

Rutgers - Eagleton Poll

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NEW JERSEYANS FAVOR FURTHER SPENDING CUTS OVER TAX INCREASES

Corzine's job approval rating holds steady, but the public dislikes his handling of the budget

As the July 1 deadline for a state budget approaches, a new Rutgers-Eagleton Poll finds that New Jersey residents don't approve of Gov. Jon Corzine's handling of the budget; they prefer budget cuts to tax increases, with tourism promotion, the arts, and roads and highways the top candidates for spending reductions.

New Jerseyans were more likely, by a margin of 44 percent to 34 percent, to disapprove rather than approve of the job Corzine is doing handling the budget. But the governor's overall job approval rating held steady at 44 percent, up one percentage point since March. The telephone poll of 803 adults, conducted June 14 through 19, has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

The overall job approval data also contained some warning signs for Corzine, however. Of those who had heard or read something about the governor's budget proposal, 42 percent disapproved of the overall job he is doing as governor. Of those who said they had heard little or nothing about the budget, only 26 percent disapproved of the job Corzine is doing as governor.

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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“People who are aware of the governor’s budget proposal are less likely to endorse his job performance,” said Murray Edelman, distinguished scholar at the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling. “Depending on the outcome of the budget process, there could be negative political consequences for the governor.”

Potentially offsetting the link between awareness of the budget and job disapproval is the fact that the general public appears to be no more aware of Corzine’s proposal now than in March, after he presented his budget plan. Fifty-six percent of respondents in June said they had heard “a lot” or “some” about the governor’s proposed budget, compared to 55 percent in March. “The people who are less aware of the budget will likely become more aware of it if and when they experience the impact of the cuts. Then their approval could turn the other way,” Edelman said.

Another way to look at job approval is in terms of spending cuts and tax increases. Those who approve of the overall job Corzine is doing as governor are more likely to favor tax increases (46 percent) over spending cuts (42 percent). Those who disapprove of Corzine are more likely to support spending cuts (56 percent) over tax increases (27 percent). A similar split occurred regarding approval of the job Corzine is doing handling the budget. Of those who approve of Corzine’s handling of the budget, 52 percent support tax hikes and 37 percent support spending reductions. Among those who disapprove of Corzine’s handling of the budget, 57 percent endorse spending cuts, and 25 percent back tax increases.

“In case he hasn’t received the message yet, this poll is a clear indication that Corzine’s standing with the public gets seriously hurt by the proposals for tax increases,” Edelman said.

Perception of the severity of the state's budget problems reached an all-time high in June, with 91 percent of respondents saying the state's budget problems are very serious or somewhat serious.

It is generally thought that people prefer spending cuts for others but not for themselves, so this poll tested whether those views would change based on individuals' self-interest. The poll randomly assigned survey respondents to hear one of two versions of a question concerning tax increases and spending reductions. The two versions were:

Version A:

"The state constitution requires New Jersey to have a balanced budget each year. To balance the state budget, if you had to choose, which would you prefer - raising taxes or cutting state services that directly affect others as well as you personally?"

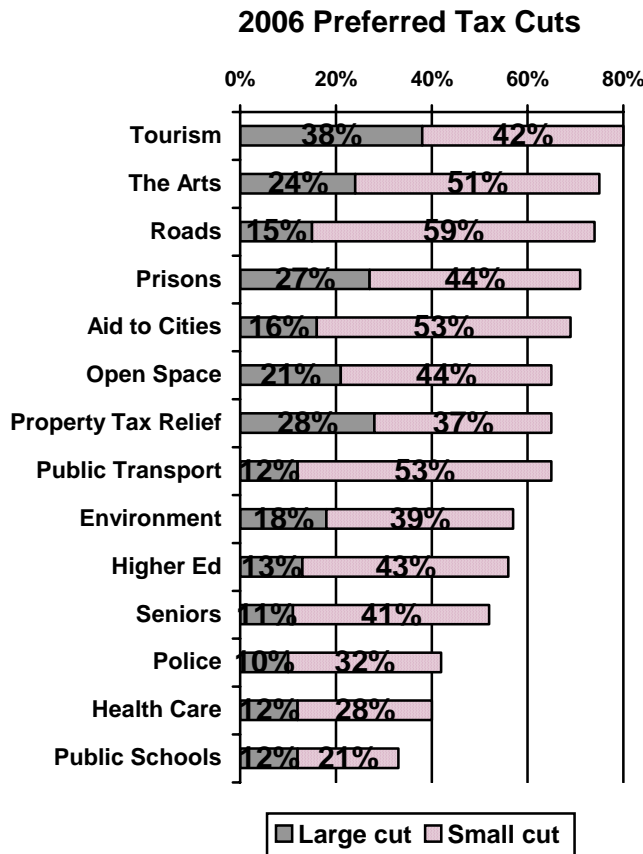
Version B:

The state constitution requires New Jersey to have a balanced budget each year. To balance the state budget, if you had to choose, which would you prefer - raising taxes or cutting state services that directly affect others, but don't affect you personally?

