

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

DUH and DUMBER New Jersey Residents Know Little about their Politics and Government

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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."

New Jerseyans are woefully ignorant about some basic facts of political life in their state, a new study has found. Consider the following from the latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton poll:

- Only half of the public knows that Republicans control the New Jersey state legislature.
- Just one-in-three can name *either* of the two U.S. Senators from New Jersey.
- Only 29 percent can recall the name of the Democratic challenger Christie Whitman bested in the general election three months ago--Jim McGreevy.
- Just under three-quarters correctly identify Whitman as a Republican.

If a passing grade was two or more correct answers, 44 percent would fail. Another 27 percent would get a C, knowing two of the four. Just 30 percent of New Jersey residents would get good grades of A or B, with only 11 percent being able to answer all four questions correctly.

The extra credit questions? Don't ask. When asked the name of the Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, only four percent respond with Deborah Poritz. Fewer--and who would have thought that possible--supply Jack Collins' name when asked to identify the Speaker of the Assembly (2 percent). Only one-quarter of residents know that New

Jersey currently has a budget surplus. Almost as many--17 percent--think the state has a deficit, while the vast majority (58 percent) admit they have no idea of the state's fiscal condition.

These are among the main findings of the latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton poll, conducted by telephone between February 12 and 17, with a scientifically selected sample of 800 adults in New Jersey. This poll has a margin of error of ± 3 percentage points.

Political knowledge varies tremendously among different population groups: Republicans know more than either independents or Democrats; men know more than women; whites know more than non-whites; college graduates know more than others; registered voters know more than those who do not participate in the political system.

But perhaps the biggest difference in knowledge is by age or generation. New Jerseyans under 30, often referred to as Generation X, are on a different political planet from their older counterparts. Fully 60 percent of those under 30 know the answers to none or only one of the four questions in the knowledge quiz, compared to 39 percent of those between 30 and 49 (baby boomers), and 36 percent of those over 50.

Politics is not a staple of the diet of the average New Jerseyan. Just 39 percent say they follow what is happening in politics and government "regularly;" another third say they do so just "sometimes," leaving a large number--28 percent--who say they follow politics only "once in a while" or "never."

Cliff Zukin, Director of the Poll commented, "The poll findings are a combination of two primary factors: First, as in other states, there is not a high level of natural interest in politics and government; for most it is an afterthought. People have families, jobs, hobbies and other things to occupy their time. Second, New Jersey's media structure works against us. The fact that our television comes from New York and Philadelphia, and that they barely cover the state, means information is a bit harder to come by here. Despite being a well educated and affluent state, we know less about our politics and government than do people living in other states."

With the lack of TV coverage, New Jerseyans do in fact rely more heavily on the newspaper to learn what is happening in their state. Some 52 percent say they get most of their information about what is going on in New Jersey from newspapers, 35 percent from television, 6 percent from radio, 4 percent from other people, and 3 percent from a small scattering of other sources. The roles of newspapers and television are reversed when state residents are asked about where they get their information about what is going on in the country as a whole: 58 percent from television, 31 percent from newspapers, 6 percent from radio, 2 percent each from magazines and other people, and 1 percent from the Internet.

The difference between New Jersey and other states can perhaps best be seen in the ability to name U.S. Senators. In the current survey, just 12 percent were able to recall the names of *both* Frank Lautenberg and Bob Torricelli. Another 14 percent named only

Lautenberg and 5 percent named only Torricelli. Overall, 31 percent were able to name one of the two Senators.

By way of comparison, a national survey conducted in 1989 found that 55 percent of the public could name at least one of the two U.S. Senators from their state. Some 30 percent could name both, compared to the 12 percent in New Jersey. Moreover, while Torricelli was elected fairly recently, the finding that New Jerseyans are less knowledgeable does not appear to be due to their brief experience with him. In 1988, when Senators Bill Bradley and Lautenberg had both been in office for at least six years, the percentage able to name either or both trailed the national average by about 10 percentage points.

Younger New Jerseyans are remarkably ill-informed in terms of identifying New Jersey Senators as well. Fully ninety percent of those under 30 could not recall the names of *either* U.S. Senator, compared to 68 percent of those between 30 and 49, and 59 percent of those over 50 years of age.

