

# Rutgers - Eagleton Poll

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## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN AMERICAN?**

*Sharp differences emerge along political party, education and age lines*

When asked which characteristics best capture what it means to be an American, New Jersey adults point to respect for religious beliefs as the most important, followed by voting regularly and speaking English as one's primary language. Buying only American-made products and having been born in the United States were among the least important characteristics, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

Sharp distinctions showed up in terms of political party, education level, age and gender. For example, 73 percent of Republicans said it is extremely important to speak English as one's primary language, while only 56 percent of Democrats said the same. Fifty-six percent of those with a high school education or less said it was extremely important to display the flag regularly, and not just on national holidays. Only 31 percent of those with some college education or more said the same thing.

"The data reflect complex and sometimes conflicting views of what it means to be an American," said Murray Edelman, distinguished scholar at the Eagleton Center for Public

**Rutgers-Eagleton Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics**

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Interest Polling. “New Jerseyans have distinct notions of what constitutes American identity, but there is significant variation from group to group.”

The poll interviewed 803 adults by telephone June 14 through June 19, resulting in a sample with a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.5 percent. Interviewers asked those completing the survey to respond to eight statements describing what might be important characteristics of being an American. Survey respondents could rate the characteristics as: extremely important, fairly important, not that important, or not at all important.

	Extremely important
Respecting others' religious beliefs, even if you disagree with those beliefs?	76%
Voting in every national, state, and local election?	65%
Speaking English as one's primary language?	63%
Protecting the free-speech rights of people whose speech offends you?	55%
Displaying the flag regularly, and not just on national holidays?	41%
Supporting the government, even when you disagree with the government's actions?	33%
Having been born in the United States?	32%
Buying only American-made products?	22%

“The strong support voiced for respecting religious beliefs suggests that it is a core value for New Jerseyans,” Edelman said. “Unlike voting, this characteristic is rarely promoted and is rarely in the news in a way that is comparable to the debate over speaking English or free-speech issues, for example. So, it is noteworthy that this view is so widely held.”

Voting in every national, state, and local election was extremely important to two-thirds of those surveyed. But large gaps exist between specific demographic groups. Sixty-

nine percent of women said voting in all elections is extremely important, compared to 61 percent of men. Nearly three-quarters of non-white respondents said voting is extremely important, compared to 62 percent of white respondents.

Speaking English as one's primary language also received heavy emphasis, with 63 percent rating it as extremely important. Women, white respondents, senior citizens, and those with a high school education or less were more likely to emphasize speaking English. Surprisingly, there was only a five-point gap between native-born citizens and naturalized citizens, but Edelman said the difference needs to be viewed with caution given the small number of naturalized citizens in the sample (61 out of 803 respondents).

Displaying the American flag on a regular basis was rated as extremely important by only 41 percent of those surveyed. But stark differences surfaced in terms of political parties, age, and education. Fifty-two percent of respondents who said they identified with the Republican Party said displaying the flag on a regular basis was extremely important, compared to 43 percent of Democrats and 33 percent of Independents. Those ages 65 and older were much more likely than their younger counterparts to say displaying the flag is extremely important (56 percent compared to 37-39 percent for younger age groups). There was also a 25-point gap between respondents with a high school education or less and those with some college or more (56 percent to 31 percent).

“While there has been a national debate over the constitutional amendment to ban flag-burning, there is quite a difference of opinion in New Jersey on even the importance of displaying the flag,” Edelman said.

Partisan differences also emerged concerning whether Americans ought to support their government even when they disagree with the government's actions. Forty-one percent

of Republicans said such support is extremely important, compared to 31 percent of Democrats and 28 percent of Independents.

“This may be a characteristic driven as much by current politics as deeper philosophical views,” Edelman observed. “The numbers might be quite different if Democrats controlled one or more branches of the federal government.”

