

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 5, 2009

For more commentary from Professor Redlawsk see
<http://eagletonpoll.blogspot.com>

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RUTGERS-EAGLETON POLL FINDS NEW JERSEYANS OVERWHELMINGLY BELIEVE STATE POLITICS IS CORRUPT

Leadership by citizens groups needed to raise ethical standards

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – As New Jersey voters elected a corruption-busting former US Attorney to the Governor’s office, a Rutgers-Eagleton Poll of state residents finds overwhelming belief that New Jersey politics is corrupt, with more than half believing the state is more corrupt than other states. At the same time they are divided about the harshness of punishment to be meted out to those accused of corruption, believing accused officials should not summarily have their pay and benefits cut off, but that they should be forced to leave office upon being accused.

Respondents also think citizens groups are best-equipped to help raise ethical standards in politics; 28 percent tap these groups, while 22 percent think state and federal prosecutors should lead this fight.

The poll of 903 New Jersey adults was fielded October 15-20 and has a margin of error of +/-3.3 percentage points.

Perceptions of Corruption in New Jersey

Almost two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) say that there is “a lot” of political corruption in New Jersey, while 26 percent say there is “some” and only 5 percent say there is “little” political corruption. In comparison, when asked about corruption in New Jersey business, 80 percent are evenly split between “a lot” and “some” categories, and 10 percent said there is only a little corruption.

A similar question on political corruption asked by the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll in October 2007 also found 65 percent thought there was a lot of corruption in New Jersey. In August 2004 only 45 percent felt the same.

“The comparison with beliefs about business is instructive,” said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science. “A large share of New Jerseyans thinks corruption pervades both business and politics, but many more seem to find politics especially corrupt. Moreover they have become more negative over the past few years. The result is increased cynicism and negativity about government and politics.”

Exit polls show that while corruption was the No. 1 issue for only 20 percent of Tuesday’s voters, both Republican Chris Christie and Democrat Jon Corzine were viewed quite negatively by many in the electorate. “Many voters are unhappy about corruption but at the same time they are doubtful that any politician can really clean things up,” said Redlawsk.

When asked to compare states, 54 percent of respondents say that New Jersey is more corrupt than other states, while 40 percent believe corruption in New Jersey is about the same as elsewhere. Only 3 percent believe New Jersey is less corrupt.

The results show a dramatic surge over the past decade in the belief that New Jersey is more corrupt. Redlawsk noted that in a 1974 poll, only 16 percent thought New Jersey was more corrupt than other states, and the percentage dropped to 11 percent in 2002. “With recent high-profile corruption arrests and convictions, New Jerseyans have become much more negative about how corrupt their state really is,” he said.

Penalties for Officials Accused of Corruption

After the July 2009 arrests of legislators and local officials on corruption charges, Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts Jr. announced the immediate cutoff of pay and benefits to three legislators who had been accused. By 58 percent to 36 percent, poll respondents say that such penalties should be applied only after conviction. But when asked if officials who have only been accused of corruption should be forced to leave office, 50 percent say yes; 42 percent say such officials should be allowed to stay in office until found guilty.

“These conflicting results show the sense of frustration voters feel about corruption,” said Redlawsk. “They recognize that an accusation is not the same as a conviction, and thus do not support cutting off pay and benefits. However, they do think those accused must leave office, which, of course, would cut off their pay and benefits. The difference may be due to a sense of fair play – those still in office should get paid for their work, regardless. But people would be happier if accused officials went quietly.”

New Jersey Residents Prefer Honest Officials, even if Ineffective

The poll tested tolerance for corruption by asking respondents to make a choice between a “politician who might be corrupt but could get important things done” and “an honest politician who had trouble making things happen.” Overwhelmingly, New Jerseyans chose the honest politician, 78 percent to 15 percent. When asked to “in government corrupt means are needed to achieve important goals,” 80 percent disagreed, while only 15 percent agreed.

“People believe in their heart that it is possible to get things done in politics without being corrupt, even if they are cynical about it actually happening,” said Redlawsk. “And the fact that they would prefer honesty even over getting important things accomplished suggests a real opportunity for public support of visible and extensive corruption fighting efforts.”

