer maintaining nuclear power plants, and rural respondents were more likely than urban to prefer continued or expanded coal production. These results could not be compared to 2008 as respondents were not given similar options to consider at that time (See Figure 1).

When asked questions concerning the extraction of natural gas (“fracking”), rural and urban respondents were also in agreement. Both indicated that they would prefer to strengthen environmental regulations of

the industry, rather than reduce or continue to enforce existing regulations (46.1 percent rural and 47.1 percent urban respondents supported strengthening) (See Figure 2). Most also indicated that they would support the adoption of a severance tax on natural gas produced in Pennsylvania (62.2 percent rural and 60.3 percent urban respondents supported a severance tax). These questions were not asked in 2008, so responses could not be compared.

Residents of the commonwealth were also asked

Figure 2

Regulation of Natural Gas Extraction (Fracking)

In terms of regulating the extraction of natural gas in Pennsylvania (“fracking”), do you support:

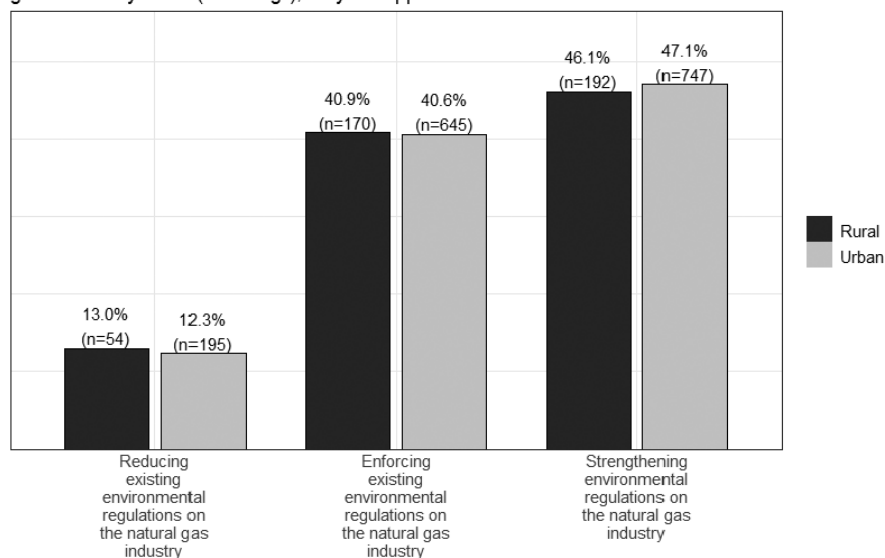


Table 4

	Rural			Urban		
	Somewhat/ Strongly Agree	No Opinion	Somewhat/ Strongly Disagree	Somewhat/ Strongly Agree	No Opinion	Somewhat/ Strongly Disagree
The recreational use of marijuana by adults aged 21 and older should be legalized*	234 (56.25 %)	51 (12.26 %)	131 (31.49 %)	997 (62.63 %)	189 (11.87 %)	406 (25.50 %)
The state income tax should be changed from a flat rate to graduated rates	260 (62.50 %)	63 (15.14 %)	93 (22.36 %)	988 (62.10 %)	230 (14.46 %)	373 (23.44 %)
The death penalty be abolished in Pennsylvania*	91 (21.82 %)	88 (21.10 %)	238 (57.07 %)	489 (30.74 %)	301 (18.92 %)	801 (50.35 %)
Trained faculty and staff should be allowed to carry firearms in schools*	228 (54.81 %)	45 (10.82 %)	143 (34.38 %)	728 (45.73 %)	164 (10.30 %)	700 (43.97 %)

*Most common responses for each question in bold. * = statistically significant rural-urban difference*

about several current policy issues. Although there were statistically significant differences in how they felt, the general responses from both rural and urban respondents were the same. Most agreed that the recreational use of marijuana by adults aged 21 and older should be legalized, with urban respondents being more likely to have agreed with this. Most also disagreed when asked if the death penalty should be abolished, with rural respondents being more likely to have provided this response. Both rural and urban respondents also agreed that trained faculty and staff should be allowed to carry firearms in schools, with the majority of rural respondents having said this. Finally, most respondents

agreed that the state income tax should be changed from a flat to a graduated rate, with no significant difference in rural and urban responses. Responses could not be compared to 2008, when current policy issues differed (See Table 4). The final questions concerning statewide issues regarded the opioid crisis. Here, rural and urban views differed. Rural respondents most supported stricter enforcement of criminal penalties to address the crisis, while urban respondents most supported increased funding for programs to treat and prevent addiction (See Figure 3). Most urban respondents also supported the expansion of methadone clinics in their communities, while rural respondents were split, with similar proportions being in support of and opposition to this. These questions were not asked in 2008, so responses could not be compared.

