

**THURSDAY, April 17, 2014**

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## **STRONG OPPOSITION TO HIGHER GAS TAX DECREASES AS NEW JERSEYANS LEARN WHY MORE REVENUE IS NEEDED**

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – While winter weather hammered the state's already crumbling roads, New Jerseyans appear to remain opposed to raising the gas tax to pay for repairs, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. Two-thirds oppose paying more for gas, even with the resulting revenue dedicated to road maintenance. Only 31 percent support an increase.

But all may not be lost for proponents such as Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto and Sen. Raymond Lesniak, who last month introduced a gas tax increase in the state Senate. When forced to choose between a higher tax and borrowing money for repairs, 39 percent of initial opponents express a willingness to raise the tax. About as many would prefer continued borrowing to cover costs. Including initial supporters, a majority of all New Jerseyans give some support to a higher gas tax, if borrowing is the only other choice. But 16 percent reject both options, insisting road maintenance and improvements are not needed.

Moreover, opposition to a higher gas tax fades when respondents are given some context around the proposal. To test the role of additional information, the poll placed respondents into three random groups, giving each a different set of details. All groups were told that a five-cent increase raises \$250 million per year dedicated to road and bridge repairs.

One group then was told gas costs would increase by only 1.5 percent annually. The effect is dramatic. With this information, support outpaced opposition, 58 percent to 38 percent. When another group was told the state needed \$21 billion over five years for to fix crumbling roads and bridges, supporters also topped opponents, 57 percent to 40 percent.

But when informed the proposed increase would double the state's share of the gas tax over three years, residents were less positive: supporters barely outnumbered opponents, 48 percent to 45 percent.

"Not surprisingly, the first reaction of most New Jerseyans is, 'Please, no more taxes!'" said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers. "But our experiment shows that if they know more details, residents think the proposed gas tax increase may be a reasonable option, assuming it is dedicated to fixing roads and bridges."

Results are from a statewide poll of 816 New Jersey adults contacted by live callers on both

landlines and cell phones from March 31 to April 6, 2014. The poll has a margin of error of +/-3.9 percentage points.

**Republicans, younger residents, lower wage-earners strongest opponents**

No demographic group gives majority support for a higher gas tax when no context is given: 73 percent of Republicans, 67 percent of independents, and 63 percent of Democrats are opposed to a higher gas tax generally. Only 24 percent of Republicans, 31 percent of independents and 35 percent of Democrats favor a gas tax hike in general terms.

Respondents whose family budgets would likely be less adversely affected by higher fuel costs are somewhat less opposed. Sixty-one percent of New Jerseyans in households earning \$100,000 or more are opposed to an increase, while 37 percent support it. Opposition grows to more than 70 percent for those with lower incomes, with 27 percent of this group supporting an increase.

Opposition also varies by age, with the strongest negativity (76 percent) in the 35 to 49 age group, where only 22 percent support a gas tax increase. Support among seniors is higher at 39 percent, but this still leaves 60 percent opposed.

Perhaps surprisingly, individuals' daily time behind the wheel has little effect on opposition to a tax increase. Whether rarely venturing out or fighting traffic for 90 minute or more, opposition remains steady.

**Higher tax or increased debt?**

When initial opponents of a higher gas tax must choose between an increase or borrowing to fund road repairs, even many Republicans – usually the most vehement opponents of tax increases – revise their original position. Republican gas tax opponents split on a tax increase over borrowing, 38 percent to 39 percent, but 19 percent think neither option should be pursued. Among Democrats who first opposed a tax increase, 47 percent prefer to borrow for repairs, 35 percent support a higher tax and 16 percent say neither. Independent opponents are most likely to prefer a higher tax over borrowing, 42 percent to 36 percent, with 14 percent refusing either option.

Overall, by combining initial supporters with those who would prefer a gas tax increase over borrowing, a majority of Democrats (58 percent), independents (60 percent) and even Republicans (53 percent) are found to be supportive of a tax increase.

