

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Sunday, February 14th Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

How much *confidence* do New Jerseyans have in

- *Insurance Companies?*
- *Lawyers and the Legal System?*
- *Government and Political parties?*
- *the News Media?*
- *Big Business and Labor?*
- *Educational institutions?*
- *HMOs and Doctors?*
- *Organized Religion?*

....to do what they ought to be doing?

For the most part, not a lot.

The most recent *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll took a look at how much confidence New Jerseyans have in 17 prominent political, social and economic institutions. Just six of the 17 could be said to be held in a positive state of trust, another five—including government—seem to be held in a state of suspicion where the public is not hostile but far from confident, and the remaining six incur a great deal of public misgiving.

The survey was conducted between January 7 and 13 when a random sample of 400 New Jersey adults was interviewed by telephone. Sampling error for the poll is plus or minus five percentage points. Pollsters constructed a confidence scale by subtracting the percentage saying they had "not very much" confidence in each institution from the percentage saying they had "a lot" of confidence in each. Survey respondents could also say they had "some" confidence in each of the 17 asked about.

At the top of the confidence scale were education and religion. "Rutgers University" topped the list at plus 47 points, followed by "Church and organized religion" at 41 points. And 30 percentage points more expressed a lot than not much confidence in their "local schools."

Also on the positive side of the confidence scale were the news media—television news (+15) and newspapers (+14), and "Doctors and organized medicine" (+15).

Interestingly, while Doctors were one of only six to receive a positive score, the absolute harshest assessments were reserved for HMOs. Just eight percent of New Jerseyans have a lot of confidence in HMOs while 50 percent have not much confidence, for an overall score of minus 42, just slightly worse than the -39 score given to Insurance Companies, another Garden State pincushion.

The poll, taken largely before the Senate trial of President Clinton found "The Republicans in Washington" also among the bottom-feeders. Their confidence score of -31 put them in dubious company in the public's eye—between Insurance Companies (-39) and "Lawyers" (-28). "The Democrats in Washington" fared a little bit better (-22) than Republicans; "The legal system" as a whole (-13) did better than "Lawyers," although all are on the wrong side of the public confidence line.

New Jersey residents did not make much of a distinction in the amount of confidence they held in various levels of government. Confidence scores in evaluating "Local" (-4), "State" (-7) and "National" (-9) government were quite similar, and lukewarm. In each case a majority of New Jerseyans said they had "some" confidence, while slightly more said they had "not much" than "a lot" of confidence.

Finally, business and labor fare about equally—a little less well regarded than government but better trusted than political parties, lawyers and insurance companies. "Large corporations" had a confidence scale score of -13, slightly better than the -22 rating given to labor unions.

Cliff Zukin, director of the poll, commented, "The numbers suggest that a large number of New Jerseyans, like people elsewhere in the country, have serious doubts about the performance or trustworthiness of many central institutions. Zukin also noted, "the results are not terribly different from what we observed some 15 years ago, although ratings of the educational institutions and religion are up. It certainly does not appear there has been a significant erosion in New Jerseyans' level of confidence in their institutions in the recent past.

Here are the confidence scale scores:

Confidence	Score*
47	Rutgers University

41	Church, or organized religion
30	Your local schools
15	Doctors & organized medicine
15	Television News
14	Newspapers
-4	Your local government
-7	NJ State government
-9	The national government
-13	The legal system
-13	Large corporations
-20	The Democrats in Washington
-22	Labor Unions
-28	Lawyers
-31	The Republicans in Washington
-39	Insurance companies
-42	Health Maintenance Organizations or HMOs

* Score is made by subtracting percentage "not much" confidence from percentage "a lot" of confidence.

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP71-5 (EP121-5), SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1999

The latest Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll was conducted between January 7 and 13, 1999, 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 + 3.5 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 46.5 and 53.5 percent (50 + 3.5) 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 get some idea of how you feel about different organizations or institutions that exist to serve you and others. For each of the institutions or groups I mention such as (...STARTING POINT...) tell me whether you have a lot of confidence IN THEM, SOME CONFIDENCE IN THEM, OR NOT VERY MUCH CONFIDENCE. By confidence, I mean that you feel they are doing what they ought to be doing. (RANDOMIZE ITEMS ON EACH FORM). [C1A, C1B].

ASKED FORM A ONLY

January, 1999	<u>Level of Confidence</u>				<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>		
Rutgers University	51%	26%	4%	19%	100%	(399)
--1991	46	26	4	25	101	
--1984	35	30	3	31	99	
--1978	44	28	6	22	100	
--1974	33	28	7	33	101	
Church/organized religion	52	34	11	3	100	(399)
--1991	44	37	15	4	100	
--1984	40	42	13	4	99	
Your local schools	44	38	14	4	100	(399)
--1991	34	39	17	10	100	
--1984	30	41	20	9	100	
--1978	36	35	24	5	100	
--1974	31	39	19	11	100	

	<u>Level of Confidence</u>				<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>		
Television news	32	49	17	1	99	(399)
--1991	34	44	20	3	100	
--1984	30	54	15	1	100	
--1978	38	47	14	1	100	
--1974	34	46	17	3	100	
The national government	18	54	27	1	100	(399)
--1991	20	55	21	4	100	
--1984	13	57	27	3	100	
--1978	21	59	17	3	100	
--1974	13	48	32	7	100	
The legal system	17	51	30	2	100	(399)

Doctors and organized medicine	37	41	19	3	100	(399)
Insurance companies	11	38	50	1	100	(399)

ASKED FORM B ONLY

January, 1999	<u>Level of Confidence</u>				<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>		
Labor unions	14%	42%	36%	8%	100	(401)
--1991	19	37	34	10	100	
--1984	13	40	38	9	100	
--1978	12	37	43	7	99	
--1974	12	38	39	10	99	
Your local government	20	53	24	4	101	(401)
--1991	18	54	24	3	99	
--1984	16	55	26	3	100	
--1978	22	52	24	2	100	
--1974	25	47	22	7	101	
Large corporations	16	50	29	5	100	(401)
--1991	12	46	34	7	99	
--1984	9	46	38	7	100	
--1978	19	40	35	6	100	
--1974	10	35	45	10	100	
NJ State government	15	60	22	2	99	(401)
--1991	10	57	30	3	100	
--1984	15	59	23	2	99	
--1980*	10	53	35	2	100	
--1978	18	61	19	2	100	
--1974	19	57	16	9	101	
The Democrats in Washington	13	47	33	7	100	(401)
The Republicans in Washington	10	44	41	6	100	(401)
Lawyers	10	49	38	3	101	(401)
HMOs	8	35	50	6	99	(401)

*Asked in February, 1980 in the wake of Abscam.

ASKED FULL SAMPLE

Level of Confidence

January, 1999	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Newspapers	31%	50%	17%	2%	100	(800)
--1991	27	52	18	4	101	
--1984	25	56	18	1	100	
--1978	34	48	16	2	100	
--1974	28	47	23	3	101	