

RELEASE AUGUST 18, 2011

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Debt Ceiling Agreement Has New Jersey Voters Split; Frustrated at Washington

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J – New Jersey Republicans and Democrats agree on one thing: voters of both parties are evenly split over the debt limit agreement recently reached in Washington, according to a new Rutgers-Eagleton Poll released today. While Democrats narrowly support the agreement, 40 percent to 38 percent, Republicans are also split, with 36 percent supporting and 41 percent opposing the agreement. New Jersey independents are also slightly opposed, with 39 percent in favor and 43 percent against. Overall, 39 percent of New Jersey voters support the agreement and 41 percent oppose it, while 20 percent are not sure. Those who paid the most attention to the debate also reported the most anger with Washington and the strongest belief that Washington “no longer works.”

“The agreement seems to have made few New Jersey voters happy,” said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers University. “Maybe it’s the sign of a good compromise that partisans on both sides are disappointed, or perhaps it simply reflects that the contentious process really didn’t solve anything.”

Results are from a Rutgers-Eagleton Poll of 615 registered voters conducted among both landline and cell phone households from August 9 - 15, with a margin of error for the full sample of +/- 3.9 percentage points.

More NJ Voters Blame Republicans for Crisis

While voters of both parties are less than thrilled about the debt ceiling compromise, they differ completely in where they place the blame for the crisis. More than a third (34 percent) of Republicans says President Barack Obama was most to blame and another 19 percent blame Democrats in Congress. Only a few Republicans place blame on their own party in Congress (8 percent) or on Tea Party Republicans specifically (3 percent). Another 24 percent say “someone else” is to blame, and 13 percent don’t know. Democrats, not surprisingly, have different take, with 39 percent blaming Republicans in Congress and an additional 29 percent blaming Tea Party Republicans specifically. Only about 2 percent places the blame on either Obama or Democrats in Congress, while 19 percent say someone else is to blame, and 11 percent don’t know.

Independents are more likely to blame Republicans, with 20 percent naming Tea Party Republicans and 15 percent blaming Democrats in Congress, while 15 percent blame Obama and 13 percent

blame Democrats in Congress. Twenty-three percent of independents blame “someone else” and 14 percent don’t know whom to blame.

“For the most part, Republicans in Washington emerge from the debate in somewhat worse shape than do Democrats, at least among New Jersey voters,” said Redlawsk. “There are, of course, more Democrats in New Jersey, which accounts for part of it, but by a 35 to 28 percent margin, independents lay more blame on Republicans than on Democrats.”

NJ Voters Want Revenues and Spending Cuts

When asked to choose from a set of three options for getting the federal budget “under control,” Garden Staters strongly support increased tax revenues, while opposing across-the-board cuts with no tax increases. Among all voters, 42 percent support a balance of tax increases on higher earners with some cuts in programs like Medicare, while another 19 percent support tax increases that would avoid any cuts. Only 22 percent want cuts and no tax increases, while 12 percent opt for none of these choices.

Democrats and Republicans have different views on how to fix the federal budget, though independents lean toward Democratic preferences. While 42 percent of Republicans call for across-the-board cuts and no tax increases, only 12 percent of Democrats agree. Only about 1 in 5 independents agrees that getting the budget under control should be done this way. Democrats prefer a mix of tax increases on the wealthy and small program cuts, with 53 percent of Democrats choosing this approach, compared to only 29 percent of Republicans. Independents side mostly with Democrats here, with 42 percent preferring a mix of tax increases and budget cuts. Nearly equal percentages of Democrats (24 percent) and independents (20 percent) would like to see tax increases and no budget cuts used to solve the problem, while few Republicans (11 percent) agree with this position.

The 22 percent of New Jerseyans who want across the board cuts are partly a reflection of stronger Tea Party support for this position. About 42 percent of those who have a favorable impression of the Tea Party support only budget cuts, while only 10 percent of those with an unfavorable view of the Tea Party movement agree. At the same time, 31 percent of Tea Party supporters in New Jersey support a mix of tax increases and budget cuts, while 53 percent of those unfavorable to the movement take this position. Those unsure of their feelings toward the Tea Party are much more evenly split, with 35 percent favoring across-the-board spending cuts and 29 percent preferring a mix of cuts and tax increases. Another 15 percent of these voters wants taxes raised to avoid spending cuts, compared to only 7 percent with a positive view of the Tea Party and 24 percent viewing the movement negatively.

