

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

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RELEASE INFORMATION

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

NEW JERSEYANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD REGIONALIZING LOCAL SERVICES

Overall, more New Jersey residents favor the regionalization of local public services than oppose it, and half of the state's residents think that regionalizing local services with a neighboring town would lower their property taxes. However, about 6-in-10 residents say that they have not read or heard anything about regionalization as a way for towns to share costs to hold taxes down.

New Jerseyans have specific preferences for the types of services they are willing to have their town share with a neighboring town to hold down local property taxes. While 8-in-10 favor regionalizing senior citizen activities and public libraries, 7-in-10 favor road and street maintenance, and 6-in-10 support regionalizing fire protection. About half of the state's residents favor regionalizing police protection and the public schools.

The percentage of New Jerseyans who feel their property taxes are too high (66%) or who have experienced an increase in property taxes in the past year (61%) has not changed since February 1994. However, there has been a 12 percentage point increase in those who think state government is most responsible for their property tax increase.

"New Jersey has been labeled a 'home rule' state because it has been assumed that most residents want to control the services and activities that go on in their own communities," commented Janice Ballou, Director of the *Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll*. "However, it appears that people are willing to consider regionalizing local services, even if it means less control, when there are pocketbook incentives such as lower property taxes."

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The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll conducted by telephone between June 14 and 22 with a random sample of 801 New Jersey adults also finds that most residents take pride in where they live. Slightly more than 8-in-10 have a lot or some pride in being a resident of New Jersey and a similar number feels that way about their own town or city. Also, about 7-in-10 New Jerseyans rate their state and their town or city as an excellent or good place to live.

ATTITUDES TOWARD REGIONALIZATION

A suggested approach to reducing property taxes in New Jersey is to regionalize services—which means several towns would combine services and share the costs for these services. Overall, a majority of state residents are not aware of regionalization. Fifty-eight percent of New Jerseyans say that they have not heard or read about regionalization while 41 percent have read or heard a lot (10%), some (16%), or a little (15%).

Even though many New Jerseyans are not currently informed about regionalization, by a margin of 44 to 37 percent, more people favor than oppose this idea. When favoring regionalization is described as a way to hold costs and taxes down and opposing is viewed as giving up their own town's control of services, 20 percent strongly favor regionalization and 24 percent mildly favor it compared to 17 percent who mildly oppose it and 20 percent who strongly oppose regionalization. Also, 15 percent report they do not know whether they support or oppose it, and 2 percent say it depends on which town they would regionalize with.

Those who say they have read or heard about regionalization are more likely to favor this approach to reducing property taxes than those who have not read or heard about it by a margin of 52 to 41 percent. Not surprisingly, those who are not aware of regionalization (19%) are more likely to say that they don't know if they favor or oppose it than those who are aware (7%).

Also, more residents who say their property taxes are much too high (52%) favor regionalization than those who say taxes are a little too high (41%) or about right (38%).

Residents in Central Jersey (54%) are more likely than those in South Jersey (45%) or North Jersey (41%) to favor regionalization. Also, more New Jerseyans who live in rural areas

(52%) favor regionalization than those who live in center cities (41%), cities and old suburbs (42%), or new suburbs (45%).

While 51 percent of New Jerseyans think that regionalizing local services will result in saving money and lower property taxes, 30 percent say it will not, and 19 percent don't know. People who live in Central (56%) and South Jersey (57%) are more likely than those in North Jersey (44%) to say regionalization will lower property taxes. Also, more people who live in rural areas (64%) and in new suburbs (53%) view regionalization as a way to reduce local taxes than those who live in cities and old suburbs (41%) or in the center cities (36%).

Overall, residents do not see regionalization as having a negative impact on the quality of their local services. While 40 percent say local services will stay the same, 24 percent feel they will get better, and 27 percent say they will get worse. Ten percent say they don't know how regionalization will effect the quality of their local services.

Those who favor regionalization appear comfortable that combining services will not effect the quality while those who oppose this approach think the quality of services will decline. Forty percent of those who favor regionalization say services will get better, and only 7 percent of those who oppose it feel this way. In comparison, 55 percent of those who oppose regionalization say it will result in worse services while 8 percent of those who favor it feel this way.

