

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

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NEW JERSEY: MICROCOSM OF THE NATION

Public Belief Report Card Shows Garden State is in the American Mainstream

New Jersey has been gaining a reputation as a "liberal" state out of touch with the national mainstream. But is this reputation deserved? Well, we are decidedly pro-choice, pro-labor and pro-environment. And Garden State residents oppose hiring practices which discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. On the other hand, the public is split on affirmative action, feels that government policy on immigration should be more restrictive, and counts personal prayer as an important part of daily life.

And even though the New Jersey electorate has been trending more towards the Democratic party over the past decade, the bottom line is, ideologically speaking, we are squarely in the American mainstream.

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* asked New Jerseyans a series of 12 "belief" questions that had been asked on national surveys in the past year, ranging from ideological policy positions to views on government to assessment of forces controlling one's life. In all, only one of the 12 questions showed a large disparity in the opinions of Garden State residents and other Americans and another four showed smaller differences.

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

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Policy Issues

In assessing opinions on five different policy issues, New Jerseyans tend to have typically liberal views in three areas, conservative views on one and are divided on one. On the liberal side, fully 4-in-5 New Jerseyans disagree that school boards should be able to fire teachers based on their sexuality. A similar 4-in-5 believe that abortion should be legally available, including 28 percent who say it should be legal under any circumstances. Also, 2-in-3 New Jerseyans say that people should be willing to pay higher prices for environmental protection.

New Jerseyans are split on the need for affirmative action – 48 percent feel that it is still needed to help minorities overcome discrimination while 46 percent say the policy is not necessary today. And the public holds somewhat conservative views on immigration, with 4-in-5 saying that we should place greater restrictions on people coming into our country to live.

And in what may surprise some observers, New Jersey and the nation agree on four of these five issues. Similar levels of New Jerseyans and other United States residents believe that abortion should be legal (81% NJ to 81% US), people should be willing to pay higher prices for environmental protection (64% NJ to 65% US), affirmative action is needed today to address racial discrimination (48% NJ to 51% US), and government policy on immigration should be more restrictive than it is now (81% NJ to 77% US).

Public opinion in the Garden State differs from that of other residents of the United States only in the area of firing openly gay teachers. While a majority of the country (62%) frowns on such discrimination, the sentiment in New Jersey is stronger (80%).

“Many political observers look at New Jersey’s political leaders and see the state as a bastion of liberalism in the United States, but that’s an inaccurate picture of how most New Jerseyans think,” observed Patrick Murray, associate director of the poll. “With the exception of somewhat greater support for the employment rights of homosexuals, New Jersey opinions on wedge issues are well in line with most of America.”

Policy Issues	New Jersey	USA	Difference
Schools should not be able to fire openly gay teachers	80%	62%	+18
Abortion should be legal	81%	81%	0
People should pay higher prices to protect the environment	64%	65%	-1
Affirmative action is needed to help minorities today	48%	51%	-3
Government should restrict immigration more	81%	77%	+4

Business and Labor

In the economic sector, New Jersey tends to support the need for labor unions and exhibits some skepticism about corporate greed. The U.S. as a whole is slightly more pro-labor than New Jersey. Garden State residents are somewhat less likely than other Americans to feel that corporations make too much profit (55% NJ to 62% US) and that labor unions are necessary to protect workers’ rights (67% to 74%). However, these differences are at the margin of error for comparing the state and national numbers.

Murray commented, “In a state whose economy has become highly reliant on the high tech, health, research and service sectors, it’s not surprising that labor support is not quite as high as in areas of the country with more manufacturing jobs. Still, the large majority of New Jerseyans still believe that labor unions are needed to protect workers.”

Business and Labor	New Jersey	USA	Difference
Corporations make too much profit	55%	62%	-7
Labor unions are needed to protect workers	67%	74%	-7

Views on Government

The state’s views on government present a mixed bag. Three-in-four New Jerseyans agree that part of government’s role is to provide a helping hand to those who need it. However, only a bare majority feel that government is really run for the benefit of all people. Most New Jerseyans claim some interest in following local politics.

New Jersey’s level of faith in government is similar to other Americans, although the state’s belief that government should aid those in need is slightly higher. An identical percentage of New Jersey (52%) and United States (52%) residents feel that government is run for the benefit of all the people. New Jersey residents (74%) are somewhat more likely than other Americans (66%) to feel that the government should act as a safety net for those who fall into less fortunate circumstances.

