

Rutgers - Eagleton Poll

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VOTERS COOL TO ANOTHER TERM FOR LAUTENBERG

By 2 to 1 margins, voters also say age would prevent senator from serving effectively

With the November 2008 election still 15 months away, three-fifths of New Jersey voters say it is time for someone else to fill Frank Lautenberg's seat in the U.S. Senate.

Only twenty-four percent of voters surveyed in the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll said that Lautenberg deserves to be re-elected to the Senate, while 61 percent said it is time for a change. By similar margins, voters also said that Lautenberg's age – if re-elected, he will be 84 at the start of his next term – would make it difficult for him to represent New Jersey effectively in the Senate.

“Fifteen months is an eternity in politics, so Sen. Lautenberg has plenty of time to present his case to the voters,” said Tim Vercellotti, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. “But the data indicate that voters currently are not enthusiastic about returning Lautenberg to the Senate for a fifth term.”

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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The survey of 891 voters, conducted Aug. 2 through 7, has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.3 percentage points.

While the majority of voters said Lautenberg does not deserve to be re-elected, the survey also found large percentages of voters who simply do not have strong views about the senator.

When asked whether they have a favorable or unfavorable view of Lautenberg, 13 percent said they had not heard of him and 23 percent said they had no opinion. In response to a question about whether they approve or disapprove of the job Lautenberg is doing as a senator, 31 percent said they did not know or declined to answer the question.

“Sen. Lautenberg is approaching the final year of his fourth term in the Senate, yet about one-third of voters either do not have an opinion about him or decline to express their views,” Vercellotti noted. “There is ample opportunity for the senator to define himself with a large percentage of voters, but any challengers also will have that opportunity during the 2008 election cycle.”

Lautenberg’s favorability rating stands at 38 percent, up six points from September 2006, and his unfavorability rating is 25 percent, up three points during the same period. Thirty-seven percent of voters approve of the job he is doing, and 32 percent disapprove. The poll found that New Jersey’s other U.S. senator, Bob Menendez, has a job approval rating of 29 percent, while 36 percent disapprove of the job Menendez is doing and 35 percent offered no opinion.

The proportion of voters saying that Lautenberg does not deserve re-election to another term is significantly higher at 61 percent compared to the last time the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll asked the question in 1994. As Lautenberg sought his third term in 1994, Eagleton consistently found that more than 40 percent of registered voters said it was time for a change.

A few days before the 1994 general election, Eagleton poll data showed that 51 percent of likely voters said it was time for a change. Lautenberg went on to win another term by three percentage points, with 50 percent of the vote compared to 47 percent for Republican Garabed "Chuck" Haytaian, who was then the speaker of the New Jersey Assembly.

“The latest numbers are much more tilted toward change than we have seen in the past,” Vercellotti said.

The latest poll data contain potentially problematic indicators for Lautenberg among sub-groups of voters. While 75 percent of Republican voters said it is time for a change, so did 69 percent of independent voters and 48 percent of Democrats. Majorities of two key constituencies for Democratic candidates – non-white voters and women, also expressed support for change. Seventy percent of non-white voters said it is time for a change, compared to 59 percent of white voters. Sixty-one percent of women favored change, as did 62 percent of men.

One of the key issues that Lautenberg will have to face in the upcoming campaign is his age. If re-elected, he will be 84 at the start of his next term in 2009, and 90 at the end of the term.

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll asked voters whether Lautenberg, given his age, could effectively represent New Jersey in the Senate for another term. (Note: The question concerning age came after the question concerning whether Lautenberg deserved to be elected to another term.)

In an experiment to test the effects of emphasizing Lautenberg’s age at the start or end of the term, voters were randomly assigned to hear the question framed in one of two ways:

S5. If Lautenberg wins re-election next year, he will be 84 at the start of his next six-year term. Given his age, will he be able to represent New Jersey effectively or not?

S6. If Lautenberg wins re-election next year, he will be 90 at the end of his next six-year term. Given his age, will he be able to represent New Jersey effectively or not?