Age was a consistent indicator of differences of opinion for several of the characteristics. Senior citizens were much more likely than younger age groups to indicate that the following are extremely important: voting in every election (81 percent); speaking English as one’s primary language (78 percent); displaying the flag on a regular basis (56 percent); supporting government, even when disagreeing with its actions (46 percent); having been born in the U.S. (41 percent); and buying only American-made products (39 percent).

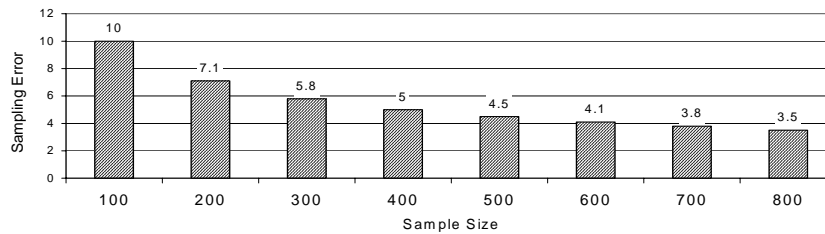
“These age differences are really generational differences.,” Edelman said. “Younger people are coming of age in a more pluralistic society, and seem to accept differences between people more readily.”

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP 159-4) June 28, 2006**

The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted 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. All 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  $\pm 3.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adults were found to have rated an element of American identity as extremely important, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent ( $50 \pm 3.5$ ) had all New Jersey adults been interviewed, rather than just a sample. The margin of sampling error for 699 registered voters is  $\pm 3.7$  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



Being an American means many things to many people. I am going to read a number of activities that people may or may not believe are important parts of being an American. For each activity, I would like you to say if **you** think the activity **should** be an extremely important, fairly important, not that important or not at all important part of being an American. How about . . . [RANDOMIZE] (ID1)

- A Voting in every national, state, and local election?
- B Speaking English as one's primary language?
- C Having been born in the United States?
- D Respecting others' religious beliefs, even if you disagree with those beliefs?
- E Displaying the flag regularly, and not just on national holidays?
- F Supporting the government, even when you disagree with the government's actions?
- G Buying only American-made products?
- H Protecting the free-speech rights of people whose speech offends you?

All Adults						
	Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	Total
Voting in every national, state, and local election?	65%	27%	5%	3%	1%	803
Speaking English as one's primary language?	63%	26%	7%	4%	1%	803
Having been born in the United States?	32%	23%	25%	19%	1%	803
Respecting others' religious beliefs, even if you disagree with those beliefs?	76%	20%	3%	1%	1%	803
Displaying the flag regularly, and not just on national holidays?	41%	33%	18%	7%	1%	803
Supporting the government, even when you disagree with the government's actions?	33%	39%	14%	10%	4%	803
Buying only American-made products?	22%	36%	26%	15%	2%	803
Protecting the free-speech rights of people whose speech offends you?	55%	35%	5%	3%	2%	803

## A. Voting in every national, state, and local election?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		65%	27%	5%	3%	1%	803
Party ID	Democrat	68%	25%	6%	1%	0%	282
	Republican	64%	28%	5%	2%	1%	206
	Independent	62%	29%	4%	4%	0%	241
Gender	Male	61%	30%	6%	3%	1%	385
	Female	69%	24%	4%	2%	1%	418
Race	White	62%	29%	5%	3%	1%	637
	Non-white	74%	20%	4%	2%	0%	152
Age	18-29	64%	32%	1%	3%	0%	69
	30-49	58%	31%	8%	2%	0%	284
	50-64	67%	24%	3%	3%	3%	266
	65+	81%	15%	2%	2%	0%	174
Education	High school or below	63%	26%	5%	5%	1%	224
	Some college and above	66%	27%	5%	1%	1%	576
Region	North	63%	28%	5%	2%	1%	369
	Central	62%	31%	5%	1%	1%	200
	South	72%	21%	4%	4%	0%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	66%	27%	5%	3%	1%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	66%	25%	8%	0%	1%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.