When asked to rate their confidence in several government institutions and officials in the Commonwealth, rural and urban responses were quite similar. Generally, both indicated that they had “some” confidence in the state legislature, the courts, local and municipal officials, and local school district officials (See Table 5). Rural and urban respondents differed in the trust and confidence they had in the governor, however, with rural residents being less trusting. In comparison to 2008, trust in local and municipal officials increased, with increases being largest among urban respondents. Trust in other institutions and officials was generally lower than or similar to the trust levels indicated in 2008. However, while fewer said they had “some” confidence in the governor, more also indicated that they had “a great deal” of trust, especially among urban respondents. Trust in local school district officials could not be compared to 2008,

Figure 3

Opinions on Addressing the Opioid Crisis

In terms of addressing the opioid crisis in Pennsylvania, which of the following do you MOST support?

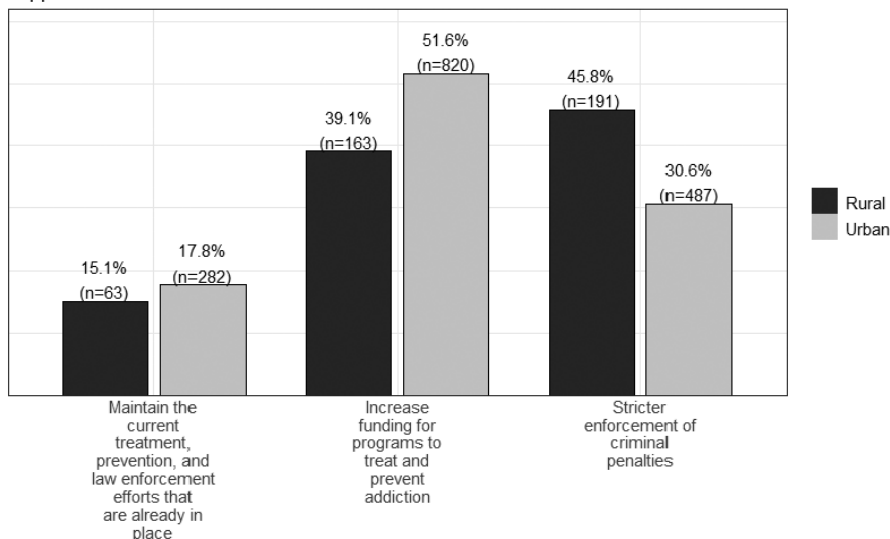


Table 5

Confidence and Trust in State Government
How much confidence and trust do you have in each of the following?

	Rural				Urban			
	A Great Deal	Some	A Little	None	A Great Deal	Some	A Little	None
State Legislature	19 (4.56 %)	173 (41.49 %)	167 (40.05 %)	58 (13.91 %)	100 (6.29 %)	725 (45.57 %)	550 (34.57 %)	216 (13.58 %)
Courts in Pennsylvania	48 (11.51 %)	195 (46.76 %)	126 (30.22 %)	48 (11.51 %)	190 (11.93 %)	759 (47.68 %)	461 (28.96 %)	182 (11.43 %)
Governor of Pennsylvania*	57 (13.64 %)	138 (33.01 %)	131 (31.34 %)	92 (22.01 %)	309 (19.41 %)	679 (42.65 %)	375 (23.56 %)	229 (14.38 %)
Local/municipal officials	46 (11.03 %)	184 (44.12 %)	141 (33.81 %)	46 (11.03 %)	173 (10.87 %)	765 (48.08 %)	454 (28.54 %)	199 (12.51 %)
Local school district officials	57 (13.64 %)	138 (33.01 %)	131 (31.34 %)	92 (22.01 %)	234 (14.71 %)	716 (45.00 %)	433 (27.22 %)	208 (13.07 %)

*Most common responses for each question in bold. * = statistically significant rural-urban difference*

when a similar question was not asked.

Finally, when asked to rate their local governments on several specific points, rural and urban residents agreed that they did a “fair” or “good” job. Assessments of their attention to citizen concerns and managing public funds and facilities exhibited no significant rural-urban differences. Rural residents provided significantly lower ratings when asked about improving and preserving quality of life and planning for future change. Compared to 2008, ratings for each point improved.

