

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

JUNE 18, 1998
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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Thursday, June 18 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

PUBLIC COMING AND GOINGS:

Want Open Space Preservation/Transportation Improvement? HELLO

Willing to Pay for Them? GOOD BYE

There is a hearty public consensus on the importance of a good transportation system and the need to preserve farmland and open space in New Jersey. However, this consensus gives way to deep conflict when residents are asked to accept an increase in the gas tax to pay for either.

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll finds New Jerseyans almost evenly divided over Governor Christy Whitman's proposal to increase the price of gasoline by 7 cents a gallon. Two cents of this increase would go to preserve farmland and open space and 5 cents to fund road improvements and mass transit. Statewide, 46 percent say they would vote for this proposal while 48 percent say they would vote against it--a statistical tie. The remaining six percent take no position.

Residents are similarly divided over a proposal to raise the gas tax by 5 cents a gallon as a dedicated source of revenue to fund transportation programs and projects, with 49 percent in favor and 47 percent against the proposal. The poll finds more support for a Bond Issue to raise money for farmland and open space preservation--56 percent say they would vote for a bond of about 375 million while 36 percent say they would vote against it. The remaining eight percent are undecided.

The telephone survey was conducted with a random sample of 600 state residents between June 8 and June 11. The poll's margin of error is plus or minus 4 percent.

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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There is strong sentiment about the importance of preserving open space and farmland in the Garden State--views that are deeply imbedded in the state's culture and have endured over time. Better than seven-in-ten say it is "very" important to them to make sure that farmland and open spaces are preserved here in the state, with another two-in-ten saying this is "somewhat" important to them. These figures are almost identical to responses given by those questioned on a statewide Eagleton Poll twenty years ago.

An even larger number of state residents--86 percent--say they think it is "very" important for New Jersey to have a good transportation system of roads, highways and mass transit. A 1987 Eagleton survey put this number at 79 percent.

Only about half of the people interviewed in the survey said they had heard or read anything about Governor Whitman's proposal to have the state purchase about 1 million acres of undeveloped land over the next 10 years. Just 11 percent had heard "a lot," 19 percent "some" and 21 percent "a little." However, opposition to the Governor's proposal to fund land preservation through an increase in the gas tax was greater among those more familiar with her proposal.

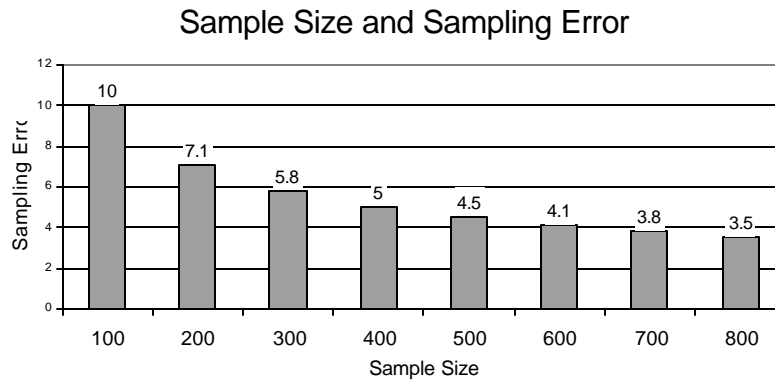
Opposition to the 7 cents a gallon tax increase outnumbered support by a margin of 53 to 43 percent among the half of the public having heard or read something about the Governor's proposal. However, support outnumbered opposition by a margin of 50 to 42 percent among the less aware half.

Cliff Zukin, director of the Rutgers-based Poll commented, "This is the age-old situation where the public wants services but is unwilling to pay for them. The findings suggest that any raise in the gas tax would be a controversial and possibly divisive issue. Moreover, early polls often over-state public support for bond issues. History in New Jersey has shown that almost all of those who initially say they are undecided end up voting 'no' on election day. Work remains to be done if the public is going to be convinced to reach into their pocket to pay for what they want."

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BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP69-1 (EP119-1), SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 1998

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted between June 8 and 11, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 602 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 602 is just over ± 4 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 46 and 54 percent (50 ± 4) 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 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.

How important is it to you to make sure that farm and open spaces are preserved here in New Jersey, very, somewhat or not very important? [Q6A]

	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	72%	21%	6%	1%	100%	(602)
January 1978	73	17	5	5	100	(1006)

How important do you think continued growth and development in New Jersey is to the state's future economic health, very, somewhat or not very important? [Q6B]

	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	58%	30%	10%	3%	101%	(602)
December 1987	61	29	7	2	99	(1000)

How important do you think it is for New Jersey to have a good transportation system of roads and highways, trains and busses, very, somewhat or not very important? [Q6C]

	Very	Somewhat	Not Very	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	86%	12%	2%	--	100%	(602)
December 1987	79	19	1	1	100	(1000)

Which do you think is more important, economic growth or the preservation of farmland and open space? [Q7]

	Economic Growth	Land Preservation	Both/Rejects Choice	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	35%	44%	15%	6%	100%	(602)
December 1987	26	62	9	3	100	(1000)

Governor Whitman has recently proposed that the state purchase about 1 million acres of undeveloped land over the next 10 years. Money to do this would come from an increase in the tax on gasoline. Have you heard or read anything about this proposal. [Q8]

	A Lot	Yes Some	Little	No	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	11% →	19% 51%	21% ←	49%	--	100%	(602)

Questions 9-11 were rotated when asked.

One proposal being discussed would raise the price of gasoline by 7 cents a gallon. Two cents of this would go to preserve farmland and open space, while the other 5 cents funded road improvements and mass transit in the state. Do you think you would vote for against this proposal? [Q9]

	For	Against	Depends	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	46%	48%	2%	4%	100%	(602)
Heard or Read of Proposal						
<i>Yes</i>	43	53	1	3	100	(319)
<i>No</i>	50	42	2	6	100	(283)
<i>Registered Voters</i>	47	47	2	4	98	(496)

And what about a proposal to raise the gas tax by 5 cents a gallon if the money could only be used to fund transportation programs and projects in New Jersey, would you vote for or against it? [Q10]

	For	Against	Depends	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	49%	47%	3%	2%	101%	(602)
<i>Registered Voters</i>	49	46	3	1	99	(496)

Another proposal for funding farmland and open space preservation is to put a State Bond Issue of about 375 million dollars on the ballot. Do you think you would vote for against this bond issue? [Q11]

	For	Against	Depends	DK	Total	(n)
June, 1998	56%	36%	2%	6%	100%	(602)
<i>Registered Voters</i>	56	36	2	6	100	(496)