

# The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

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## RELEASE INFORMATION

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in Sunday's *Star-Ledger*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll*."

## DIVORCE SETTLEMENTS IN NEW JERSEY

### REFORMS AND PERCEPTIONS

The New Jersey State Legislature is currently discussing a range of different reforms for divorce settlements. Two of the six possible reforms reviewed by state residents get overwhelming approval: 9-in-10 support giving both parents equal access to their children's records, and 8-in-10 approve of requiring divorcing parents to develop a parenting plan. Also, a majority of New Jerseyans approve of having penalties for parents who interfere with the visitation rights of the non-custodial parent (66%), including alimony as part of the custodial parent's income before deciding on the amount of child support payments (59%), and allowing alimony to be directly withdrawn from the non-custodial parent's paycheck (57%). Less than a majority — about 1-in-3 — state residents approve of automatically cutting off child support payments at age 18 even if the child is attending college.

While three of these reforms receive similar approval from both men and women, there is a gender gap for two that are favored more by men, and one that receives greater support from women. Men are more likely than women to approve of penalties for interference with visitation rights and automatically cutting off child support at age 18. Women are more likely than men to favor allowing alimony to be directly withdrawn from the non-custodial parent's paycheck.

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"While the gender gap is evident in opinions about divorce," commented Janice Ballou, Director of the Poll, "there are some issues that do not polarize men and women. These areas of consensus provide opportunities for more immediate divorce reforms while others may require additional dialogue to achieve agreement between the sexes."

The *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll conducted with 802 randomly selected New Jersey adults by telephone from May 25 to June 1, 1995 also found that 8-in-10 New Jerseyans are not aware of the divorce settlement bills that are being considered.

While there is a consensus (91%) in the perception that women are usually given custody of children in divorce settlements, there is variation in other opinions about divorce. Four-in-ten state residents say that women are treated more fairly than men in divorce settlements; however, more than 1-in-3 say they don't know which partner gets the fairer treatment. Close to 4-in-10 think that the parent who has custody of the children should be the most responsible for their financial well being, compared to 3-in-10 who feel both parents should share the financial responsibility.

### ***DIVORCE REFORMS***

The divorce settlement reform laws being discussed in the New Jersey Legislature have not yet gotten the attention of state residents. Eight-in-ten say they have not read or heard much (35%) or know nothing at all (49%) about these bills. In comparison, 15 percent have read or heard either a great deal (2%) or some (13%) about these reform bills.

Among the six possible divorce settlement reform bills described to New Jerseyans, five receive approval from a majority or more, while one is approved by about 1-in-3.

**•Giving both parents equal access to school, medical, and other records (91%)**

There is a consensus among state residents that both parents in a divorce settlement should have equal access to their children's school, medical, and other records. Overall, 91 percent strongly (72%) or mildly (19%) approve of this reform compared to 5 percent who strongly (2%) or mildly (3%) disapprove.

This is a reform where both men (94%) and women (90%) are similar in their approval. Divorced or separated New Jerseyans (89%) are also similar in their opinions about equal access to records as are residents who are married (94%) or single (91%).

**•Requiring the divorcing parents to develop a parenting plan (80%)**

A second suggested divorce settlement reform also gets substantial approval from state residents. Eight-in-ten New Jerseyans strongly (59%) or mildly (21%) approve of requiring divorcing parents to develop a parenting plan compared to 11 percent who strongly (6%) or mildly (5%) disapprove.

This is another reform where both men (77%) and women (82%) have similar opinions.

**•Having penalties on parents who interfere with the visitation rights of the non-custodial parent (66%)**

Two-in-three New Jerseyans strongly (42%) or mildly (24%) approve of having penalties for interfering with the visitation rights of the non-custodial parent compared to 24 percent who strongly (12%) or mildly (12%) disapprove and 10 percent who don't know.

With this suggested divorce settlement reform, there is an 11 percentage point gender gap between the approval given by men compared to that given by women. Seventy-one percent of

men support this reform while 60 percent of women approve. However, divorced or separated New Jerseyans (69%), as well as residents who are married (68%) or single (67%), have similar opinions about visitation rights.

**•Including alimony as part of the custodial parent's income before deciding on the amount of child support payments (59%).**

Six-in-ten residents strongly (30%) or mildly (29%) approve of including alimony as part of the custodial parent's income before deciding on the amount of child support payments compared to 30 percent who strongly (15%) or mildly (15%) disapprove and 10 percent who don't know.

Similar percentages of men (61%) and women (57%) approve of including alimony as part of the custodial parent's income before deciding on child support.

