

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

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Sunday, June 16 *Star-Ledger*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*."

## McGREEVEY'S BUDGET WOES

### *Residents Want Service Cuts, But Not In Social Programs*

Governor James McGreevey gets positive job marks overall from Garden State residents, but views of his handling of the state's budget problems have worsened over the past three months as the projected budget deficit has grown. Currently residents are divided over McGreevey's efforts to deal with the budget – 35 percent approve of the job he is doing on the budget while 35 percent disapprove.

Residents themselves are conflicted over how to deal with the budget problems, however. While most express a preference for cutting services over raising taxes, few are willing to cut into specific services when asked. Funds for education, senior health services, and environmental protection are off the table to most residents, and they divide over whether to make cuts to the transportation budget. But while unwilling to raise taxes, residents are willing to reduce funds for tax rebates.

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* was conducted by telephone among a scientifically selected sample of 801 New Jersey adults, from June 4<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup>. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

Overall, McGreevey receives positive ratings after five months in office. Fifty percent of New Jerseyans approve of the job he is doing as governor, while only 24 percent disapprove and 26 percent have no opinion. These numbers are slightly better than those he received in March, when 45 percent approved of his job performance. But while his overall performance has improved in the eyes of residents, views of his handling of the state's budget problems have declined. In March, assessments of his budget performance were marginally positive – 37 percent approved and 28 percent disapproved. But residents are now evenly divided, with 35 percent approving and an equal number disapproving.

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

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“Perhaps because they understand the seriousness of the budget problems the state faces, residents seem to be separating the job McGreevey is doing overall from the job he’s doing handling the budget” says Monika McDermott, the poll’s interim director.

Garden State residents continue to view the state’s budget problems as serious. Thirty-seven percent of adults feel the budget problems are “very serious” and another 48 percent view them as “somewhat serious.” Only nine percent feel the problems are either “not very serious” or “not at all serious.” These numbers are virtually unchanged from the March survey.

At the same time, however, residents’ views of the state economy have improved over the past three months. Currently residents are divided over the state of the economy – 44 percent say the state is in economic “good times,” while 46 percent think the state is in “bad times.” In March, 55 percent of New Jersey adults called the state’s economic situation “bad” and only 34 percent labeled it “good.”

When it comes to solving the state’s budget problems, residents are conflicted. A majority – 56 percent – would rather see services cut than taxes raised, and only 30 percent would prefer raising taxes to cutting services. But residents’ expressed willingness to cut services has limitations – they see some specific services as untouchable.

Only 21 percent of residents approve of reducing education funding to help balance the budget, and only 22 percent approve of reducing spending for health care and prescription drugs for the elderly. Each of these possible reductions is opposed by an overwhelming 77 percent of residents. Residents are also unwilling to reduce funds for environmental protection and preservation. A 59 percent majority say they would disapprove of reducing environmental funds as a way to help balance the budget, while 39 percent would approve of such an action.

	Cut funds to help balance budget?	
	Approve	Disapprove
Tax rebates	54%	42%
Transportation	50%	47%
Environment	39%	59%
Health care for elderly	22%	77%
Education	21%	77%

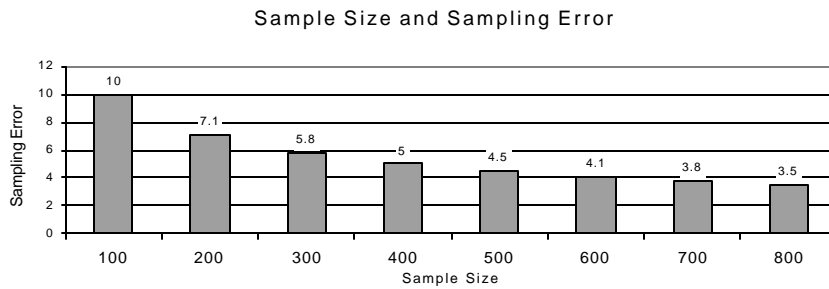
While unwilling to raise taxes, residents say they would be willing to reduce tax rebates in order to help balance the budget. Fifty-four percent of residents approve of cutting funds to tax rebates and 42 percent disapprove. Even among those residents who say they would prefer cutting services to raising taxes, 52 percent still support a reduction in tax rebates to help balance the budget. Among those willing to raise taxes in the first place, 63 percent support reducing tax rebate funding.

Besides tax rebates, the only other service included in the survey to which residents are willing to at least entertain cuts is transportation, over which residents are divided. Half of residents – 50 percent – approve of cutting transportation funds as a way to help balance the budget, but a nearly equal 47 percent disapprove.

“While cutting services seems like an attractive idea to residents in the abstract, they balk at the reality of actually touching some of the state’s most visible programs” comments McDermott. “The good news for state government could be that residents see a distinct difference between raising taxes and reducing tax rebates – the former is off limits in residents’ minds but, at least in the current budget climate, they see the latter as acceptable.”