The 49 percent of residents who know that Republicans control the state legislature is actually up from a low mark of 44 percent who knew the Democrats controlled the legislature in 1991. The current figure, however, is down from the Brendan Byrne years of the mid 1970s through 1980--when the state's income tax debate was raging. During those years, various Eagleton surveys showed that between 57 and 63 percent knew the Democrats were in control of the legislature.

There are significant differences in how closely people in different groups follow government and politics. While 39 percent of all state residents say they do so "regularly," this figure jumps to 50 percent of Republicans, compared to just 38 percent of Democrats and 35 percent of independents. Registered voters (46 percent) are far more likely to follow government and politics regularly than are those who are not registered (19 percent). Additionally, those who primarily rely on newspapers are far more likely to follow this type of news regularly (49 percent) than are those who rely primarily on television (31 percent).

Finally, there are huge schisms in attentiveness along generational lines: Half of those over 50 report following news of politics and government regularly, compared to just one-quarter of those under 30 years of age. Baby boomers are in the middle, with 38 percent saying they follow civic news

regularly.

BACKGROUND MEMO -- RELEASE SL/EP67-3 (EP117-3), SUNDAY, MARCH 1, 1998

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagle* Poll was conducted between February 12 and 17, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for the total sample size of 800 is just over ± 3 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jerseyans were found to have a favorable opinion of the Governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 47 and 53 percent (50 ± 3) had all New Jerseyans been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked are reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. Two versions of the questionnaire were used in this study. Not all questions were on both versions.

"In general, how often do you follow what is happening in government and politics here in New Jersey--regularly, sometimes, once in a while, or almost never? [KN.1]

| | | | Once In a While | Don't | | |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 39% | 32% | 28% | 1% | 100% | (802) |
| <i>Party ID</i> | | | | | | |
| --Democrat | 38 | 29 | 32 | 1 | 100 | (242) |
| --Independent | 35 | 34 | 32 | -- | 101 | (335) |
| --Republican | 50 | 32 | 18 | -- | 100 | (177) |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|-----|-------|
| | | | | | | |
| Registered Voter | | | | | | |
| --Yes | 46 | 32 | 21 | 1 | 100 | (625) |
| --No | 19 | 32 | 49 | -- | 100 | (172) |
| | | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | | |
| --Men | 42 | 28 | 29 | 2 | 101 | (391) |
| --Women | 37 | 35 | 28 | -- | 100 | (411) |
| | | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | | |
| --18-29 | 24 | 34 | 42 | -- | 100 | (120) |
| --30-49 | 38 | 35 | 26 | 1 | 100 | (351) |
| --50 and older | 49 | 27 | 23 | 1 | 100 | (316) |
| | | | | | | |
| <u>NJ Information Source (KN.2)</u> | | | | | | |
| --Newspapers | 49 | 34 | 17 | -- | 100 | (448) |
| --Television | 31 | 31 | 38 | -- | 100 | (252) |

"Where do you get most of your information about what is going on in New Jersey: from newspapers, television, radio, magazines, or other people?" [KN.2]

| | Newspapers | Television | Radio | People | Don't Know | Total* | (n) |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 52% | 35% | 6% | 4% | 1% | 98% | (802) |
| | | | | | | | |
| Party ID | | | | | | | |
| --Democrat | 49 | 43 | 3 | 3 | -- | 98 | (242) |
| --Independent | 48 | 34 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 100 | (335) |
| --Republican | 66 | 25 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 99 | (186) |
| | | | | | | | |
| Registered Voter | | | | | | | |
| --Yes | 56 | 33 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 98 | (625) |
| --No | 43 | 41 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 100 | (172) |
| | | | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|---|---|-----|-------|
| --Men | 58 | 28 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 99 | (391) |
| --Women | 47 | 41 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 98 | (411) |
| | | | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | | | |
| --18-29 | 38 | 47 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 99 | (120) |
| --30-49 | 53 | 32 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 101 | (351) |
| --50 and older | 61 | 31 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 98 | (316) |
| | | | | | | | |
| Education | | | | | | | |
| --High school or less | 48 | 41 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 98 | (286) |
| --Some college | 49 | 36 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 101 | (216) |
| --College graduate | 65 | 21 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 99 | (300) |
| | | | | | | | |
| Income | | | | | | | |
| --Less than \$30,000 | 49 | 43 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 100 | (143) |
| --\$30,000 - \$50,000 | 50 | 36 | 5 | 7 | 1 | 99 | (162) |
| --More than \$50,000 | 57 | 29 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 99 | (366) |
| | | | | | | | |
| Race | | | | | | | |
| --White | 59 | 29 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 100 | (609) |
| --Non-white | 35 | 54 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 99 | (164) |
| * Less than 1% each named Internet, magazines, or other sources; figures will total to less than 100%. | | | | | | | |