“These differences reflect the core beliefs of each party,” said Redlawsk,. “But independents lean strongly in the direction of the Democrats on a preferred solution. Yet with the parties so far apart, there

may be little hope of meeting in the middle, where most New Jersey voters seem to want them.”

Attention to the Debate May Have Increased Frustration with Washington

Many New Jersey voters paid careful attention to the debt ceiling debate, with 36 percent saying they followed the debate “very closely” and another 41 percent saying they followed it “somewhat closely.” Only 23 percent say they did not follow it closely at all. Members of both parties and independents were about equally likely to say they followed the debate closely.

Men were much more likely to say they followed the debate very closely – 47 percent of men, compared to 25 percent of women, paid very close attention. While only 17 percent of men said they did not follow it at all closely, nearly a third of women – 30 percent – did not pay close attention.

Following the debate very closely seems to have led to greater opposition to the agreement. A majority (57 percent) of those who paid close attention oppose the outcome, while only 39 percent support it. On the other hand, those following “somewhat closely” are in favor of the compromise, 46 percent to 39 percent. Voters not following it at all are also more in favor, 26 percent to 22 percent, but a majority (52 percent) of those not paying attention are not sure what they think.

Those paying the most attention were also more likely than others to place blame for the crisis on Tea Party Republicans, at 26 percent of close followers, while another 20 percent blame Republicans in Congress. Fewer blame Obama (17 percent) or Democrats in Congress (14 percent).

Policy preferences differ depending on how closely voters followed the debate. Among those following it most closely, 48 percent prefer a mix of spending cuts and tax increases, while 27 percent want across the board cuts and 13 percent support tax increases with no cuts. Preferences are similar among those following the debate “somewhat closely” but are very different among those not following the debate closely at all. Among the latter group, 32 percent would prefer only tax increases with no spending cuts, and 28 percent want a balanced approach, while 20 percent support across the board cuts.

Those who followed the debate very closely were much more likely to also say that Washington “no longer works,” with 78 percent of those who paid the most attention agreeing. Far fewer – 56 percent – of those who did not pay close attention to the debate feel the same way. At the same time 76 percent of voters who paid close attention say thinking about the government in Washington makes them angry, compared to 67 percent of those who did not follow the debate closely.

“For the most part, the debate in Washington engaged Garden Staters,” said Redlawsk. “But it may also have increased already high levels of anger and frustration with politics. Voters are split on the outcome, angry with Washington, and probably frustrated that they did not get what they wanted.”

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**Rutgers-Eagleton Poll August 9-15, 2011
Questions and Tables**

The questions covered in the release of August 18, 2011 are listed below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents are Registered Voters.

Q. For each of the following, tell me if you agree or disagree with the statement. [ROTATE]

I get angry thinking about the government in Washington. N=613

Agree 73%
Disagree 24%
Don't Know 3%

	Party ID			Tea Party Impression				Ideology			Education			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Fav	Unfav	No Opin	DK	Lib	Middle	Con	HS or Less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Grad Work
Agree	70%	74%	75%	76%	76%	63%	72%	75%	72%	79%	77%	65%	75%	77%
Disagree	26%	24%	21%	24%	21%	31%	28%	19%	26%	18%	21%	34%	20%	20%
Don't Know	4%	2%	4%	0%	3%	6%	0%	6%	2%	3%	2%	1%	5%	3%
N=	191	303	115	140	330	123	18	106	365	114	130	137	194	138

	Employment				Race				Age			
	Full Time	Part Time	Retired	Not Empl	White	Black	Hisp	Other	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Agree	75%	65%	77%	68%	75%	68%	66%	77%	62%	72%	76%	78%
Disagree	23%	30%	18%	29%	23%	26%	34%	15%	38%	25%	21%	16%
Don't Know	2%	4%	5%	3%	3%	6%	0%	8%	0%	3%	3%	5%
N=	273	72	152	97	420	73	51	42	82	201	177	142

