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NEW JERSEYANS' INTEREST IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Most say politics doesn't have to be a dirty business

Nearly two-thirds of New Jersey residents feel it is important to be active in their communities and 4-in-10 express at least some interest in serving on a board or commission in their town. However, smaller percentages say that their participation can make a great deal of difference. The latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* also found that contrary to New Jersey's reputation for ethical lapses among its political leaders, most residents feel that getting involved in politics is an honorable thing to do.

Overall, most Garden State adults say they feel it is either very (28%) or somewhat (37%) important for them personally to be active in community organizations and neighborhood groups. Another 20% say it is just a little important and 14% not at all important. However, just under 1-in-4 (23%) report having worked to solve a problem in their community in the past year.

Fifteen percent of residents say they would be very interested in serving on a local board or commission, 26% have some interest, and 1% report currently serving on some type of appointed body in their town. Another 23% have just a little interest in this type of service and 33% have no interest at all.

A majority of residents (57%) believe that being a good citizen means having some special obligations, compared to just 36% who say simply being a good person is enough to make someone a good citizen. Furthermore, 55% see getting involved in politics and government as honorable, compared to 32% who feel it is a dirty business.

“Although New Jersey has developed a reputation for ethically-challenged government, most residents feel it doesn’t have to be that way,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute. Murray added, “While many residents feel some obligation to take part in the political process, only about 1-in-7 express high levels of interest in participating in local governance. Still, if just 1-in-7 residents got involved at the local level, the impact would be noticeable.”

Harry Pozycycki, Chair of the Citizens’ Campaign said, “These results show that there is a large number of New Jerseyans interested in constructively participating in their communities. Now, it is important to give them the knowledge about how to best accomplish this goal given their busy lives. That is exactly what we intend to do as we launch a New Jersey Call to Service.”

Most residents believe that decisions made by town councils and schools boards have an impact on their own lives, including 37% who say local government actions affect them a great deal and 33% who say these actions affect them somewhat. Another 17% say local government actions affect them a little and 11% say there is no impact at all on their own lives.

About half of New Jersey residents feel they personally can make a difference in working to solve problems in their local communities. This includes 16% who feel they can make a great deal of difference and 32% who feel they can make some difference. Another 27% say they can only make a little difference and 21% feel they can make no difference at all.

The poll also found that 4-in-10 residents are familiar with the appointed boards and commission in their towns, including 13% who are very familiar and 27% who are somewhat familiar. The majority are either just a little (27%) or not at all (31%) familiar with their town’s boards and commissions.

The Citizens’ Campaign and Monmouth University will be holding a “Call to Service Conference” on the university campus on Tuesday, October 14. The conference will encourage New Jersey business leaders to become more involved in state and local governance and assist local government leaders in launching calls to service in their own towns.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 808 New Jersey adults from September 11 to 14, 2008. This sample has a margin of error of ± 3.5 percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute and originally published by the Gannett New Jersey newspaper group (Asbury Park Press, Courier-Post, Courier News, Daily Journal, Daily Record, and Home News Tribune).

DATA TABLES

The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

(* Some columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.)

1. How much of an impact do the actions of local government, that is your town council and school board, have on your life – a great deal, some, a little, or no impact at all?

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Great deal	37%	35%	40%	30%	43%	38%	46%	33%	32%	39%	42%
Some	33%	35%	30%	28%	36%	33%	26%	36%	31%	32%	36%
A little	17%	19%	14%	24%	12%	15%	17%	17%	18%	19%	13%
None at all	11%	9%	14%	16%	8%	11%	9%	13%	16%	8%	8%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

2. How important is it for you personally to be active in community organizations or neighborhood groups – very, somewhat, a little, or not at all important?

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Very important	28%	25%	30%	31%	30%	21%	38%	22%	35%	31%	21%
Somewhat important	37%	38%	36%	35%	38%	37%	38%	36%	31%	35%	47%
A little important	20%	22%	18%	23%	16%	22%	13%	24%	17%	21%	20%
Not at all important	14%	14%	14%	11%	15%	17%	11%	16%	15%	12%	13%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	2%	2%	0%	1%	3%	1%	2%	3%	2%	0%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

3. Have you ever worked either alone or with a group to solve a problem in the community where you live, or have you not had the opportunity to do that? [IF YES, ASK: Was this in the last 12 months or not?]

