

Rutgers - Eagleton Poll

Oct. 5, 2006
(Release 160-2)

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CITIZENS SKEPTICAL THAT LEGISLATURE CAN LOWER PROPERTY TAXES

Yes to merging with a neighboring school district, as long as it has more money

With state legislative committees scheduled to recommend ways to reduce local property taxes next month, most New Jerseyans doubt that the legislative session on property tax reform will lead to meaningful change, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

Seventy percent of adults said that it is “not very likely” or “not likely at all” that the State Legislature will find ways to lower local property taxes by a significant amount, according to a telephone survey of 804 adults conducted Sept. 24-26. The survey has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percent.

At the same time, there is strong support for combining services to reduce taxes, but only under certain circumstances. Half of those surveyed were asked whether they would support or oppose merging their schools with those of a neighboring, more affluent community. Fifty-six percent favored and 37 percent opposed the idea. The other half of the sample responded to a similar question about merger, but with schools in a less affluent neighboring community. Opinion was more evenly divided, with 45 percent in favor and 47 percent opposed.

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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“People are willing to consider combining services,” said Murray Edelman, distinguished scholar at the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling. “But not if they think they might lose something in the process.”

Opinions About Merger? It All Depends					
Sept. 2006	Favor	Oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS	No opinion	(n)
Merge schools with those of a more affluent town	56%	37%	2%	5%	400
Merge schools with those of a less affluent town	45%	47%	3%	5%	404
Merge fire departments, even with slightly longer response times	30%	65%	2%	3%	804
Merge road maintenance, etc. under your town’s mayor	65%	29%	1%	4%	404
Merge road maintenance, etc., under other town’s mayor	51%	42%	2%	5%	400

Thirty percent said they would support merging the fire department in their community with one in a neighboring town, even if it meant firefighters might take longer to get to a fire, while 65 percent were opposed.

Opinion about merging public works services – such as street maintenance and snow removal – varied according to whether control over the services stayed with the mayor of one’s own town or a neighboring town. Sixty-five percent supported merger if their mayor remains in charge, compared to 51 percent in favor if the mayor of another town oversees the services.

Overall support for merging local government services, a process known as regionalization, increased in the latest poll. Fifty-four percent said they strongly or mildly favor

regionalization, up five points from the January 2004 Eagleton Poll and up six points from the February 1998 Eagleton Poll.

Seventeen percent said regionalization could save a significant amount of money, 20 percent said it could save some money, but would not make much of a difference, and 19 percent said while there would be savings, they were unsure how much. Another 30 percent said mergers would not save any money. All of the results are virtually unchanged from the 2004 and 1998 surveys.

A growing percentage of residents reported that their local property taxes have increased substantially in the past year. Forty-six percent said their tax bills have “gone up a lot” during that time, compared to 37 percent in a January 2004 Eagleton Poll and 25 percent in a February 1998 Eagleton Poll. The September 2006 poll found that only 15 percent said their tax bills stayed the same in the past year, compared to 21 percent in January 2004 and 28 percent in February 1998.

“New Jersey residents indicate there is a great need for tax relief,” Edelman said. “They just don’t believe that the State Legislature is capable of helping them with their tax bills.”

Skepticism is greatest among Republicans and independents. Seventy-seven percent of individuals in each group said it is not very likely or not at all likely that the legislative session will lead to significant reductions, compared to 60 percent of Democrats.

“That 60 percent of Democrats – the party that controls both chambers of the Legislature and holds the governor’s office – don’t believe there will be significant change speaks volumes about the level of skepticism in New Jersey,” Edelman said.

Expectations also are lowest among those whose tax bills increased the most in the past year. Of those reporting their taxes had gone up “a lot,” 79 percent said major changes were not

likely, compared to 57 percent of those whose tax bills stayed the same in the past year.

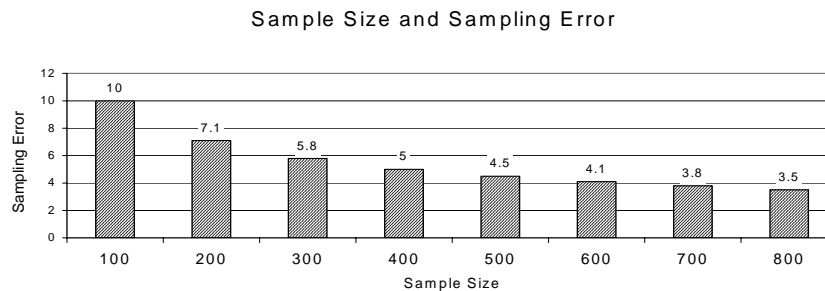
Public attention to news about the special session is relatively low. When asked how closely they were following news about the special session, 12 percent of those surveyed said “very closely,” 37 percent said “somewhat closely,” and nearly half said “not closely at all.”

