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NEW JERSEY OK WITH PROPERTY TAX DEAL, BUT PREFER A HARD CAP

With the governor expected to sign historic property tax cap legislation today, the latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll* finds that many state residents approve of the agreement, but more would have preferred a hard cap over a soft one. Regardless, the overwhelming majority say a cap won't fix the underlying problems that cause high property taxes.

About 3-in-4 New Jerseyans have heard something about the recent special session on the property tax cap. Among this group, 48% say they approve of the deal reached by the governor and legislature compared to 31% who disapprove. However, it is not clear that these residents are actually aware of the plan's details.

When asked specifically about their opinion on a 2 percent cap with exemptions for health care, pension, and debt payments, only 35% of New Jerseyans say they favor this type of cap versus 45% who oppose it. By comparison, a majority of 54% favor a hard 2.5% cap like the one the governor originally proposed, with 31% opposed to it. It is among the governor's fellow Republicans where the difference in support levels between a hard cap (72%) and soft cap (40%) is most pronounced. Democrats are somewhat more likely to support a hard cap (45%) over a soft cap (29%) and independents are significantly more likely (54% to 36%).

Even among those who claim to have been paying a lot of attention to the past weeks' events, preference for a 2.5% hard cap (66%) is much higher than for the 2% soft cap (39%) that was eventually agreed upon.

“The governor appears to get credit for doing something on this issue, especially since few New Jerseyans are likely to be aware of his stand-down from a hard constitutional cap to a soft statutory one. This may not hurt Chris Christie’s public standing in the short term, but in the long run, he will be judged by his ability to lower property taxes, rather than just slow the rate of increases,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

Only 12% of the Garden State public believe that a property tax cap will actually fix the underlying problems that cause the state’s highest-in-the-nation property taxes. The overwhelming majority – 74% – say those problems will persist even with a cap in place.

Some residents also worry about the impact a property tax cap will have on local services. While the large majority of New Jerseyans say that the quality of local services (63%) and schools (61%) in their towns will not be affected by the property tax cap, about 3-in-10 fear the cap will cause those services to get worse.

The poll also asked the public to evaluate two other proposals in the “tool kit” that is part of the governor’s overall property tax strategy. There is fairly widespread support for submitting a district’s teacher contract agreement to the county level superintendent for final approval (57%). There is less support, though, for eliminating the ability of laid-off workers to “bump” other employees with less seniority (33%).

“The recent drama at the State House focused on the property tax cap, but many other provisions of the plan await action. Governor Christie still has some work to do to convince the public that all these measures are needed to achieve significant property tax reform,” said Murray.

In the end, just under half (49%) of the New Jersey public say it is at least somewhat likely that the state will enact significant property tax reforms in the next few years. This number is nominally higher than the 42% who said the same five months ago. However, only 10% are confident that such reforms are *very likely* to happen.

The poll also found that New Jerseyans continue to blame a wide variety of causes for the state’s property tax burden. More than 6-in-10 residents say that waste and fraud (70%) and high public employee salaries (63%) contribute a lot to this problem. A majority also count pensions and benefits (53%) and the number of towns (57%) and school districts (55%) among the list of major contributors.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll* was conducted by telephone with 801 New Jersey adults from July 7 to 11, 2010. 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 New Jersey Press Media 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.)

- The governor called the legislature into special session last week to pass a cap on property tax increases. How much have you heard or read about this – a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
A lot	28%	30%	12%	24%	28%	40%	24%	30%	29%
A little	46%	45%	47%	44%	43%	48%	46%	42%	47%
Nothing at all	26%	25%	41%	32%	29%	12%	29%	28%	23%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

[The following question was asked only of those who heard at least a little about the special session on property taxes: moe=+/-3.9%]

- Do you approve or disapprove of the plan that the governor and legislature agreed to?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Approve	48%	48%	48%	28%	52%	69%	20%	56%	53%
Disapprove	31%	32%	25%	49%	28%	11%	53%	28%	24%
(VOL) Mixed	4%	4%	0%	6%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%
(VOL) Don't know	17%	16%	28%	18%	18%	16%	23%	12%	18%
Unwtd N	644	609	35	177	279	175	88	261	285

- I'm going to read you some proposals about property taxes. For each one, please tell me if you favor or oppose it. If you have no opinion, just say so. [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

Limit property tax increases to two point five percent (2.5%) across the board, even if certain costs rise higher than that

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Favor	54%	55%	45%	45%	54%	72%	33%	59%	60%
Oppose	31%	29%	43%	36%	35%	19%	47%	28%	25%
No opinion	16%	16%	12%	19%	11%	9%	21%	13%	15%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

Limit property tax increases to two percent (2%) for many costs including salaries, but allow a higher increase for rising costs in health care, pension, and debt payments

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Favor	35%	35%	27%	29%	36%	40%	29%	38%	36%
Oppose	45%	45%	47%	50%	44%	44%	46%	45%	44%
No opinion	20%	19%	26%	21%	19%	16%	25%	17%	20%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

Eliminate the ability of laid-off public workers to take the job of another worker with less seniority

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Favor	33%	33%	27%	28%	33%	45%	22%	34%	35%
Oppose	49%	48%	58%	56%	48%	37%	65%	47%	45%
No opinion	18%	18%	16%	16%	19%	18%	13%	19%	20%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

Require that each local school district submit their teacher contracts to a county level superintendent for final approval

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Favor	57%	59%	45%	57%	57%	61%	41%	61%	62%
Oppose	25%	24%	33%	25%	25%	28%	35%	24%	22%
No opinion	17%	17%	22%	18%	18%	11%	24%	15%	16%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