Policy Considerations

One of the study goals was to provide policymakers and other stakeholders with suggestions as to how they can use the information in this analysis to best serve their communities. Following are considerations for policymakers when addressing the issues examined in the survey:

- **Recognize areas of agreement.** Both rural and urban residents held similar attitudes on a variety of issues. Policymakers should consider these areas of agreement when deciding how to address issues facing both rural and urban Pennsylvania communities. This result does not imply that policymakers should hold these specific positions on these issues without also considering other pertinent information, as attitudes may vary across communities with unique characteristics, and some common goals may be achieved through multiple policy options.

- **Address top rural and urban priorities.** Rural and urban respondents identified different issues as being the most important. Rural respondents said the availability of jobs, local tax structure reform, maintenance of roads and bridges, and drug and alcohol

abuse treatment and prevention should be given “higher priority.” Urban respondents said maintenance of roads and bridges, availability of jobs, local tax structure reform, and crime and violence prevention should be given “higher priority.” Policymakers should consider what is already being done to address these top priorities and weigh the policy options available to respond to what respondents see as the most important issues.

- **Meet Pennsylvania’s**

- energy demands. Rural and urban respondents generally agreed that investment in renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind, is the best option to meet Pennsylvania’s energy demands. Policymakers should consider the continuation of current efforts, such as the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards Act of 2004, along with weighing new policy options to meet these demands. They should also consider the role that natural gas production plays in meeting these demands. Pennsylvania is a top natural gas producer. At the same time, both rural and urban respondents agreed that regulations of this industry should be strengthened, and a severance tax should be adopted, both of which could impact the productivity of this industry.

- **Address the opioid crisis.** Rural Pennsylvania has been disproportionately impacted by opioid overdose deaths. The opioid crisis is also one issue where rural and urban respondents disagreed. Rural respondents supported addressing the crisis through the criminal justice system, while urban respondents supported addressing it through public health efforts. Both rural and urban respondents agreed that action needs to be taken. Furthermore, current efforts to address the crisis incorporate both components. Policymakers should consider continuation of current efforts along with weighing new policy options to further reduce the impact of this crisis, especially in rural areas.

- **Address other current issues.** There were several other current issues where rural and urban respondents agreed on a specific policy direction. These included: legalization of recreational marijuana by adults aged 21 and older; changing the state income tax rate from a flat rate to a graduated rate; keeping the death penalty; and allowing trained faculty and staff to carry firearms in schools. Policymakers should consider the positions

of those in the communities they serve along with other pertinent information in deciding which direction to take on these current issues.

• **Maintain and build trust in government.** Trust and confidence in government institutions and officials was not extremely high or low, with both rural and urban respondents stating they had “some” trust as opposed to “a great deal,” “a little,” or “none.” Trust has remained at similar levels or increased since 2008. To maintain levels of trust or potentially increase them, policymakers can focus their efforts on supporting economic growth, interpersonal trust, and civic engagement, and their own job performance, all factors that impact levels of trust in government.

• **Foster engagement in local communities.** Since 2008, the proportion of respondents participating in their local communities, both rural and urban, has declined, which is a concerning trend. Other than rural respondents reporting “occasional” volunteering, respondents most commonly said they had “never” participated in a variety of avenues for community involvement. Efforts to foster community engagement are numerous but include: support of public education; increasing access to the internet and digital technologies that can connect community members; and building communities that bring their diverse residents together. The decline in community involvement is a national trend and has no simple solutions, but policymakers should consider the impact of their decisions on the education system as well as opportunities for community members to connect to one another in their efforts to foster engagement. This may be especially true for policymakers that serve rural communities, where those most likely to become involved may move away, exacerbating the problem.

• **Respond to changing circumstances.** Policymakers should recognize that, although the results of this analysis focus on the issues of importance today, this does not imply these will remain the issues of tomorrow. When surveyed in 2008, respondents focused on the availability of jobs amidst a recession; however, over the following decade, other issues emerged, such as the opioid crisis and declining quality of infrastructure. Therefore, policymakers may also want to consider how demands may change with the political, economic, and social contexts of rural Pennsylvania.

For a copy of the full research results, *Attitudinal Survey of Pennsylvanians, 2019*, visit www.rural.palegislature.us.

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