Edelman said the lack of public attention to the special session places a greater burden on lawmakers to sell the public on any recommended reforms. “If they are going to do anything significant, they will have to show real leadership,” he said.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP 160-2) OCT. 5, 2006

The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from September 24-26, 2006 with a scientifically selected random sample of 804 New Jersey adults. Unless otherwise noted, most of the figures in this release are based on the statewide sample of 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 804 adults is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adults favored regionalizing municipal services, 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. 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.



In the past year, have your local property taxes gone up, gone down, or stayed about the same-- (PROBE IF UP OR DOWN: Have they (gone up/gone down) a lot or just a little)? (R1)

		Up a lot	Up a little	Down a little	Down a lot	Stayed the same	DK/RF	(n)
Sept. 2006	Adults	46%	25%	1%	0%	15%	13%	804
Jan. 2004	Adults	37%	27%	1%	0%	21%	14%	904
Feb. 1998	Adults	25%	29%	2%	0%	28%	17%	802

Now, on another topic, the State Legislature is currently holding a special session to look for ways to help lower local property taxes in New Jersey. How closely are you following news about the special session? (T1)

		How closely are you following news about the special session					
		Very closely	Somewhat closely	Not closely at all	DK/RF	(n)	
Sept. 2006	Adults	12%	37%	49%	2%	804	
Party ID	Democrat	10%	37%	51%	2%	244	
	Republican	17%	41%	42%	1%	188	
	Independent	12%	37%	51%	0%	269	
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	16%	39%	43%	2%	377	
	Up a little	9%	44%	47%	1%	209	
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***	
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***	
	Stayed the same	12%	38%	51%	0%	111	
Family income	Under \$35,000	12%	31%	51%	5%	143	
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	8%	36%	55%	0%	228	
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	12%	36%	52%	0%	145	
	\$100,000 or more	14%	46%	40%	0%	201	
Region	North	11%	36%	52%	2%	350	
	Central	16%	38%	47%	0%	207	
	South	11%	38%	48%	2%	220	

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

In your opinion, how likely is it that the State Legislature will find ways to lower local property taxes by a significant amount? (T2)

		How likely is it that the state legislature will find ways to lower local property taxes					(n)
		Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	DK/RF	
Sept. 2006	Adults	4%	21%	37%	33%	5%	804
Party ID	Democrat	6%	30%	33%	27%	4%	244
	Republican	3%	18%	46%	31%	2%	188
	Independent	2%	17%	40%	37%	4%	269
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	4%	14%	38%	41%	3%	377
	Up a little	3%	21%	46%	28%	2%	209
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***	***
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***	***
	Stayed the same	5%	34%	34%	23%	3%	111
Family income	Under \$35,000	8%	23%	27%	34%	9%	143
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	3%	19%	41%	35%	2%	228
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	3%	20%	42%	32%	2%	145
	\$100,000 or more	2%	20%	41%	34%	3%	201
Region	North	3%	22%	39%	31%	5%	350
	Central	2%	17%	44%	34%	3%	207
	South	5%	22%	32%	37%	4%	220

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Currently many towns in New Jersey are facing budget problems. In order to provide the same level of services they might have to raise taxes. If you had to choose between raising taxes or cutting services, which would you choose? (R2)

		Raise taxes or cut services?				
		Increase taxes, maintain services	Maintain taxes, decrease services	(VOL) DEPENDS	DK/No opinion	(n)
Sept. 2006	Adults	33%	48%	12%	7%	804
Party ID	Democrat	39%	40%	14%	7%	244
	Republican	21%	61%	13%	6%	188
	Independent	34%	47%	12%	7%	269
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	25%	54%	13%	7%	377
	Up a little	39%	46%	12%	3%	209
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***
	Stayed the same	44%	42%	10%	5%	111
Family income	Under \$35,000	33%	41%	14%	12%	143
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	30%	57%	10%	3%	228
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	37%	50%	10%	3%	145
	\$100,000 or more	39%	46%	11%	4%	201
Region	North	40%	44%	10%	6%	350
	Central	27%	50%	16%	7%	207
	South	30%	53%	10%	7%	220
Jan. 2004	Adults	43%	40%	10%	7%	904
Feb. 1998	Adults	41%	40%	10%	9%	802

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

As you probably know, property taxes provide a variety of local services, such as education and police. There has been some talk lately of REGIONALIZATION, where different towns combine these services

Those who favor regionalization feel it would hold costs and taxes down. Those who oppose it are worried about giving up their own town's control of services. Overall, do you favor or oppose regionalization of services where you live. (IF FAVOR OR OPPOSE, PROBE: Do you strongly or mildly favor/oppose it)? (R4)