Among the half of the sample that heard version A, in which the cuts would target services that would affect them personally, 34 percent of respondents said they preferred a tax increase and 48 percent opted for spending cuts. Among the half of the sample that heard version B, in which service cuts would not affect respondents personally, 35 percent supported a tax increase and 45 percent backed spending cuts. In other words, respondents were slightly more likely to endorse spending cuts when the services affected them personally.

"This surprising finding could be a result of the smaller sample sizes and the respondents' unwillingness to say to the interviewer that they wanted to cut services that only affected others, so one should be cautious in the interpretation," Edelman said. "However, this finding definitely does demonstrate the strength of the preference for cutting services rather than raising taxes."

When asked which services, from a list of 14 policy areas, should receive large or small cuts or no cuts at all, respondents cited promoting tourism (80 percent), cultural programs and the arts (75 percent), and roads and highways (74%) as candidates for large or small cuts.



“In terms of actual dollars, roads and highways are by far the largest budget item in that group, but this budget area has not been prominent in the current discussions,” Edelman observed.

In addition to being the third most popular area for cutting, roads and highways showed the largest shift since 2003, when the poll last asked this series of questions. The 74 percent supporting large or small cuts represents a 13 percent increase from 2003.

Edelman said, “This isn’t measuring the impact or public receptiveness to specific cuts, but as the deadline approaches and the pressure for cuts increases, this area could come under more consideration.”

The public is least willing to accept large or small cuts in elementary, middle, and high schools (33 percent), health care for the needy (40 percent), and police forces and state security (42 percent). These areas were at the bottom of the list in 2003 as well.

Given the emphasis of recent news coverage on the state’s sizable budget deficit, and the public’s preference for spending cuts over tax increases to balance the budget, one might expect

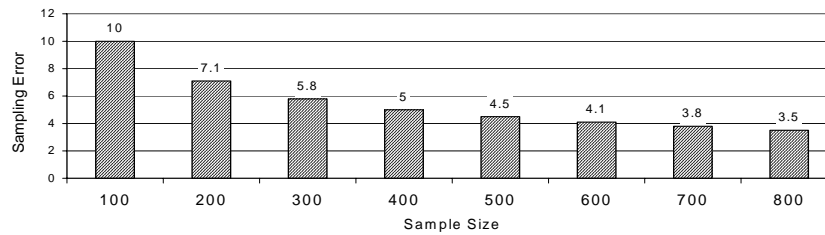
the public to endorse more drastic cuts this year than in 2003, when the budget picture was not as dire. However, the average increase in cuts over all areas was only three percent, and the average increase in large cuts was only one percent. Edelman said that while the public is aware of the need for cuts this year, “there is no clear shift as to where to make them.”

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP 159-1) June 21, 2006

The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from June 14-19, 2006 with a scientifically selected random sample of 803 New Jersey adults. This sample yielded 699 adult residents registered to vote in New Jersey. Most of the figures in this release are based on the statewide sample of all adults. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc (SRBI).

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 for a sample of 803 adults is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adults were found to have a favorable opinion of a senatorial candidate, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 47.5 and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) had all New Jersey adults been interviewed, rather than just a sample. The margin of sampling error for 699 registered voters is ± 3.7 percent. 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. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error. 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. This release contains the verbatim wording of all questions featured in the release.

Sample Size and Sampling Error



Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jon Corzine [PRONOUNCED COR-ZYNE] is handling his job as Governor? (J1)

All Adults				
	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	44%	35%	21%	803
March 2006	43%	34%	24%	800

Registered Voters				
	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	45%	35%	20%	699
March 2006	41%	36%	23%	676

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jon Corzine [PRONOUNCED COR-ZYNE] is handling the state budget? (J2) (Questions J2 and J3 were randomly rotated.)

