

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

June 26, 2002
(Release 137-6)

CONTACT: MONIKA McDERMOTT
(732) 932-9384 x 250

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Wednesday, June 26 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

VIEWS OF GOVERNMENT IN NEW JERSEY GO NEGATIVE

But Residents Don't See Anything Better Out There

Residents are divided over the quality of government in New Jersey, and more than eight in ten say there is at least some political corruption in the state. Currently, 51 percent of New Jerseyans rate the quality of government here as "only fair" or "poor," while 47 percent say it is "excellent" or "good" according to the *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*. Positive sentiments have decreased over the past year – in April 2001, 54 percent of residents rated the quality of government in New Jersey as "good" or "excellent."

At the same time, however, residents continue to believe that their government and their politicians are no different from those in any other state. Nearly six in ten believe the quality of their government is the same as the quality of government in most other states, and roughly three-quarters feel that New Jersey politicians are no more or less corrupt than those anywhere else in the country. In addition, roughly equal numbers christen each level of government – local, state and federal – as the most corrupt.

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* was conducted by telephone June 5 - 9, among a scientifically selected random sample of 801 New Jersey adults. The margin of sampling error for the survey is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

Garden Staters have very skeptical views of politicians and their motives for getting into office and governing. Sixty-four percent of residents believe that most people who go into politics do so for reasons of personal gain, rather than for public service. Only one-quarter – 25 percent – say most people go into politics to serve the public. Once in office, things are no better – 69 percent of residents feel that officeholders look out more for their own interests than for those of the public. Twenty percent feel that officeholders look out more for the public interest than their own interests. These attitudes have changed little over the past two decades. In 1981,

64 percent of residents said politicians were out for personal gain and 62 percent said officeholders were mostly looking out for their own interests rather than those of the public.

When it comes to political corruption, New Jerseyans see quite a bit of it. Thirty-three percent of residents feel there is “a lot” of political corruption in New Jersey, and another 51 percent feel there is at least “some.” Only nine percent of Garden State residents say there is little or no corruption here. In addition, out of every ten politicians, New Jerseyans estimate that just under half (about 4 $\frac{3}{4}$) are actually corrupt. Only 20 percent of residents believe only one or two out of every ten politicians are corrupt, while 29 percent say that over half are.

But residents’ skepticism is not limited to New Jersey, or even to politicians. Seventy-six percent of residents say that politicians here are no more or less corrupt than those in other states. Eleven percent of adults feel that New Jersey politicians are more corrupt and five percent feel they are less corrupt here than elsewhere. In addition, 61 percent of adults feel that politicians are no more or less corrupt than people in other occupations. One-third – 34 percent – feel that politicians are more corrupt, and only two percent think they are less corrupt.

Residents also do not think corruption is limited to any one level of government. When asked whether local, state, or federal government houses more corruption, residents split their votes. Twenty-seven percent feel that local government is the most corrupt, 21 percent feel the state government is, and 29 percent say the federal government is the most corrupt. Thirteen percent of residents volunteer that all levels are equally corrupt. Not surprisingly, partisan politics play some role in residents’ perceptions of corruption. With Democrats in control of the governor’s mansion, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to target state government as a hotbed of corruption – 28 percent to 18 percent respectively. Among Democratic residents, more corruption is seen in both local government (30 percent) and federal government (30 percent) than in state government (18 percent).

“New Jerseyans seem to accept political corruption as a normal part of life – they really take it in stride” says Monika McDermott, the interim director of the poll. “While they don’t necessarily think that their government or their politicians have the public’s interests at heart, they also don’t think that those anywhere else would be any better.”

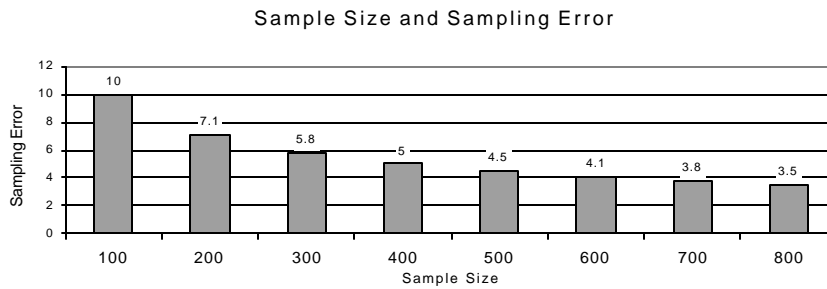
Overall, government in New Jersey gets marginally negative marks. Forty-two percent of New Jerseyans say that the quality of government here is “only fair” while another nine percent call it “poor.” Forty-three percent of residents say that government quality in New Jersey is

“good” and another four percent call it “excellent.” These numbers have actually declined since April 2001, a time when statewide news was filled with stories of possible unethical behavior by both the acting Governor, Don DiFrancesco, and Senator Bob Torricelli. At that time 54 percent of residents said the quality of government in New Jersey was at least “good” while only 43 percent dubbed it “only fair” or “poor.”

