

Rutgers - Eagleton Poll

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 A.M. EDT SEPT. 28, 2006

**Sept. 28, 2006
(Release 160-1)**

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VIRTUAL TIE IN U.S. SENATE RACE

National politics help Menendez, local politics help Kean

With less than six weeks to go before the Nov. 7 midterm election, a new Rutgers-Eagleton Poll finds that the race for the U.S. Senate is a virtual tie, with Democratic incumbent Robert Menendez receiving support from 45 percent of likely voters and State Senator Tom Kean, Jr. backed by 44 percent of likely voters. The one-point difference among the 404 likely voters is well within the margin of error of plus or minus 4.9 percent.

Among registered voters in the latest poll, Kean has a two-point lead over Menendez, 42 percent to 40 percent, compared to a four-point advantage for Menendez among registered voters in June. The margin of error for the sample of 660 registered voters in the Sept. 24-26 poll is plus or minus 3.8 percent.

Much could change between now and Nov. 7. Forty-five percent of registered voters who said they would support one of the two candidates said they might change their minds by Election Day. Also, about half of all registered voters said they have not heard of the candidates or do not have an opinion of them.

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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Only 36 percent of voters correctly identified Menendez as a U.S. Senator, an office he has held since Gov. Jon Corzine appointed him to the Senate in January. When asked a parallel question concerning whether Kean was or is governor of New Jersey, an office Kean's father held, 8 percent of registered voters said yes, a drop from 12 percent in March. A similar percentage, however, also thought that Kean, who has served in the New Jersey Senate since 2003, was or is a U.S. Senator.

"The candidates have a ways to go to capture the attention of the voters and there are ample opportunities for the race to fluctuate," said Murray Edelman, distinguished scholar at the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling. "The major campaign advertising has yet to begin, and the ads could have a considerable effect considering the lack of voter knowledge about the candidates."

National and local considerations have different effects on the race. Menendez supporters are more likely to view the contest in terms of national politics, while Kean appears to benefit when voters view the race in terms of New Jersey politics.

When registered voters were asked whether they think of their vote for Senate as a vote for or against President George W. Bush, 15 percent said it is a vote for Bush, 33 percent said it is a vote against Bush, and 47 percent said Bush is not a factor. Among registered voters who support Menendez, 55 percent said their vote is a vote against Bush, while 26 percent of Kean supporters said their vote is a vote in favor of Bush.

Voters are equally likely to associate Kean very closely or somewhat closely with the policies of the Bush administration (51 percent) and Menendez very closely or somewhat closely with the policies of the Corzine administration (50 percent). But Bush's job approval rating in

New Jersey is at 30 percent, an all-time low for the president in the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. Corzine's job approval rating, on the other hand, is at 48 percent, up three points since June.

"As long as Bush's approval rating remains low, Menendez's strategy will be to keep tying Kean to Bush and make this a referendum on Bush's policies," Edelman said.

Mendendez supporters also are thinking in terms of the balance of power in the U.S. Senate, where Democrats need a net gain of six seats nationally to take control of the chamber. Twenty-nine percent of voters think of their vote as a way of helping to put Democrats in control of the Senate, 20 percent say their vote is to keep the Republicans in control, and 44 percent say that party control of the Senate is not a factor in their vote. Among Menendez supporters, 55 percent said their vote is a vote to help the Democrats take power in the Senate, while 41 percent of Kean supporters said their vote is aimed at helping Republicans retain control.

Kean benefits from a focus on state issues, particularly tying Mendendez to the theme of Democratic corruption in state government. When asked about corruption at the national level, 12 percent of voters said that the Republican Party has a greater problem with corruption, 7 percent said Democrats have a greater problem, and 67 percent said the problem is equal in the two parties.

In New Jersey, however, opinion is reversed. Only 6 percent said the Republican Party has a greater problem with corruption in New Jersey, 18 percent said the Democrats have a greater problem, and 63 percent said the two parties are equal. At both the national and state levels, only 4 percent of registered voters said neither party has a problem with corruption.

Forty-one percent of voters said they had read or heard anything about the federal investigation into Menendez's ownership of office space leased to a non-profit agency that received federal money. Of those who had heard of the probe, 41 percent said that they were less

likely to vote for Mendendez, while 52 percent said that it made no difference. Among independent voters, 42 percent said the investigation would make them less likely to vote for Menendez, compared to 21 percent of Democrats and 54 percent of Republicans.

