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Daggett's Challenge:
New Jersey Voters Say they Want Choices but Still Support Major Party Candidates

NEW BRUNSWICK – While a large majority of New Jersey voters wants an alternative to the two-party system, independent gubernatorial candidate Chris Daggett has yet to capitalize on this discontent, according to the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

The poll finds that only 27 percent of likely voters say the current two-party system works well. Given a choice, 37 percent would prefer more than two strong parties, while another 32 percent believe candidates should run without party labels at all. Despite nearly 70 percent support for an alternative to Democrats and Republicans, only one in five likely voters supports Daggett. Results are from a statewide Rutgers-Eagleton Poll of 583 likely voters conducted October 15-20. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 4.1 percent.

Only 17 percent of voters who think the two-party system works well support Daggett, compared to 46 percent for Democratic incumbent Jon Corzine and 34 percent for Republican Chris Christie. But even among those who say New Jersey needs more than two strong parties, Daggett wins only 25 percent, while the major party candidates win about one-third each. Finally, voters who think candidates should not run under party labels also fail to support Daggett. He wins 20 percent of these voters, compared to Christie's 40 percent and Corzine's 36 percent.

“It is striking how many New Jersey voters say they want an alternative, yet how unwilling they are to vote for that alternative when available. And of course, there are widely varying views on what the alternative should be, much as in the health care debate” said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers.

“Even though Daggett is running a credible campaign, he is failing to attract most disaffected voters. Much of this is because many voters still know little about Daggett, but the numbers also are driven by history: independents don’t win in New Jersey and voters know that.”

Impressions of Daggett

Fewer than half of New Jersey’s likely voters (46 percent) have formed an impression of Daggett, although among those who have, more than twice as many (31 percent) see him favorably as unfavorably (15 percent). In contrast, views of both Corzine and Christie are more negative than positive.

“Daggett’s challenge, with only a week to go, is to make inroads with those who know little about him,” said Redlawsk. “But given his lack of funding and local organization, this will be difficult at best.”

The poll shows Daggett does do well among those who view him favorably – he wins 53 percent of these likely voters. But this lags both Corzine, who wins 81 percent of those who view him favorably, and Christie, who wins 74 percent of his favorable voters.

“Interestingly, at 31 percent favorable, Daggett is viewed positively by nearly as many voters as Christie (39 percent favorable) and Corzine (40 percent favorable),” said Redlawsk. “But because he is winning only half of those who like him, he cannot compete with the two major party candidates, who have managed to nail down their supporters. Here is more evidence that many voters, while liking Daggett, just can’t bring themselves to vote for him.”

Daggett’s Tax Plan

Daggett drew media attention with his release of a detailed tax plan before the October 1 debate. But two weeks before the election, the poll showed that only 23 percent of likely voters had heard “a lot” about Daggett’s plan, while 25 percent said they had heard “nothing at all” about the plan. Daggett’s supporters were no more likely to have heard a lot about the plan than Corzine or Christie supporters, although they were significantly less likely to have heard nothing at all.

“Awareness of Daggett’s tax plan is another indicator of how hard it is for an independent candidate with much less money to get his message across,” said Redlawsk.

“Despite a good deal of media coverage, and attacks on the plan by Christie, most voters say they have heard little or nothing about it.”

Hearing about the plan does not make a voter more likely to support Daggett, according to the poll. Voters who have heard a lot about the plan are more likely to support Christie, at 40 percent and Corzine at 32 percent, than Daggett, who gets only 22 percent of these voters. At the same time, Daggett does much worse among voters who have heard nothing about the plan, winning only 13 percent to Corzine’s 48 percent and Christie’s 32 percent.

“In the end, the tax plan probably has done Daggett some good,” said Redlawsk. “He got media attention, and voters who have heard about the plan are more likely to support him than those who have not. But Christie’s attacks on the plan seem to have had some effect as well, given that he does best among those who have heard the most.”