	Income				Gender	
	< 50K	50K- <100K	100K- <150K	150K+	Male	Female
Agree	66%	75%	81%	77%	70%	76%
Disagree	30%	21%	19%	20%	27%	21%
Don't Know	4%	4%	0%	4%	3%	3%
N=	134	137	89	107	307	306

	How Closely did R Follow Debate?		
	Very	Some-what	Not at All
Agree	76%	75%	67%
Disagree	21%	23%	29%
Don't Know	3%	2%	4%
N=	218	246	139

*Debt Limit Agreement, August 2011
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll*

The government in Washington no longer works. N=612

Agree 69%
Disagree 24%
Don't Know 7%

	Party ID			Tea Party Impression				Ideology			Education			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Fav	Unfav	No Opin	DK	Lib	Middle	Con	HS or Less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Grad Work
Agree	63%	71%	76%	79%	67%	63%	65%	67%	71%	72%	75%	59%	65%	80%
Disagree	31%	23%	14%	17%	28%	23%	20%	25%	22%	21%	18%	37%	23%	16%
Don't Know	6%	6%	10%	4%	5%	14%	15%	8%	7%	7%	7%	4%	12%	4%
N=	190	302	116	140	328	123	18	105	364	115	131	137	192	138

	Employment				Race				Age			
	Full Time	Part Time	Retired	Not Empl	White	Black	Hisp	Other	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Agree	71%	48%	76%	69%	75%	55%	57%	52%	52%	71%	75%	70%
Disagree	21%	48%	18%	23%	18%	39%	34%	40%	43%	22%	19%	21%
Don't Know	8%	4%	7%	7%	7%	6%	9%	8%	6%	7%	6%	9%
N=	273	72	151	97	419	71	51	42	82	201	175	143

	Income				Gender	
	< 50K	50K- <100K	100K- <150K	150K+	Male	Female
Agree	69%	64%	74%	78%	69%	69%
Disagree	24%	27%	21%	19%	25%	23%
Don't Know	7%	9%	6%	3%	5%	8%
N=	133	137	88	107	305	307

	How Closely did R Follow Debate?		
	Very	Some-what	Not at All
Agree	78%	69%	57%
Disagree	18%	21%	36%
Don't Know	4%	10%	7%
N=	219	244	138

*Debt Limit Agreement, August 2011
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll*

Q. As you know there has been a debate over increasing the borrowing ability of the United States – also known as the debt ceiling. How closely did you follow this debate? Was it:
N= 603

Very closely 36%
Somewhat closely 41%
Not at all closely 23%

	Party ID			Tea Party Impression			Ideology			Education			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Fav	Unfav	No Opin	Lib	Middle	Con	HS or Less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Grad Work
Very Closely	33%	37%	38%	48%	37%	24%	40%	32%	45%	20%	32%	42%	49%
Somewhat Closely	39%	42%	41%	38%	42%	43%	43%	43%	33%	39%	39%	40%	44%
Not at All Closely	27%	21%	21%	15%	21%	33%	17%	26%	23%	41%	29%	18%	7%
N=	186	300	114	139	325	121	106	364	115	130	137	194	138

	Employment				Race				Age			
	Full Time	Part Time	Retired	Not Empl	White	Black	Hisp	Other	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Very Closely	36%	24%	46%	27%	38%	26%	15%	46%	30%	26%	45%	44%
Somewhat Closely	44%	35%	38%	41%	43%	30%	40%	38%	35%	45%	41%	37%
Not at All Closely	20%	41%	16%	32%	19%	44%	45%	16%	35%	29%	14%	19%
N=	273	72	152	97	420	73	51	42	82	201	177	142

	Income				Gender	
	< 50K	50-100K	100-150K	150K+	Male	Female
Very Closely	31%	31%	41%	42%	47%	25%
Somewhat Closely	39%	40%	49%	41%	36%	45%
Not at All Closely	30%	29%	10%	17%	17%	30%
N=	135	137	89	107	303	300

Q. Do you support or oppose the agreement that was made in Washington to end the debt ceiling crisis, including some cuts now and future cuts to be defined, but with no current revenue increases? N= 595