In terms of attention to politics, New Jerseyans – sandwiched between the New York and Philadelphia media markets – are less likely to express interest in following local politics than are other Americans (62% NJ to 73% US).

View on Government	New Jersey	USA	Difference
Government should take care of those who can’t care for themselves	74%	66%	+8
Government is run for the benefit of all the people	52%	52%	0
I’m interested in following local politics	62%	73%	-11

Life Forces

The survey also included two questions about reliance on forces beyond earthly control. While 3-in-4 New Jerseyans say prayer to a higher power is an important part of their daily life, only 1-in-4 believe that forces outside of their control determine their path in life. New Jerseyans are slightly less likely than other Americans to believe that the locus of control in their lives is beyond their power. In all, 76 percent of New Jerseyans say that prayer is an important part of their lives compared to 81 percent of other U.S. residents who say the same. The 25 percent of Garden State residents who feel that

success in life is determined by forces beyond their control is similar to the 30 percent found nationwide.

Life Forces	New Jersey	USA	Difference
Success is determined by forces beyond our control	25%	30%	-5
Prayer is an important part of my daily life	76%	81%	-5

Murray remarked, “As residents of one of the most diverse states in the country, both racially and economically, it’s not surprising that New Jerseyans’ opinions tend to mirror those of the country as a whole. Even those areas where we differ, such as a greater tolerance of those who have different lifestyles, may be based in the notion that our high population density promotes greater interaction among different types of people.”

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* was conducted by telephone with a random sample of 904 New Jersey adults between January 7 and 13, 2004. Most of the questions reported in this release were asked to a randomized half sample of 452 participants. Results for these questions have a +/-5.5 percent margin of error. Comparisons to national data need to show a difference of at least 7 percentage points to be considered statistically significant.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP145-7) March 14, 2004

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from January 7 to 13 with a scientifically selected random sample of 904 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 ± 3.9 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adult residents were found to disagree with a statement, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.1 and 53.9 percent (50 ± 3.9) had all New Jersey adult residents been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Most of the questions reported in this release were asked to a randomized half sample of 452 participants. Results for these questions have a ± 5.5 percent margin of error. Comparisons to national data need to show a difference of at least 7 percentage points to be considered statistically significant.

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 abortions should be legal under any circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?” [IS1]

	<u>Legal under any</u>	<u>Legal under certain</u>	<u>Illegal in all circumstances</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>Don't know/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	28%	53%	15%	3%	2%	101%	(904)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>							
Gallup Poll August 2003	26	55	17	--	2	100	(1006)

“Do you think affirmative action programs are needed today to help minorities such as blacks and Hispanics overcome discrimination, or are they not needed today?” [IS2]

	<u>Needed today</u>	<u>Not needed today</u>	<u>Don't know/Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	48%	46%	6%	100%	(904)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Associated Press Poll March 2003	51	43	6	100	(1013)

[Asked of half the sample:]

Now I am going to read you some different statements. For each, please tell me if you mostly agree or mostly disagree with it.

“People should be willing to pay higher prices in order to protect the environment?” [IS3]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	64%	32%	4%	100%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	65	34	1	100	(1284)

“It is the responsibility of government to take care of people who can't take care of themselves?” [IS4]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	74%	20%	6%	100%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	66	31	3	100	(1284)

“We should restrict and control people coming into our country to live, more than we do now?” [IS5]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	81%	16%	4%	101%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	77	19	4	100	(1284)

“Prayer is an important part of my daily life?” [IS6]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	76%	23%	1%	100%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	81	18	1	100	(1244)

“I'm pretty interested in following local politics?” [IS7]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	62%	36%	2%	100%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	73	26	1	100	(1244)

“Labor unions are necessary to protect the working person?” [IS9]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	67%	27%	6%	100%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	74	23	3	100	(1244)

“Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control?” [IS10]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	25%	71%	3%	99%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	30	67	3	100	(2528)

“The government is really run for the benefit of all the people?” [IS11]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	52%	45%	3%	100%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	52	46	2	100	(1284)

“Business corporations make too much profit?” [IS12]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	55%	39%	5%	99%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	62	32	6	100	(1244)

“School boards ought to have the right to fire teachers who are known homosexuals?” [IS13]

	<u>Mostly agree</u>	<u>Mostly disagree</u>	<u>Don't know/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	17%	80%	3%	100%	(452)
<u>NATIONAL SURVEY</u>					
Pew Research Center August 2003	33	62	5	100	(1244)