

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

October 4, 2003
(Release 142-9)

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MIXED OPINIONS ON DIVORCE

NOT GREAT FOR SOCIETY, BUT NO CLEAR REASONS WHY AN UNHAPPILY MARRIED COUPLE SHOULD STAY TOGETHER

Attitudes toward divorce are decidedly ambivalent in the Garden State. While more residents see society's growing acceptance of divorce as a change for the worse rather than for the better, most can't find a good reason why an unhappily married couple should stay together. Even when children are involved, a majority of New Jerseyans say that the kids are usually better off when parents with irreconcilable differences get divorced.

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* conducted last month also found that about one-quarter of residents (24%) feel it is too easy for couples to get a divorce in the state, compared to 6 percent who say it is too hard. Another 47 percent say that divorce procedures in New Jersey are "about right." More than 1-in-5 New Jersey adults have been through a divorce, but their opinions on the ease of divorce are only slightly different from others. Nineteen percent of divorced individuals say getting a divorce in New Jersey is too easy, compared to 28 percent of other married residents – representing half of all adults in the state – and 20 percent of those who have never been married.

Divorce has become more common over the past decades. However, few people feel that more progressive attitudes toward divorce have had a positive impact on society. Only 1-in-5 New Jerseyans (21%) feels that society's greater acceptance of divorce has

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

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been a change for the better, compared to twice as many (40%) who say it has been a change for the worse. Another 34 percent say it hasn't made much difference. Interestingly, the feeling that more tolerant attitudes toward divorce have had a negative impact on society is shared by more than one-quarter of divorced residents, as well as half of other married residents and one-third of singles.

With the growing acceptance of divorce receiving a mixed assessment in the state, the survey results also indicate that most residents would support an effort to decrease the divorce rate. Nearly 3-in-4 residents (73%) favor a legal requirement to undergo counseling before a couple is allowed to divorce. Patrick Murray, associate director of the poll, remarked, "Garden State residents seem to be of two – or even three – minds when it comes to the topic of divorce. Many think that growing divorce rates have had a negative impact on society and that efforts should be made to keep marriages intact. Yet, few can name a compelling reason why an unhappily married couple should stick it out."

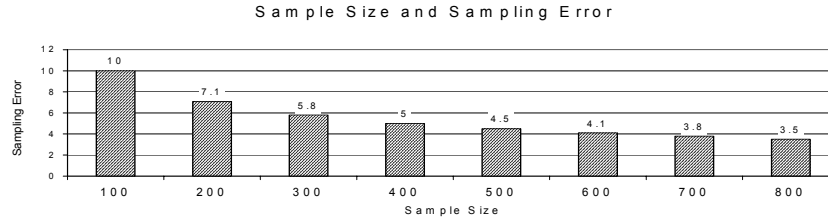
When asked about a non-abusive marriage where the couple cannot work out their differences, most New Jerseyans don't pinpoint an individual circumstance that warrants the couple staying together. Only 24 percent feel that the couple's religion forbidding divorce is a good enough reason for them to stay together. Slightly more residents – 31% – feel that the fact a couple made a vow to each other is reason enough to stay together.

A somewhat larger number of residents, but by no means a majority – only 42% – say that the presence of children in the home is a good enough reason to preserve an unhappy relationship. In fact, a majority of New Jerseyans (52%) feel that children involved in an unhappy marriage are generally better off when the parents split up. Only 27 percent say that it is better for these kids when their parents stay together.