Most New Jerseyans think the quality of their government is the same as the quality of government in most other states. Fifty-eight percent say it is about the same, 14 percent think New Jersey government is of higher quality, and 18 percent believe the quality of government here is worse than in other states. These numbers have changed some over time – in 1984 only four percent of residents thought New Jersey government was worse than most other states, and just last year only eight percent felt that way, compared to 18 percent who now say New Jersey government is of a lower quality than government in most other states.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP137-6) June 26, 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 ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to say that New Jersey has a lot of political corruption, 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 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:

On another subject, overall, how would you rate the quality of government in New Jersey -- excellent, good, only fair, or poor? [G1]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	4%	43%	42%	9%	2%	100%	(801)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	7	50	37	5	2	101	(294)
--Independent	2	38	45	12	3	100	(284)
--Republican	3	41	43	10	2	99	(188)
<u>Previous surveys</u>							
--April 2001	5	49	37	6	3	100	(802)
--October 1984	8	53	31	5	2	99	(500)
--January 1981	4	36	48	10	2	100	(1003)

Compared to most other states is the quality of government in New Jersey better, worse, or about the same? [G2]

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	14%	18%	58%	11%	101%	(801)
<i>Party ID</i>						
--Democrat	16	11	65	7	99	(294)
--Independent	14	20	54	13	101	(284)
--Republican	11	23	54	13	101	(188)
<i>Previous Surveys</i>						
--April 2001	17	8	63	13	99	(802)
--October 1984	21	4	66	9	100	(500)

Do you think most people decide to GO INTO politics for public service reasons, or for personal gain? [G3]

	<u>Public service</u>	<u>Personal gain</u>	<u>Both (vol.)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	25%	64%	7%	3%	99%	(801)
<i>Party ID</i>						
--Democrat	28	63	7	2	100	(294)
--Independent	26	64	8	3	101	(284)
--Republican	22	66	9	2	100	(188)
<i>Previous Surveys</i>						
--April 2001	26	57	11	5	99	(802)
--September 1998	21	65	10	5	101	(403)
--February 1981	20	64	14	3	101	(1003)

Once in office, do you think politicians look out more for the interests of the public, or more for their own interests? [G4]

	<u>Public interests</u>	<u>Own interests</u>	<u>Both (vol.)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	20%	69%	6%	5%	100%	(801)
<i>Party ID</i>						
--Democrat	22	68	6	4	100	(294)
--Independent	18	72	6	4	100	(284)
--Republican	20	66	9	4	99	(188)
<i>Previous Surveys</i>						
--September 1998	16	69	12	3	100	(403)
--February 1981	19	62	14	5	100	(1003)

How much political corruption would you say there is in New Jersey – a lot, some, not much, or none at all? [G5]

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not much</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	33%	51%	8%	1%	7%	100%	(801)
<i>Party ID</i>							
--Democrat	29	50	12	2	8	101	(294)
--Independent	36	55	5	--	5	101	(284)
--Republican	32	53	8	1	7	101	(188)

In general, which level of government would you say has more corruption – the local level, the state level, or the federal level? [G6]

	<u>Local level</u>	<u>State level</u>	<u>Federal level</u>	<u>All equally (vol.)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	27%	21%	29%	13%	11%	101%	(801)
<i>Party ID</i>							
--Democrat	30	18	30	10	12	100	(294)
--Independent	27	22	28	13	10	100	(284)
--Republican	23	28	26	15	9	101	(188)

Corrupt politicians get more press attention than others, so it's hard to tell how many are really corrupt-- Out of 10 politicians, how many would you guess to be corrupt? [G7]

	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	--	8%	12%	15%	8%	19%	5%	7%	8%	4%	5%	7%	98%	(801)
AVERAGE	4.73													
<i>Party ID</i>														
--Democrat	--	10	11	15	5	18	6	7	9	6	3	11	101	(294)
--Independent	1	6	13	16	11	18	6	9	6	4	6	4	100	(284)
--Republican	--	8	15	15	8	21	5	7	6	2	5	6	98	(188)
<i>Previous surveys</i>														
--September 1998	--	6	13	12	8	21	9	8	5	6	5	7	100	(403)
AVERAGE	4.87													
--February 1981	1	9	10	15	10	21	7	7	6	4	2	7	99	(990)
AVERAGE	4.5													

Do you think politicians are more corrupt than people in other occupations, less corrupt, or is there really no difference? [G8]

	<u>More</u>	<u>Less</u>	<u>No Difference</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	34%	2%	61%	3%	100%	(801)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	33	1	63	3	100	(294)
--Independent	36	2	59	2	99	(284)
--Republican	38	2	60	--	100	(188)
<u>Previous surveys</u>						
--September 1998	31	4	63	3	101	(403)
--February 1981	22	4	71	3	100	(1000)

Do you think that politicians here in New Jersey are more corrupt than those in other states, less corrupt, or is there really no difference? [G9]

	<u>More</u>	<u>Less</u>	<u>No Difference</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June 2002	11%	5%	76%	9%	101%	(801)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	8	8	76	8	100	(294)
--Independent	12	5	75	7	99	(284)
--Republican	15	1	74	10	100	(188)
<u>Previous surveys</u>						
--September 1998	4	8	84	4	100	(403)