"And where do you get most of your information about what is going on in the country as a whole: from newspapers, television, radio, magazines, or other people?" [KN.3]

| | Newspapers | Television | Radio | Magazines | Other People | Internet | Don't Know | Total | (n) |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 31% | 58% | 6% | 2% | 2% | 1% | -- | 100% | (802) |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Registered Voter | | | | | | | | | |
| --Yes | 35 | 56 | 5 | 2 | 1 | -- | 1 | 100 | (625) |
| --No | 23 | 65 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 | -- | 100 | (172) |

ANALYSIS NOTE: COMBINING THE RESPONSES OF KN.2 (NJ) WITH KN.3 (NATIONAL) PRODUCES THE FOLLOWING JOINT DISTRIBUTION.

| | NEWSPAPER NJ NEWSPAPER NATIONAL | NEWSPAPER NJ TELEVISION NATIONAL | TELEVISION BOTH | OTHER COMBINATIONS | TOTAL | (n) |
|-----------------------|---|---|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 24% | 25% | 28% | 23% | 100% | (802) |

"As far as you know, is the Governor of New Jersey a Democrat or a Republican?" [KN.4]

| | <u>Correct</u> | <u>Incorrect</u> | <u>Don't Know</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>(n)</u> |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 73% | 18% | 9% | 100% | (802) |
| Registered Voter | | | | | |
| --Yes | 78 | 15 | 7 | 100 | (625) |
| --No | 59 | 26 | 15 | 100 | (172) |
| PAST SURVEYS | | | | | |
| --Jim Florio, 1991 | 70 | 13 | 17 | 100 | (800) |
| --Tom Kean, 1987 | 59 | 20 | 21 | 100 | (500) |
| --Tom Kean, 1983 | 57 | 14 | 28 | 99 | (803) |
| --Brendan Byrne, 1980 | 79 | 9 | 12 | 100 | (1005) |
| --Brendan Byrne, 1977 | 74 | 13 | 14 | 101 | (1005) |
| --Brendan Byrne, 1975 | 75 | 14 | 11 | 100 | (800) |
| --William Cahill, 1971 | 68 | 20 | 12 | 100 | (1208) |

"And, do you happen to recall the name of Whitman's Democratic opponent in last November's gubernatorial election?" [KN.5]

| | Jim McGreevey | Other/Don't Know | <u>Total</u> | <u>(n)</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 29% | 71% | 100% | (802) |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|----|----|-----|-------|
| Party ID | | | | |
| --Democrat | 34 | 66 | 100 | (198) |
| --Independent | 29 | 71 | 100 | (238) |
| --Republican | 35 | 65 | 100 | (164) |
| | | | | |
| Registered Voter | | | | |
| --Yes | 32 | 68 | 100 | (625) |
| --No | 21 | 79 | 100 | (172) |
| | | | | |
| Registered and Voted in 1997 | 37 | 63 | 100 | (527) |

