

*A partnership among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Maywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Hazleton, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, Wilkes University, and the business community*

## Student Polling Project

The Institute launched a polling program in 2014. The Institute regularly polls students at its partnering higher education institutions. These polling and survey research services are part of The Institute's menu of services offered to all types of clients.

This 2025 poll assesses students' opinions about public policy issues and civic engagement. A total of 581 students participated in this poll—from all class years and a variety of majors. Part-time and graduate students are well represented in the data. The poll is distributed online through our academic partners, and the data was collected during September 2025.

The Institute is an applied research and economic consulting organization that fulfills two related priorities:

- (1) customized client solutions and strategies to facilitate decision-making
- (2) planning that enhances growth, impact, and sustainability for organizations.

The Institute also serves a public mission to provide data, analytics, and research to the community at large. This empirical, objective information is intended to drive discussion and innovative solutions that enhance regional quality of life and standard of living.

The Institute was formed as a unique collaborative of regional higher education institutions and the business community, and founded on the belief that good decisions are driven by good data.

### **Overall, students feel that the United States is not moving in the right direction. Their perceptions of Pennsylvania's trajectory are not as clear.**

Fourteen percent of students believe that the United States is headed in the right direction, while 58.78 percent believe the country is on the wrong course. Additionally, another 16.34 percent indicated feelings that the country's direction is ultimately unchanged, while a final 10.24 percent are uncertain about the country's direction. The proportion of 'right track' answers has increased from 5.05 percent in 2024, and the share of 'not sure' answers has also increased from 17.98 percent in 2024.

Students' perceptions of Pennsylvania's direction are considerably less certain, with 36.19 percent of respondents indicating that they are not sure. Another 29.83 percent claim that the Commonwealth's direction is unchanged, while 19.32 percent express optimism and 14.67 percent have concerns. A slight decrease in the level of optimism was noted from 2024 (20.35 percent), along with a decrease in concerns (16.56 percent).

"Geisinger College's mission centers on improving community well-being through research and education grounded in population health. So, it's encouraging to see the level of concern about public health in this study, particularly in terms of access, safety, and overall well-being. These findings align closely with our college's priorities and tell us we can rely on community-wide collaboration in advancing public health outcomes. We are happy to have such concerned young neighbors motivated to help!"

Julie Byerley, MD., MPH  
President and Dean  
Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine



## Public Policy and Civic Engagement 2025

**Jobs and the economy, health care, the cost of education, corruption of government or public officials, and public health are deemed by student respondents to be the most important public policy issues, while policies related to criminal justice or police issues and terrorism/homeland security were rated least important.**

Students were asked to evaluate the importance of various public policy issues by assigning a number between 1 ('Not at All important') to 5 ('Very Important').

Based on this scale of 1 to 5, the most important public policy issues to regional students are: (1) jobs and economy; (2) healthcare; (3) cost of college education; (4) corruption of government or public officials; (5) public health; (6) issues related to education (other than the cost of college); (7) efficiency of government (8) equality or civil rights issues; (9) criminal justice or police issues; and (10) terrorism/homeland security.

The bottom tier issues include: (1) international affairs and/or foreign policy; (2) the national debt; (3) immigration; (4) climate change; (5) taxes; (6) energy; and (7) social security.

### **Students feel reasonably well-informed about current events, crediting the internet and national and local news sources.**

Their primary sources are the internet, in particular social media, or online communities, televised national news, word of mouth, televised local news, websites of newspapers, websites of television networks, and other internet news websites.

Knowledge of Current Events	
Very informed	34.5%
Somewhat informed	52.7%
Not very informed	11.3%
Not at all informed	1.0%

Less utilized forms of media include smartphone apps of newspapers, radio, other smartphone apps, late night television, and smartphone apps from television networks or cable news channels. Similar to 2024, this continuing trend suggests that smartphones are still major contenders in the field of media dissemination, while more traditional forms of online content (such as internet news or even social media) remain the prevailing forms of content circulation for students.

## Public Policy and Civic Engagement 2025

### General trends in political science research suggest that the likelihood of voter registration increases with age.

Among regional college students, a plurality of respondents who are not registered to vote are 18-19 years old (31.48 percent).

Approximately 34.16 percent of students between the ages of 18 and 19 are reportedly very likely to vote in the upcoming election, compared to 51.16 percent of students aged 20 and 21, 37.04 percent of students between the ages of 22 and 23, 53.33 percent of students between the ages of 24 and 29, and 59.38 percent over the age of 30. The cohort with the largest proportion of students who identify as 'not at all likely' to vote in the upcoming election is between the ages of 24 and 29 (13.33 percent).