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP137-3) June 16, 2002**

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from June 5 to June 9 with a scientifically selected random sample of 801 New Jersey adults. 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 is  $\pm 3.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to have a favorable opinion of McGreevey, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent ( $50 \pm 3.5$ ) had all New Jersey residents 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 Republicans, Independents or Democrats, 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 is 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. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

Do you approve or disapprove of the way James McGreevey is handling his job as Governor? [M1]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i>Party affiliation</i>					
-- Democrat	64	15	21	100	(294)
-- Independent	45	25	30	100	(284)
-- Republican	40	39	21	100	(188)
<i>Previous Surveys</i>					
March 2002	45	21	34	100	(803)

How would you generally describe economic conditions in New Jersey right now? Would you say that economically New Jersey is in good times or bad times right now? [M2]

	<u>Good times</u>	<u>Bad times</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<u>Party affiliation</u>					
-- Democrat	40	47	12	99	(294)
-- Independent	44	47	9	100	(284)
-- Republican	51	41	7	99	(188)
<u>Household Income</u>					
-- Under \$35,000	37	50	13	100	(157)
-- \$35,000 to \$70,000	40	49	10	99	(229)
-- \$70,000 or more	53	40	6	99	(319)
<u>Previous Surveys</u>					
-- March 2002	34	55	11	100	(803)
-- April 2001	67	24	9	100	(802)
-- February 1995	41	50	10	101	(801)
-- February 1994	28	66	5	99	(801)
-- February 1993	22	72	6	100	(801)
-- January 1992	8	84	7	99	(800)
-- February 1991	12	84	4	100	(800)
-- March 1990	36	55	8	99	(800)
-- September 1989	57	31	12	100	(1,000)

And do you approve or disapprove of the way McGreevey is handling problems with the state budget? [M3]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<u>Party affiliation</u>					
--Democrat	47	30	24	101	(294)
--Independent	29	36	35	100	(284)
--Republican	27	45	28	100	(188)
<u>Previous Surveys</u>					
-- March 2002	37	28	35	100	(803)

How serious do you think New Jersey's budget problems are—very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious? [M4]

	<u>Very serious</u>	<u>Somewhat serious</u>	<u>Not very serious</u>	<u>Not at all serious</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i>Party affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	37	49	9	1	4	100	(294)
--Independent	35	47	6	2	10	100	(284)
--Republican	35	52	7	2	4	100	(188)
<i>Previous Surveys</i>							
-- March 2002	39	44	8	2	7	100	(803)
-- March 1982	26	46	15	3	10	100	(1206)

The state constitution requires that New Jersey have a balanced budget each year. To balance the state budget next year, if you had to choose, which would you prefer – raising taxes to keep state services at their current level, or cutting state services to keep taxes at their current level? [M5]

	<u>Raise Taxes</u>	<u>Cut State Services</u>	<u>Both/Some of each (vol.)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i>Party affiliation</i>						
--Democrat	37	48	7	7	99	(294)
--Independent	28	57	5	10	100	(284)
--Republican	23	66	6	4	99	(188)
<i>Previous Surveys</i>						
--March 2002	23	64	5	8	100	(803)
--March 1990*	27	65	3	5	100	(800)

\*Varied question wording: "... if you had to choose between reducing spending for government services, or increasing taxes to keep government services at current levels, which would you prefer?"

I'm going to read you a list of some state government services. For each one, please tell me whether you would approve or disapprove of REDUCING funds for that particular service if spending cuts were necessary to balance next year's budget. Would you approve or disapprove of REDUCING funds to [FILL – RANDOMIZE: A. Transportation, B. Education, C. Environmental preservation and protection, D. Tax rebates, E. Health care and prescription drugs for the elderly]? [M6]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>					
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i>Taxes vs. Services (QM5)</i>					
-- Raise Taxes	39	59	2	100	(252)
-- Cut Services	57	39	3	99	(441)
<i>Party affiliation</i>					
-- Democrat	47	51	2	100	(294)
-- Independent	48	48	4	100	(284)
-- Republican	57	39	4	100	(188)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>June 2002</b>					
<b><u>Education</u></b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Taxes vs. Services (QM5)</u></i>					
-- Raise Taxes	10	89	--	99	(252)
-- Cut Services	31	68	1	100	(441)
<i><u>Party affiliation</u></i>					
-- Democrat	16	83	1	100	(294)
-- Independent	22	76	2	100	(284)
-- Republican	30	67	2	99	(188)
<b><u>Environment</u></b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Taxes vs. Services (QM5)</u></i>					
-- Raise Taxes	26	73	1	100	(252)
-- Cut Services	45	53	2	100	(441)
<i><u>Party affiliation</u></i>					
-- Democrat	37	61	1	99	(294)
-- Independent	36	62	2	100	(284)
-- Republican	45	52	2	99	(188)
<b><u>Tax Rebates</u></b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Taxes vs. Services (QM5)</u></i>					
-- Raise Taxes	63	34	3	100	(252)
-- Cut Services	52	45	3	100	(441)
<i><u>Party affiliation</u></i>					
-- Democrat	56	43	2	101	(294)
-- Independent	55	41	4	100	(284)
-- Republican	57	38	5	100	(188)
<b><u>Health Care for Elderly</u></b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(801)</b>
<i><u>Taxes vs. Services (QM5)</u></i>					
-- Raise Taxes	12	87	--	99	(252)
-- Cut Services	28	71	1	100	(441)
<i><u>Party affiliation</u></i>					
-- Democrat	21	79	--	100	(294)
-- Independent	23	76	--	99	(284)
-- Republican	23	76	1	100	(188)