## B. Speaking English as one's primary language?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		63%	26%	7%	4%	1%	803
Party ID	Democrat	56%	29%	9%	5%	1%	282
	Republican	73%	21%	1%	4%	0%	206
	Independent	60%	27%	7%	5%	1%	241
Gender	Male	58%	29%	7%	5%	1%	385
	Female	68%	23%	6%	4%	0%	418
Race	White	66%	25%	5%	4%	1%	637
	Non-white	55%	28%	11%	5%	0%	152
Age	18-29	43%	38%	10%	10%	0%	69
	30-49	63%	27%	6%	3%	1%	284
	50-64	62%	24%	8%	5%	1%	266
	65+	78%	17%	4%	1%	0%	174
Education	High school or below	69%	23%	4%	3%	1%	224
	Some college and above	59%	27%	8%	5%	0%	576
Region	North	59%	28%	8%	5%	0%	369
	Central	63%	30%	3%	4%	1%	200
	South	68%	19%	8%	4%	1%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	63%	25%	7%	4%	1%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	58%	29%	8%	5%	0%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.



## C. Having been born in the United States?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		32%	23%	25%	19%	1%	803
Party ID	Democrat	32%	26%	22%	18%	2%	282
	Republican	29%	20%	28%	21%	1%	206
	Independent	34%	19%	24%	22%	1%	241
Gender	Male	29%	24%	24%	21%	2%	385
	Female	35%	21%	25%	17%	1%	418
Race	White	28%	23%	27%	21%	1%	637
	Non-white	45%	21%	17%	14%	3%	152
Age	18-29	22%	26%	26%	25%	1%	69
	30-49	33%	22%	24%	20%	1%	284
	50-64	30%	24%	26%	20%	1%	266
	65+	41%	20%	23%	11%	4%	174
Education	High school or below	46%	24%	18%	10%	1%	224
	Some college and above	23%	21%	29%	26%	1%	576
Region	North	30%	21%	24%	22%	2%	369
	Central	27%	21%	30%	20%	2%	200
	South	39%	25%	21%	15%	0%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	33%	23%	25%	19%	1%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	25%	23%	24%	24%	5%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.

## D. Respecting others' religious beliefs, even if you disagree with those beliefs?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		76%	20%	3%	1%	1%	803
Party ID	Democrat	75%	20%	3%	0%	1%	282
	Republican	78%	19%	2%	0%	1%	206
	Independent	77%	17%	3%	2%	1%	241
Gender	Male	72%	21%	5%	2%	1%	385
	Female	79%	18%	1%	0%	1%	418
Race	White	73%	22%	3%	1%	1%	637
	Non-white	82%	13%	4%	0%	1%	152
Age	18-29	72%	24%	2%	1%	0%	69
	30-49	76%	21%	3%	0%	0%	284
	50-64	79%	17%	3%	1%	1%	266
	65+	74%	18%	3%	2%	3%	174
Education	High school or below	69%	24%	4%	1%	1%	224
	Some college and above	80%	17%	2%	1%	0%	576
Region	North	75%	21%	3%	1%	1%	369
	Central	79%	19%	1%	1%	1%	200
	South	74%	19%	5%	1%	1%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	76%	20%	2%	1%	1%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	73%	16%	8%	1%	2%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.

## E. Displaying the flag regularly, and not just on national holidays?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		41%	33%	18%	7%	1%	803
Party ID	Democrat	43%	31%	17%	8%	1%	282
	Republican	52%	33%	12%	2%	0%	206
	Independent	33%	34%	25%	9%	1%	241
Gender	Male	38%	33%	21%	8%	1%	385
	Female	45%	33%	16%	5%	1%	418
Race	White	40%	34%	19%	7%	0%	637
	Non-white	45%	29%	17%	8%	1%	152
Age	18-29	38%	31%	24%	7%	0%	69
	30-49	39%	34%	20%	8%	0%	284
	50-64	37%	34%	21%	7%	1%	266
	65+	56%	31%	7%	4%	2%	174
Education	High school or below	56%	29%	12%	2%	1%	224
	Some college and above	31%	36%	23%	10%	0%	576
Region	North	42%	29%	18%	10%	1%	369
	Central	35%	39%	20%	5%	0%	200
	South	46%	34%	17%	3%	0%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	42%	33%	17%	7%	1%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	43%	27%	26%	4%	0%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.

