

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

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NEW JERSEYANS SAY CORRUPTION THE NORM IN STATE GOVERNMENT

Most Point to the System as the Major Problem

While New Jersey's legislative races were largely noncompetitive last year, ethics seemed to be the over-riding issue on the campaign trail. And fewer than 2-in-5 residents today would say that the quality of government in their home state is good. In fact, the overall approval rating of the legislature has dropped in the past two years and residents tend to blame the system for its corrupting culture.

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* found an overwhelming 4-in-5 residents (79%) saying that at least some corruption is the norm in state politics, with one-third (34%) saying there is a lot of corruption in the Garden State. This compares to only 14 percent who say there is only a little political corruption or none at all.

And few residents believe their own state legislators are particularly virtuous. Only 5 percent characterize the state legislature as a whole as "very honest," and a similarly meager 12 percent would apply that description to the legislators from their own district. One-quarter of state residents (26%) believe that the people who serve in New Jersey's Senate and General Assembly are in fact dishonest. Another 58 percent say that the people who serve in the legislature are "somewhat" honest. Furthermore, over one-third (35%) of New Jerseyans believe that most of the state's 120 legislators are "willing to sell out to lobbyists" in return for gifts and contributions.

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

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“In New Jersey politics, lapses in ethics are more likely to be considered the norm than not,” remarked Patrick Murray, associate director of the poll. “However, it doesn’t appear that New Jerseyans see their legislators as coming to Trenton with their hands already out. Residents are more likely to believe that the way State House business is conducted lies at the core of the ethics issue.”

According to the survey, New Jersey residents are more likely to see the system itself as the key corrupting influence on dishonest legislators (52%) rather than feel that ethically-challenged legislators started off that way before they sought office (29%).

Murray observed, “One of the most interesting patterns in these results is that there are few, if any, partisan differences. Democrats, Republicans, and independents alike tend to hold negative views on the pervasiveness of corruption in state politics.”

Currently, 40 percent of New Jerseyans approve of the performance of the state legislature compared to 30 percent who disapprove. Another 30 percent register no opinion. Two years ago the positive to negative ratio stood at a much higher 48 to 19 percent. This decline in legislative approval was recorded among residents of all political persuasions. Democratic approval dropped from 54 to 45 over the past two years, independents dropped from 47 to 37, and Republicans from 46 to 41.

The poll also found that only 4-in-10 New Jerseyans (39%) feel the quality of government in their home state is either excellent or good. Another 47 percent rate the quality of state government as only fair and 12 percent say it is poor. While the level of positive ratings is similar to those registered one year ago (38%), they are down considerably from positive ratings in 2001 when a majority (54%) felt that New Jersey had a good quality government.

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. Results from this poll have a +/-3.9 percent margin of error.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP145-8) March 25, 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 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 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.

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:

“And do you approve or disapprove of the job the New Jersey state legislature is doing?” [Q7]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	40%	30%	30%	100%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>					
--Democrat	45	22	33	100	(289)
--Independent	37	37	27	101	(295)
--Republican	41	32	28	101	(214)
<i>Region</i>					
--North	39	28	32	99	(401)
--Central	37	27	35	99	(227)
--South	42	35	23	100	(254)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>					
--March 2002	48	19	33	100	(803)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>					
--Democrat	54	16	30	100	(275)
--Independent	47	21	32	100	(275)
--Republican	46	19	35	100	(201)

“Overall, how would you rate the quality of government in New Jersey -- excellent, good, only fair, or poor?” [E1]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	2%	37%	47%	12%	2%	100%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	3	44	41	10	2	100	(289)
--Independent	1	38	47	13	1	100	(295)
--Republican	2	36	48	12	1	99	(214)
<i>Region</i>							
--North	1	43	45	9	2	100	(401)
--Central	--	39	48	11	2	100	(227)
--South	4	29	51	15	1	100	(254)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
--February 2003	1	37	44	16	2	100	(802)
--June 2002	4	43	42	9	2	100	(801)
--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, is it worse here, or is it about the same?” [E2]

