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## **Five Decades Later, Rutgers-Eagleton Poll Still Finds Taxes to be Most Important Problem Facing New Jersey**

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (Nov. 23, 2021) – Not much has changed in 50 years when it comes to New Jersey’s most important problem, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. Then and now, New Jerseyans rate taxes – including property taxes – as their number one concern.

In the most recent poll, 39 percent of residents mention taxes when asked about the top issues facing the state, followed by 14 percent who say the economy, and 10 percent who cite state government.

“The more things change, the more they stay the same—at least when it comes to how residents view taxes,” said Ashley Koning, an assistant research professor and director of the [Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling \(ECPIP\)](#) at [Rutgers University–New Brunswick](#).

Six percent of New Jerseyans mention the pandemic as an issue; problems with the state’s response to the pandemic, climate change and the environment, infrastructure, education, crime and drugs, and housing are considered to be major problems by under 5 percent of those polled.

[In 1971](#), when the poll was first founded, taxes also took the top spot at 26 percent, followed closely by crime and drug addiction at 24 percent, poverty, welfare, and unemployment each at 24 percent, the environment at 23 percent, education at 22 percent, and transportation at 11 percent.

“The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll—the first university-based statewide survey research center in the nation—has been taking the pulse of New Jerseyans for five decades now and has perennially found taxes to be their biggest concern,” said Koning. “As we revisit some of the first questions the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll asked in celebration of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is clear that New Jerseyans’ frustration with taxes has not only withstood the test of time but also intensified.”

Taxes are the number one concern across the board – particularly among Republicans (49

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percent), men (44 percent), and white residents (42 percent). Taxes are also a concern among older residents, upper income residents, and those living in exurban areas (52 percent).

New Jerseyans, moreover, do not believe that the state government is making much progress toward solving the state's most important problem.

Only 7 percent say the state is doing a great deal about it, 18 percent say a fair amount, 34 percent say very little, and 36 percent say none at all. Those who specifically mention taxes as their biggest concern are especially negative: 48 percent say the state has made no progress at all on this issue, and another 37 percent say it has made very little progress.

Republicans are the most negative about the state—no matter the issue, 59 percent believe the government has made no progress—while Democrats are the most positive with 43 percent saying the state has made a “great deal” or “fair amount” of progress.

Meanwhile, the poll found that New Jerseyans are split on the direction of the state: 40 percent believe it is going in the right direction, while 45 percent say it is on the wrong track and another 15 percent are unsure.

There are stark demographic divides on residents' outlook for the state. Democrats are more optimistic with 68 percent saying the state is on the right direction, compared to 51 percent of independents and 76 percent of Republicans who say the state is on the wrong track. White respondents have a negative view (53 percent wrong track), while Black residents and Hispanic residents have positive ones (49 percent and 63 percent right direction, respectively). Young adults and urban residents are more positive than their counterparts. Those in the highest income bracket are more negative than those in less affluent households.

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, part of the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECPPI) at the Eagleton Institute of Politics, was established in 1971. ECPPI is the oldest university-based state survey research center in the United States. Now in its 50<sup>th</sup> year and with the publication of over 200 polls, the center's mission is to provide scientifically sound, nonpartisan information about public opinion, as well as design opportunities for students to learn how to read, analyze, design and administer polls. Visit our website at [eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu](http://eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu) to view over 50 years of questionnaires, data, press releases and reports.

Results are from a statewide poll of 1,008 adults contacted by live interviewers on landlines and cell phones from Oct. 21–27. The full sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.9 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](mailto: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 50<sup>th</sup> 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](http://eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu). You can also visit our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).*

**ABOUT THE EAGLETON INSTITUTE OF POLITICS**

*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](http://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. 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?**

Right direction	40%
Wrong track	45%
Don't know	15%
Unweighted N=	998

	Party ID			Sex		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Right direction	68%	31%	15%	41%	39%	35%	49%	63%	33%	46%	41%	37%	38%
Wrong track	17%	51%	76%	48%	42%	53%	26%	29%	40%	33%	45%	53%	49%
Don't know	15%	18%	10%	12%	18%	12%	25%	8%	26%	21%	14%	10%	13%
Unwt N=	353	365	255	482	506	641	104	116	75	269	271	258	184

	Income				Region				Education				
	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	\$150K+	Urban	Suburban	Exurban	Phil/South	Shore	HS or Less	Some College	College Grad	Grad Work
Right direction	43%	42%	46%	43%	50%	40%	33%	40%	37%	35%	39%	42%	50%

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Wrong track	42%	39%	46%	51%	36%	48%	46%	44%	47%	44	50%	44%	37%
Don't know	15%	18%	8%	6%	14%	12%	21%	17%	16%	21	11%	14%	13%
										%			
Unwt N=	215	297	162	196	146	351	143	179	177	156	302	301	228

**Q. What, in your opinion, is the most important problem facing the State of New Jersey? Please tell me in just a word or two.**

**[FIRST NAMED ONLY]**

Taxes (incl property)	39%
Economy (incl unemployment/labor shortages, cost of living)	14%
Government (incl governor, particular parties, budget)	10%
COVID-19/Pandemic	6%
Government pandemic response (incl mandates)	4%
Climate change/environment	4%
Infrastructure	3%
Schools and education	3%
Crime and drugs	3%
Housing	2%
Other	11%
Unweighted N=	884

	Party ID			Sex		Race or Ethnicity				Age			
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Ind	Rep	White	Black	Ind	Rep	18-29	30-49
Taxes	29%	36	49	44%	31%	42	32	25%	30%	23	35	47%	40%
		%	%			%	%			%	%		
Economy	17%	20	10	14%	17%	15	14	18%	24%	25	11	15%	13%
		%	%			%	%			%	%		
Govt	4%	7%	12	10%	6%	7%	0%	7%	14%	6%	12	8%	5%