“Borrowing more money for road repairs appears to be even more distasteful than raising gas taxes for many New Jerseyans,” said Redlawsk. “The choices are not good – pay now or pay more later – and as a result, the usual differences across political parties are washed out. Some people think nothing should be done, but most appear to recognize there is a need to fix roads.”

A similar pattern holds with household income. Initial opponents in households with incomes under \$100,000 are slightly more in favor of borrowing than an increased tax bite, 44 percent to 34

percent. Higher-income households say the opposite; 43 percent favor a tax hike, 37 percent want more borrowing. Combined, more than half of residents in all income brackets are inclined to support a higher tax if forced to choose between these alternatives.

A majority of every age group shows combined support as well, even middle-aged New Jerseyans who were originally the strongest opponents. Women, who were initially less in favor of a higher gas tax than men (28 percent to 34 percent), are seven points more likely to support an increase if the only other option is borrowing. As a result, 58 percent of both genders supporting a gas tax increase.

**More information has double-digit impact on support**

New Jerseyans' general distaste for taxes comes through loud and clear when asked a simple question about raising the gas tax. However, given a more complete picture, their opposition all but melts away, although the level of support is somewhat dependent on the information provided.

Each of three groups of respondents was told the revenue projection from a nickel increase in the gas tax and also offered additional information. Learning that a five-cent increase results in a 1.5 percent rise in gas prices caused a 27-point increase over this group's initial support. The other two scenarios had somewhat smaller, but still significant, impacts. Respondents told the state gas tax would double over three years were 21 points more likely to support an increase than they had been. Those who learned that the state needs to spend \$21 billion over five years to repair its crumbling infrastructure showed a 19-point increase in support over the initial question.

"In the original question, we did not specify how large an increase, nor how much money it would raise," noted Redlawsk. "This baseline tells us that New Jerseyans just see dollars flying from their pockets when taxes are mentioned. But explaining the size of the increase – a nickel per gallon each year – changes the game, and increases the chances of support, even if the increase is presented as doubling the tax. And when reminded how bad things really are, many more also see a tax increase as an acceptable option."

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**QUESTIONS AND TABLES BEGIN ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE**

**Questions and Tables**

The questions covered in the release of April 17, 2014 are listed below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents are New Jersey Adults unless otherwise indicated; all percentages are of weighted results.

**NOTE: EVALUATIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERS INCLUDING GOV. CHRIS CHRISTIE AND PRES. BARACK OBAMA (PREVIOUSLY RELEASED) AND OTHER UNRELATED ISSUE QUESTIONS (RESERVED FOR FUTURE RELEASE) PRECEDED THIS PART OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE.]**

**Q. Legislative leaders have proposed increasing New Jersey’s gasoline tax. Any increase would be dedicated to pay for road maintenance and improvements. Do you support or oppose this gas tax increase?**

<b>ALL ADULTS</b>	
Support	31%
Oppose	66%
Don't know	3%
Unwgt N=	809

**ALL ADULTS**

	Party ID			Ideology			Gender		Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Lib	Mod	Con	Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Support	35%	31%	24%	39%	30%	26%	34%	28%	31%	22%	35%	39%
Oppose	63%	67%	73%	60%	68%	70%	64%	68%	66%	76%	61%	60%
Don't know	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%	2%	4%	1%
Unwt N=	272	352	163	203	417	164	422	387	133	165	273	238

	Income				Region				
	<50K	50K- <100K	100K- <150K	150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/South	Shore
Support	27%	27%	39%	36%	37%	32%	31%	28%	27%
Oppose	70%	72%	59%	64%	60%	64%	68%	69%	72%
Don't know	3%	1%	2%	1%	3%	4%	2%	3%	1%
Unwt N=	146	225	133	131	114	279	131	133	152

	Time Spent in Car on Average Weekday			
	< 30 minutes	30 - < 60 minutes	60 - < 90 minutes	90 minutes +
Support	34%	28%	29%	32%
Oppose	62%	70%	67%	66%
Don't know	4%	3%	3%	1%
Unwt N=	241	186	153	225