		Favor or oppose regionalization?							
		Strongly favor	Mildly favor	Mildly oppose	Strongly oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS ON TOWN	(VOL) Don't know/Refused	(n)	
Sept. 2006	Adults	29%	25%	14%	17%	3%	12%	804	
Party ID	Democrat	26%	25%	15%	16%	5%	13%	244	
	Republican	34%	30%	12%	15%	1%	8%	188	
	Independent	32%	24%	17%	21%	2%	5%	269	
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	35%	20%	15%	17%	3%	10%	377	
	Up a little	28%	28%	12%	19%	4%	10%	209	
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	
	Stayed the same	21%	34%	10%	20%	2%	12%	111	
Family income	Under \$35,000	23%	22%	14%	17%	6%	18%	143	
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	28%	28%	17%	16%	1%	10%	228	
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	31%	24%	12%	21%	1%	10%	145	
	\$100,000 or more	35%	27%	12%	15%	1%	10%	201	
Region	North	27%	26%	15%	18%	2%	11%	350	
	Central	32%	25%	15%	15%	2%	12%	207	
	South	31%	24%	12%	19%	3%	11%	220	
Jan. 2004	Adults	25%	24%	17%	22%	2%	10%	904	
Feb. 1998	Adults	24%	24%	16%	22%	2%	13%	802	

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Do you think regionalizing your local services with a neighboring town would or would NOT result in saving money and lower property taxes-- IF WOULD SAVE MONEY, PROBE: Would it save enough money to make a significant difference in what you pay in taxes, or don't you think it would make that much of a difference? (R5)

		Would regionalization save money?						
		Would save a significant amount	Would save, but not make that much of a difference	Would save – Don't know how much of a difference	Would not save money	Don't know / Refused	(n)	
Sept. 2006	Adults	17%	20%	19%	30%	13%	804	
Party ID	Democrat	15%	20%	20%	30%	15%	244	
	Republican	20%	20%	22%	24%	13%	188	
	Independent	21%	24%	15%	32%	10%	269	
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	21%	18%	18%	32%	11%	377	
	Up a little	13%	25%	20%	29%	13%	209	
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***	***	
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***	***	
	Stayed the same	19%	17%	23%	30%	12%	111	
Family income	Under \$35,000	21%	15%	15%	30%	19%	143	
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	15%	22%	25%	30%	8%	228	
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	19%	19%	19%	36%	7%	145	
	\$100,000 or more	19%	21%	19%	26%	15%	201	
Region	North	18%	22%	20%	28%	12%	350	
	Central	15%	21%	16%	36%	11%	207	
	South	19%	18%	20%	30%	14%	220	
Jan. 2004	Adults	19%	19%	18%	29%	15%	904	
Feb. 1998	Adults	19%	18%	17%	29%	17%	802	

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Here are some proposals people have made for combining government services. These changes could reduce your property taxes, but your town might have less control over the services you receive. Please tell me whether you favor or oppose each one. First, how about combining schools in your town with a neighboring one if it meant that you shared common athletic programs like a single football team and bus lines-- Would you favor or oppose this? (R8)

		School merger				
		Favor	Oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS	No opinion	(n)
Sept. 2006	Adults	54%	38%	2%	6%	804
Party ID	Democrat	55%	36%	1%	9%	244
	Republican	53%	39%	3%	5%	188
	Independent	59%	36%	1%	4%	269
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	57%	37%	2%	4%	377
	Up a little	53%	39%	1%	7%	209
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***
	Stayed the same	51%	41%	2%	6%	111
Family income	Under \$35,000	49%	43%	1%	7%	143
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	55%	36%	3%	5%	228
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	57%	38%	1%	5%	145
	\$100,000 or more	58%	37%	0%	5%	201
Region	North	56%	39%	0%	4%	350
	Central	53%	39%	2%	6%	207
	South	51%	37%	3%	8%	220
Jan. 2004	Adults	52%	41%	2%	5%	904
Feb. 1998	Adults	51%	43%	1%	6%	802

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Combining the fire department of your town with a neighboring one if it meant that it might take firefighters a little longer to get to a fire? (R9)

		Fire department merger				
		Favor	Oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS	No opinion	(n)
Sept. 2006	Adults	30%	65%	2%	3%	804
Party ID	Democrat	29%	65%	4%	2%	244
	Republican	30%	66%	3%	2%	188
	Independent	31%	64%	2%	3%	269
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	33%	61%	3%	3%	377
	Up a little	30%	68%	1%	1%	209
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***
Family income	Stayed the same	22%	72%	2%	4%	111
	Under \$35,000	22%	72%	2%	5%	143
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	30%	66%	2%	2%	228
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	35%	60%	3%	2%	145
Region	\$100,000 or more	35%	62%	2%	1%	201
	North	30%	66%	1%	2%	350
	Central	30%	62%	4%	4%	207
	South	29%	65%	3%	3%	220
Feb. 1998	Adults	28%	69%	1%	2%	399

