

# The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

## NEW JERSEYANS' VIEWS OF THE STATE POLICE:

### A CONTRAST IN BLACK AND WHITE

MAY 17, 1998 CONTACT: CLIFF ZUKIN

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Sunday, May 17 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

While the overall job performance rating of the State Police is quite positive in New Jersey, there is a major racial divide among Garden State residents. Black and white New Jerseyans have such different views of troopers' fairness in enforcement of the laws, evenhanded treatment of all drivers, judgment in deciding whom to pull over, and courteousness in dealing with stopped motorists, that the different races not only appear to be living in different states, but could be living on different planets.

The vast majority of African Americans in New Jersey feel the State Police treat minorities worse than others, and that troopers target cars to pull over based on the race or age of people in the cars--a practice known as profiling, which courts have held to be illegal. In stark contrast, the vast majority of white New Jerseyans feel that troopers treat all motorists the same and seem highly satisfied with all aspects of their job performance.

These are some of the findings of the most recent *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* poll conducted with a random sample of 556 state residents between May 8 and 11. The survey was conducted in the wake of an April 23 incident on the NJ Turnpike, when state troopers opened fire on a van carrying three Black and one Hispanic New Yorkers. Three of the men were wounded, two seriously. Police say they stopped the van for speeding and fired shots when the van went into reverse, striking one of the officers. At this point some of the facts of the case are in dispute. The poll over-sampled Black residents of the state, so as to get a clearer picture of racial differences in perceptions of the State Police.

Statewide, 79 percent give the State Police positive job performance ratings of "excellent" or "good," while just 16 percent rate the job they are doing negatively as "only fair" or "poor." The small remainder express no opinion. Positive evaluations outnumber negative ones by a margin of 86 to 10 percent among whites, and by a narrower 56 to 30 percent among Blacks.

But when asked about specific issues related to fairness, evenhanded application of the laws, judgment used by troopers in who to pull over and ticket, and courtesy they believe to be shown to stopped motorists, Black and white New Jersey could not be more different. The vast majority of Caucasian New Jerseyans give the State Police positive assessments of excellent or good in these areas; the vast majority of African American New Jerseyans give the State Police negative ratings of only fair or poor. In specific, the poll finds:

- White New Jerseyans give the State Police high marks for treating "all drivers the same regardless of race, sex or age"--61 percent positive to 25 percent negative. Black New Jerseyans offer a severe mirror-image assessment--20 percent positive to 72 percent negative. Subtracting negative ratings from positive ones, and comparing whites to Blacks, yields a total difference of 88 points.
- While positive assessments of the State Police for "using good judgment in deciding who to pull over and ticket" outnumber negative ones by 66 to 27 percent among white New Jersey residents (a positive difference of 39 percentage points), the vast majority of Black Garden State resident feel the reverse is the case by 66 to 28 percent (a negative difference of 38 percentage points). The total difference between the two groups is 77 points.
- Whereas the vast majority of white New Jerseyans give positive ratings to the State Police for "treating all drivers with courtesy" by a margin of 70 to 18 percent, a clear majority of Black New Jerseyans give negative ratings to troopers on this score--54 to 34 percent. The total difference on this question is 73 points.
- Three-quarters of white residents give State Troopers high marks for "enforcing the rules of the road in a fair manner (77 percent), compared to less than half of Black residents (46 percent).

Cliff Zukin, director of the poll and a Professor of Public Policy at Rutgers commented, "These results are remarkable. In my 20 years of conducting public opinion polls in New Jersey I have never seen a schism as wide between *any* two groups in the electorate. It is as though Black and white New Jerseyans are living in different worlds in terms of their perceptions of the State Police."

A majority of Black New Jersey residents (56 percent) said they feel the State Police treat minorities worse than others. Just 30 percent of African Americans feel minorities are treated the same, with the remainder expressing no clear opinion (13 percent). In contrast, only 14 percent of white New Jerseyans believe the State Police treat minorities worse than others. The vast majority--64 percent--feel that minorities are treated the same as any non-minority citizens, with 19 percent offering no opinion (and 3 percent saying that minorities are treated better than whites).

Blacks and whites also offer starkly contrasting assessments of whether State Police engage in "profiling"--targeting certain cars to stop based on the race or age of people in the car. Almost two-thirds of Blacks (64 percent) feel the State Police do so, while just one-quarter feel that everyone who commits a traffic violation has an equal chance to be pulled over. In contrast, 62 percent of white New Jerseyans feel all violators have the same chance of being pulled over regardless of other factors. Just 29 percent feel the State Police use the characteristics of car occupants in deciding whom to stop.