PREFERENCES FOR SERVICES TO REGIONALIZE

New Jerseyans have preferences for specific services that they are willing to share with a neighboring town if it held down their property taxes. Eight-in-ten residents favor sharing senior citizen activities (83%) and public libraries (82%). Also, 69 percent would favor sharing road and street maintenance, and 61 percent feel this way about fire protection. About half of the state's residents favor sharing police protection (54%) and schools (52%). About 7-in-10 or more New Jerseyans who support the general idea of regionalization favor it for all six of these services. And, among those who oppose the general idea of regionalization, there is majority support for sharing three of these services. Among those who don't generally favor regionalization, 78 percent favor shared senior citizen activities, 77 percent would share

libraries, and 59 percent road and street maintenance. However, fewer people in this group favor shared fire protection (45%), police protection (29%), and schools (35%).

"These results show that not all people focus on the same thing when they hear the term regionalization. Even those who are opposed to it in general can favor regionalization when it comes to a particular type of service," commented Ballou.

ASSESSMENT OF NEW JERSEY AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

Overall, most New Jerseyans are proud of both their state and their city or town. While 86 percent say they take a lot (59%) or some (27%) pride in being a resident of New Jersey, 13 percent have a little (9%) or no (4%) pride in being a resident of the state. A similar 83 percent say they take a lot (55%) or some (28%) pride in being a resident of their community, while 16 percent have a little (10%) or no (6%) pride in being a resident of their community.

In rating New Jersey as a place to live, 68 percent say it is excellent (20%) or good (48%) while 31 percent rate it only fair (24%) or poor (7%). New Jerseyans give their own towns and cities similar ratings as a place to live. Seventy-two percent give their community an excellent (31%) or good (41%) rating while 28 percent rate it only fair (19%) or poor (9%).

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TAXES IN NEW JERSEY

It is not unexpected that New Jerseyans are willing to consider alternatives such as regionalization to reduce their local property taxes. Sixty-six percent feel their property taxes are much (42%) or a little (24%) too high. Also, 6-in-10 New Jerseyans say that they have seen their local property taxes go up a lot (27%) or a little (34%) in the past year. These percentages have been about the same since February 1994.

However, in the past five months, there has been a shift in New Jerseyans' thinking about the entity that is most responsible for the increase in local property taxes. Currently, 31 percent say state government is most responsible for increasing local property taxes, local public schools are named by 32 percent, 17 percent say local government, 10 percent county government, and 10 percent don't know. In February 1994, 19 percent named state government,

38 percent local public schools, 21 percent local government, 13 percent county government, and 8 percent said they didn't know. This represents a 12 percentage point increase in those who feel state government is most responsible for the increase in their local property taxes and a 6 percent decline in those who feel it is because of the public schools.

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP48-3 (EP98-3), SUNDAY, JULY 10, 1994

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between June 14 and June 22, 1994, when a random sample of 801 New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. Figures based on this sample size are subject to a sampling error of about ± 3.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval.

Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from that population. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The questions and figures referred to in this release are presented below. The location of each question on the actual questionnaire is in brackets.

"Overall, how would you rate New Jersey as a place to live—excellent, good, only fair or poor?" [Q.23]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	20%	48%	24%	7%	1%	100%	(801)
<i>Region**</i>							
--North	20	53	20	7	--	100	(345)
--Central	22	37	31	9	1	100	(192)
--South	19	49	24	7	1	100	(264)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
February, 1994	18	53	22	7	--	100	(801)
July, 1990	16	43	25	15	1	100	(800)
February, 1988	27	51	17	4	1	100	(800)
December, 1984	29	51	15	4	1	100	(1000)
June, 1980	18	50	23	7	2	100	(1000)
May, 1977	16	47	27	9	1	100	(1000)

"How much pride do you take in being a resident of New Jersey—a lot, some, a little or none?" [Q.24]