**[ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO DO NOT SUPPORT THE GAS TAX IN PRIOR QUESTION]**

**Q. If the only way New Jersey could raise the money to maintain and improve the state's roads were to either [ROTATE: raise the gas tax OR borrow the necessary money], would you prefer: to raise the gas tax, or borrow the necessary money [ROTATE AS IN QUESTION]?**

<b>ALL ADULTS</b>	
Raise the gas tax	39%
Borrow the necessary money	40%
Neither/maintenance and improvements not needed	16%
Don't know	5%
Unwgt N=	536

**ALL ADULTS**

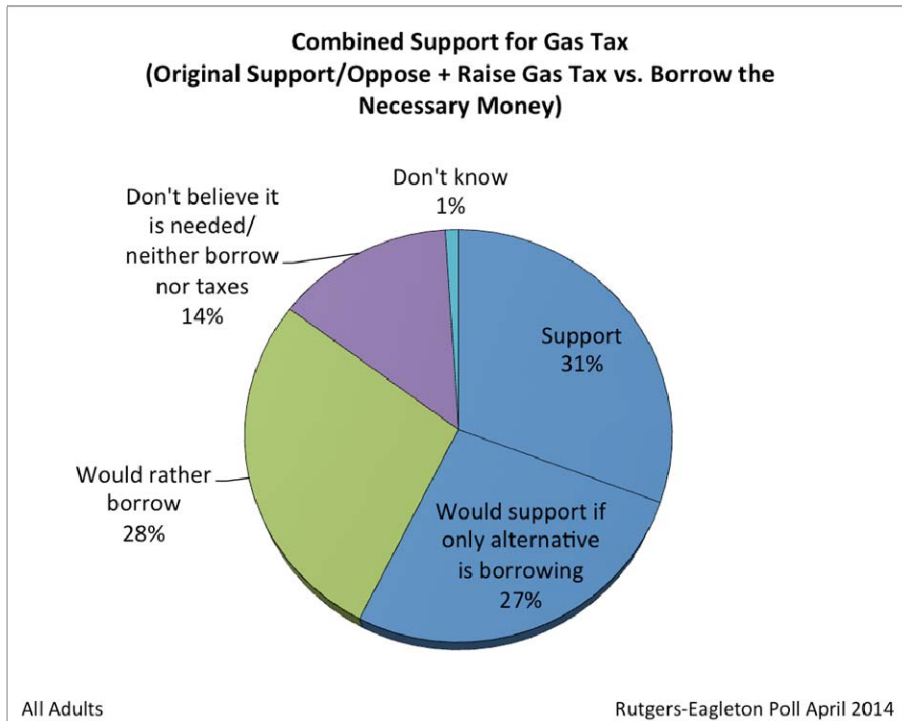
	Party ID			Ideology			Gender		Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Lib	Mod	Con	Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Raise	35%	42%	38%	38%	38%	44%	35%	42%	43%	38%	37%	34%
Borrow	47%	36%	39%	43%	41%	35%	43%	38%	41%	41%	39%	41%
Neither	16%	14%	19%	13%	16%	17%	18%	13%	11%	16%	18%	19%
Don't know	2%	7%	4%	6%	5%	4%	4%	6%	5%	4%	6%	7%
Unwt N=	157	240	123	109	289	119	267	269	91	130	169	146

	Income				Region				
	<50K	50K-100K	100K-150K	150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/South	Shore
Raise	35%	34%	46%	40%	41%	37%	43%	42%	34%
Borrow	45%	43%	36%	38%	43%	42%	38%	34%	44%
Neither	12%	19%	17%	19%	9%	16%	16%	19%	17%
Don't know	8%	4%	2%	3%	7%	5%	3%	5%	5%
Unwt N=	109	153	79	80	66	185	87	96	102

