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Murphy’s Pandemic-High Ratings Ease; High Marks on Handling of the Pandemic Continue, Taxes Still a Sore Spot

Half of New Jerseyans say Garden State headed in right direction

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (June 7, 2021) – More than a year into the coronavirus pandemic, Governor Murphy’s [once-skyrocketing ratings](#) have now returned to pre-pandemic levels, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. Forty-seven percent of residents currently have a favorable impression of the Governor (down from 54 percent in [October 2020](#)), while 36 percent have an unfavorable one (up from 28 percent). Murphy garners slightly higher marks on his job performance: 55 percent approve of the job he is doing (down from 62 percent), versus 40 percent who disapprove (up from 33 percent).

“The ‘rally around the flag’ effect the pandemic has had on Governor Murphy’s ratings in the past year is inevitably coming to an end,” said Ashley Koning, an assistant research professor and director of the [Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling \(ECPIP\)](#) at [Rutgers University–New Brunswick](#). “But the Governor still garners the kind of ratings most politicians envy, especially in a reelection year and during an increasingly polarizing crisis and recovery process.”

On his first term report card, Murphy is a ‘C’ student, on average. When it comes to grading him overall, 15 percent of New Jerseyans give him an ‘A,’ 32 percent a ‘B,’ 20 percent a ‘C,’ 14 percent a ‘D,’ and 19 percent an ‘F.’

As for individual issues areas, Murphy gets his highest marks on his handling of the pandemic, with 31 percent of New Jerseyans continuing to give him an ‘A’ (a few points up from 26 percent in the fall), 23 percent a ‘B’ (down from 33 percent), 13 percent a ‘C’ (down from 17 percent), 10 percent a ‘D,’ and 23 percent an ‘F’ (up from 15 percent).

Murphy gets his next highest grades on the economy and education, followed by transportation and infrastructure, crime and drugs, and the state budget. The Governor’s lowest marks come from his handling of taxes: just 7 percent give him an ‘A,’ 20 percent a ‘B,’ 23 percent a ‘C,’ 19 percent a ‘D,’ and 31 percent an ‘F.’

“Governor Murphy earns higher marks, on average, than [Governor Chris Christie](#) received in each of these same areas at the end of his second term,” noted Koning.

Despite the pandemic, 52 percent of New Jerseyans say the state is headed in the right direction; 41 percent believe it has gone off on the wrong track.

“New Jerseyans’ outlook on the state has improved over the last few years,” said Koning. “These numbers were practically flipped back in [2019](#), when 44 percent of residents thought New Jersey was going in the right direction and 56 percent thought it was off on the wrong track.”

President Biden remains popular in the state: 56 percent of residents approve of the job he is doing as president, while 36 percent disapprove. Similarly, 55 percent have a favorable opinion of him, compared to 35 percent who have an unfavorable one. The President also gets high marks for his handling of the pandemic: 34 percent give him an ‘A,’ 22 percent a ‘B,’ 12 percent a ‘C,’ 10 percent a ‘D,’ and 22 percent an ‘F.’

Results are from a statewide poll of 1,004 adults contacted by live interviewers on landlines and cell phones from May 21–29. The full sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.8 percentage points.

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Broadcast interviews: Rutgers University–New Brunswick has broadcast-quality TV and radio studios available for remote live or taped interviews with Rutgers experts. For more information, contact John Cramer at john.cramer@rutgers.edu.

ABOUT RUTGERS—NEW BRUNSWICK

Rutgers University–New Brunswick is where Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, began more than 250 years ago. Ranked among the world’s top 60 universities, Rutgers’s flagship university is a leading public research institution and a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities. It is home to internationally acclaimed faculty and has 12 degree-granting schools and a Division I Athletics program. It is the Big Ten Conference’s most diverse university. Through its community of teachers, scholars, artists, scientists, and healers, Rutgers is equipped as never before to transform lives.

ABOUT THE EAGLETON CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEREST POLLING (ECPIP)

Home of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, ECPIP was established in 1971 and is the oldest and one of the most respected university-based state survey research centers in the United States. Now in its 48th year and with the publication of over 200 polls, ECPIP’s mission is to provide scientifically sound, non-partisan information about public opinion. To read more about ECPIP and view all of our press releases, published research, and data archive, please visit our website: eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu. You can also visit our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

ABOUT THE EAGLETON INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

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The Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling is a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. The Eagleton Institute studies how American politics and government work and change, analyzes how the democracy might improve, and promotes political participation and civic engagement. The Institute explores state and national politics through research, education, and public service, linking the study of politics with its day-to-day practice. To learn more about Eagleton programs and expertise, visit eagleton.rutgers.edu.

QUESTIONS AND TABLES START ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Questions and Tables

The questions covered in this release are listed below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents are New Jersey adults; all percentages are of weighted results. Interpret groups with samples sizes under 100 with extreme caution.

Q. Please tell me if your general impression of Phil Murphy is favorable or unfavorable, or if you do not have an opinion.

Favorable	47%
Unfavorable	36%
No opinion	14%
Don't know person	3%
Unweighted N=	1001

Q. Please tell me if your general impression of Joe Biden is favorable or unfavorable, or if you do not have an opinion.

Favorable	55%
Unfavorable	35%
No opinion	9%
Don't know person	0%
Unweighted N=	1000

Q. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Phil Murphy is handling his job as governor?

Approve	55%
Disapprove	40%
Don't know	4%
Unweighted N=	483

Q. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden is handling his job as President of the United States?