“The effect on independent voters should be worrisome for the Menendez campaign, given that independent voters typically tip the balance in statewide races in New Jersey,” Edelman said.

The local nature of the race also emerged when voters were asked which issue is most important to them in choosing a candidate for Senate. In response to the open-ended question, voters pointed to property taxes more often than any other issue (21 percent). The war in Iraq and the war on terror, a topic dominating the national political discourse in the congressional elections, was a distant second at 10 percent, followed by taxes and tax reform (9 percent) and morals, ethics, and personal integrity (9 percent).

“Given that U.S. senators aren’t even remotely involved in setting local property tax rates, voters in New Jersey appear to be much more focused on local issues than on national concerns right now,” Edelman said.

The national-local distinction also carried through in terms of voter perceptions of some candidate characteristics. Menendez is viewed as more likely than Kean to stand up to leaders of his own party when he disagrees with them (35 percent to 30 percent), while Kean is viewed as honest and trustworthy by a larger share of voters (32 percent to 23 percent for Menendez).

“That fewer voters view Kean as likely to stand up to his party’s leaders should concern the Kean campaign,” Edelman said. “Kean has emphasized his differences with Bush on the Iraq war, but the message is not getting through very well.”

Kean's edge over Menendez on honesty and trust suggests that "if Kean succeeds in making public corruption in New Jersey the dominant issue in the race, he has the upper hand," Edelman said.

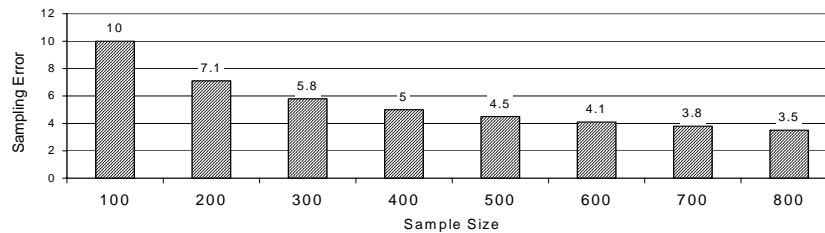
The family background of the candidate also may be influencing voters. Fifty-two percent of voters said family background is the most important factor or one of many factors in their vote choice. Among Kean supporters, 57 percent said family background is the most important factor or one of many factors, while the same was true for 42 percent of Menendez voters.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP 160-1) September 28, 2006

The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from September 24-26, 2006 with a scientifically selected random sample of 804 New Jersey adults. This sample yielded 660 adult residents registered to vote in New Jersey, and 404 adult residents considered likely to vote. 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 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 804 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 660 registered voters is ± 3.8 percent; the margin of sampling error for 404 likely voters is ± 4.9 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



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 (PF1-PF4) [ROTATE PF1-PF4]

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Haven't heard	No opinion	DK/RF	(n)
Menendez						
September 2006	27%	23%	21%	26%	3%	660
March 2006	23%	13%	25%	32%	7%	676
Kean Jr.						
September 2006	27%	18%	19%	33%	3%	660
March 2006	26%	13%	21%	32%	8%	676
Corzine						
September 2006	44%	31%	4%	20%	2%	660
March 2006	42%	37%	2%	16%	4%	676
Lautenberg						
September 2006	32%	22%	19%	25%	3%	660

As you may know, there will be an election for the United States Senate from New Jersey in November. How much interest do you have in this election – a lot, some, a little, or none at all? (RL2)

	A lot	Some	A little	None	DK/RF	(n)
September 2006						
Registered voters	38%	35%	19%	8%	1%	660

If the election for the U.S. Senate were held today, for whom would you vote (ROTATE) Robert Menendez, the Democrat, Tom Kean Jr., the Republican, or some other candidate for Senate? (S1)
[Includes "Leaners" from S1a]