For the November 2025 election, Democrats on campuses across Northeastern Pennsylvania appear to have a slight edge in voter enthusiasm. Half the Democrats, compared to 31.76 percent of Republicans, are 'very likely' to vote in November 2025.

Among third-party or other voters, 1.76 percent are very likely to vote on Election Day, while 14.71 percent of students who are unaffiliated party made the same claim.

Voting Likelihood	Voting Likelihood by Age				
	18-19	20-21	22-23	24-29	30+
Not at all likely	6.21%	6.98%	11.11%	13.33%	7.81%
Not sure	12.42%	8.14%	7.41%	6.67%	12.50%
Not very likely	15.53%	9.30%	7.41%	16.67%	7.81%
Somewhat likely	31.68%	24.42%	37.04%	10.00%	12.50%
Very likely	34.16%	51.16%	37.04%	53.33%	59.38%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>64</b>

"The voices of Northeastern Pennsylvania's college students offer both a call to awareness and a path forward in our shared responsibility for responsive action. When young adults tell us clearly and consistently that health care access, economic opportunities and stability, affordable education, and trust in institutions and elected leaders matter most, they are providing us with a prioritized blueprint for community transformation. Their unifying clarity is inspiring. Our charge as educators, employers, policymakers, and civic leaders is to lean in, listen intently, close the distance between expressed concern and responsive change, so we can co-create the preferred future we all deserve."

Linda Thomas-Hemak, MD., FACP, FAAP  
President and CEO

The Wright Centers for Community Health and Graduate Medical Education



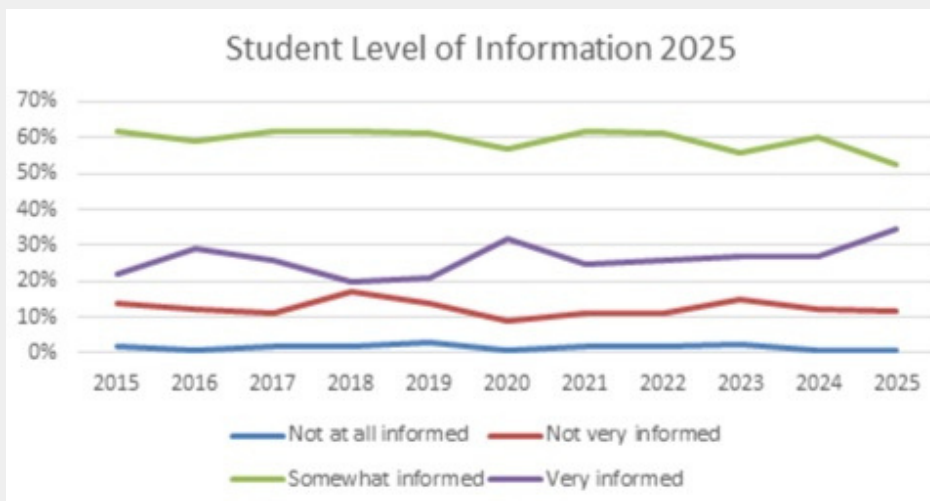
## Public Policy and Civic Engagement 2025

### A large majority of students are registered to vote, and likely to vote in the upcoming election.

At 76.40 percent, a majority of regional students are registered to vote in any location in the United States. A plurality of students (34.71 percent) are registered Democrats, followed by Republicans (30.03 percent), unaffiliated voters (24.24 percent), and members of other parties (1.38 percent). The remaining 9.64 percent are not sure of their current political party affiliations.

### Knowledge of Current Events

Since 2015, respondents' levels of information about current events have remained fairly consistent. From 2015 to 2025, the number of students who feel very informed about the news has fluctuated between 20.00 percent and 34.50 percent, with an average year-by-year change of 6.97 percent. Compared to 2015, this share of students increased by 12.50 percent and has increased by 7.57 percentage points in the last year. The proportion of students who claim to feel not very informed has also decreased, from 12.12 percent in 2024 to 11.76 percent in 2025, which is slightly lower than the overall share from 2015 (14.00 percent).



Meanwhile, the percentage of students feeling completely uninformed has remained relatively static throughout the same period, dropping from 2.37 percent in 2023 to 1.02 percent in 2025. The share of students who are very informed not only increased in 2025, but marked a new recorded high over the years of measurement.

### Members of the regional student population who are likeliest to vote are generally well-informed, and concerned about the direction of the United States.

At 76.40 percent, a majority of regional students are registered to vote in any location in the United States. A plurality of students (34.71 percent) are registered Democrats, followed by Republicans (30.03 percent), unaffiliated voters (24.24 percent), and members of other parties (1.38 percent). The remaining 9.64 percent are not sure of their current political party affiliations.

They are most concerned about: (1) Health care, (2) Cost of college education, (3) Jobs and the economy, (4) Corruption of government or public officials, (5) Public health, and (6) Efficiency of government.