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worst</u>	<u>About the Same</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	16%	20%	53%	11%	100%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>						
--Democrat	25	17	48	10	100	(289)
--Independent	9	20	60	11	100	(295)
--Republican	14	23	51	12	100	(214)
<i>Region</i>						
--North	14	16	55	15	100	(401)
--Central	23	24	43	10	100	(227)
--South	13	22	59	6	100	(254)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
--February 2003	16	20	51	14	101	(802)
--June 2002	14	18	58	11	101	(801)
--April 2001	17	8	63	13	99	(802)
--October 1984	21	4	66	9	100	(500)

“How much political corruption would you say there is in New Jersey – a lot, some, only a little, or none at all?” [E3]

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Only a little</u>	<u>None at all</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	34%	45%	11%	3%	7%	100%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	29	51	10	4	7	101	(289)
--Independent	36	46	12	1	5	100	(295)
--Republican	32	45	11	5	7	100	(214)
<i>Region</i>							
--North	30	50	11	3	7	101	(401)
--Central	33	44	12	5	7	101	(227)
--South	40	43	9	1	7	100	(254)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
--February 2003	38	39	14	1	7	99	(802)
--June 2002	33	51	8	1	7	100	(801)

“Overall, how honest are the people who serve in the New Jersey state legislature – are they very honest, somewhat honest, somewhat dishonest, or very dishonest?” [E4]

	<u>Very honest</u>	<u>Somewhat honest</u>	<u>Somewhat dishonest</u>	<u>Very Dishonest</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	5%	58%	22%	4%	10%	99%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	5	62	21	3	9	100	(289)
--Independent	5	62	21	4	9	101	(295)
--Republican	6	58	23	3	10	100	(214)
<i>Region</i>							
--North	4	62	20	2	11	99	(401)
--Central	7	54	24	3	12	100	(227)
--South	5	58	24	6	7	100	(254)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
--February 1994	4	55	26	6	7	98	(801)

“And how about the people who represent YOUR DISTRICT in the New Jersey state legislature - would you describe them as very honest, somewhat honest, somewhat dishonest, or very dishonest?” [E5]

	<u>Very honest</u>	<u>Somewhat honest</u>	<u>Somewhat dishonest</u>	<u>Very Dishonest</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	12%	56%	15%	3%	14%	100%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	15	51	16	2	17	101	(289)
--Independent	11	60	13	3	12	99	(295)
--Republican	12	63	14	1	9	99	(214)
<i>Region</i>							
--North	12	58	15	3	13	101	(401)
--Central	11	51	17	2	19	100	(227)
--South	15	56	15	3	12	101	(254)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
--February 1994	13	57	18	5	8	101	(801)

“Among those state legislators who are corrupt, do you think they were corrupt when they were first elected to office, or do you think they became corrupted by the system?” [E6]

	<u>When first elected</u>	<u>By the system</u>	<u>Both (VOL)</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	29%	52%	4%	15%	100%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>						
--Democrat	31	53	4	12	100	(289)
--Independent	31	50	4	15	100	(295)
--Republican	27	54	5	15	101	(214)
<i>Region</i>						
--North	30	46	5	19	100	(401)
--Central	33	50	4	13	100	(227)
--South	26	63	3	8	100	(254)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
--February 1994	37	51	2	10	100	(801)

“If you had to guess – What percentage of state legislators are willing to sell out to lobbyists in return for free meals, free trips, or campaign contributions?” [E7]

	<u>25% or less</u>	<u>25 to 50%</u>	<u>More than half</u>	<u>All</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January 2004	20%	29%	29%	6%	16%	100%	52%	(904)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>								
--Democrat	21	33	31	2	13	100	47	(289)
--Independent	23	27	30	7	14	101	53	(295)
--Republican	15	26	31	4	24	100	53	(214)
<i>Region</i>								
--North	21	30	29	5	16	101	50	(401)
--Central	17	34	30	6	12	99	52	(227)
--South	21	24	30	7	17	99	55	(254)