"Which party controls the New Jersey State Legislature--the Republicans or the Democrats?" [KN.6]

| | <u>Correct</u> | <u>Incorrect</u> | <u>Don't Know</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>(n)</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 (Republican) | 49% | 20% | 30% | 99% | (802) |
| | | | | | |
| Party ID | | | | | |
| --Democrat | 46 | 25 | 30 | 101 | (242) |
| --Independent | 50 | 19 | 31 | 100 | (335) |
| --Republican | 60 | 18 | 23 | 99 | (186) |
| | | | | | |
| Registered Voter | | | | | |
| --Yes | 53 | 21 | 26 | 100 | (625) |
| --No | 38 | 19 | 43 | 100 | (172) |
| | | | | | |
| NJ Information Source | | | | | |
| --Newspapers | 54 | 21 | 25 | 100 | (448) |
| --Television | 44 | 21 | 35 | 100 | (252) |
| | | | | | |
| PAST SURVEYS | | | | | |
| Democrat, 1991 | 44 | 21 | 35 | 100 | (800) |
| Democrat, 1980 | 57 | 12 | 31 | 100 | (1005) |
| Democrat, 1977 | 56 | 14 | 29 | 99 | (1005) |
| Democrat, 1975 | 62 | 15 | 24 | 101 | (1005) |
| Republican, 1971 | 43 | 28 | 29 | 100 | (1208) |

"Does New Jersey currently have a budget surplus, a deficit, or aren't you sure?" [KN.7]

| | <u>Surplus</u> | <u>Deficit</u> | <u>Not Sure</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>(n)</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 (Republican) | 25% | 17% | 58% | 100% | (802) |
| Party ID | | | | | |
| --Democrat | 20 | 13 | 68 | 101 | (242) |
| --Independent | 26 | 19 | 55 | 100 | (335) |
| --Republican | 31 | 19 | 50 | 100 | (186) |
| NJ Information Source | | | | | |
| --Newspapers | 32 | 17 | 50 | 99 | (448) |
| --Television | 15 | 14 | 70 | 99 | (252) |

"Now I'm going to ask you the names of some New Jersey office holders. We know most people have not heard of them so don't worry if you can't recall their names. Do you happen to know the names of the United States Senators from New Jersey? (IF YES, What are their names?) IF ONLY ONE GIVEN, PROBE: Can you think of anyone else?" [KN.8] Total may exceed 100 as two answers were accepted.

| | Names <u>Lautenberg</u> | Names <u>Torricelli</u> | Names <u>Neither</u> | <u>(n)</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 26% | 17% | 69% | (802) |
| Party ID | | | | |
| --Democrat | 27 | 16 | 69 | (242) |
| --Independent | 25 | 15 | 70 | (335) |
| --Republican | 27 | 22 | 66 | (186) |
| Registered Voter | | | | |
| --Yes | 31 | 20 | 64 | (625) |
| --No | 12 | 8 | 83 | (172) |
| Age | | | | |
| --18-29 | 8 | 3 | 90 | (120) |

| | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|----|-------|
| --30-49 | 27 | 19 | 68 | (351) |
| --50 and older | 36 | 24 | 59 | (316) |
| | | | | |
| Education | | | | |
| --High school or less | 18 | 13 | 77 | (286) |
| --Some college | 24 | 13 | 72 | (216) |
| --College graduate | 45 | 31 | 49 | (300) |
| | | | | |
| NJ Information Source | | | | |
| --Newspapers | 33 | 24 | 60 | (448) |
| --Television | 15 | 7 | 83 | (252) |
| | | | | |
| PAST SURVEYS* | | | | |
| --1988 | FL-30 | BB-35 | 58 | |
| --1980 | HW-33 | BB-25 | 59 | |
| --1978 | HW-25 | CC-34 | 62 | |
| --1972 | HW-24 | CC-32 | 62 | |
| * FL=Frank Lautenberg, BB=Bill Bradley, HW=Harrison Williams, and CC=Clifford Case | | | | |

"A. Can you name the Speaker of the Assembly in Trenton?" [KN.9]

| | Jack <u>Collins</u> | No/Other <u>Don't Know</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>(n)</u> |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 2% | 98% | 100% | (802) |

"C. Finally, can you recall the name of the Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court?" [KN.9]

| | Deborah <u>Poritz</u> | No/Other <u>Don't Know</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>(n)</u> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| February, 1998 | 4% | 96% | 100% | (802) |

NATIONAL -- NEW JERSEY COMPARISONS

Can Name Can Name

1 Senator Both Senators

National 1989 55% 30%

NJ 1998 31 12

NJ 1988 42 23

Know Governors Party

National 1989 73%

NJ 1998 73

NJ 1991 70