**•Allowing alimony to be directly withdrawn from the non-custodial parent's paycheck (57%)**

About 6-in-10 residents strongly (39%) or mildly (18%) approve of allowing alimony to be directly withdrawn from the non-custodial parent's paycheck compared to 35 percent who strongly (21%) or mildly (14%) disapprove and 8 percent who don't know.

Women (64%) are more likely than men (50%) to approve of directly withdrawing alimony from paychecks which is a 14 percentage point gender gap. Divorced or separated New Jerseyans (55%) and residents who are married (59%) or single (63%) have similar opinions about direct withdrawal for alimony.

**•Automatically cutting off child support payments at age 18 even if the child is attending college (32%)**

The automatic cut-off of child support payments at age 18 even if the child is attending

college is the suggested divorce reform that is approved by less than half of the state's residents. Thirty-two percent strongly (21%) or mildly (11%) approve of this divorce settlement reform compared to 65 percent who strongly (21%) or mildly (44%) disapprove and 4 percent who don't know.

There is a 15 percentage point gender gap in the approval of this divorce settlement reform with 39 percent of men approving compared to 24 percent of the women.

### ***PERCEPTIONS OF DIVORCE***

Almost all state residents — 92 percent — think that women are usually given custody of the children in a divorce settlement. Men (92%) and women (92%) feel exactly the same about this aspect of divorce settlements.

New Jerseyans generally feel that women are dealt with more fairly than men in divorce settlements by a margin of 42 to 13 percent. Nine percent would not select either partner as being treated *more* fairly with 7 percent saying both are treated fairly and 2 percent feeling neither gets fair treatment. About a third of the state's residents (36%) say they do not know who is treated fairest in a divorce settlement.

There are large gender differences in these opinions about who is treated fairest in divorce settlements. Men (56%) are twice as likely as women (27%) to feel women receive better treatment, and women (19%) are twice as likely as men (8%) to say men are treated more fairly.

Close to 4-in-10 (37%) state residents think that the parent who has custody of the children should be the most responsible for their financial well being compared to 15 percent who feel the

non-custodial parent should be the most responsible. However, 31 percent who did not select either of these choices reported that both parents should have financial responsibility. In addition, 19 percent say it depends (13%) or they don't know (4%) who should have the most financial responsibility.

There is a gender gap related to this issue with men (44%) more likely than women (29%) to say that the custodial parent should have the most financial responsibility for the children. Women (36%) are more likely than men (25%) to say both parents have financial responsibility.

### ***PROFILE OF DIVORCED/SEPARATED NEW JERSEYANS***

Overall, 11 percent of New Jerseyans describe themselves as being divorced (8%) or separated (3%) compared to 54 percent who are married, 25 percent who are single and have never been married, and 10 percent who are widowed. Among the residents included in the survey, similar percentages of men (9%) and women (12%) report they are divorced or separated. New Jerseyans who have children under age 18 (15%) are somewhat more likely to say that they are divorced or separated than those without children (9%). Middle-aged New Jersey residents who are between 30 and 49 years old (16%) and those who are 50 to 64 years old (14%) are more likely to report being divorced or separated than younger 18 to 29 year old residents (4%) or those over 65 years old (6%).

## BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP53-2 (EP103-2), SUNDAY, JUNE 11, 1995

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between May 25 and June 1, 1995, when a random sample of 802 New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. Figures based on this sample size are subject to a sampling error of about  $\pm 3.5$  percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from that population. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The questions and figures referred to in this release are presented below. The location of each question on the actual questionnaire is in brackets.

"In general, do you think men or women are treated more fairly in New Jersey divorce settlements?" [Q.19]

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
<i>Gender</i>							
--Male	8	56	5	1	31	101	(400)
--Female	19	27	10	2	41	99	(402)
<i>Marital Status</i>							
--Married	13	45	7	2	34	101	(458)
--Never married	11	42	6	2	39	100	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	15	45	12	2	25	99	(95)
--Widowed	20	21	8	2	50	101	(77)

"When there is a divorce and children are involved, who do you think is usually given custody of the children -- the mother or the father?" [Q.20]

	<u>Mother</u>	<u>Father</u>	<u>Both/ Joint</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
<i>Gender</i>						
--Male	92	2	3	4	101	(400)
--Female	92	1	4	3	100	(402)

"Generally in a divorce, the parent who the children live with is called the custodial parent and the other parent becomes the non-custodial parent. Who do you think should be most responsible for the financial well being of the children--the custodial or the non-custodial parent?" [Q.21]