		2006 Senate Horserace					(n)
		Menendez	Kean, Jr.	Other Candidate	Would Not Vote	DK/RF/ Undecided	
Sept. 2006	Likely voters	45%	44%	1%	--	10%	404
	Registered voters	40%	42%	3%	2%	14%	660
Party ID	Democrat	74%	15%	2%	1%	7%	205
	Republican	11%	82%	0%	1%	6%	167
	Independent	29%	42%	4%	2%	23%	223
	Something else / Other	45%	32%	3%	10%	10%	47
Gender	Male	35%	47%	3%	3%	12%	308
	Female	44%	38%	2%	1%	15%	352
Race	White	36%	48%	3%	2%	12%	522
	Non-white	49%	27%	3%	2%	19%	125
Age	18-29	45%	38%	1%	4%	12%	48
	30-49	39%	39%	4%	3%	15%	228
	50-64	36%	48%	2%	0%	14%	220
	65+	42%	45%	2%	1%	9%	154
Education	High school or below	39%	41%	4%	2%	14%	183
	Some college and above	40%	43%	1%	2%	13%	469
Region	North	42%	42%	2%	1%	13%	287
	Central	38%	47%	2%	3%	11%	178
	South	40%	37%	4%	3%	17%	179
June 2006	Registered voters	42%	38%	1%	2%	17%	699
March 2006	Registered voters	40%	35%	2%	3%	20%	676

Note: All demographic cross-tabulations are for registered voters.

Are you very sure about voting for [FILL NAME – Q.S1/Q.S1a]; or might you change your mind before Election Day? (S2)

September 2006	Very sure	Might change	DK/RF	(n)
Registered voters	51%	45%	4%	660
Menendez supporters	53%	43%	4%	258
Kean, Jr. supporters	50%	46%	4%	291

What is the most important issue to you personally in determining whom to vote for? (S11) *[DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE ANSWER – PROBE FOR MOST IMPORTANT.]*

Issues in the 2006 Senate Campaign	Percentage of voters reporting issue as most important September 2006 Registered voters
The economy/jobs	6%
Iraq/war on terror	10%
Corporate responsibility	1%
Taxes and tax reform	9%
Property taxes	21%
Social security/retirement	1%
Morals/ethics/ personal integrity	9%
Health care	2%
Environment	2%
Education	7%
Abortion/choice	1%
Crime	2%
No issue/party	1%
Other	15%
DK/RF/Nothing	12%
(n)	(660)

Do you think of your vote in the Senate race as a vote for George W. Bush, a vote against George W. Bush, or don't you think of your vote this fall as being about George W. Bush's presidency? (S2a)
[ROTATE questions S2a and S2b]

September 2006	Vote for Bush	Vote against Bush	Bush not a factor	Won't vote	DK/RF/ Undecided	(n)
Registered voters	15%	33%	47%	1%	4%	660
Menendez supporters	5%	55%	35%	---	4%	258
Kean, Jr. supporters	26%	14%	58%	---	3%	291

Do you think of your vote in the Senate race as a vote to help put Democrats in control of the Senate, a vote to help keep Republicans in control of the Senate, or will your vote be about something else? (S2b)

September 2006	Put Democrats in control	Keep Republicans in control	Something else	Won't vote	DK/RF/ Undecided	(n)
Registered voters	29%	20%	44%	2%	6%	660
Menendez supporters	55%	5%	32%	1%	6%	258
Kean, Jr. supporters	9%	41%	47%	1%	3%	291

There will also be an election for the U.S. House of Representatives in your district this November. If the election were held today, would you vote for the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate? (H1)

2006 House of Representatives election					
	Republican	Democratic	Other	DK/RF	(n)
September 2006					
Registered voters	29%	40%	3%	28%	660

We would like to find out how much you have heard or read about the candidates for Senate so far. I'm going to read you a list of public offices and as I read each one, please tell me if Robert Menendez now holds or has ever held this position? (G3) [ROTATE G3 WITH G4] [ROTATE LIST] [Correct response is in bold type.]

Menendez					
Registered Voters	Yes, he now holds or has held this position	No	DK/RF	(n)	
September 2006					
United States Senator	36%	28%	37%	660	
Governor of New Jersey	3%	81%	16%	660	
March 2006					
United States Senator	26%	31%	43%	676	
Governor of New Jersey	3%	74%	23%	676	

We would like to find out how much you have heard or read about the candidates for Senate so far. I'm going to read you a list of public offices and as I read each one, please tell me if Tom Kean, Jr. now holds or has ever held this position? (G4) [ROTATE LIST] [Correct response is in bold type.]