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	59%	27%	9%	4%	1%	100%	(801)
<i>Type of Location*</i>							
--Central City	55	33	8	3	--	99	(71)
--Older City and Suburb	62	29	5	5	--	101	(125)
--New Suburb	60	24	11	3	2	100	(476)
--Rural	56	30	8	5	--	99	(129)

"How would you rate your own town or city as a place to live—excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.25]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	31%	41%	19%	9%	--	100%	(801)
<i>Region**</i>							
--North	26	45	21	9	--	101	(345)
--Central	34	40	14	13	--	101	(192)
--South	35	37	21	8	--	101	(264)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
December, 1984	30	41	21	7	1	101	(1000)
June, 1980	23	44	24	9	1	101	(1000)
May, 1977	25	41	24	10	--	100	(1000)

"How much pride do you take in being a resident of your town or city—a lot, some, a little, or none?" [Q.26]

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	55%	28%	10%	6%	1%	100%	(801)
<i>Region**</i>							
--North	51	32	9	6	1	99	(345)
--Central	54	28	9	9	--	100	(192)
--South	61	23	10	4	2	100	(264)
<i>Type of Location*</i>							
--Central City	40	41	13	6	--	100	(71)
--Older City and Suburb	51	28	9	10	2	100	(125)
--New Suburb	59	26	9	5	1	100	(476)
--Rural	56	30	9	5	--	100	(129)

"Do you think the local property taxes you pay are too high or are they about right? (PROBE IF TOO HIGH: Are they much too high or just a little too high?)" [Q.27]

	<u>Much Too High</u>	<u>A Little Too High</u>	<u>About Right</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	42%	24%	24%	10%	100%	(801)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
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?" [Q.28]

	<u>Gone Up A Lot</u>	<u>Gone Up A Little</u>	<u>Down A Little</u>	<u>Down A Lot</u>	<u>Stayed Same</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	27%	34%	3%	--	22%	14%	100%	(801)

PAST SURVEYS

February, 1994	29	30	2	--	26	12	99	(801)
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AMONG THOSE WHO WAY WENT UP:

"Which of the following do you think is most responsible for the increase in your local property taxes—state government, county government, local government, or the local public schools?" [Q.29]

	<u>State Government</u>	<u>County Government</u>	<u>Local Government</u>	<u>Public Schools</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	31%	10%	17%	32%	10%	100%	(488)

PAST SURVEYS

February, 1994	19	13	21	38	8	99	(506)
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"As you probably know, property taxes provide a variety of local services, such as education and police. There has been some talk lately of "regionalization," where towns combine these services and share costs in order to hold taxes down. Have you heard or read anything about this? (IF YES: How much have you read or heard—a lot, some, a or a little?)" [Q.30]

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>Have Not Heard About</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	10%	16%	15%	58%	2%	101%	(801)

"Those who favor regionalization feel it would hold costs and taxes down. Those who oppose it are worried about giving up their own town's control of services. Overall, do you favor or oppose regionalization of services where you live? (PROBE: Do you strongly or mildly favor/oppose it?)" [Q.31]

	<u>Strongly Favor</u>	<u>Mildly Favor</u>	<u>Mildly Oppose</u>	<u>Strongly Oppose</u>	<u>Depends On Town</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	20%	24%	17%	20%	2%	15%	98%	(801)

Region**

--North	16	25	19	21	2	18	101	(345)
--Central 28	26	17	19	2	8	100	(192)	
--South	22	23	15	21	2	17	100	(264)

Type of Location*

--Central City	11	30	22	18	4	15	100	(71)
--Older City and Suburb	20	22	18	21	1	18	100	(125)
--New Suburb	22	23	18	21	2	14	100	(476)
--Rural	23	29	10	18	1	19	100	(129)

Assessment of Local

Property Taxes

--Much too high	31	21	12	18	1	17	100	(338)
--A little too high	14	27	21	19	2	16	99	(197)
--About right	13	25	23	27	2	10	100	(196)

Awareness of

Regionalization

--Aware	28	24	17	22	2	7	100	(370)
--Not Aware	16	25	18	20	2	19	100	(418)

"Do you think regionalizing your local services with a neighboring town would or would not result in saving money and lower property taxes?" [Q.32]