	<u>Custodial</u>	<u>Non-Custodial</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
<i>Gender</i>							
--Male	44	12	25	14	4	99	(400)
--Female	29	19	36	12	4	100	(402)
<i>Marital Status</i>							
--Married	37	17	29	14	3	100	(458)
--Never Married	43	15	30	11	2	101	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	28	15	44	10	4	101	(95)

--Widowed 31 11 28 17 13 100 (77)

"How much have you read or heard about the bills being discussed in the New Jersey Legislature to reform the state's divorce laws--a great deal, some, not much, or nothing at all?" [Q.22]

	<u>A Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing At All</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>	

"The New Jersey Legislature is considering some changes in the state's divorce laws. Please tell me if you approve or disapprove of **READ ITEM?** Do you (approve/disapprove) strongly or mildly?" [Q.23]

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
➤ Giving both parents equal access to school, medical, and other records							

<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
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Gender

--Male <sup>77</sup>	17	2	2	2	100	(400)	
--Female	68	22	2	3	5	100	(402)

Marital Status

--Married	75	19	1	1	4	100	(458)
--Never Married	72	19	3	2	3	99	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	74	15	5	3	2	99	(95)
--Widowed	58	28	3	9	3	101	(77)

➤ Requiring the divorcing parents to develop a parenting plan

<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
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Gender

--Male <sup>54</sup>	23	6	6	11	100	(400)	
--Female	64	18	6	4	7	99	(402)

Marital Status

--Married	63	18	5	5	9	100	(458)
--Never Married	56	25	6	6	8	101	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	61	21	9	6	3	100	(95)
--Widowed	47	24	7	2	21	101	(77)

➤ Having penalties on parents who interfere with the visitation rights of the non-custodial parent

<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
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Gender

--Male <sup>48</sup>	23	10	12	6	99	(400)	
--Female	35	25	14	12	14	100	(402)



Marital Status

--Married	43	25	12	11	10	101	(458)
--Never Married	42	25	13	13	7	100	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	45	24	11	14	5	99	(95)
--Widowed	32	16	12	15	25	100	(77)

Q.23 (continued)

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
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➤ Including alimony as part of the custodial parent's income before deciding on the amount of child support payments

<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
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Gender

--Male	29	14	15	10	100	(400)	
--Female	27	30	16	15	13	101	(402)

Marital Status

--Married	31	28	14	15	12	100	(458)
--Never Married	24	39	20	12	5	100	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	35	20	14	24	8	101	(95)
--Widowed	29	23	8	14	27	101	(77)

➤ Allowing alimony to be directly withdrawn from the non-custodial parent's pay check

<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
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Gender

--Male	19	16	27	6	99	(400)	
--Female	48	16	12	16	9	101	(402)

Marital Status

--Married	41	18	13	20	7	99	(458)
--Never Married	37	20	18	19	6	100	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	46	13	8	32	1	100	(95)
--Widowed	29	17	15	22	18	101	(77)

➤ Automatically cutting off child support payments at age 18 even if the child is attending college

<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(802)</b>
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Gender

--Male	12	22	33	6	100	(400)	
--Female	14	10	20	55	2	101	(402)

Marital Status

--Married	21	9	23	43	3	99	(458)
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--Never Married	18	12	24	40	6	100	(168)
--Divorced/Separated	24	7	13	56	1	101	(95)
--Widowed	17	22	14	43	4	100	(77)

"Are you married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?" [D.13]

	<u>Married</u>	<u>Never Married</u>	<u>Divorced/Separated</u>	<u>Widowed</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>Total, May 1995</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>8 \ / 11%</b>	<b>3 10%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(798)</b>
<i><u>Gender</u></i>						
--Male	32	9	5	101	(398)	
--Female	53	19	12	16	100	(400)
<i><u>Children Under Age 18</u></i>						
--Yes	71	12	15	2	100	(268)
--No	45	32	9	14	100	(530)
<i><u>Age</u></i>						
--18 - 29	23	74	4	--	101	(135)
--30 - 49	66	17	16	1	100	(331)
--50 - 64	66	5	14	15	100	(165)
--65 or over	54	3	6	37	100	(155)
<i><u>Total Annual Family Income</u></i>						
--\$30,000 or less	32	27	15	26	100	(170)
--\$30,001 - \$50,000	57	30	10	3	100	(203)
--\$50,001 - \$70,000	62	23	12	3	100	(134)
--Over \$70,000	75	16	8	1	100	(182)