Support 39%
Oppose 41%
Don't Know 20%

	Party ID			Tea Party Impression			Ideology			Education			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Fav	Unfav	No Opin	Lib	Middle	Con	HS or Less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Grad Work
Support	40%	39%	36%	35%	38%	49%	37%	43%	33%	36%	39%	39%	41%
Oppose	38%	43%	41%	51%	45%	20%	45%	37%	46%	37%	35%	42%	49%
Don't Know	21%	18%	23%	15%	17%	31%	18%	20%	21%	27%	26%	18%	9%
N=	182	297	112	138	321	120	103	361	114	127	135	192	135

*Debt Limit Agreement, August 2011
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll*

	Employment				Race				Age			
	Full Time	Part Time	Retired	Not Empl	White	Black	Hisp	Other	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Support	39%	33%	41%	38%	39%	32%	45%	47%	42%	33%	42%	41%
Oppose	41%	36%	45%	40%	45%	25%	24%	38%	35%	39%	47%	41%
Don't Know	20%	31%	14%	22%	16%	42%	31%	15%	22%	28%	11%	18%
N=	271	71	148	96	411	72	51	42	80	200	175	139

	Income				Gender	
	< 50K	50K- <100K	100K- <150K	150K+	Male	Female
Support	35%	45%	37%	40%	42%	36%
Oppose	39%	35%	55%	40%	49%	33%
Don't Know	26%	20%	7%	20%	9%	31%
N=	134	135	85	106	303	292

	How Closely did R Follow Debate?		
	Very	Some-what	Not at All
Support	39%	46%	26%
Oppose	57%	39%	22%
Don't Know	5%	15%	52%
N=	217	240	138

Q. And who do you think was most to blame for the crisis in the first place? Was it: [ROTATE FIRST FOUR OPTIONS] N= 587

President Obama	14%
Democrats in Congress	10%
Republicans in Congress	21%
Tea Party Republicans specifically	19%
Someone else (Vol)	22%
Don't Know	13%

	Party ID			Tea Party Impression			Ideology			Education			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Fav	Unfav	No Opin	Lib	Mid	Cons	HS Less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Grad Work
President Obama	2%	15%	34%	37%	4%	17%	2%	11%	36%	17%	8%	14%	17%
Democrats in Congress	1%	13%	19%	24%	5%	10%	3%	10%	20%	10%	9%	12%	10%
Republicans in Congress	39%	15%	7%	8%	28%	15%	22%	23%	13%	20%	25%	20%	19%
Tea Party Republicans Specifically	29%	20%	2%	2%	33%	4%	38%	19%	5%	14%	17%	18%	30%
Someone Else	19%	23%	23%	23%	19%	29%	25%	21%	18%	29%	24%	22%	14%
Don't Know	11%	14%	13%	6%	11%	26%	10%	16%	7%	9%	18%	14%	10%
N=	185	285	114	135	320	114	105	355	112	124	134	189	136

*Debt Limit Agreement, August 2011
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll*

	Employment				Race				Age			
	Full Time	Part Time	Retired	Not Empl	White	Black	Hisp	Other	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
President Obama	14%	9%	20%	10%	17%	3%	9%	6%	0%	13%	15%	23%
Democrats in Congress	10%	14%	11%	6%	12%	0%	12%	11%	15%	9%	9%	11%
Republicans in Congress	24%	21%	18%	19%	15%	43%	34%	30%	25%	22%	23%	14%
Tea Party Republicans Specifically	18%	19%	23%	21%	18%	23%	11%	36%	20%	14%	25%	21%
Someone Else	21%	16%	21%	31%	24%	16%	27%	15%	20%	26%	19%	21%
Don't Know	14%	21%	7%	14%	15%	15%	6%	2%	20%	16%	9%	10%
N=	262	70	151	96	409	72	48	42	73	199	176	138

	Income				Gender	
	< 50K	50K- <100K	100K- <150K	150K+	Male	Female
President Obama	15%	13%	12%	14%	16%	13%
Democrats in Congress	3%	19%	12%	11%	12%	9%
Republicans in Congress	25%	26%	23%	16%	19%	23%
Tea Party Republicans Specifically	19%	14%	20%	28%	24%	15%
Someone Else	28%	15%	23%	17%	22%	22%
Don't Know	10%	13%	10%	14%	8%	18%
N=	131	136	86	105	293	295