Daggett as the “Not Christie/Corzine” Candidate

The Rutgers-Eagleton poll shows that nearly one-quarter of likely voters rate *both* Christie and Corzine unfavorably. These should be voters ripe for the taking by Daggett, Redlawsk said, however, Daggett wins only 41 percent of these voters, compared to 25 percent for Christie and 22 percent for Corzine. Among the voters least likely to support the two major party candidates, Daggett does not perform especially well.

One possible reason can be found when voters are asked which candidate would do the best job solving the state’s “most important problem.” While 69 percent of Daggett voters think he will do the best job on their most important problem, slightly more Christie (72 percent) and Corzine (73 percent) voters think their candidate will do the best job. And among those who view Daggett favorably, whether voting for him or not, only 48 percent believe he will do the best job. Corzine and Christie do much better with those who view them favorably. Of those who rate Corzine favorably, 66 percent say he will do the best job, while 63 percent of those favorable to Christie say the same about him.

Even more surprising, only 33 percent of those who view both Corzine and Christie unfavorably think Daggett will do the best job on their more important problem. Nearly 40 percent of this group simply doesn’t think any of the candidates can solve the state’s important problems.

“Most voters who dislike both major party candidates cannot bring themselves to vote for Daggett – at least not yet,” said Redlawsk. “These voters, who could be key to a Daggett surprise, seem instead to be defeatist, suggesting that New Jersey’s problems cannot be solved by any of the candidates. Thus, they seem more likely to simply default to Corzine or Christie rather than rallying to Daggett.”

Daggett and the Two-Party System

One consequence of both the lack of awareness of Daggett and the lack of confidence that he can solve the state’s problems is that he does no better among those who dislike the two party system than he does among those who like it.

Most New Jerseyans, even those who identify with one of the two major parties, say they prefer something other than the two-party system. Only 36 percent of self-identified Democrats and 27 percent of Republicans say the current system works well. But most of these voters would still vote for their own party’s candidate, with 71 percent of Democrats and 76 percent of Republicans supporting their party, while only 15 percent of partisans support Daggett.

“It is not surprising that Republicans are less supportive of the two-party monopoly in New Jersey where they are the minority party,” said Redlawsk. “But it is a bit surprising that even most Democrats – who are in control – think there should be other options on the ballot. Nevertheless, despite what they say, party members remain very unlikely to defect to Daggett.”

Even among independents, Daggett lags overall and among those who want alternatives to the two-party system. Independents who like the system – a very small group representing only 7 percent of the sample – give a very small nod to Daggett, 33% to 28% for both Christie and Corzine. Independents who say they want alternatives (28 percent of all likely voters) are actually more likely to support Christie, 36 percent to 30 percent for Daggett and 27 percent for Corzine.

“We would think that Daggett might be able to capitalize on those who see their choices limited by two major parties,” said Redlawsk. “But voters who gripe about the two-party system still have to be convinced that they really have a viable choice outside that system. Daggett does not appear to have been able to do that yet. But the number of people who want more choices provides possibilities for a strong third party or independent run. This could help fuel Daggett’s potential history-making showing.”

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from October 15-20, 2009 with a scientifically selected random sample of 903 New Jersey adults of whom 583 were determined to be likely voters. Likely voters were defined by registration status, vote history, self reported turnout intention, and attention to the campaign. Data are weighted to represent known parameters in the New Jersey population, including age, race, and Hispanic ethnicity. All results are reported with this weighted data.

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 903 adults is +/-3.3 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. The sampling error for the likely voter sample reported here is +/-4.1 percent. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey likely voters favored a particular position, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 45.9 and 54.1 percent (50 + 4.1) had all New Jersey likely 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.