	<u>Would</u>	<u>Would Not</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	51%	30%	19%	100%	(801)
<i>Region**</i>					
--North	44	31	25	100	(345)
--Central	56	32	12	100	(192)
--South	57	27	15	99	(264)
<i>Type of Location*</i>					
--Central City	36	35	30	101	(71)
--Older City and Suburb	41	28	31	100	(125)
--New Suburb	53	32	15	100	(476)
--Rural	64	21	15	100	(129)
<i>Awareness of Regionalization</i>					
--Aware 56	31	14	101	(370)	
--Not Aware	49	30	21	100	(418)

"If your local services are regionalized, do you think the quality of those services will get better, get worse, or stay about the same?" [Q.33]

	<u>Will Get Better</u>	<u>Will Get Worse</u>	<u>Stay About The Same</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1994	24%	27%	40%	10%	101%	(801)
<i>Region**</i>						
--North	19	27	44	10	100	(345)
--Central	29	28	36	7	100	(192)
--South	27	27	36	10	100	(264)
<i>Awareness of Regionalization</i>						
--Aware 20	32	41	7	100	(370)	
--Not Aware	26	24	39	11	100	(418)
<i>Attitude toward Regionalization</i>						
--Favor	40	8	48	4	100	(362)
--Oppose	7	55	32	6	100	(305)

"I'm going to read you a list of different services that are provided by local property taxes. For each one that I mention, please tell me whether you favor or oppose having your town share that service with a neighboring town if it held down your property taxes. First, do you favor or oppose sharing (READ ITEM) with a neighboring town?" [Q.39]

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Depends</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
--Senior citizen activities	83%	12%	1%	4%	100%	(801)
<i>Attitude toward Regionalization</i>						
--Favor	92	6	--	1	99	(362)
--Oppose	78	18	1	3	100	(305)
--Public libraries	82	14	1	3	100	(801)
<i>Attitude toward Regionalization</i>						
--Favor	88	10	--	1	99	(362)
--Oppose	77	20	1	2	100	(305)
--Road and street maintenance	69	26	1	4	100	(801)
<i>Attitude toward Regionalization</i>						
--Favor	82	15	1	1	99	(362)
--Oppose	59	39	--	2	100	(305)
--Fire protection	61	36	2	2	101	(801)
<i>Attitude toward Regionalization</i>						
--Favor	75	23	1	--	99	(362)
--Oppose	45	53	2	1	101	(305)
--Police protection	54	41	2	3	100	(801)
<i>Attitude toward Regionalization</i>						
--Favor	78	20	1	1	100	(362)
--Oppose	29	67	3	1	100	(305)
--Schools	52	40	2	5	99	(801)
<i>Attitude toward Regionalization</i>						
--Favor	72	25	2	2	101	(362)
--Oppose	35	59	2	3	99	(305)

*Type of Place Respondent Lives In: All municipalities in the state have been classified into one of four groups, based on location, settlement patterns, population density and growth.

Central Cities: New Jersey's largest cities: Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Elizabeth, Trenton and Camden.

Older Cities and Suburban Areas: This category is generally based on the cities of the state over 25,000 in 1980 with the following exceptions: balance of Hudson and Union counties, included because of their high density. Long Branch and Vineland were excluded because of the rapid growth and their small proportion of their county's population. Woodbridge, South Amboy and Carteret were included because of their similarity to nearby high density areas of Union County.

New Suburbs: These are primarily "outside central city" proportions of the Census Bureau's Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, with the addition of Somerset and parts of Middlesex, Ocean and Monmouth because of their settlement patterns.

Rural Areas: Includes communities not in any of the three categories above. Salem, Warren and sections of Gloucester, Burlington, Middlesex and Monmouth are not classified as rural by the Census Bureau, but they are included here either because of the minor central cities toward which they are directed or because of their development patterns. Atlantic County outside of Atlantic City is included here because of its development pattern and similarity to surrounding rural areas.

**Region of State Respondent Lives In:

North Jersey: Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, Union and Warren counties;

Central Jersey: Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth and Somerset counties;

South Jersey: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean and Salem counties.