

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

February 9, 2003  
(Release 142-3)

CONTACT: PATRICK MURRAY OR  
CLIFF ZUKIN

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Sunday, February 9, 2003 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

## NEW JERSEYANS ON PROPERTY TAXES: "ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!"

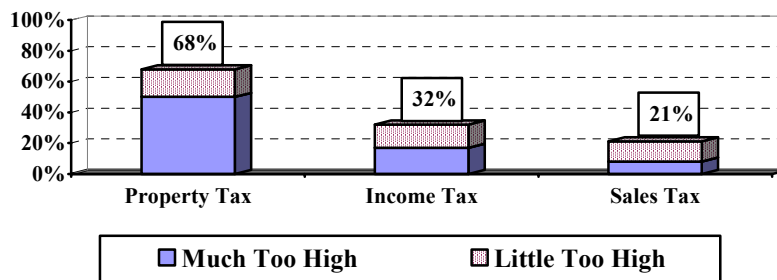
### MOST SUPPORT CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION ON TAX REFORM

In New Jersey, all taxes are not created equal. While relatively few residents say their state income taxes and the sales tax rate are too high, a large majority feel the amount they pay in local property taxes is unreasonable. While few New Jerseyans have heard of the proposal to hold a constitutional convention on property tax reform, most say they would support the idea.

When thinking about their property tax bills over the past year, 64 percent of Garden State residents report that their property taxes have gone up – 32 percent say they have gone up a lot and 32 percent say they have gone up a little. Only 1-in-5 reports that local property taxes have remained stable.

According to the latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton Rutgers Poll*, two-thirds of New Jerseyans (68%) feel that local property taxes are too high, with half saying that they are *much* too high. In comparison, 32 percent say their state income taxes are too high and only 21 percent say the same about the state sales tax.

Taxes Too High in New Jersey



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

185 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

Director: Cliff Zukin x247 • Associate Director: Patrick Murray x243

Graduate Research Assistants: Kelly Sand • Robert Suls

Phone: 732-932-9384 - Website: <http://slerp.rutgers.edu> - Fax: 732-932-1551

While escalating property taxes are a major concern of New Jerseyans, only 17 percent have heard of the proposal to hold a state constitutional convention on the issue. According to pending legislation, such a convention would propose constitutional amendments designed to lessen local governments' dependence on property taxes and provide other means for funding local services. Voters would elect delegates to the convention and have to approve any resulting recommendations.

While few are aware of the specific proposal, more than 8-in-10 New Jerseyans support the idea of holding such a constitutional convention. And while 27 percent feel that property tax reform should be the legislature's responsibility, nearly two-thirds of state residents (65%) feel that the politicians' have been unwilling to tackle this issue and a constitutional convention is needed to get action on tax reform.

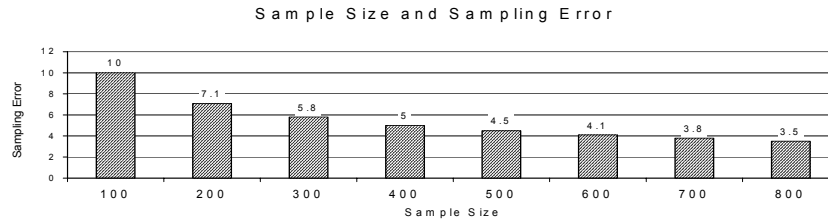
"Taxes of all kinds are a perennial sore spot with Garden State residents and politicians alike," commented Patrick Murray, the poll's associate director. "However, in the past few years, the local property tax has taken a clear lead as the tax New Jerseyans dislike the most."

With 64 percent in the current poll saying their property taxes have gone up, this represents a broader impact for property tax increases than noted in the previous decade. In polls conducted between 1991 and 1999, fewer New Jerseyans – from 54 to 59 percent – reported a rise in their property taxes. Also, nine years ago, 44 percent of state residents said their local property taxes were much too high – 6 points lower than the 50 percent who say the same today. During the same time period, opinion on the state income tax has moved in the opposite direction. In February 1994, before the Whitman tax cut took effect, 46 percent of New Jerseyans felt the income taxes they paid were too high. The current poll's level of 32 percent who say their income taxes are too high represents a 14 percentage point drop in this opinion.

