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THE EAGLETON INSTITUTE OF POLITICS
WOOD LAWN • NEILSON CAMPUS • NEW BRUNSWICK • NEW JERSEY 08801 • 201/828-2210

DEMOCRATS HOLD EARLY LEAD OVER REPUBLICANS IN ASSEMBLY RACES

Early poll results show that New Jersey voters favor Democratic Assembly candidates over Republican candidates, but a large portion of the electorate is still undecided. The latest Eagleton Poll, conducted earlier this month, found that among those who report being registered voters, 41 percent favored Democratic candidates, 27 percent favored Republican candidates and 31 percent had not yet made up their minds. When the undecideds were asked which way they "leaned," the Democratic margin over Republicans became 50 to 33 percent, with 17 percent still expressing no preference.

Both bond issues also were favored by New Jerseyans. The 95 million dollar bond issue to improve higher education facilities was favored by a 50 to 27 percent margin with 23 percent undecided. When the undecideds were asked which way they "lean" the margin favoring the higher education bond issue became 60 to 34 percent with 5 percent still undecided.

The 475 million dollar transportation bond issue was supported by the state's registered voters by 45 to 32 percent with 24 percent undecided. When "leaners" were included 53 percent favored this bond issue, 40 percent were opposed and 7 percent were still undecided.

Interest in this year's election is the lowest in four years, with only 25 percent saying they are "very interested." An additional 55 percent said they are "somewhat interested" while 18 percent

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expressed no interest at all. Last year, at this time in the campaign, 32 percent said that they were "very interested" in the Senate election. The year before that, 48 percent were "very interested" in the Gubernatorial election while 67 percent expressed high interest in the 1976 Presidential election.

Voting preferences in this year's Assembly elections closely reflect partisan divisions in the state's electorate. Democrats strongly favor Democratic candidates by a 76 to 3 percent margin with 21 undecided. Similarly, Republicans almost unanimously favor their party's candidates by 82 to 2 percent with 16 percent undecided. Independents who stated a preference were evenly divided with 26 percent supporting Democrats and 24 percent favoring Republicans. However, 50 percent of the state's independent voters were still undecided.

Stephen A. Salmore, Eagleton's Associate Director, noted that "the low level of interest in this year's election probably reflects low levels of information. In such low information situations voters tend to fall back on their basic predispositions. Democratic voters favor Democratic candidates and Republican voters will favor Republican candidates. Since in New Jersey Democrats outnumber Republicans by two-to-one, the Democratic candidates are starting off with a natural advantage."

"However," Salmore said, "since Republicans are more likely to actually vote in a low interest and low turnout election such as this one, the present Democratic advantage will probably be much reduced on election day."

The public was most supportive of the provisions of the higher education bond issue which would make college and university buildings more accessible to the handicapped. Almost half--49 percent--felt this was the most important element in this bond issue while 29 percent said that making college buildings more energy efficient was most important. Only 12 percent felt renovating and repairing college buildings was the most important element. Supporters and opponents of the bond issue differed little on these priorities.

By a two-to-one margin of 61 to 31 percent, New Jerseyans felt it was more important to improve mass transit in the state rather than highways and roads. Supporters of the transportation bond issue were slightly less likely than opponents to favor improving mass transit.

In commenting on these results, Salmore said, "this early indication of support for the two bond issues indicates only that the public is generally favorably disposed toward them. However, given the low interest in the election, the public probably knows little of the details of these bond issues. As election day approaches and more information becomes available, the margin favoring these issues is likely to decline." Salmore added, "Vocal opposition to either of these issues could still turn public sentiment around."

The latest Eagleton Poll was conducted between September 10 and 21 when a scientifically selected sample of 1005 New Jersey residents, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. The sample included 829 respondents who reported they were registered to vote.



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BACKGROUND MEMO--RELEASE 37-2, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1979

The questions and figures referred to in this release are as follows. The numbers in parentheses are the number of respondents answering each question.

"In November there will be an election for the New Jersey State Assembly. How interested are you in this election--very interested, somewhat interested, or not at all interested?"

	<u>Very Interested</u>	<u>Somewhat Interested</u>	<u>Not At All Interested</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1979	25	55	18	1	99%	(829)
September, 1978	32	47	17	3	99%	(946)
October, 1977	48	43	9	0	100%	(849)
September, 1976	67	29	3	1	100%	(675)

"If the election were held today, would you vote for the Democratic or Republican candidates for the State Assembly?"

	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters*	41	27	31	99%	(829)
Democrats	76	3	21	100%	(304)
Independents	26	24	50	100%	(336)
Republicans	2	82	16	100%	(171)

"Don't Know's" were asked:

"Are you leaning more toward the Democratic candidate(s) or the Republican candidate(s)?"

Registered Voters including Leaners	50	33	17	100%	(829)
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*These results are for the state as a whole and not designed to apply to any particular district.

"There will also be a bond issue on the ballot to raise 475 million dollars to improve the state's highways and mass transit facilities. If the election were held today do you think you would vote for or against this bond issue or can't you really say?"

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	45	32	24	101%	(829)

"Don't Know's" were asked:

"Well, as of now, would you say you lean more for or against this bond issue?"

Registered Voters including Leaners	53	40	7	100%	(829)
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"Which do you think is more important to do here in New Jersey-- improve roads and highways; or improve mass transit?"

	<u>Roads & Highways</u>	<u>Mass Transit</u>	<u>Both the Same</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	31	61	5	1	1	99%	(829)

"There will also be a bond issue on the ballot to raise 95 million dollars for higher education in New Jersey. If the election were held today do you think you would vote for or against this bond issue or can't you really say?"

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	50	27	23	100%	(824)

"Don't Know's" were asked:

"Well, as of now, would you say you lean more for or against this bond issue?"

Registered Voters including Leaners	60	34	5	99%	(824)
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"The bond issue for higher education would provide money for three purposes. First to renovate and repair college and university buildings, second to make college and university buildings more accessible to the handicapped, and third, to make college and university buildings more energy efficient. Which of these three purposes do you think is more important?"

<u>Renovate & Repair</u>	<u>Accessible to Handicapped</u>	<u>Energy Efficient</u>	<u>Combination</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
12	49	29	5	2	2	99%	(829)