	Time Spent in Car on Average Weekday			
	< 30 minutes	30 - < 60 minutes	60 - < 90 minutes	90 minutes +
Raise	40%	36%	44%	36%
Borrow	42%	37%	42%	41%
Neither	14%	15%	12%	20%
Don't know	4%	11%	2%	3%
Unwt N=	151	123	105	154

**[COMBINED SUPPORT: INITIAL SUPPORT + SUPPORT IF ONLY ALTERNATIVE WAS TO BORROW COMBINED]**

<b>ALL ADULTS</b>	
Support	31%
Would support if only alternative is borrowing	27%
Would rather borrow	28%
Don't believe it is needed/neither borrow nor taxes	14%
Don't know	1%
Unwgt N=	802



**COMBINED SUPPORT: ALL ADULTS**

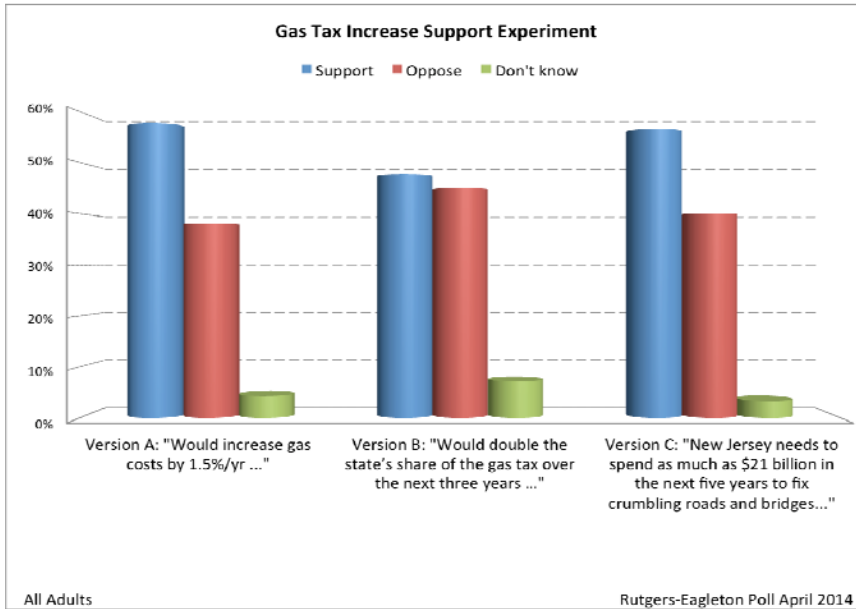
	Party ID			Ideology			Gender		Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Lib	Mod	Con	Male	Female	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Support	36%	31%	24%	39%	30%	27%	35%	28%	31%	22%	36%	39%
Supp., no borrow	22%	29%	29%	23%	27%	32%	23%	30%	30%	30%	24%	21%
Borrow	30%	25%	30%	26%	29%	26%	28%	28%	29%	32%	25%	25%
Neither	11%	15%	17%	11%	14%	15%	14%	13%	10%	16%	15%	15%
Don't know	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%
Unwt N=	271	348	161	202	417	158	416	386	132	166	266	238

	Income				Region				
	<50K	50K-100K	100K-150K	150K+	Urban	Suburb	Exurban	Phil/South	Shore
Support	26%	27%	39%	35%	37%	32%	31%	28%	28%
Supp., no borrow	26%	25%	28%	26%	26%	25%	29%	30%	25%
Borrow	33%	32%	22%	25%	27%	28%	27%	24%	32%
Neither	14%	16%	11%	15%	10%	14%	12%	17%	15%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Unwt N=	147	222	131	132	113	278	131	132	148

	Time Spent in Car on Average Weekday			
	< 30 minutes	30 - < 60 minutes	60 - < 90 minutes	90 minutes +
Support	35%	27%	29%	33%
Supp., no borrow	26%	26%	31%	24%
Borrow	27%	27%	29%	28%
Neither	12%	18%	10%	15%
Don't know	0%	2%	0%	0%
Unwt N=	237	185	153	223