New Jersey Residents Draw Distinctions between Lawbreaking and Favoritism but Many Find Everyday Politics Corrupt

The poll presented five specific activities (below) that citizens or public officials might consider corrupt. The first three are illegal:

- A bribe to avoid a speeding ticket
- No-bid contracts by a City Council member
- “Ghost” employees on a senator’s staff
- Access to the governor by a corporate executive campaign donor
- Candidate promises to fill potholes.

Respondents overwhelmingly considered lawbreaking to be corrupt, with 65 percent to 87 percent considering these three activities to be “extremely corrupt”. More interestingly, 30 to 40 percent considered the last two items – which are not illegal – to be “extremely corrupt”.

“There is such a pervasive sense that politics is corrupt in New Jersey that it spills over to activities, like pothole filling promises, that are simply part of the political process,” said Redlawsk. “Most local candidates make campaign promises to improve streets or other local services, and hope that voters will support them because of those promises. Likewise, Governors call on corporate executives (both donors and not) to give them advice. But many people simply see corruption everywhere they look.”

Residents Call on Citizen’s Groups to Take the Lead

Given the perceived pervasiveness of corruption in New Jersey politics, the question becomes who should play a leadership role in raising ethical standards and addressing

corruption. Repeating a question first asked by the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll in 2006, respondents were asked to identify who should take the lead on ethics in New Jersey. Citizen's groups were preferred by 28 percent of respondents, while 22 percent thought it is up to state and federal prosecutors. The governor and the state legislature were each named by 17 percent, while only 3 percent thought business leaders should take the lead on political corruption and ethical standards.

"These new results are similar to what we found in 2006, when 25 percent picked citizen's groups, followed by the governor (20 percent), prosecutors (19 percent) and the legislature (12 percent)," noted Redlawsk. "More than half of all New Jersey residents look outside for help – either through citizen's groups, prosecutors, or business leaders, another indicator of the lack of trust that politicians can get the job done".

Summary

Governor-elect Chris Christie was elected at least in part with strong support for the 20 percent of voters who told exit polls corruption was their reason for voting. While most New Jersey voters had other issues directly on their minds in the voting booth, corruption remains a strong undercurrent of all discussions about New Jersey politics.

QUESTIONS AND TABLES BEGIN ON THE NEXT PAGE

**Rutgers-Eagleton Poll October 15-20, 2009
Questions and Tables**

The questions covered in the release of November 5, 2009 are list below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. All percentages are of New Jersey adults.

Is New Jersey more or less corrupt than other states, or is it about the same? (N= 901)

More	54%
Less	3%
About the same	40%
Don't know	3%

Historical Trend

Is New Jersey more or less corrupt than other states, or is it about the same?					
	1974	1984	1998	2002	2009
More	16%	11%	4%	11%	53%
Less	28%	43%	8%	5%	3%
About the Same	35%	30%	84%	76%	40%
Don't Know	21%	17%	4%	9%	3%

How much corruption would you say there is in New Jersey POLITICS? Is it a lot, some, only a little, or none at all? (N=903)

A lot	65%
Some	26%
Only a little	5%
None at all	1%
Don't Know	2%

Historical Trend

How much corruption would you say there is in New Jersey POLITICS? Is it a lot, some, only a little, or none at all?						
	2002	2003	Jan 2004	Aug 2004	2007	2009
A Lot	33%	38%	34%	45%	65%	65%
Some	51%	39%	45%	31%	24%	26%
Only A little	8%	14%	11%	12%	4%	5%
None at all	1%	1%	3%	2%	0%	1%
Don't Know	7%	7%	7%	10%	7%	2%

How much corruption would you say there is in New Jersey BUSINESS? Is it a lot, some, only a little, or none at all? (N=900)

A lot	40%
Some	40%
Only a little	10%
None at all	2%
Don't Know	9%

Recently some legislators accused of corruption had their pay and benefits cut off as soon as they were charged. Is this the right way to deal with an official accused of corruption or should penalties be imposed only after an official is found guilty of a crime? (N=900)

Right way	36%
Penalties only after conviction	58%
Something else (Vol)	1%
Don't Know	5%

Should officials who have been accused of corruption be forced to leave office immediately or should they be allowed to stay in office until found guilty? (N=901)