All Adults				
	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	34%	44%	22%	803

Registered Voters				
	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	36%	42%	22%	699

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jon Corzine [PRONOUNCED COR-ZYNE] is handling economic development in the state? (J3)

All Adults				
	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	36%	36%	28%	803

Registered Voters				
	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	36%	35%	29%	699

Now, thinking about state government, how serious do you think New Jersey's budget problems are - very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious? (BD2)

All Adults						
	Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not very serious	Not at all serious	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	64%	27%	4%	1%	4%	803
March 2006	60%	28%	5%	1%	6%	800
January 2004	41 %	41 %	5 %	2 %	11 %	904
February 2003	55 %	36 %	2 %	1 %	5 %	401
May 2003	39 %	49 %	4 %	2 %	5 %	1002
September 2002	41 %	37 %	8 %	3 %	11 %	804
June 2002	37 %	48 %	7 %	2 %	7 %	801
March 2002	39 %	44 %	8 %	2 %	7 %	803
March 1982	26 %	46 %	15 %	3 %	10 %	1206

How much have you heard or read about Governor Jon Corzine's proposed state budget...(READ LIST) (BD4)

All Adults						
	A lot	Some	Very little	Nothing at all	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	16%	40%	32%	11%	1%	803
March 2006	19%	36%	31%	13%	1%	800

[Split Ballot BD3A and BD3B—Each question asked of half of the sample.]

The state constitution requires New Jersey to have a balanced budget each year. To balance the state budget, if you had to choose, which would you prefer - raising taxes OR cutting state services that directly affect others as well as you personally? (BD3A)

All Adults					
	Raise taxes	Cut state services	Both/Some of Each	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	34%	48%	6%	11%	401

The state constitution requires New Jersey to have a balanced budget each year. To balance the state budget, if you had to choose, which would you prefer - raising taxes OR cutting state services that directly affect others, but don't affect you personally? (BD3B)

	All Adults				
	Raise taxes	Cut state services	Both/Some of Each	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	35%	45%	4%	16%	402

“I’m going to read you a list of some state government services. In order to balance the budget, please just tell me whether you would be willing to see a large cut in each, a small cut, or no cut. First, the money going to [READ ITEM] – a large, small cut, or no cut? (BT4) (Items were divided into a split ballot, with Ballot A containing items A through G and Ballot B containing items H through N. The list of items was then asked in random order on each ballot. Survey respondents were randomly assigned to hear either the items on Ballot A or the items on Ballot B.)

All Adults – Split					
	Large cut	Small cut	No cut	DK/RF	(n)
A. Roads and Highways					
June 2006	15%	59%	23%	2%	401
May 2003	15%	46%	38%	1%	501
B. Elementary, Middle, and High Schools¹					
June 2006	12%	21%	65%	2%	401
May 2003	9%	26%	63%	1%	501
C. Environmental Protection					
June 2006	18%	39%	41%	2%	401
May 2003	16%	44%	39%	1%	501
D. Prisons					
June 2006	27%	44%	24%	6%	401
May 2003	36%	43%	19%	2%	501
E. Programs for Seniors					
June 2006	11%	41%	48%	1%	401
May 2003	8%	33%	57%	1%	501
F. Public Transportation – Buses and Commuter Railroads					
June 2006	12%	53%	32%	2%	401
May 2003	15%	51%	32%	2%	501
G. Health Care Services for the Needy					
June 2006	12%	28%	58%	2%	401
May 2003	8%	26%	65%	1%	501
H. Aid to Cities					
June 2006	16%	53%	27%	4%	402

¹ In May 2003 the item referred to “grade and high schools.”

May 2003	18%	49%	31%	3%	501
I. Cultural Programs and the Arts					
June 2006	24%	51%	23%	3%	402
May 2003	24%	47%	27%	1%	501
J. Open Space Preservation					
June 2006	21%	44%	31%	5%	402
May 2003	16%	42%	37%	4%	501
K. Property Tax Relief					
June 2006	28%	37%	32%	5%	402
May 2003	26%	36%	32%	6%	501
L. Police Forces and State Security					
June 2006	10%	32%	56%	2%	402
May 2003	9%	31%	58%	1%	501
M. Promoting Tourism in New Jersey					
June 2006	38%	42%	17%	5%	402
May 2003	31%	42%	25%	2%	501
N. Public Colleges and Universities					
June 2006	13%	43%	42%	3%	402
May 2003	12%	39%	47%	1%	501