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* poll was conducted between January 30 and February 2 with a scientific sample of 401 New Jersey residents. The associated sampling error is  $\pm 5$  percentage points.

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP142-3) February 9, 2003**

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from January 30 to February 2 with a scientifically selected random sample of 401 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 for 401 is  $\pm 5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to be less likely to agree with a statement, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 45 and 55 percent ( $50 \pm 5$ ) 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 residents of North, Central and South Jersey, 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 think the STATE INCOME taxes you pay are too high or are they about right. [IF TOO HIGH, PROBE: Are they much too high or just a little high]?” [BT4]

	<u>Much too High</u>	<u>A little too High</u>	<u>About Right</u>	<u>Too Low (VOL)</u>	<u>DK/ Refuse</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	17%	15%	61%	1%	7%	101%	(401)
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
--February 1994	19	27	48	--	6	100	(801)

“Do you think the STATE SALES tax is too high or is it about right. [IF TOO HIGH, PROBE: Are they much too high or just a little high]?” [BT5]

	<u>Much too High</u>	<u>A little too High</u>	<u>About Right</u>	<u>Too Low (VOL)</u>	<u>DK/ Refuse</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	8%	13%	77%	1%	2%	101	(401)

“Do you think the LOCAL PROPERTY taxes you pay are too high or are they about right. [IF TOO HIGH, PROBE: Are they much too high or just a little high]?” [BT6]

	<u>Much too High</u>	<u>A little too High</u>	<u>About Right</u>	<u>Too Low</u>	<u>DK/ Do not pay</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	50%	18%	25%	--	7%	100%	(401)
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
--April 2001	39	23	26	--	12	100	(802)
--February 1994	44	25	22	--	9	100	(801)

“In the past year, have your local property taxes gone up, gone down, or stayed about the same. [IF “GONE UP,” PROBE: Have they gone up a lot or just a little]?” [BT7]

	<u>Gone up a lot</u>	<u>Gone up a little</u>	<u>Gone down</u>	<u>Stayed the same</u>	<u>DK/ Do not pay</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February 2003</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(401)</b>
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
--September 2002	34	33	--	18	15	100	(804)
--September 1999		55	3	23	19	100	(802)
--February 1998	25	29	2	28	17	101	(802)
--February 1997	28	28	4	25	15	100	(800)
--February 1995	28	31	4	26	12	101	(801)
--February 1994	29	30	2	26	12	99	(801)
--September 1991		59	9	15	17	100	(800)

“There is currently a proposal to hold a state constitutional convention specifically to deal with the issue of property tax reform. Have you read or heard anything about this. [IF “YES” ASK: Have you heard a great deal, some, or just a little]?” [BT8]

	<u>Yes, a Great Deal</u>	<u>Yes, Some</u>	<u>Yes, a Little</u>	<u>No, not heard anything</u>	<u>DK/ Refuse</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February 2003</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(401)</b>

“This convention would be responsible for proposing amendments to the New Jersey constitution to lessen local governments’ dependence on property taxes and to provide for other means of funding local services. Delegates to the convention would be elected by the voters of the state, and the voters would also have to approve any recommendations that come out of the convention. Would you support or oppose holding such a constitutional convention?” [BT9]

	<u>Support</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>DK/ Refuse</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February 2003</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(401)</b>

“I’m going to read you two statements. Please tell me which you agree with more: Reforming property taxes should be the responsibility of the state legislature, and NOT a constitutional convention - OR - The politicians have been unwilling to deal with the property tax issue, so a constitutional convention is the only way we’ll get tax reform. Which do you agree with more?” [BT10]

	<u>Responsibility of the state legislature</u>	<u>Constitutional convention only way to get reform</u>	<u>DK/ Refuse</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>February 2003</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(401)</b>