Approve	56%
Disapprove	36%
Don't know	8%
Unweighted N=	492

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Q. Please give Phil Murphy a grade for the overall job he is doing as governor throughout his first term using a grading scale from A to F. You can give him any full letter grade, A, B, C, D, or F

A	15%
B	32%
C	20%
D	14%
F	19%
Unweighted N=	980

Q. I am now going to list some specific areas and ask you to give Phil Murphy a grade for the job he is doing as governor on each using a grading scale from A to F. You can give him any full letter grade, A, B, C, D, or F. [RANDOMIZE ORDER]

	The coronavirus pandemic	Education and schools	Economy and jobs	Transportation and infrastructure	Crime and drugs	The state budget	Taxes
A	31%	17%	13%	12%	11%	11%	7%
B	23%	27%	31%	27%	28%	26%	20%
C	13%	20%	23%	27%	23%	28%	23%
D	10%	13%	14%	14%	13%	12%	19%
F	23%	23%	19%	19%	25%	23%	31%
Unwght N=	990	465	487	444	454	456	473

Q. In general, would you say the state of New Jersey is currently going in the right direction, or has it gone off on the wrong track?

Going in the right direction	52%
On the wrong track	41%
Don't know	7%
Unweighted N=	999

Q. Please give Joe Biden a grade for the overall job he is doing handling the coronavirus pandemic, using a grading scale from A to F. You can give any full letter grade – A, B, C, D, or F.

A	34%
B	22%
C	12%
D	10%
F	22%
Unweighted N=	493

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Q. Please give your local elected officials a grade for the overall job he is doing handling the coronavirus pandemic, using a grading scale from A to F. You can give any full letter grade – A, B, C, D, or F.

A	28%
B	30%
C	22%
D	11%
F	8%

Unweighted N= 471

Methodology

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone using live interviewers May 21-29, 2021, with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,004 New Jersey adults, 18 or older. Persons without a telephone could not be included in the random selection process. Respondents within a household are selected by asking randomly for the youngest adult male or female currently available. If the named gender is not available, the youngest adult of the other gender is interviewed. The poll was available in Spanish for respondents who requested it. This poll included 435 adults reached on a landline phone and 569 adults reached on a cell phone, all acquired through random digit dialing; 101 of the cell phone completes were acquired through one-to-one SMS text messaging by live interviewers that led respondents to an online version of the survey. Distribution of phone use in this sample is:

	Individual	Household
Cell Only	29%	29%
Dual Use	27%	27%
Dual Use, Reached on LL	41%	41%
Landline Only	3%	2%

The data were weighted to be representative of the non-institutionalized adult population of New Jersey. The weighting balanced sample demographics to target population parameters. The sample is balanced, by form, to match parameters for sex, age, education, region, race/ethnicity and phone use. The sex, age, education, race/ethnicity and region parameters were derived from 2018 American Community Survey PUMS data. The phone use parameter was derived from estimates provided by the National Health Interview Survey Early Release Program.¹ Weighting was done in two stages. The first stage of weighting corrected for different probabilities of selection among the RDD samples associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent’s telephone usage patterns. This adjustment also accounts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.² The second stage of weighting balanced sample demographics, by form, to match target population benchmarks. This weighting was accomplished using SPSSINC RAKE, an SPSS extension module that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using the GENLOG procedure. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on survey estimates. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target population.

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response.³

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between

¹ NCHS, National Health Interview Survey, 2014–2018; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013–2018.

² Buskirk, T. D., & Best, J. (2012). Venn Diagrams, Probability 101 and Sampling Weights Computed for Dual Frame Telephone RDD Designs. *Journal of Statistics and Mathematics*, 15, 3696-3710.

³ The composite design effect for a sample of size *n*, with each case having a weight, *w*, is computed as $deff = n \sum w^2 / (\sum w)^2$.

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Rutgers-Eagleton Poll**

interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. Sampling error should be adjusted to recognize the effect of weighting the data to better match the population.

In this poll, the simple sampling error for 1,004 New Jersey adults is +/-3.1 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence interval.⁴ This means that in 95 out every 100 samples using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 3.8 percentage points away from their true values in the population. The design effect⁵ is 1.48, making the adjusted margin of error +/- 3.8 percentage points. Thus, if 50 percent of New Jersey adults in this sample favor a particular position, we would be 95 percent sure that the true figure is between 46.2 and 53.8 percent (50 +/- 3.8) if all New Jersey adults had been interviewed, rather than just a sample.

Sampling error does not consider 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 Braun Research, Inc. with sample from Dynata. The questionnaire was developed and all data analyses were completed in house by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECP/IP). Dr. Kyle Morgan, David Martin, and Panktiben Patel assisted with analysis and preparation of this report. The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll is paid for and sponsored by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, a non-partisan academic center for the study of politics and the political process. Full questionnaires are available on request and can also be accessed through our archives at eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu. For more information, please contact poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu.

**Weighted Sample Characteristics
1,004 New Jersey Adults**

Male	48%	Democrat	42%	18-34	26%	HS or Less	29%	White	57%
Female	52%	Independent	36%	35-49	23%	Some College	31%	Black	13%
		Republican	23%	50-64	30%	College Grad	22%	Hispanic	18%
				65+	21%	Grad Work	19%	Other	12%

⁴ The survey’s maximum margin of error is the largest 95% confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample – one around 50%.

⁵ Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response.