	How Closely did R Follow Debate?		
	Very	Some-what	Not at All
President Obama	17%	14%	12%
Democrats in Congress	14%	6%	12%
Republicans in Congress	20%	21%	21%
Tea Party Republicans Specifically	26%	20%	8%
Someone Else	19%	26%	18%
Don't Know	4%	12%	29%
N=	213	240	133

Q. Which position most closely resembles your own? The federal government must get the budget under control by: N= 598

- Making across the board cuts that include defense, Medicare, and Medicaid with no tax increases 22%
- Balancing tax increases on high income earners with some cuts in Medicare and other programs 42%
- Raising taxes enough to avoid cuts in any programs 19%
- Something else (Vol) 12%
- Don't Know 4%

*Debt Limit Agreement, August 2011
Rutgers-Eagleton Poll*

	Party ID			Tea Party Impression			Ideology			Education			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Fav	Unfav	No Opn	Lib	Mid	Con	HS or Less	Some Coll	Coll Grad	Grad Work
Across the board cuts only	12%	21%	42%	42%	10%	35%	6%	21%	39%	22%	19%	25%	21%
Balance cuts with some tax increases	53%	42%	28%	30%	53%	30%	47%	48%	26%	29%	42%	48%	50%
Raise taxes/avoid cuts	24%	20%	11%	7%	24%	15%	32%	19%	12%	29%	22%	15%	14%
Something Else	8%	12%	14%	18%	10%	10%	13%	9%	16%	13%	14%	8%	13%
Don't Know	2%	5%	6%	4%	2%	10%	2%	4%	7%	8%	3%	5%	2%
N=	183	298	113	137	323	120	105	360	115	128	137	192	136

	Employment				Race				Age			
	Full Time	Part Time	Retired	Not Empl	White	Black	Hisp	Other	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Across the board cuts only	23%	19%	26%	15%	25%	11%	8%	23%	13%	24%	23%	26%
Balance cuts with some tax increases	48%	43%	34%	42%	43%	42%	46%	40%	63%	40%	44%	33%
Raise taxes/avoid cuts	16%	19%	21%	28%	15%	37%	26%	35%	21%	23%	14%	19%
Something Else	10%	13%	16%	9%	13%	8%	13%	0%	0%	11%	14%	16%
Don't Know	3%	6%	4%	6%	5%	3%	6%	2%	3%	3%	5%	7%
N=	272	71	151	96	417	71	51	42	82	198	176	141

	Income				Gender	
	< 50K	50K- <100K	100K- <150K	150K+	Male	Female
Across the board cuts only	20%	22%	24%	22%	26%	19%
Balance cuts with some tax increases	35%	45%	55%	50%	47%	38%
Raise taxes/avoid cuts	28%	19%	11%	16%	16%	22%
Something Else	14%	9%	11%	10%	9%	14%
Don't Know	4%	5%	0%	2%	3%	6%
N=	132	137	88	107	302	296

	How Closely did R Follow Debate?		
	Very	Some-what	Not at All
Across the board cuts only	27%	20%	20%
Balance cuts with some tax increases	48%	46%	28%
Raise taxes/avoid cuts	13%	18%	32%
Something Else	11%	13%	10%
Don't Know	1%	3%	11%
N=	217	242	136

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll August 9-15, 2011
New Jersey Statewide Registered Voters Poll

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone from August 9-15, 2011 with a scientifically selected random sample of 615 New Jersey registered voters. Data are weighted to represent known parameters in the New Jersey population, using gender, age, race, and Hispanic ethnicity matching to US Census Bureau data. Data are also weighted to the current NJ voter registration records by party. All results are reported with these weighted data. This telephone poll included 574 landline respondents supplemented with 41 cell phone respondents, 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. The sampling error for 615 registered voters is +/-3.9 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey voters favored a particular position, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 53.9 and 46.1 percent (50 +/-3.9) had all New Jersey 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. 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 Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was fielded by the Eagleton Institute of Politics Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University using an in-house CATI system. The questionnaire was developed and all data analysis was 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 focused on the study and teaching of politics and the political process.

Weighted Sample Characteristics
615 New Jersey Registered Voters

31% Democrat	50% Male	14% 18-29	72% White
50% Independent	50% Female	33% 30-49	12% Black
19% Republican		29% 50-64	9% Hispanic
		24% 65+	4% Asian
			3% Other/Multiracial