

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

A SELF-DESCRIPTION OF NEW JERSEY DRIVERS:

**WE'RE RUDE, AGGRESSIVE AND CARELESS.
AND IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT....WELL, !@%#* YOU, BUDDY!**

RELEASE: SL/EP 70-4 (EP120-4)
SEPTEMBER 28, 1998
CONTACT: CLIFF ZUKIN (732) 932-9384, Ext. 247

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo is in the Monday, September 28th Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to the "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

ROAD RAGE?

*71% say they have been given "the finger" by some other driver
35% admit they have given "the finger" to another driver*

The style of driving in New Jersey and respect for civility on the road have changed a lot in the last 10 years, and for the worse, according to the most recent *Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll*.

New Jerseyans describe their fellow drivers as more rude, aggressive and careless now than they did 10 years ago, with seven-in-ten saying they have received "the finger" or been "flipped off" by someone on the road, and half of that number admitting they have done so to someone else. Overall, it's not a pretty picture.

There are, however, some rays of light in the Poll's exploration into *motoring in the Garden State*. Safety belt usage is up, and concern about drunk driving is down, even though there has been no reported drop in the number of drivers admitting to drinking while behind the wheel. Moreover, citizens voice strong approval of the increase in the speed limit to 65 MPH from 55 MPH on some highways in the state.

These are some of the main findings from a statewide sample of the New Jersey public conducted between September 14 and 20 of this year. The poll has a margin of error of just under plus or minus four percentage points.

The survey is ripe with indicators showing a deteriorating quality of motoring life in the state that has clearly crossed the median divider of safety and civility. For example:

- Far more now describe New Jersey drivers as rude (58 percent) than courteous (37 percent). Ten years ago an identical 47 percent

chose each description. In 1982, descriptions of courteous actually outnumbered ones of rude by 52 to 41 percent.

- Ten years ago equal numbers described New Jersey drivers as careless (44 percent) and safe (43 percent). In 1998 the figures are down to 39 percent safe and up to 58 percent careless.
- Now, two-thirds of New Jersey residents say that drivers try to bend the rules of the road to get away with whatever they can, while just 29 percent say they obey the rules. In 1988, the figures were a narrower 60 "bend" to 35 "obey."

Cliff Zukin, director of the Rutgers-based poll commented, "We have witnessed a tremendous change in the culture of driving in New Jersey in the 1990s. It is clearly more aggressive and selfish, and less civil. There is much less a sense that we are all on the road together trying to get where we want to go and more of 'it's everyone for him- or herself' out there on the road. Driving in New Jersey has clearly become more stressful and combative over the last decade."

Perhaps as a reaction to a more aggressive style on the roadways, safety belt usage is up significantly over the same period of time. In 1988, 47 percent said they "always" used safety restraints while driving. The current survey finds usage has jumped to a high mark of 67 percent. The percentage saying they always use safety belts was first measured at 13 percent in 1982 and then 21 percent in 1984. Safety restraint usage then jumped to 49 percent in 1986 after it became mandatory by a change in the law.

And in this vein, the new poll findings suggests general approval of the recent change in state law about when Drivers Licences are granted. Under a new law to reach full effect by the year 2000, driving privileges will be gradually phased in starting at 16 and not reaching full privileges until 18 years of age. Until then there are restrictions on when and with whom young drivers may be on the roads. When asked at what age young drivers should be given unrestricted licences to drive at any time of the day, with or without passengers, just four percent said 16 years of age and another 29 percent said at 17. Over one-third (36 percent) said they would not like to see this privilege extended until 18 years of age and remarkably, another 30 percent said they do not think this should happen until potential drivers are *over* 18 years of age.

About one New Jerseyan in 20 admits to having had a beer or other alcoholic beverage *while* they were driving in the last 12 months--including 12 percent of men under 30. Another 12 percent acknowledge having done so, but not in the last 12 months. These figures are basically unchanged from a decade ago. Additionally, 12 percent say they have been a passenger in a car where the driver was drinking at some point in the last year. Taken in total, the survey estimates that at least 13 percent of all New Jerseyans say they were either a drinking driver themselves or rode with one in the last 12 months. This figure reaches up to one-quarter of men between the ages of 18 and 29, and about one-fifth of women in that age group.

But while drinking-while-driving has remained unchanged, the *perception* of drunk driving as a problem has declined noticeably in the last decade. Currently, 47 percent describe drunk driving in New Jersey as a "very serious" problem, down from 61 percent in 1988. In 1986, 65 percent said drunk driving was "very serious."

In the last half year or so New Jersey has increased the speed limit from 55 to 65 miles per hour on stretches of the Parkway, Turnpike and a few other roads in the state. So far, this change enjoys widespread public support. Three-quarters (77 percent) of Garden State residents say they approve of the increased speed limit, while only 20 percent disapprove, with the remaining three percent offering no opinion.