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers survey contacted 401 adults by telephone from February 5 to 9 and has a ± 5 percentage point margin of error. The poll also found that most New Jerseyans don't buy the argument that living together before marriage will decrease the likelihood of divorce. Only 3-in-10 (29%) say that pre-nuptial living arrangements are more likely to lead to a lasting marriage. Nearly half (46%) feel that it will make no difference and 18 percent say that a couple who lives together before marriage is *more* likely to get divorced in the end.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP142-9) October 4, 2003

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from February 5 to 9 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 ± 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 ± 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:

“Now I’d like to ask you some questions about the subject of divorce. There has been more acceptance of divorce in society in the recent past. Do you think this has been a change for the better, a change for the worse, or hasn’t made much difference?” [DV1]

	<u>Change for the better</u>	<u>Change for the worse</u>	<u>Made no difference</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	21%	40%	34%	4%	99%	(401)
<u>Marital History</u>						
--Been Divorced	25	27	38	10	100	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	15	49	32	4	100	(217)
--Never Married	29	34	35	2	100	(91)

“Do you think divorce in New Jersey is too easy for couples to get, too hard, or about right?” [DV2]

	<u>Too easy</u>	<u>Too hard</u>	<u>About right</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	24%	6%	47%	22%	99%	(401)
<u>Marital History</u>						
--Been Divorced	19	14	52	15	100	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	28	4	39	29	100	(217)
--Never Married	20	4	59	17	100	(91)

“Do you think couples who live together before marriage are more likely to end up getting divorced, less likely to get divorced, or is there no difference?” [DV3]

	<u>More likely</u>	<u>Less likely</u>	<u>No difference</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	18%	29%	46%	8%	101%	(401)
<i>Marital History</i>						
--Been Divorced	12	25	52	11	100	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	27	19	45	9	99	(217)
--Never Married	6	49	42	3	100	(91)

“Suppose a couple is unhappy in their marriage. The marriage is NOT abusive, but the couple can’t make up their differences. [A. If they have children under age 18? B. If their religion forbids divorce? C. Simply because they made a vow to each other?] – Should this couple stay together or isn’t this a good enough reason?”[DV4]

	<u>Should stay together for this reason</u>	<u>Is not a good enough reason</u>	<u>Depends (VOL)</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<i>If they have children under age 18</i>						
February 2003	42%	52%	4%	2%	100%	(401)
<i>Marital History</i>						
--Been Divorced	32	62	4	2	100	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	45	49	4	2	100	(217)
--Never Married	44	51	3	2	100	(91)
<i>If their religion forbids divorce</i>						
February 2003	24%	64%	5%	7%	100%	(401)
<i>Marital History</i>						
--Been Divorced	26	62	6	6	100	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	21	64	5	10	100	(217)
--Never Married	28	66	4	2	100	(91)
<i>Simply because they made a vow to each other</i>						
February 2003	31%	58%	5%	5%	99%	(401)
<i>Marital History</i>						
--Been Divorced	24	60	6	11	101	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	35	57	5	3	100	(217)
--Never Married	31	60	5	5	101	(91)

“Do you think children involved in an unhappy marriage are generally better off when the parents stay together or better off when the parents get divorced?” [DV5]

	<u>Stay together</u>	<u>Get divorced</u>	<u>Depends (VOL)</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	27%	52%	12%	9%	100%	(401)
<i>Marital History</i>						
--Been Divorced	22	58	15	5	100	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	30	48	11	11	100	(217)
--Never Married	25	56	11	8	100	(91)

“Would you favor or oppose a law requiring couples to try counseling before they are allowed to get a divorce?” [DV6]

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Depends/DK/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	73%	24%	3%	100%	(401)
<i>Marital History</i>					
--Been Divorced	68	24	7	99	(92)
--Married, Never Divorced	76	22	2	100	(217)
--Never Married	71	26	3	100	(91)

MARITAL HISTORY:

“Are you married, living as married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?” [DV7] “Have you ever been divorced, or not?” [DV8]

	<u>Been Divorced</u>	<u>Married, Never Divorced</u>	<u>Never Been Married</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
February 2003	22%	50%	28%	100%	(401)
<i>Gender</i>					
--Male	17	44	39	100	(192)
--Female	25	56	19	100	(208)
<i>Religion</i>					
Catholic	22	56	22	100	(176)
Protestant	26	51	24	101	(104)
Other	22	48	30	100	(76)