4. Will a property tax cap fix the problems that cause high property taxes in New Jersey, or will the problems still exist even with a cap in place?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Fix the problems	12%	13%	5%	13%	9%	19%	11%	14%	12%
Problems still exist	74%	73%	82%	77%	80%	67%	70%	73%	78%
(VOL) Fix some but not all	4%	3%	5%	1%	3%	7%	3%	4%	3%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	10%	8%	8%	7%	8%	17%	9%	7%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

[QUESTIONS 5 AND 6 WERE ROTATED]

5. If a two percent property tax cap is imposed, do you think the quality of local services in your town will get better, get worse, or stay about the same?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Get better	5%	5%	3%	6%	2%	5%	6%	5%	2%
Get worse	30%	30%	33%	39%	28%	15%	40%	31%	25%
Stay about the same	63%	63%	62%	52%	68%	78%	51%	60%	72%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	3%	2%	3%	1%	2%	2%	4%	1%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

6. If a two percent property tax cap is imposed, do you think the quality of the public schools in your town will get better, get worse, or stay about the same?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Get better	7%	7%	7%	7%	4%	9%	6%	8%	5%
Get worse	29%	29%	31%	37%	29%	15%	37%	29%	26%
Stay about the same	61%	61%	56%	53%	65%	74%	51%	58%	68%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	3%	6%	4%	1%	2%	6%	4%	2%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

7. How much do each of the following contribute to higher property taxes in the state – [READ ITEM] – a lot, a little, or not at all? [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

Waste and fraud

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
A lot	70%	71%	59%	63%	74%	75%	62%	73%	70%
A little	23%	20%	40%	27%	20%	20%	29%	18%	24%
Not at all	4%	5%	1%	4%	5%	2%	3%	5%	4%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	4%	0%	6%	2%	3%	6%	4%	2%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

TREND:	July 2010	September 2009	September 2005
A lot	70%	64%	64%
A little	23%	23%	24%
Not at all	4%	4%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	9%	8%
Unwtd N	801	900	800

High salaries for public employees

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
A lot	63%	65%	53%	60%	62%	74%	55%	68%	65%
A little	23%	22%	35%	26%	25%	18%	28%	21%	24%
Not at all	9%	9%	10%	9%	10%	5%	11%	9%	8%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	4%	2%	5%	3%	3%	6%	2%	4%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

TREND:	July 2010	September 2009	September 2005
A lot	63%	53%	44%
A little	23%	29%	37%
Not at all	9%	8%	12%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	11%	7%
Unwtd N	801	900	800

Union pension and benefit agreements

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
A lot	53%	55%	38%	39%	57%	70%	30%	60%	59%
A little	29%	28%	36%	40%	22%	21%	40%	24%	27%
Not at all	11%	10%	20%	11%	14%	6%	19%	10%	7%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	8%	6%	10%	7%	3%	11%	6%	6%
Unwtd N	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

TREND:	July 2010	September 2009
A lot	53%	41%
A little	29%	33%
Not at all	11%	13%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	13%
Unwtd N	801	900

The number of school districts we have

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
A lot	55%	56%	45%	48%	58%	61%	42%	61%	56%
A little	29%	29%	36%	32%	31%	25%	30%	26%	32%
Not at all	8%	8%	10%	10%	6%	8%	16%	6%	7%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	8%	8%	11%	5%	7%	13%	7%	5%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

TREND:	July 2010	September 2009
A lot	55%	54%
A little	29%	25%
Not at all	8%	9%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	12%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	900

The number of municipal governments we have

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
A lot	57%	57%	54%	53%	61%	63%	51%	62%	56%
A little	28%	27%	36%	30%	25%	29%	26%	23%	32%
Not at all	6%	7%	0%	4%	6%	4%	10%	4%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	9%	11%	13%	8%	4%	12%	10%	6%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

TREND:	July 2010	September 2009
A lot	57%	51%
A little	28%	32%
Not at all	6%	7%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	10%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	900

8. How likely is it that the state will enact reforms in the next few years to significantly lower property taxes – very, somewhat, not too, or not at all likely?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			COMMUNITY TYPE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb
Very likely	10%	10%	11%	9%	6%	20%	9%	10%	11%
Somewhat likely	39%	39%	38%	39%	38%	43%	36%	35%	43%
Not too likely	18%	19%	12%	18%	21%	14%	21%	19%	15%
Not at all likely	30%	29%	37%	30%	33%	21%	30%	33%	28%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	3%	2%	4%	2%	2%	4%	2%	3%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	747	54	240	349	195	121	313	353

TREND:	July 2010	February 2010	April 2006
Very likely	10%	8%	6%
Somewhat likely	39%	34%	20%
Not too likely	18%	29%	17%
Not at all likely	30%	27%	51%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	2%	5%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	803	803

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll* was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute on July 7-11, 2010 with a statewide random sample of 801 adult residents. Sampling and data collection services were provided by Braun Research, Inc. 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.

<i>POLL DEMOGRAPHICS (weighted)</i>			
<i>38% Dem</i>	<i>48% Male</i>	<i>28% 18-34</i>	<i>67% White</i>
<i>40% Ind</i>	<i>52% Female</i>	<i>41% 35-54</i>	<i>13% Black</i>
<i>22% Rep</i>		<i>31% 55+</i>	<i>12% Hispanic</i>
			<i>8% Asian/Other</i>

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 that affect the state. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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