Sample Characteristics			
Full Sample (n=903)			
36% Dem	49% Male	29% 18-34	69% White
42% Independent	51% Female	42% 35-54	11% Black
22% Republican		29% 55+	14% Hispanic
			5% Asian
			1% Other
Likely Voter Sample (n=583)			
39% Dem	49% Male	21% 18-34	74% White
35% Independent	51% Female	43% 35-54	13% Black
26% Republican		35% 55+	9% Hispanic
			4% Asian
			1% Other

Questions and Tables

The questions covered in this press release are below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. All percentages are of Likely Voters.

If the election for Governor were today and the candidates were [Names Rotated: Democrat Jon Corzine, Republican Chris Christie or Independent Chris Daggett] who would you vote for? [IF VOTE IS OTHER/DON'T KNOW/REFUSED] As of TODAY, do you LEAN more to: [Names in same order as vote question]?

	Likely Voters	Daggett Favorable	Christie Favorable	Corzine Favorable	Both Christie/Corzine Unfavorable
Daggett	20%	53%	14%	13%	41%
Christie	36%	25%	74%	3%	25%
Corzine	39%	21%	8%	81%	23%
DK	5%	1%	3%	3%	11%
N	571	176	223	225	145

Is your opinion of [Names Rotated: Chris Christie, Jon Corzine, Chris Daggett] favorable, unfavorable, or haven't you heard enough about him?

	Daggett	Christie	Corzine
Favorable	31%	39%	40%
Unfavorable	15%	42%	52%
Haven't Heard Enough	53%	19%	7%
N	574	574	570

How much have you heard about Chris Daggett's plan to reduce property taxes? Is it a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

	Likely Voters	Daggett Voters	Christie Voters	Corzine Voters
A lot	23%	25%	26%	20%
A Little	52%	59%	52%	49%
Nothing at all	25%	16%	22%	31%
N	570	115	201	213

	Likely Voters	Heard about Daggett Property Tax Plan		
		A lot	A little	Nothing
Daggett Favorable	31%	48%	35%	11%
Daggett Unfavorable	15%	27%	12%	11%
Haven't Heard Enough	53%	26%	53%	78%
N	574	128	296	139

Vote For:	Heard about Daggett Property Tax Plan		
	A lot	A little	Nothing
Daggett	22%	24%	13%
Christie	40%	36%	32%
Corzine	32%	36%	48%
Don't Know	6%	4%	7%
N	131	288	139

Regardless of which candidate for governor you support, which one of the candidates, [ROTATE NAMES] Jon Corzine, Chris Christie, or Chris Daggett, would do the best job solving this problem? [Referencing respondent's "most important problem"]

	Likely Voters	Daggett Favorable	Christie Favorable	Corzine Favorable	Daggett Voter	Christie Voter	Corzine Voter
Daggett	19%	48%	19%	11%	69%	10%	3%
Christie	30%	18%	63%	6%	5%	72%	4%
Corzine	30%	17%	7%	66%	5%	0%	73%
None/Don't Know	21%	17%	11%	17%	21%	17%	20%
N	574	180	225	231	115	204	221

I'm going to read three statements about political parties, and I'd like you to say which one you agree with MOST: [Response Options Rotated]

1. The current two-party system of Democrats and Republicans works well.
2. We need more than two strong political parties to give us more choice.
3. We need elections where candidates run as individuals, without any party labels at all.

	Likely Voters	Party ID			Vote Choice		
		Ind	Rep	Dem	Daggett	Christie	Corzine
Two-party works well	27%	17%	29%	36%	23%	26%	34%
More strong parties	37%	42%	34%	36%	45%	34%	31%
Run as individuals	32%	39%	34%	26%	32%	36%	31%
Don't Know	3%	3%	2%	3%	0%	3%	2%
N	581	202	148	223	116	204	219

Vote For:	Likely Voters	Two Party System		
		Works Well	Need more Parties	Run as Individuals
Daggett	20%	17%	25%	20%
Christie	36%	34%	33%	40%
Corzine	39%	46%	36%	36%
N	571	160	208	187