# Public Policy and Civic Engagement 2025

## Public Policy Issues over Time

While the full range of public policy issues presented in this course of this survey has expanded from year to year, the overwhelming majority of issues evaluated by students have been featured regularly enough to analyze over a longer-term period. These issues include: (1) the cost of a college education; (2) issues related to education other than the cost of college; (3) healthcare; (4) jobs and the economy; (5) terrorism and homeland security; (6) environmental issues; (7) energy policy; (8) immigration policy; (9) Social Security; (10) taxes, and (11) government efficiency.

Students indicate the most concern about five public policy issues: healthcare (68 percent), cost of college (67 percent), jobs and economy (65 percent), education (54 percent), and efficiency of government (51 percent). Conversely, the bottom tier public policy issues which students consider 'very important' include (1) taxes (33 percent), (2) energy (34 percent), (3) immigration (36 percent), and (4) social security (40 percent).

Students Describing Public Policy Issues as "Very Important"											
National Public Policy Issue	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Cost of College	66%	59%	63%	66%	61%	60%	62%	61%	66%	66%	67%
Education	45%	44%	42%	45%	45%	45%	43%	46%	44%	47%	54%
Healthcare	55%	52%	55%	58%	61%	63%	61%	60%	65%	65%	68%
Jobs and Economy	63%	55%	55%	54%	52%	51%	50%	48%	56%	54%	65%
Terrorism	50%	50%	50%	45%	46%	41%	45%	39%	44%	41%	44%
Environmental	35%	34%	42%	43%	55%	51%	50%	49%	39%	40%	42%
Energy	32%	28%	32%	33%	40%	35%	37%	35%	34%	29%	34%
Immigration	26%	26%	28%	28%	33%	32%	32%	30%	29%	29%	36%
Social Security	36%	29%	31%	33%	32%	31%	32%	29%	34%	36%	40%
Taxes	34%	25%	28%	26%	30%	24%	27%	26%	30%	33%	33%
Efficiency of Government	50%	45%	44%	42%	44%	46%	43%	44%	42%	47%	51%

## Media Dissemination

Reliance on traditional media conduits, whether by print (newspaper), internet sites, television, or radio, has generally declined since 2016. Social media, on the other hand, has become an important resource for students.

Source of Information about Current Events										
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Newspaper (local)	43%	31%	35%	32%	33%	29%	34%	34%	26%	26%
Television (National News)	75%	61%	59%	56%	41%	57%	51%	54%	56%	54%
Radio	36%	31%	32%	31%	26%	27%	25%	25%	24%	20%
Internet (newspapers)	79%	64%	47%	48%	48%	50%	48%	40%	37%	39%
Internet (social media)	72%	60%	70%	70%	73%	71%	73%	73%	71%	77%
Internet (other)	28%	24%	44%	39%	43%	43%	42%	40%	34%	36%
Word of Mouth	63%	53%	57%	55%	56%	57%	57%	57%	57%	52%

In 2018, for the first time in the Public Policy and Civic Engagement Poll, a wider range of resource options was provided to respondents in an attempt to more fully capture the diverse methods (including smartphone applications and podcasts) by which today's students acquire news and information.

When comparing these results to those of previous years, however, these new categories were reintegrated back into larger categories, which explains the pronounced jump in the number of students who receive news from "Internet – Other" between 2017 and 2018. Social media, national news television, and word of mouth are the top three sources of information about current events that lead in 2025, as the only three options to exceed more than half of the students.