The results varied by several percentage points, but the differences were not statistically significant given the sizes of the split samples.

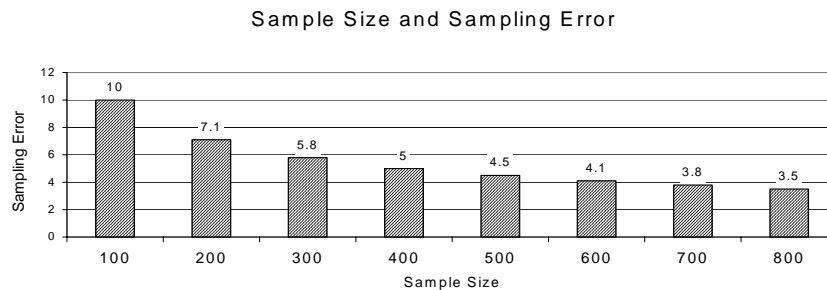
Will Lautenberg be able to effectively represent New Jersey?					
	He will be able	He will not be able	DK/RF (VOL)	(n)	Margin of sampling error
Age 84 at the start of the term	32%	61%	7%	442 registered voters	+/- 4.7%
Age 90 at the end of the term	26%	64%	10%	449 registered voters	+/- 4.6 %

“Regardless of how the issue is framed, nearly two-thirds of voters question whether Sen. Lautenberg can be effective in a fifth term given his age,” Vercellotti said.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP 162-3) AUGUST 16, 2007

The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted Aug. 2-7, 2007 with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,002 New Jersey adults. This sample yielded 891 adult residents who said they are registered to vote in New Jersey. Unless otherwise noted, most of the figures in this release are based on the statewide sample of registered voters. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Braun Research, Princeton, NJ.

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 1,002 adults is ± 3.1 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. The margin of sampling error for 891 registered voters is ± 3.3 percent. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey registered voters were found to have a favorable view of Frank Lautenberg, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.7 percent and 53.3 percent (50 ± 3.3 percent) had all New Jersey registered voters 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. 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 background memo contains the verbatim wording of all questions featured in the release.



Please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following people. If you haven't heard of them or don't have an opinion of them, just tell me and we'll move on. (ROTATE Q.PF1-PF6)

PF2. Frank Lautenberg

	Aug. 2007					(n)
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Haven't heard of Lautenberg	No opinion	DK/RF (VOL)	
Aug. 2007 Registered voters	38%	25%	13%	23%	2%	891
Democrat	50%	10%	18%	22%	0%	268
Republican	24%	42%	6%	25%	4%	205
Independent	38%	31%	10%	20%	2%	325
Sept. 2006 Registered voters	32%	22%	19%	25%	3%	660
Feb. 2005 Registered voters	49%	22%	12%	13%	3%	575
Oct. 3-6, 2002 Potential voters	42%	19%	--	--	39%	532
Sept. 1994 Registered voters	34%	16%	6%	--	44%	645
June 1994 Registered voters	41%	13%	4%	--	43%	673

[ROTATE Q. S1 / Q. S2]

- S1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bob Menendez is handling his job as United States senator?

		Aug. 2007			
		Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF (VOL)	(n)
Registered voters	Statewide	29%	36%	35%	891
Party ID	Democrat	38%	29%	33%	268
	Republican	13%	52%	36%	205
	Independent	28%	40%	32%	325

- S2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Frank Lautenberg is handling his job as United States senator?

		Aug. 2007			
		Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF (VOL)	(n)
Registered voters	Statewide	37%	32%	31%	891
Party ID	Democrat	45%	23%	32%	268
	Republican	23%	47%	30%	205
	Independent	39%	36%	25%	325

S3. Frank Lautenberg will be up for re-election to the United States Senate in 2008.

Thinking about the job that Lautenberg has done as U.S. Senator, do you think he deserves to be re-elected, or do you think it's time for a change?

