

Overview

Potomac Incorporated periodically surveys communities throughout the region on public issues. This survey of Prince George's County voters is the latest in that series.

For this survey, a total of 800 Prince George's County registered voters were interviewed by telephone June 17-24, 2003.

Margin of Sampling Error

According to customary statistical standards, this countywide sample produces a maximum margin of sampling error of $\pm 3.5\%$ at a 95% confidence level. This means that, 95 percent of the time, the "true" figure would fall within this range if every registered voter in the county had been interviewed. For smaller subgroups of the overall sample, the potential sampling error is larger.

Margin of sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion survey. The practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion introduce other sources of error into the study. Variations in question wording or the order of the questions, for instance, can lead to somewhat different results.

Sample Selection

Potomac constructed this sample of voters from the most recently updated voter file provided by the Prince George's County Board of Elections. In matters of public issues, the use of such a voter file is preferred because it ensures the exclusion of residents who are not registered to vote, which largely precludes their participation in the political process.

Furthermore, for this survey a likely voter selection criterion was used. From the overall pool of registered voters, individuals were selected as potential interview subjects if they had voted in the most recent presidential general election (2000), or if they had registered to vote since that election.

To ensure that a valid sample was achieved in each of the nine County Council districts, the overall voter file was then stratified by district. Within each district, Potomac randomly drew individuals to be interviewed using an "every nth" selection methodology. That is, each district file was sorted, and voters were selected at a specific interval moving across the entire district file.

The resulting list of randomly-selected likely voters was telephone matched by a commercial vendor. Though telephone match rates varied district by district, on

average about 60% of the eligible names were successfully matched with a telephone number.

Potomac further developed sampling goals by gender.

Telephone Interviewing

Professionally trained and supervised callers completed the telephone interviews from a central calling facility in Windsor, Nova Scotia, using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) capability. Callers were continually monitored for quality and accuracy. Supervisors called back at least 10% of respondents to confirm the veracity of the interviews.

Calls were made between 5:00 and 9:15 p.m. weeknights, 10:00 and 8:00 p.m. Saturday, and 1:00 and 9:15 p.m. Sunday, Eastern time.

Potential respondents were screened to ensure that they did not work for the Prince George's County public schools and that they did intend to vote in the next general election.

The survey averaged 15 minutes in length, with a 75% incidence. A total of 13,413 dialings were made to achieve the 800 completed interviews.

Data Weighting

The stratified sampling approach produced valid samples in each of the nine districts, but simply aggregating those 800 interviews would not produce an accurate picture of the countywide general electorate. To bring the countywide sample into balance, the survey data were weighted.

The initial round of weighting corrected for the differences in voter turnout across the county. Each of the 18 sampling cells discussed above was given its proper weight based on its share of the countywide turnout in a typical election. The racial breakdown was then balanced with a set of overlay weights. The resulting countywide sample is an accurate reflection of Prince George's County general election voters.