## Public Policy and Civic Engagement

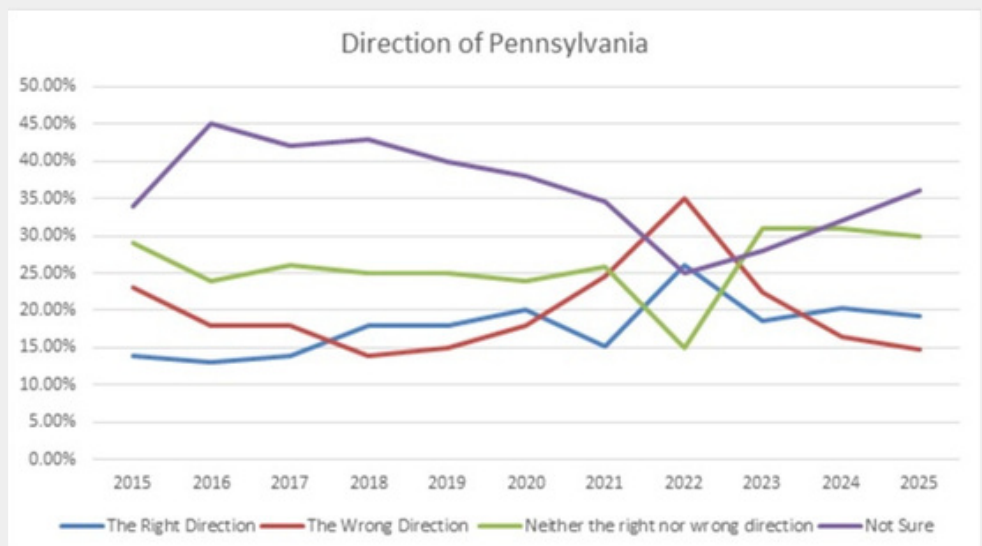
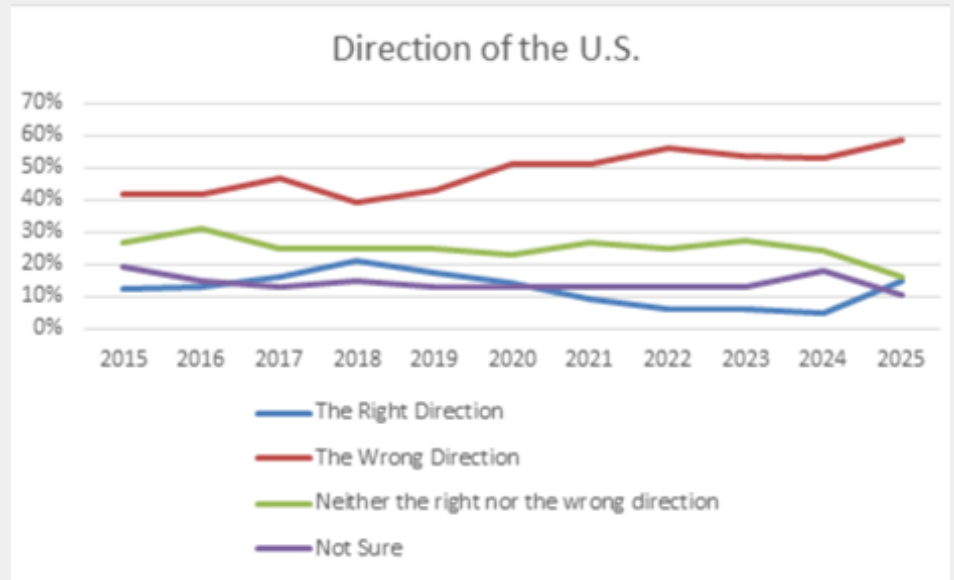
### 2025

#### Direction of the United States and Pennsylvania

Every Public Policy and Civic Engagement poll conducted thus far has asked respondents to indicate in what directions (if any) both the United States and Pennsylvania were heading. The percentages of students selecting any given option have fluctuated over time, yet broad patterns have emerged. Among students polled about the direction of the United States, the share who feel the country is headed in the right direction decreased since 2018 before rising to 14.63 percent in 2025. The percentage of students who feel the country is headed in the wrong direction also increased in the past year; this share has grown nearly 17.00 percent since 2015, however.

Among students polled about the direction of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, long-term trends are more easily observable. In every poll conducted since 2015, the plurality of students has been uncertain about the trajectory of Pennsylvania's direction, suggesting a possible disengagement from state-level politics as opposed to national developments. During 2022 and 2023, however, the percentages of those unsure about Pennsylvania's direction did not constitute pluralities, with data showing 25.00 percent in 2022 and 28.01 percent in 2023. As of 2025, only a slightly higher proportion of students was uncertain (36.19 percent) compared to those who felt Pennsylvania is moving in neither the right direction nor the wrong direction (29.83 percent).

Other observable trends emerge among responses from students who have more fully formed opinions of current events in Pennsylvania. For example, the number of students claiming Pennsylvania is heading in the wrong direction steadily increased from 2018 to 2022 before dropping to 14.67 percent in 2025 – a level similar to 2018.



The percentage of students more optimistic about Pennsylvania's direction increased from 14.00 percent to 20.00 percent between 2015 and 2020, before dropping to 15.10 percent in 2021. It has since fluctuated, reaching the 20 percent mark most recently. Lastly, despite a drop to 15.00 percent in 2022, the percentage of students who feel that Pennsylvania's direction remains unchanged rebounded to 30.96 percent in 2023, 31.07 percent in 2024, and 29.83 percent in 2025.

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## What We Believe

At The Institute, we believe that empowering leaders with the research-based strategies and solutions they need to make informed decisions will lead to a stronger economy and a better quality of life for regional residents. For over a decade, The Institute has worked behind the scenes to support initiatives that advance regional competitiveness and revitalize communities.

## 2025 Institute Underwriters

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