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			%								%		
COVID-19	8%	9%	2%	5%	8%	7%	10%	3%	2%	5%	8%	6%	5%
Gov pand. response	3%	4%	2%	2%	4%	2%	8%	1%	5%	4%	3%	3%	2%
All else	39%	24%	25%	25%	34%	27%	36%	46%	25%	37%	31%	21%	35%
Unwt N=	293	330	239	440	434	582	81	96	64	206	241	244	178

	Income			Region			Education						
	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K
Taxes	29%	35%	49%	43%	26%	39%	52%	33%	32%	31%	37%	41%	40%
Economy	18%	21%	13%	10%	15%	17%	5%	20%	18%	17%	16%	16%	15%
Govt	5%	8%	6%	12%	5%	8%	8%	9%	9%	7%	9%	7%	7%
COVID-19	8%	5%	4%	6%	6%	5%	8%	8%	5%	8%	6%	3%	7%
Gov pand. response	1%	3%	3%	4%	4%	2%	2%	3%	6%	2%	2%	4%	2%
All else	39%	28%	25%	25%	44%	29%	25%	27%	30%	35%	30%	29%	29%
Unwt N=	175	258	149	189	125	312	135	152	158	123	266	271	215

**Q. How much progress do you think the New Jersey State Government is making toward solving this problem – a great deal, a fair amount, very little, or none at all?**

Great deal	7%
Fair amount	18%
Very little	34%
None at all	36%

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Don't know 4%  
Unweighted N= 880

	Party ID			Sex		Race or Ethnicity			Age				
	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	Ind	Rep	Other	Dem	Ind	Rep	Other	Female
Great deal	12%	4%	3%	7%	6%	5%	9%	12%	8%	7%	7%	6%	8%
Very little	31%	15%	6%	13%	23%	17%	36%	19%	13%	22%	21%	15%	18%
Fair amt	41%	34%	26%	34%	35%	32%	40%	39%	42%	43%	28%	34%	33%
None at all	13%	42%	59%	41%	32%	42%	14%	26%	30%	26%	39%	43%	34%
Don't know	3%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	1%	4%	7%	3%	5%	2%	7%
Unwt N=	292	330	237	439	432	579	80	96	64	210	242	242	172

	Income			Region			Education						
	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K	\$50K-<\$100K	\$100K-<\$150K	<\$50K
Great deal	7%	7%	6%	9%	13%	6%	8%	7%	2%	6%	6%	2%	14%
Very little	22%	21%	22%	13%	25%	18%	8%	17%	21%	22%	14%	20%	16%
Fair amt	33%	40%	39%	29%	35%	35%	45%	33%	23%	36%	34%	34%	34%
None at all	30%	27%	31%	47%	24%	35%	36%	38%	50%	32%	41%	38%	31%
Don't know	7%	5%	2%	2%	3%	6%	3%	4%	3%	3%	4%	5%	4%
Unwt N=	176	257	148	187	125	310	135	150	158	124	264	272	212

Most Important  
Problem: Taxes

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Great deal	3%
Very little	8%
Fair amt	37%
None at all	48%
Don't know	4%

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Unwt N=	345
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**Methodology**

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone using live interviewers October 21-27, 2021, with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,008 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 308 adults reached on a landline phone and 700 adults reached on a cell phone, all acquired through random digit dialing; 475 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:

<b>Cell Only</b>	46
	%
<b>Dual Use, Reached on</b>	20
<b>Cell</b>	%
<b>Dual Use, Reached on LL</b>	49
	%
<b>Landline Only</b>	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 2019 American Community Survey PUMS data. The phone use parameter was derived from estimates provided by the National Health Interview Survey Early Release Program.<sup>1</sup>

Weighting was done in three stages. The first stage of weighting corrects for different probabilities of selection across 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.<sup>2</sup>

The second stage of weighting involved running a propensity score model on all cell sample. A logit model was used to predict the propensity of cell respondents to respond by text, and the inverse of the predicted probability was used as propensity score adjustment for the text respondents. The independent variables in the model included sample demographics plus a handful of substantive questions.

The third and final stage of weighting balances 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>3</sup>

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. 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 1,008 New Jersey adults is +/-3.1 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence interval.<sup>4</sup> 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 3.1 percentage points away from their true values in the population. The design effect<sup>5</sup> is 1.59, making the adjusted margin of error +/- 3.9 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 46.1 and 53.9 percent (50 +/- 3.9) 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 (ECPIP). Jessica Roman and Dr. Kyle Morgan 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](http://eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu). For more information, please contact [poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu](mailto:poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu).

**Weighted Sample Characteristics  
1,008 New Jersey Adults**

<b>Male</b>	47%	<b>Democrat</b>	38%	<b>18-34</b>	29%	<b>HS or Less</b>	30%	<b>White</b>	57%
<b>Female</b>	53%	<b>Independent</b>	37%	<b>35-49</b>	22%	<b>Some College</b>	30%	<b>Black</b>	14%
		<b>Republican</b>	26%	<b>50-64</b>	28%	<b>College Grad</b>	22%	<b>Hispanic</b>	17%

<sup>3</sup> The composite design effect for a sample of size n, with each case having a weight, w, is computed as  $deff = \frac{\sum w^2}{n}$ .

<sup>4</sup> 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%.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<b>65+</b>	21%	<b>Grad Work</b>	18%	<b>Other</b>	12%
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