Pennsylvania's Multiple Personalities
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How many Pennsylvanias are there? How one answers that question depends as much on political experience as geographic knowledge. If you ask it of rookie statewide candidates early in a campaign, they are likely to look at you with distinct alarm—but if you ask them the same question after a campaign, they are likely to smile knowingly at you. For the state provides such a rich diversity of political geography that it often seems to the initiated that there are many Pennsylvania's.

One way to understand this is to analyze the seven regions used in the Keystone Poll, the Millersville University statewide survey conducted during the past 10 years to assess voter intentions. The seven regions manifest the complexities of the state's political geography. And there is no better time just before the governor's election to examine them.

We'll move clockwise beginning in the Northwest.

NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Northwest includes 14 counties and ranges from Erie south to Lawrence County and west to Clearfield County. It encompasses about nine percent of the voting population. It is largely rural, with some farming, and light manufacturing.

Northwest narrowly registers Republican and many cultural conservatives live here. Rendell is popular and has been leading Fisher by double digits. Issue concerns seem to be driving gubernatorial voting this year, and health issues and education lead the list. The Northwest also has the highest proportion of seniors and the lowest proportion of folks earning less than $50,000 per year.

Religion is still important here; the region has the second largest protestant population in the state and has the highest percentage of born again Christians, which translates into many pro-life voters. Gun ownership is also high.

Election night question -- Can Fisher convince folks he is just as good as Rendell on the issues--and a good old boy to boot?

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

Spatially the largest of the regions; it includes 29 counties. This is the notorious Pennsylvania "T". Geographically, it ranges from Potter and Tioga counties, with some of the state's best hunting and forest areas, south to York, Adams, and Lancaster, with some of the state's most important farm, tourist and light manufacturing. It also includes Huntington and Centre, the fast growing county surrounding Penn State, and Berks and Schuylkill, areas known for mining and clothing manufacturing.
Central residents vote and heavily register Republican. More people here describe their ideology as conservative than in any other region. Central Pennsylvania also has one of the highest rates of gun ownership.

Central includes about 25% of the state's voting population. It's Mike Fisher's strongest region. It has the state's highest proportion of Protestants, and the highest proportion of born again Christians.

Election night question--This is Fisher country--he'll win it, but by how much? An eight or ten point victory isn't going to cut it this election.

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Northeast includes 10 counties. Centered in populous Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, it ranges from the resort and new growth Pocono area south to the economically diverse Northampton and Lehigh counties. Northeast comprises about 12 % of the voting population.

This is Casey country, and more Democrats than Republicans live here. Rendell leads here over Fisher, but narrowly.

The region has the state's highest proportion of Catholics. Voters in the region are moderate on social issues, such as abortion and gun control. In fact, there are many "moderate" voters here. Property tax and education rate as important issues, but interest in the election is second lowest of all Pennsylvania regions.

Election night question -- Region could be an early evening bellwether--next to Central Pennsylvania, this is Fisher's best shot to carry. But the Philly media market reaches this region, and the Rendell record is well known.

PHILADELPHIA

The region consists entirely of the city of Philadelphia--about 13 percent of the voting population of the state. This is Rendell country with the former mayor receiving as much as 80 percent of the vote in some polls. Philadelphia registers overwhelmingly Democrat, but actual voting turnout is often anemic.

Politically, the region presents some extremes. Philadelphians are most likely of all regions to call themselves liberals, and least likely to describe themselves as conservatives. It has the largest non-white population in the state, and one of the lowest proportions of college graduates. It also reports the lowest proportion of married residents and the most voters under the age of 35.

The cultural issues play large here. Philadelphia is the strongest pro-choice region in the state. In addition, people in the region are least likely to report gun ownership, and are most likely to favor gun control.

Election night question--It's not whom they will support, but will they turn out. Could be timely for the GOP to pave over some cemeteries.

SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
Southeast comprises Philadelphia's four "bedroom counties"—Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery. It's about 20 percent of the voting population. Rendell has maintained a big lead over Fisher here throughout the race.

The southeast is quintessentially suburbia. It reports the state's highest family incomes—and the lowest proportion of seniors. The region registers Republican, but it is a progressive Republicanism. People here are as likely as anywhere in the state to describe themselves as political moderates, among the least likely to call themselves conservatives.

Cultural issues can matter here, too. The region residents, along with Philadelphians, exhibit greater support for gun control than the other regions, and are least likely among the regions, again with Philadelphians, to take a strong pro-life position.

Election night question—Can Fisher remind enough voters here that he's the Republican and Rendell is the Democrat? If not the full figured lady should get to sing early in the evening.

SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Southwest includes eight counties surrounding Pittsburgh—about 10 percent of the state's voting population. This is the old mining and mill town part of the state. Economics and jobs are always important issues here.

Rendell has had a small lead over Fisher here. The region registers Democrat, but includes many so called "cultural conservatives" who have and will vote Republican. Issues are very important here, more than in any other region of the state.

The region is one of the most Catholic in the state. Gun ownership is important. Southwest has one of the highest proportion of gun owners, and the highest proportion of people who are strongly opposed to gun control. The region also has one of the state's highest rates of pro-life voters.

Election night question—The pro-gun and pro-life groups were AWOL for Bob Casey in the primary against Rendell. Do the cultural issues finally sway them toward Fisher—or does economics trump everything else this year?

ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Allegheny County includes Pittsburgh and surrounding municipalities, and comprises 12 percent of the state's voting population. Allegheny registers Democrat, but often votes for "home town" Republicans such as John Heinz, Dick Thornburgh, and Barbara Hafer. It has frequently been a swing district in close elections.

Allegheny has the state's second highest proportion of college graduates, but the second lowest proportion of married voters. It also has the state's second highest proportion of seniors and the highest proportion of widowed residents.

Fisher and Rendell have been in a virtual tie here throughout the campaign. Issues matter in the region, but personalities and party affiliation seem to be the dominating concerns this year.
Election night question--It's the home-town kid--it's Fisher's home town--versus "our kind of Democrat", that would be Rendell. This is the toss up region of election night.

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