Kean, Jr					
Registered Voters	Yes, he now holds or has held this position	No	DK/RF	(n)	
September 2006					
United States Senator	9%	55%	36%	660	
Governor of New Jersey	8%	75%	17%	660	
March 2006					
United States Senator	8%	48%	44%	676	
Governor of New Jersey	12%	64%	23%	676	

In thinking about the two major political parties AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, in your opinion, does one of the two parties have a greater problem with corruption among elected officials than the other party, are the parties equal in terms of corruption, or is there no real problem with corruption in either party? (If yes, probe to find out which party) (CO1) [ROTATE QUESTIONS CO1 AND CO2]

National level	Republicans have a greater problem	Democrats have a greater problem	Equal problem	No problem	DK/RF	(n)
September 2006						
Registered voters	12%	7%	67%	4%	10%	660

In thinking about the two major political parties IN NEW JERSEY, in your opinion, does one of the two parties have a greater problem with corruption among elected officials than the other party, are the parties equal in terms of corruption, or is there no real problem with corruption in either party? (If yes, probe to find out which party) (CO2)

New Jersey	Republicans have a greater problem	Democrats have a greater problem	Equal problem	No problem	DK/RF	(n)
September 2006						
Registered voters	6%	18%	63%	4%	8%	660

How closely do you associate Republican Tom Kean, Jr. with the policies and actions of the administration of President George W. Bush? (S6) [ROTATE S6 and S7]

	Very closely,	Somewhat closely, or	Not closely at all?	DK/RF	(n)
September 2006					
Registered voters	14%	37%	29%	20%	660
June 2006					
Registered Voters	12%	38%	26%	24%	699
March 2006					
Registered Voters	12%	31%	28%	29%	676

How closely do you associate Democrat Robert Menendez with the policies and actions of the administration of Governor Jon Corzine? (S7)

	Very closely,	Somewhat closely, or	Not closely at all?	DK/RF	(n)
September 2006					
Registered voters	17%	33%	23%	26%	660
June 2006					
Registered Voters	18%	32%	21%	29%	699
March 2006					
Registered Voters	20%	30%	22%	29%	676

Regardless of how you plan to vote in the Senate election, please just tell me whether you think each of the following statements applies more to Tom Kean Jr. or Robert Menendez. First (RANDOMIZE) ... Kean or Menendez (S8)

September 2006 Registered Voters	Kean, Jr.	Menendez	Both/Same	DK/RF	(n)
Is honest and trustworthy.	32%	23%	16%	29%	660
Has the experience needed to effectively represent New Jersey in Washington D.C.	27%	36%	10%	28%	660
Cares more about the problems of people like you.	23%	38%	13%	25%	660
Is more likely to stand up to the leaders of his own party when he disagrees with them.	30%	35%	9%	26%	660

In thinking about your vote for Senate, how important is the family background of the candidate? Is family background . . . (S12)

September 2006	Most important factor	One of many factors	Not a factor	Won't vote	(n)
Registered voters	7%	45%	47%	1%	660
Menendez supporters	5%	37%	57%	1%	258
Kean, Jr. supporters	6%	51%	42%	---	291

Have you read or heard anything about a federal investigation into Robert Menendez's ownership of office space leased by a non-profit agency that received federal money? (CO3)

September 2006	Yes	No	DK/RF	(n)
Registered voters	41%	58%	1%	660

Does what you have read or heard about the investigation make you more likely or less likely [ROTATE WITH less likely or more likely] to vote for Menendez, or doesn't it make a difference? (CO4) (*Only asked of those who said "Yes" to CO3*)

September 2006		More likely	Less likely	No difference	DK/RF	(n)
Registered voters		4%	41%	52%	3%	317
Party ID	Democrat	5%	21%	71%	3%	94
	Republican	---	54%	39%	7%	88
	Independent	6%	42%	52%	1%	119

Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as President? (B1)

Registered Voters	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
September 2006	30%	60%	9%	660
June 2006	31%	62%	7%	699
March 2006	31%	63%	7%	676
February 2005	46%	50%	4%	678
October 2004	46%	49%	6%	664
January 2004	50%	45%	6%	679
September 2003	56%	38%	6%	628
May 2003	62%	31%	8%	773
Jan/Feb 2003	58%	30%	12%	301
September 2002	71%	24%	6%	596
Feb/Mar 2002	82%	15%	4%	622
April 2001	57%	34%	9%	606
January 2001	43%	21%	37%	636

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jon Corzine (pronounced Cor-zyne) is handling his job as Governor? (J1)

	Registered Voters			(n)
	Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	
September 2006	48%	34%	19%	660
June 2006	45%	35%	20%	699
March 2006	41%	36%	23%	676