A clear majority of state residents feel that "profiling" is an unacceptable law enforcement technique, although a far greater number of Blacks object to the practice than do whites. Without telling respondents that the courts had decreed profiling to be illegal, the survey put the following question to respondents:

*Some people say profiling is a good idea as it stops those people in groups who are more likely to commit crimes. Others say that it is a bad idea as it unfairly discriminates against minorities who are pulled over more often than others. How about you: Do you think profiling is a good or bad tool for the state police to use?*

Three-quarters of African-American New Jerseyans feel profiling is a bad tool, while 18 percent think it is a good idea and the remaining seven percent express no opinion. While still in opposition, Caucasian residents of the state are more closely divided: 40 percent think this practice is a good idea, 52 percent a bad idea, and the remaining eight percent express no opinion.

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between May 8 and 11, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 556 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone. This included a statewide cross-sectional survey of 500 state residents and a supplemental sample of 56 African American New Jerseyans. Blacks were over-sampled to yield a larger respondent base to increase the accuracy of findings based on this subset of respondents. The data were weighted by race and education to provide a proportionately accurate sampling of the state. The sample weighting adjusted the parameters to conform to a 1995 census estimates of the racial breakdown of New Jersey as follows: Whites(non-Hispanic) 74%, Blacks 12%, Hispanics 10%, Others 4%.

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 556 adults approximately  $\pm 4.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. It is  $\pm 10$  percent for the 100 blacks. The sample sizes of Hispanics and "others" is too small for independent statements to be made about these groups.

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 questions referred to in this release are as follows:

"I'd like to ask you some questions about the STATE POLICE here in New Jersey. These are the people who patrol the turnpike, garden state parkway and state highways like route 78, 295, 80, 87 and 287. This is different from your local police and the sheriffs who patrol the areas around where you live. Overall, how would you describe the job the State Police do in patrolling the state's major roads--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q2]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace							
-- White	35	51	8	2	4	100	(378)
-- Black	8	48	23	7	14	100	(100)

"Please tell me whether you think the state police do an excellent, good, only fair, or poor job of each of the following." [The following four questions were rotated][Q3]

A. "Treating all drivers with courtesy."

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace							
-- White	29	41	15	3	11	99	(378)
-- Black	10	24	33	22	11	100	(100)

B. "Enforcing the rules of the road in a fair manner"

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace							
-- White	28	49	15	3	5	100	(378)
-- Black	13	33	36	12	6	100	(100)

C. "Using good judgment in deciding who to pull over and ticket"

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace							
-- White	23	43	22	5	8	101	(378)
-- Black	7	21	32	34	6	100	(100)

D. "Treating all drivers the same regardless of race, sex or age."

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace							
-- White	22	39	19	6	13	99	(378)
-- Black	6	14	36	36	9	101	(100)

"Do you think the New Jersey State Police treat minorities better, worse or the same as other people" [Q4]

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>Don't Know</u> <u>Depends</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace						
-- White	3	14	64	19	100	(378)
-- Black	1	56	30	13	100	(100)
-- Black & Hispanic	4	43	38	15	100	(139)

"Have you had been pulled over by a state police officer for any reason in the last five years?"[Q5]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace				
-- White	27	73	100	(378)
-- Black	30	70	100	(100)
-- Black & Hispanic	36	64	100	(139)

[The following question was only asked of the respondents who said they had been pulled over in the last five years.]

"Thinking about the last time you were stopped, do you think you were or were NOT treated fairly?" [Q5A]

(The black and the minority sample size are too small for independent analysis.)

	<u>Was</u>	<u>Was Not</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>15%</b>	--	<b>100%</b>	<b>(168)</b>

"The next question is a little long, so please listen carefully.

Many cars on NJ highways travel over the speed limit and could be stopped by the state police. There have been a number of stories in the news lately about something called 'Profiling.' This is where the police target certain cars to stop based on the race or age of people in the car. Do you think the state police use these characteristics when deciding who to pull over, or does every person who commits a traffic violation pretty much have the same chance of being pulled over." [Q6]

	<u>Use Characteristics</u>	<u>Same Chance</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(556)</b>

ByRace					
-- White	29	62	9	100	(378)
-- Black	64	25	11	100	(100)
-- Black & Hispanic	52	40	8	100	(139)

"Some people say profiling is a good idea as it stops those people in groups who are more likely to commit crimes. Others say that it is a bad idea as it unfairly discriminates against minorities who are pulled over more often than others. How about you: Do you think profiling is a good or bad tool for the state police to use?" [Q7]

	<u>Good Tool</u>	<u>Bad Tool</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>May, 1998</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(556)</b>
ByRace					
-- White	40	52	8	100	(378)
-- Black	18	75	7	100	(100)
-- Black & Hispanic	25	68	7	100	(139)