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Combining the public schools in your town with those in a neighboring school if it was in a less affluent town? (A2) (Asked of half of the sample)

		Merging schools with those in a less affluent town				
		Favor	Oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS	No opinion	(n)
Sept. 2006	Adults	45%	47%	3%	5%	404
Party ID	Democrat	41%	49%	3%	7%	126
	Republican	53%	40%	1%	5%	93
	Independent	48%	46%	2%	3%	135
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	48%	45%	3%	4%	195
	Up a little	46%	47%	3%	4%	107
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***
	Stayed the same	45%	48%	0%	7%	59
Family income	Under \$35,000	48%	47%	0%	5%	67
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	36%	56%	3%	6%	120
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	54%	40%	1%	5%	71
	\$100,000 or more	50%	41%	6%	3%	104
Region	North	44%	52%	1%	3%	184
	Central	52%	41%	3%	3%	104
	South	41%	44%	5%	10%	104
Jan. 2004	Adults	44%	50%	2%	5%	452
Feb. 1998	Adults	39%	55%	1%	5%	403

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Combining the public schools in your town with those in a neighboring school of a more affluent town?
 (B2) (Asked of half of the sample)

		Merging schools with those in a more affluent town				
		Favor	Oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS	No opinion	(n)
Sept. 2006	Adults	56%	37%	2%	5%	400
Party ID	Democrat	59%	31%	3%	7%	118
	Republican	55%	38%	2%	5%	95
	Independent	60%	36%	2%	3%	134
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	56%	39%	4%	2%	182
	Up a little	56%	39%	2%	3%	102
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***
	Stayed the same	59%	34%	0%	7%	52
Family income	Under \$35,000	54%	36%	3%	7%	76
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	62%	31%	3%	4%	108
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	54%	38%	2%	6%	74
	\$100,000 or more	64%	33%	1%	2%	97
Region	North	56%	40%	1%	2%	166
	Central	60%	32%	4%	4%	103
	South	55%	35%	3%	7%	116
Jan. 2004	Adults	50%	42%	1%	7%	452
Feb. 1998	Adults	50%	41%	2%	7%	399

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Combining departments for road, street maintenance and snow removal with another town if it was under the oversight of the mayor of YOUR town? (A4) (Asked of half of the sample)

		Merge road maintenance, etc. under your town's mayor				
		Favor	Oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS	No opinion	(n)
Sept. 2006	Adults	65%	29%	1%	4%	404
Party ID	Democrat	64%	29%	2%	5%	126
	Republican	68%	26%	0%	6%	93
	Independent	69%	29%	0%	2%	135
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	69%	25%	0%	5%	195
	Up a little	60%	36%	1%	2%	107
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***
Family income	Stayed the same	65%	30%	2%	3%	59
	Under \$35,000	55%	39%	0%	6%	67
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	67%	28%	1%	4%	120
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	71%	26%	0%	2%	71
Region	\$100,000 or more	67%	28%	3%	1%	104
	North	67%	28%	1%	4%	184
	Central	65%	32%	0%	3%	104
	South	64%	28%	3%	5%	104
Feb. 1998	Adults	59%	34%	0%	7%	403

***Subgroup contains less than 50.

Combining departments for road, street maintenance and snow removal with another town if it was under the oversight of the mayor in the OTHER town? (B4) (Asked of half of the sample)

		Merge road maintenance, etc. under other town's mayor					
		Favor	Oppose	(VOL) DEPENDS	No opinion	(n)	
Sept. 2006	Adults	51%	42%	2%	5%	400	
Party ID	Democrat	56%	38%	1%	6%	118	
	Republican	46%	47%	5%	2%	95	
	Independent	52%	43%	3%	2%	134	
Change in taxes in last year	Up a lot	51%	44%	2%	4%	182	
	Up a little	52%	39%	6%	4%	102	
	Down a lot	***	***	***	***	***	
	Down a little	***	***	***	***	***	
	Stayed the same	54%	39%	2%	6%	52	
Family income	Under \$35,000	37%	50%	1%	12%	76	
	\$35,000 to \$69,999	59%	35%	4%	1%	108	
	\$70,000 to \$99,000	52%	42%	1%	4%	74	
	\$100,000 or more	56%	42%	2%	1%	97	
Region	North	50%	45%	2%	3%	166	
	Central	50%	42%	3%	5%	103	
	South	55%	37%	3%	5%	116	
Feb. 1998	Adults	50%	44%	3%	5%	399	

***Subgroup contains less than 50.