## F. Supporting the government, even when you disagree with the government's actions?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		33%	39%	14%	10%	4%	803
Party ID	Democrat	31%	40%	17%	10%	3%	282
	Republican	41%	41%	8%	6%	3%	206
	Independent	28%	38%	16%	13%	5%	241
Gender	Male	31%	36%	17%	12%	5%	385
	Female	35%	42%	12%	8%	3%	418
Race	White	33%	41%	13%	9%	4%	637
	Non-white	33%	34%	19%	11%	1%	152
Age	18-29	26%	38%	20%	16%	0%	69
	30-49	30%	42%	18%	7%	3%	284
	50-64	33%	38%	12%	13%	4%	266
	65+	46%	36%	5%	5%	8%	174
Education	High school or below	44%	35%	12%	4%	5%	224
	Some college and above	25%	42%	16%	13%	3%	576
Region	North	30%	38%	17%	12%	3%	369
	Central	36%	37%	14%	8%	4%	200
	South	36%	42%	12%	7%	4%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	33%	40%	13%	10%	4%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	34%	32%	28%	3%	2%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.

## G. Buying only American-made products?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		22%	36%	26%	15%	2%	803
Party ID	Democrat	26%	35%	25%	13%	1%	282
	Republican	18%	37%	28%	15%	3%	206
	Independent	20%	37%	26%	15%	1%	241
Gender	Male	19%	35%	27%	18%	2%	385
	Female	25%	36%	25%	12%	1%	418
Race	White	22%	39%	23%	14%	2%	637
	Non-white	22%	27%	34%	18%	0%	152
Age	18-29	6%	31%	35%	28%	0%	69
	30-49	21%	37%	27%	14%	1%	284
	50-64	19%	36%	28%	14%	3%	266
	65+	39%	37%	13%	8%	3%	174
Education	High school or below	32%	36%	18%	11%	3%	224
	Some college and above	14%	35%	32%	17%	1%	576
Region	North	18%	35%	26%	19%	2%	369
	Central	25%	36%	24%	13%	1%	200
	South	25%	35%	29%	10%	1%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	22%	37%	25%	14%	2%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	17%	28%	37%	18%	1%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.

## H. Protecting the free-speech rights of people whose speech offends you?

		Extremely important	Fairly important	Not that important	Not at all important	DK/RF	(n)
All Adults		55%	35%	5%	3%	2%	803
Party ID	Democrat	56%	34%	6%	2%	2%	282
	Republican	51%	41%	6%	1%	1%	206
	Independent	62%	31%	3%	3%	2%	241
Gender	Male	59%	30%	6%	3%	1%	385
	Female	51%	40%	5%	2%	2%	418
Race	White	55%	35%	6%	2%	2%	637
	Non-white	57%	34%	3%	4%	1%	152
Age	18-29	48%	41%	4%	6%	1%	69
	30-49	56%	38%	5%	1%	1%	284
	50-64	59%	28%	6%	4%	2%	266
	65+	55%	32%	6%	2%	4%	174
Education	High school or below	53%	38%	4%	3%	2%	224
	Some college and above	57%	33%	6%	2%	2%	576
Region	North	54%	33%	7%	3%	2%	369
	Central	56%	38%	3%	2%	1%	200
	South	57%	36%	3%	2%	2%	222
Citizenship	Native-born Citizen	56%	35%	5%	2%	2%	727
	Naturalized Citizen	56%	34%	8%	0%	2%	61
	Non-citizen	***	***	***	***	***	***

\*\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50.