

# 1999 Philadelphia Mayoral Election

## November 1999

As expected, the Philadelphia mayoral election proved to be a hard fought and tight contest. Democratic mayoral candidate John Street eked out a narrow 1-percentage point win over Republican mayoral candidate Sam Katz. The final Keystone Poll of this election cycle had Street ahead by 1-percentage point. The final numbers as reported by the Associated Press are:

**Street - 211,136 - 50%**

**Katz - 203,908 - 49%**

**Other - 5,376 - 1%**

### **Some of the key elements in Street's victory are worth mentioning:**

1) More than 5,000 party and union workers made up the Democratic field organization on election day. It has been reported that the Democratic Party spent almost a million dollars on the field operation alone. The Republicans cannot match the Democrats operationally in the city and were overwhelmed by the Democratic Party's superior field organization. Another way to view this election is to consider that Street won because he gained four more votes than Katz in each of the city's election divisions.

2) Street's message in the final week emphasized party loyalty and party unity, as he urged Democrats to return home. The visits by Democratic bigwigs certainly helped make that a point to Democratic voters in the city. Street also talked about coalition building and team effort in an effort to mitigate his image as a loner. That combination of factors was critical in bringing home undecided voters, fully 1/3 of whom were straight-party voting Democrats.

3) Katz ran a textbook campaign, but in the end was unable to overcome the partisanship and the late surge by Street. He ran behind Rizzo's 1987 showing in many white wards in the city. But one needs to appreciate the success of the Katz campaign in winning over blue collar white Democrats to his cause, even though his effort fell somewhat short.

4) As campaigns go, the candidates largely stuck to the issues and to themes that articulated their vision of Philadelphia's future. Uncharacteristically for a Philadelphia campaign, both candidates mostly refrained from personal attacks. Even the negative advertisement was relatively tame. Very little polarizing rhetoric was used in the campaign by either candidate, with both preaching unity and racial harmony. The fact that many important leaders crossed racial lines was also a key element in providing an atmosphere in which racially divisive rhetoric was virtually missing from the campaign.

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