**NOTE: FOR THE FOLLOWING, RESPONDENTS WERE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, VERSION B, OR VERSION C. HOWEVER, DUE TO SYSTEM ISSUES THE NUMBER IN EACH GROUP IS OUT OF BALANCE. STATISTICAL TESTS, HOWEVER, CONFIRM THAT THE GROUPS ARE NOT STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT ON KEY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES.]**

**SUPPORT AFTER RECEIVING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**



**[VERSION A]**

**Q. The proposed increase would be five cents per year over three years, raising an additional \$250 million per year for road and bridge repairs. Given current prices, this would increase gas costs by about one and one half percent per year. Knowing this, do you now support or oppose the proposed increase in the gas tax?**

	ALL ADULTS	Initial Response on Gas Tax Increase	
		Support	Oppose
Support	58%	91%	43%
Oppose	38%	8%	52%
Don't know	4%	1%	5%
Unwgt N=	274	94	170

**[VERSION B]**

**Q. The proposed increase would be five cents per year over three years, raising an additional \$250 million per year for road and bridge repairs. This would double the state's share of the gas tax over the next three years. Knowing this, do you now support or oppose the proposed increase in the gas tax?**

	ALL ADULTS	Initial Response on Gas Tax Increase	
		Support	Oppose
Support	48%	82%	35%
Oppose	45%	15%	58%
Don't know	7%	3%	6%
Unwgt N=	300	79	211

**[VERSION C]**

**Q. The proposed increase would be five cents per year over three years, raising an additional \$250 million per year for road and bridge repairs. Experts estimate New Jersey needs to spend as much as \$21 billion in the next five years to fix crumbling roads and bridges. Knowing this, do you now support or oppose the proposed increase in the gas tax?**

	<b>ALL ADULTS</b>	Initial Response on Gas Tax Increase	
		Support	Oppose
Support	57%	81%	39%
Oppose	40%	16%	59%
Don't know	3%	3%	3%
Unwgt N=	233	93	132

**NOTE: THE FOLLOWING WAS ASKED IN THE DEMOGRAPHIC PORTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW**

**Q. And overall, how much time do you spend in your car on an average weekday? Is it less than 30 minutes, 30 to under 60 minutes, 60 to under 90 minutes, or 90 minutes or more, or do you not use a car regularly on weekdays?**

	<b>ALL ADULTS</b>
Less than 30 minutes	16%
30 to less than 60 minutes	24%
60 to less than 90 minutes	19%
90 minutes or more	29%
Do not regularly use a car on weekdays	12%
Unwgt N=	812

**Rutgers-Eagleton Poll March 31 – April 6, 2014**

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone using live callers March 31 – April 6, 2014 with a scientifically selected random sample of 816 New Jersey adults. Data are weighted to represent known parameters in the New Jersey adult population, using gender, age, race, and Hispanic ethnicity matching to US Census Bureau data. All results are reported with these weighted data. This telephone poll included 576 landline and 240 cell phone adults, all acquired through random digit dialing.

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. Sampling error should be adjusted to recognize the effect of weighting the data to better match the population. In this poll, the simple sampling error for the 816 adults is +/-3.4 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence interval. The adult sample weighting design effect is 1.29, making the adjusted margin of error +/- 3.9 percentage points for the adult sample.

Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adults in this sample favor a particular position, we would be 95 percent sure that the true figure is between 46.1 and 53.9 percent (50 +/-3.9) if all New Jersey adults had been interviewed, rather than just a sample.

Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups 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.



***Gas Tax April 2014  
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll***

This Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was fielded in house by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling. The questionnaire was developed and all data analyses were completed in house. The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll is paid for and sponsored by the Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, a non-partisan academic center for the study of politics and the political process.

<b>Weighted Sample Characteristics 816 New Jersey Adults</b>			
37% Democrat	49% Male	17% 18-29	61% White
44% Independent	51% Female	37% 30-49	13% Black
19% Republican		28% 50-64	17% Hispanic
		18% 65+	9% Asian/Other/Multi