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Yes, within last 12 months	23%	24%	22%	19%	28%	19%	32%	18%	21%	20%	29%
Yes, but not within last 12 months	22%	20%	23%	22%	19%	25%	17%	24%	23%	25%	17%
No, haven't done it	55%	55%	54%	59%	51%	55%	50%	57%	55%	55%	53%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

4. Thinking about the problems you see in your community, how much difference do you believe you personally can make in working to solve problems you see – a great deal, some, a little, or no difference at all?

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Great deal of difference	16%	19%	14%	18%	18%	14%	23%	13%	20%	15%	14%
Some difference	32%	30%	35%	35%	34%	30%	36%	31%	27%	34%	35%
A little difference	27%	29%	25%	30%	28%	24%	21%	30%	25%	28%	30%
No difference at all	21%	20%	22%	16%	16%	29%	16%	23%	22%	20%	20%
(VOL) Don't Know	4%	3%	5%	1%	5%	5%	4%	3%	6%	3%	1%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

5. Now, which of the following two statements do you agree with more: Being a good citizen means having some special obligations – or – Simply being a good person is enough to make someone a good citizen?

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Special obligations	57%	55%	59%	60%	57%	57%	62%	55%	52%	60%	64%
Being a good person is enough	36%	39%	34%	37%	36%	34%	31%	38%	38%	35%	34%
(VOL) Depends/Both/Neither	5%	5%	5%	2%	5%	7%	5%	4%	8%	3%	1%
(VOL) Don't Know	2%	2%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

6. And which of the following two statements do you agree with more: Getting involved in politics and government is a dirty business – or – Getting involved in politics and government is an honorable thing to do?

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Dirty business	32%	37%	27%	32%	35%	27%	32%	32%	31%	30%	34%
Honorable thing to do	55%	48%	61%	55%	53%	59%	53%	57%	52%	57%	54%
(VOL) Depends/Both/Neither	8%	10%	6%	9%	8%	7%	9%	8%	8%	7%	8%
(VOL) Don't Know	6%	5%	6%	5%	4%	7%	7%	4%	8%	5%	4%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

7. Along with elected officials, New Jersey towns have appointed boards and commissions, such as the Planning Board or Environmental Commission. How familiar are you with the boards and commissions in your town – very, somewhat, just a little, or not at all familiar?

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Very familiar	13%	17%	9%	11%	13%	15%	15%	12%	10%	14%	15%
Somewhat familiar	27%	24%	30%	20%	30%	30%	30%	26%	22%	29%	30%
Just a little familiar	27%	27%	27%	28%	25%	28%	27%	27%	35%	25%	24%
Not at all familiar	31%	30%	32%	41%	30%	24%	27%	34%	29%	31%	30%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	1%	2%	3%	1%	0%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

8. These boards and commissions may decide things such as which areas of your town can be developed, or they can provide advice, such as which senior services or youth programs are needed. How interested would you be in serving on a board or commission in your town – very, somewhat, just a little, or not at all interested?

	TOTAL	GENDER		AGE			HAVE KIDS		INCOME		
		Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Yes	No	Under \$50K	\$50 to \$100K	\$100K+
Very interested	15%	16%	14%	18%	13%	14%	16%	14%	19%	13%	11%
Somewhat interested	26%	28%	25%	22%	30%	27%	29%	25%	22%	30%	33%
Just a little interested	23%	22%	23%	26%	23%	20%	26%	22%	21%	21%	25%
Not at all interested	33%	30%	35%	32%	30%	36%	26%	36%	33%	32%	30%
(VOL) Already serve	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	4%	1%	0%
Unwtd N	808	372	436	154	291	351	240	561	212	244	228

The Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll was conducted and analyzed by the Monmouth University Polling Institute research staff. The telephone interviews were collected by Braun Research on September 11-14, 2008 with a statewide random sample of 808 adult residents. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by gender or party identification, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

It is the Monmouth University Polling Institute's policy to conduct surveys of all adult New Jersey residents, including voters and non-voters, on issues which affect the state. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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