Interestingly, the majority of New Jerseyans haven't noticed much of a difference, possibly because cars on the Turnpike and Parkway generally traveled well in excess of the posted speed limit to begin with. Some 54 percent say that cars do not travel any faster since the speed limit was increased, 42 percent think they do, and four percent offer no opinion.

- 30 -

Copyright September 28, 1998, The Eagleton Institute and The Star-Ledger.

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP70-4 (EP120-4), MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1998

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted between September 14 and 20, 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 ± 3.4 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 46.6 and 53.4 percent (50 ± 3.4) 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. Click here for a [chart](#) that 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.

"I'd like to ask you some questions about driving in New Jersey."

"In general would you describe most drivers in New Jersey as courteous or rude?" [DR1]

Courteous	Rude	Don't know	Total	(n)
-----------	------	------------	-------	-----

September, 1998	37%	58%	5%	100%	(804)
PAST SURVEYS					
May, 1988	47%	47%	5%	99%	(799)
October, 1982	52%	41%	7%	100%	(503)

"Do you think drivers in New Jersey are generally safe, or are many of them careless?" [DR2]

	Safe	Most Safe (vol)	Careless	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	39%	--	58%	3%	100%	(804)
PAST SURVEYS						
May, 1988	43%	9%	44%	4%	100%	(799)
October, 1982	45%	8%	45%	2%	100%	(503)

"Do most drivers obey the rules of the road, or do they try to bend the rules and get away with whatever they can?" [DR3]

	Obey	Bend	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	29%	68%	3%	100%	(804)
PAST SURVEYS					
May, 1988	47%	47%	5%	99%	(799)
October, 1982	52%	41%	7%	100%	(503)

"Have you ever been given "the finger" or "flipped off" by another driver?" [DR4]

	Yes	No/Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	71%	28%	99%	(804)

"And have you ever given the finger to or flipped off some other driver yourself?" [DR5]

	Yes	No/Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	35%	65%	100%	(804)

"As you may know, the speed limit was raised from 55 to 65 on parts of the Turnpike, Parkway and a few other roads in the state. In general do you approve or disapprove of this change?" [DR6]

	Approve	Disapprove	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	77%	20%	3%	100%	(804)

"And do you think that people travel at a faster speed since this change was made, or do people really not travel any faster than they used to?" [DR7]

	Faster	Not faster	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	42%	54%	4%	100%	(804)

"What do you think should be the age at which new drivers in New Jersey should get an unrestricted license to drive at any time of the day, with or without passengers in the car: 16, 17, 18, or over 18?" [DR13]

	16	17	18	Over 18	Don't know/care	Total	(n)
September, 1998	4%	29%	36%	30%	1%	100%	(804)

"Do you drive?" [DR15]

	Yes	No/Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	92%	8%	100%	(804)

"When driving in a car how often do you wear safety belts – always, most of the time, sometimes, only once in a while, or never?" [DR16]

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Once in a while	Never	Don't know/drive	Total	(n)
September, 1998	67%	15%	9%	6%	4%	--	101%	(804)
PAST SURVEYS								
May, 1988	47%	20%	14%	10%	9%	1%	101%	(800)
February, 1986	49%	17%	14%	8%	11%	1%	100%	(600)
August, 1984	21%	13%	12%	18%	36%	--	100%	(803)
September, 1992	13%	5%	11%	16%	54%	--	99%	(467)

"How serious a problem do you think drunk driving is in New Jersey – very serious, somewhat serious, or not too serious?" [DR17]

	Very serious	Somewhat Serious	Not too serious	Don't know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	47%	38%	9%	6%	100%	(804)
PAST SURVEYS						
May, 1988	61%	30%	7%	3%	101%	(800)
February, 1986	65%	27%	7%	1%	100%	(600)

"While very few New Jerseyans drive while they are drunk, many tell us they occasionally drink while in their cars. Have you ever had a beer or other alcoholic beverage while you were driving? IF YES, PROBE: Have you done this at any time in the last 12 months?" [DR18]

	Yes, and in last 12 months	Yes, but not in last 12 months	No	Don't know/refused	Total	(n)
September, 1998	5%	12%	84%	--	101%	(804)
PAST SURVEYS						
May, 1988	5%	10%	85%	--	100%	(752)
February, 1986	11%	10%	79%		100%	(587)

"Have you been a passenger in a car where the driver was drinking at any time in the last 12 months?" [DR19]

	Yes	No	Don't know/refused	Total	(n)
September, 1998	12%	88%	--	100%	(804)
PAST SURVEYS					
May, 1988	13%	87%	--	101%	(798)
1986 Total	13%	87%	--	100%	(598)