Leave immediately	50%
Stay in office	42%
Something else (Vol)	4%
Don't know	4%

Many people are concerned about political corruption in New Jersey, especially about campaign finance and the awarding of government contracts. In your opinion, whose leadership would be most effective in raising ethical standards on these matters? Would it be: [RANDOMIZE RESPONSE ORDER] (N=899)

	<u>2009</u>	<u>2006</u>
Citizen's Groups	28%	26%
State and Federal Prosecutors	22%	17%
The State legislature	17%	12%
The Governor	17%	20%
Business Leaders	3%	6%
Other (Vol)	2%	3%
Don't Know	10%	17%

Given a choice, and if you had to choose, would you prefer: [ROTATE AND READ FIRST TWO RESPONSES] (n=474)

A politician who might be corrupt but could get important things	15%
An honest politician who had trouble making things happen	78%
Neither (VOL)	4%
Don't Know	3%

Do you agree or disagree with this statement: In government, corrupt means are needed to achieve important goals? (n=422)

Agree	15%
Disagree	80%
Don't Know	5%

Now I'd like you to think about how corrupt certain activities might be. I will briefly describe an activity and I would like you to tell me how corrupt it is on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all corrupt and 5 being extremely corrupt.

Note, four versions of each question were used and randomly assigned to respondents. In Version A the actor was a male public official. In Version B the actor was a female public official. In Version C the actor was a male citizen. In Version D the actor was a female citizen.

A/B A policeman/policewoman asks for money from a speeding driver in exchange for not writing a ticket?

C/D A man/woman caught speeding offered money to a police officer in exchange for not writing a ticket?

<i>(columns are percentages)</i>	<u>Actor</u>			
	Official		Citizen	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Fem</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Fem</u>
Not at all Corrupt (1)	2	3	1	2
(2)	2	0	3	3
(3)	4	5	8	9
(4)	5	6	11	16
Extremely Corrupt (5)	87	85	76	70
N=	243	223	204	217

A/B A city councilman/councilwoman offers a contract to a campaign contributor without considering other contractors?

C/D A campaign contributor asks a city council member to give him/her a contract without considering other contractors?

<i>(columns are percentages)</i>	<u>Actor</u>			
	Official		Citizen	
	Male	Fem	Male	Fem
Not at all Corrupt (1)	2	4	2	1
(2)	3	5	2	2
(3)	9	8	7	10
(4)	15	19	18	17
Extremely Corrupt (5)	72	63	72	70
N=	239	231	203	218

A/B A Senator puts a person on his/his government payroll who does no work for the pay?

C/D A man/woman appointed by a senator to a government job does no work for the pay?

<i>(columns are percentages)</i>	<u>Actor</u>			
	Official		Citizen	
	Male	Fem	Male	Fem
Not at all Corrupt (1)	1	1	6	3
(2)	3	3	3	3
(3)	6	9	7	9
(4)	9	7	9	10
Extremely Corrupt (5)	81	80	75	76
N=	242	230	202	216

A/B A Governor seeks the opinion of a corporate executive who gave him/her large campaign contributions?

C/D A corporate executive who gives large campaign contributions offers his/her opinions to a Governor?

<i>(columns are percentages)</i>	<u>Actor</u>			
	Official		Citizen	
	Male	Fem	Male	Fem
Not at all Corrupt (1)	8	10	13	15
(2)	12	10	19	9
(3)	21	21	20	18
(4)	15	19	17	19
Extremely Corrupt (5)	44	40	31	39
N=	241	232	204	212

A/B A candidate running for office promises voters that the potholes on their street will be fixed if they vote for him/her?

C/D A voter agrees to vote for a candidate running for office if he/she is promised that the potholes on his/her street will be fixed?

<i>(columns are percentages)</i>	<u>Actor</u>			
	Official		Citizen	
	Male	Fem	Male	Fem
Not at all Corrupt (1)	21	23	18	14
(2)	16	13	12	13
(3)	24	23	20	22
(4)	9	11	13	13
Extremely Corrupt (5)	30	30	37	37
N=	229	232	204	212

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from October 15-20, 2009 with a scientifically selected random sample of 903 New Jersey adults. 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 points, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adults favored a particular position, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 45.9 and 54.1 percent (50 + 3.3) 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. 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 (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