		Does Lautenberg Deserve to be Re-Elected?					
		Deserves to be re-elected	Time for a change	Depends (VOL)	DK/RF (VOL)	(n)	
Aug. 2007	Statewide	24%	61%	4%	11%	891	
Registered voters							
Favorability rating	Favorable	52%	40%	4%	5%	370	
	Unfavorable	3%	93%	1%	3%	253	
Job approval rating	Approve	55%	41%	3%	2%	351	
	Disapprove	1%	94%	4%	0%	291	
Party ID	Democrat	35%	48%	7%	11%	268	
	Republican	17%	75%	0%	8%	205	
	Independent	19%	69%	3%	9%	325	
Gender	Male	26%	62%	4%	9%	434	
	Female	22%	61%	4%	13%	457	
Race	White	27%	59%	4%	11%	713	
	Non-white	16%	70%	4%	11%	146	
Age	18-29	**	**	**	**	**	
	30-49	24%	62%	5%	9%	294	
	50-64	24%	62%	4%	10%	263	
	65+	32%	58%	4%	7%	269	
Education	High school or below	25%	62%	6%	7%	217	
	Some college and above	23%	61%	2%	14%	666	
Nov. 1994 Likely voters	Statewide	37%	51%	3%	9%	801	
Oct. 1994 Likely voters	Statewide	38%	44%	3%	15%	586	
Sept. 1994 Registered voters	Statewide	39%	44%	4%	14%	645	
June 1994 Registered voters	Statewide	34%	41%	6%	18%	673	
Feb. 1994 Registered voters	Statewide	29%	48%	6%	17%	680	

**Subgroup contains fewer than 50 respondents

(SPLIT BALLOT A AND B WITH RANDOM ASSIGNMENT TO Q. S5 / Q. S6)**BALLOT A**

S5. If Lautenberg wins re-election next year, he will be 84 at the start of his next six-year term. Given his age, will he be able to represent New Jersey effectively or not?

		Age 84 at the Start of His Term			
		He will be able	He will not be able	DK/RF (VOL)	(n)
Aug. 2007	Registered voters	32%	61%	7%	442
Favorability rating	Favorable	55%	40%	5%	187
	Unfavorable	15%	84%	0%	125
Job approval rating	Approve	55%	37%	8%	175
	Disapprove	11%	84%	5%	145
Party ID	Democrat	35%	51%	14%	139
	Republican	32%	66%	3%	90
	Independent	33%	62%	4%	162
Gender	Male	31%	65%	4%	203
	Female	33%	57%	9%	239
Race	White	35%	58%	7%	339
	Non-white	24%	69%	7%	84
Age	18-29	**	**	**	**
	30-49	34%	61%	6%	155
	50-64	33%	65%	2%	119
	65+	30%	58%	11%	134
Education	High school or below	28%	60%	12%	103
	Some college and above	35%	61%	4%	334

***Subgroup contains fewer than 50 respondents*

BALLOT B

- S6. If Lautenberg wins re-election next year, he will be 90 at the end of his next six-year term. Given his age, will he be able to represent New Jersey effectively or not?

		Age 90 at the End of His Term			
		He will be able	He will not be able	DK/RF (VOL)	(n)
Aug. 2007	Registered voters	26%	64%	10%	449
Favorability rating	Favorable	50%	39%	11%	183
	Unfavorable	9%	85%	6%	128
Job approval rating	Approve	53%	40%	7%	176
	Disapprove	8%	85%	7%	146
Party ID	Democrat	34%	58%	9%	129
	Republican	23%	72%	5%	115
	Independent	19%	68%	13%	163
Gender	Male	30%	61%	9%	231
	Female	23%	66%	11%	218
Race	White	28%	64%	8%	374
	Non-white	19%	67%	14%	62
Age	18-29	**	**	**	**
	30-49	28%	66%	7%	139
	50-64	25%	63%	12%	144
	65+	32%	54%	14%	135
Education	High school or below	21%	69%	10%	114
	Some college and above	30%	60%	10%	332

***Subgroup contains fewer than 50 respondents*